Death Treasure

by R. A. J. WALLING

SEPTEMBER 20 .. ..

Chapter 35

BANKNOTE DIPLOMACY

The express next morning landed Somerfield and myself in Brussels. We took rooms at the Hotel Terminus, as we had agreed with Laxton. Having lunched in the hotel restaurant, we went out on to the Place Rogier, and sat to take our coffee in front of a cafe bar overlooking the entrance to the station.

We had just begun to lay our plan of inquiry when we plunged into the middle of it.

I was looking at the crowd pouring out of the station when I saw a woman hurrying to the narrow street by the side of the hotel.

She was in sight only a few seconds, but I recognized Miss Vandenessen.

We dashed after her, she turned to the right around the hotel, walking fast, and made for the dome of the church of Ste. Marie. Her pace did not relax and she never turned her head; she had the air of being on an urgent mission.

We followed by a torturous way, until she stopped at one tall house and rang. Somerfield and I dodged into a doorway till she was admitted. Then we walked to the end of the street to look at the plaque on the corner. It was the Rue Rogier—the eastern section of it. No doubt the house Miss Vandenessen had entered was No. 39 bis.

"That cooks our goose!" said I.

When Miss Vandenessen had put No. 39 bis on guard we were not likely to get much out of it. Having waited till she left 20 minutes afterwards, we dogged her back by the way she had come. We saw her go into the station and leave by a train for the east. Little doubt Miss Vandenessen had undertaken a journey from Bruges to Brussels merely to Warn No. 39 bis that two impertinent young men might be making inquiries and were to be told nothing.

However, here was a plausible excuse for calling. We could now ask for Miss Vandenessen. And when we rang at the iron-grilled door of No. 39 bis, that was what we did.

The concierge who opened was a little man with greenish-gray eyes and a rather obsequious manner.

"We called," I said, "in the hope that we might catch Miss Vandenessen, of Bruges."

The concierge said he was desolated, but Miss Vandenessen had called and departed already. Somerfield brought his diplomacy into action. He took out his pocketbook and began to handle the notes therein. The greenish-gary eyes followed the movements of his fingers with bright interest.

"Miss Vandenessen came to call on madame——" Somerfield began.

"Yes, monsieur, she called half an hour ago."

"What a pity we missed her!" exclaimed Somerfield. He turned to me. "Now we shall have to go to Bruges."

At this point we heard footsteps on the stairs to the right of the conciergerie, and a voice calling:

"Joseph!"

A lady came to the bottom of the stairs.

"Joseph——who are these gentlemen and what do they want?"

"They called expecting to find Mademoiselle Vandenessen, madame."

"Tell them mademoiselle is not here."

This third-person treatment was amusing. The lady was within two yards of us, but pretended we were not there.

Somerfield flicked the notes in his wallet, and looking Joseph straight in his eyes, said:

"Ah, well, we shall have an hour to spare. Let's go and sit in the Botanical Gardens on that terrace in front of the grande serre, eh? Good-day."

We heard the lady's voice saying:

"Shut the door, Joseph," and we were out in the Rue Rogier again.

"No flies on madame," said Somerfield. "But I guess Joseph will fall for it. He has the bump of acquisition all right."

Somerfield's expectation was not disappointed. We walked along the front of the great glass house sto a terrace overlooking the park in the alley and sat on a bench. We should miss nobody who came on to the terrace.

Within 10 minutes Joseph appeared, whiffing a cigarette as he strolled leisurely round the end of the grande serre.

He was, of course, immensely surprised to encounter us. He raised his hat very politely and passed along.

"Joseph!" Somerfield called.

"Monsieur?" said Joseph halting.

Somerfield made room between us on the bench and Joseph sat down, remarking that the day made very hot. Somerfield was suddenly seen to be playing idly with a pocketbook stuffed full of money. He did not delay his dive into the cross-examination to Joseph.

"You know Miss Vandenessen very well, Joseph?" said Somerfield.

Joseph had that honor. Since long? Yes. Ever since the English captain's family lived in the Rue Rogier? Yes. They had lots of friends? No, only a few.

Madame Pavaert, whom we had had the honor of seeing, was the owner of the house; she had an affection for Madame Seabroke. And Mademoiselle Vandenessen, an institutrice at the school in Bruges where Miss Seabroke was educated. Hardly anybody else.

No English people? Well, hardly any English people.

Somerfield slowly closed his pocketbook, having extracted one 50-franc note from it.

But there were some English people in the circle? Yes, one or two. The pocketbook opened again.

