

Registered luggage

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Ulrich Knellwolf

Registered Luggage

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The railways are my sphere of action – or my camouflage, you could say. My working instruments are a go-as-you-please first class railway ticket and a large, soft, light suitcase. At the beginning of an enterprise the suitcase is empty. In addition I require a raincoat, a hat, the day's newspaper and my mobile phone – nothing else.

At some place or other I board a train. It should be a rather large station and the train should be an only moderately occupied express. A further condition is that it should have a dining car or at least a buffet car. However, I do not board the train at the dining car, but at the first class carriage farthest away from it. Here I hang up my coat and place the hat and the suitcase onto the baggage rack. I do not sit down, but – plainly visible to anyone who might be observing me – pick up my briefcase and make my way to the dining car. On the way I keep a steady look-out. Female tourists are suitable. Not those rucksack-girls wearing far-too-tight jeans, but elegant ladies with brand-name suitcases and crocodile leather handbags. If I see such a person, I sit down opposite her. Now the important thing is to strike up a conversation with her within a reasonable time. There are various tricks to accomplish this. No one will expect me to go into details about that, since these tricks are my professional secret. If you do it the right way, you will almost always be successful. Many women travelling alone are only too glad to meet a pleasant person to talk to. On such a trip you will often hear the most intimate stories from complete strangers. However, right from the beginning it is my intention to lure the object of my choice into the dining car as soon as possible. For this and for what follows it is important that I have a fair knowledge of the timetable.

Let us for example assume that I take the fast train from Zurich Main Station to Geneva at 11:34. That train unfortunately doesn't have a dining car, but at least it does have a buffet car. I have to be sitting there with my new acquaintance by Berne at the latest. That is less difficult to accomplish than a non-specialist might think. We are already ordering and drinking something. Shortly before arriving at Fribourg I ask her to forgive me if I leave her alone for a moment while I make a short telephone call. When I stand up I draw the mobile phone from my pocket. I run back through all the carriages, pick up my new acquaintance's suitcase on the way, stuff it into my own one, put on the raincoat, turn up its collar, put on my hat and leave the train at Fribourg. According to the timetable it is 1:08 PM. At 1:09 the train continues on its way. And at 1:16 the next train leaves Fribourg for Zurich. I take it, but I get off at Berne and check in

my suitcase, which is slightly heavier now, as registered luggage. Of course not to Zurich, that might give me away, but for example to Basle, to St. Gallen or to Chur. There I am able to pick up my loyal suitcase on the following day at the latest and return home, and then I can begin with the evaluation of my haul. If you accost the proper kind of person, the contents of such suitcases can yield quite a lot. I don't live badly from it. Of course the jewellery is the most lucrative. It is amazing what things better-off ladies pack into their suitcases. Furs aren't bad, either. On the other hand, you won't very often find cash. However, once I found no less than 20,000 Euro in cash lying among the underwear and the stockings in the suitcase of an Italian countess whom I had travelled with from Chiasso to Zurich (of course I got off the train at Zug). It was a hard-covered suitcase and you would never have credited it with such contents. The lady didn't dare to take it along to the dining car for fear of it being too conspicuous.

I made my largest haul ever last week. Since then I have had a problem. The piece of luggage in question was a large expensive-looking trolley case belonging to a very elegant and extremely attractive lady wearing a lot of make-up, who was travelling on the train from Zurich to Geneva as I explained earlier. Especially that piece of luggage, but also its owner had already attracted my attention on the platform at Zurich. Everything went very smoothly. At Burgdorf we were already sitting in the buffet car, at Fribourg I excused myself in the manner described. There was only one snag about the whole thing, but I didn't think that was too terrible at the time: My suitcase was too small to contain the lady's trolley case. So I left my reliable travelling companion lying in its place and only took along my raincoat and my hat. I feared there might be a search operation if my travelling acquaintance discovered her loss too soon, so I checked in the trolley case right away at Fribourg as registered luggage to Basle. On the evening of the same day I already had it handed over to me without any difficulty shortly before closing time.

The difficulties only started at home when I opened the trolley case. I should have been immensely pleased by its contents. There was jewellery lying there wrapped up in pieces of cloth – I should say it was worth about half a million Swiss francs altogether. I knew at once where the stuff came from: It was loot from the raid on a jeweller's at Lucerne that had taken place the previous week. Not only had the shop been raided, but the owner had been kidnapped as well. Although his next of kin had paid a heavy ransom, he had not turned up yet. And he would never turn up again – the proof for that was lying before me. For apart from the pile of trinkets the trolley case contained a large plastic bag filled with clothes – blood-smeared clothes.

One can imagine just how horrified I was. I was just wondering how to get rid of the incriminating textiles in the least conspicuous way when the telephone rang. A man's voice that I didn't recognize said: «Have you got them?» I played the innocent. Without another word the other person rang off. Through half the night I waited for another call, trembling; there was none. I was already calming down when the telephone rang again at eight o'clock: «Good morning. This is Tiefenbrunnen Station. You asked to be informed when your suitcase had arrived. It is here now.» I had not phoned them and I was not expecting any luggage, either.

I check in my bags as registered luggage at Tiefenbrunnen Station when I am going on a holiday trip and not travelling on business. They are very helpful there and treat me almost as part of

the family. «I'm coming right away», I said, so as not to arouse any suspicion. I was full of foreboding when I left the house, and had a look in the letter box, just to make sure. There was an envelope there with a ticket inside: «Registered luggage, registered: Lausanne, destination: Zurich Tiefenbrunnen.»

It was my suitcase. When I opened it at home I nearly fell over backwards. Inside the suitcase there was a severed human hand, to which a note was attached, saying: «We hope you will offer a hand to a good cooperation with us.»

I still didn't know what to do when the telephone rang yet again. I lifted up the receiver hesitatingly. «Yes, this is Tiefenbrunnen Station again», the kindly official's voice said. «Yet another suitcase has come for you. If I didn't know you as a good customer of our's, that most certainly would give me the creeps!»

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END