Joseph had mentioned only ladies so far. Yes, that was true, but he did not know much about the gentlemen. What he saw was the one of the two had a love affair with Miss Vandenessen—oh, very serious, he assured you. And Miss Seabroke (a second note joined the first in Somerfield's hand) interested herself enormously in this affair.

As to the names of the gentlemen, Joseph could not recall them. But he could describe their owners. The lover of Miss Vandenessen was a tall, dark man. And his wooing—an impetuous man, this monsieur. But his friend, you could not have a cooler head—a veritable Englishman with his gray eyes that looked as if they saw behind your own, and his quiet manner of speaking.

I glanced at Somerfield. Here, indeed, we were on the track of Pell. Joseph described him exactly. But the other man—the lover of Miss Vandenessen? . . .

Was it strange that Joseph did not know the names of these two messieurs? Joseph eyed Somerfield's fingers as they extracted a third note from the wallet. No, it was not, because English names were hard to remember and he had seen those messieurs only three times, and he would not have kept them so clearly in his recollection as he did if the last time had not been so extraordinary, and—yes, so painful.

When? About three years, perhaps more. A desperate affair—the English officer, monsieur the captain, who had come back from sea to live with madame and mademoiselle in the Rue Rogier, made a scene—and such a scene. He quarreled Miss Vandenessen's lover and he quarreled the lover's friend. Again Joseph's command of portraiture was wonderful. Seabroke lived before our eyes. The captain was of a fury.

The two messieurs never came to the Rue Rogier again, and in some months afterwards the captain and his family went away. Joseph had not seen Miss Vanden-

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LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

The Boss

By Harold Gray

REG'LAR FELLERS

The Big Noise

By Gene Byrnes

TAILSPIN TOMMY

Advising The President

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST

DUMB DORA

A Single Man's Privilege

By Chick Young

BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus

MUTT AND JEFF

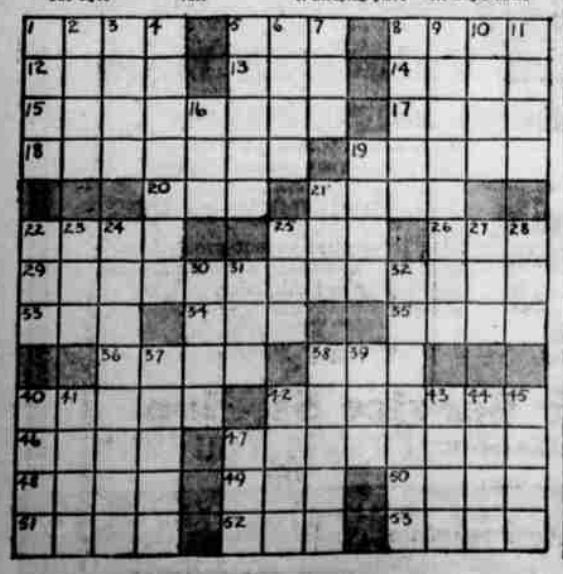
It Was The Finest Kind Of News For The Best Man

By Bud Fisher

Solution of Yesterday's Puzzle

ACROSS

1. Chums
5. Tennis stroke
9. Water: Latin
12. Encourage
13. Prayer
14. Moon: comb. form
15. Showed to another seat
17. Devils Nest.
18. Slumberer
19. Nuisances
20. Ay
21. Portable shelter
22. Small bottle
25. Evergreen tree
26. Adjective ending
29. Conversational
32. Rug
34. Attention
35. Poker term
36. Old oath
38. Preceded
40. Marked with lines
42. Assume
44. Piece of old Irelandic literature
47. Given rations
48. Prophet
49. Hall
50. Constellation, The Lyre
51. Small boys
53. Word of assent
55. Students' nightmare

DOWN

1. Young salmon: var.
2. Son of Adam
3. "—— majeste"
4. Spire
5. Subsequently
6. Finished
7. Sleeping place
8. One of the Pilgrim settlers
9. Interrogation
10. Single thing
11. Is the matter
16. Monkey
19. South American country
21. Norwegian toilsome
22. Vigor
23. Girls' name
24. Was present at
25. In place of
27. Skill
28. Caustic alkaline solution
30. Peruse
31. Gap
33. Immature frog
37. Working parts of a machine
38. Old musical instruments
39. Sleeker finial
43. For fear that
45. Mental image
46. Hallowed
48. Veal-colored quartz
49. Medical fluids
52. Kind of cheese
54. Dog's name