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A Guilty Conscience

It Needs No Accuser

By RODMAN BIRCH

On my return trip from London my hand baggage was carried to my stateroom by a steward. Unrolling my rugs, what was my astonishment to find within its folds a large quantity of the finest grade of lace and within the folds of the lace a chamois bag full of jew-

I examined the rug carefully and discovered that though the same coler as mine-a dark blue-it was not so much strap showed that it was not mine. It was plain that in the transition from the station to my stateroom my rug had been exchanged for this one. The only details of this theory I could supply were that the rugs had been dumped together on the steamer deck and later carried to their supposed respective staterooms. The one that had come to me had no tag on it, which, considering its valuable contents, amazed me. Indeed, I was surprised that the owner should have permitted it to go out of his possession.

I rolled up the bundle as I had found it, strapped it and instead of going on deck went to the smoking room to think out the problem of its owner-I proceeded methodically and after the fashion of detectives. The fact that the package was not tagged indicated that the owner did not care to have his name on it-that is, he intended to keep it in his own possession. Evidently the goods were to be smug-gled, and the smuggler on boarding the ship, finding himself suspected, had desired to temporarily get rid of it.



baggage on the deck and when unobserved had tossed it on one of these heaps. Then his attention had been distracted, and either he was unable to locate the pile on which Le had ried away before he could again get sion of it.

It remained for me to account on this theory for my not having both my own and this other rug in my posses ion. I theorized in this way: The smuggler having dropped his rug on my pile of hand baggage, finding an opportunity to take it up without being served, had picked up mine instead

I was well satisfied with my explana-

of his own.

tion and having settled the cause of the episode in my mind, began to think about the outcome. It struck me at once that there was enough in it to keep me interested all the way across. The smuggler having lost his property, What measures? I confess that were I in his place I would consider a search for my valuables like looking for a needle in a haystack. I, too, would be on the watch for him. Indeed, this phase of the question promised to be

very interesting. If I found him and he was a good fellow I would return his property without asking any ques tions. If he acted disagreeably-well, I could be disagreeable too. I knew some of the customs men in New York, and what I might do I could determine before meeting them.
I made a number of acquaintances

on the stemmer, and with one party—a gentleman named Stoneman, his wife and two daughters-I became quite intimate. They were wealthy and had been seeing Europe expensively. After pledging them to secreey I told them that there was a matter I would confide to them which might interest them -a problem that I would like their assistance in solving. I then told them about the error which had thrown a valuable property into my poss and invited them to observe our fellow passengers with a view to determining

the rightful poss Mr. Stoneman didn't take to the matter at all, cautioning me that it might get me into trouble. His wife coincided with him in this opinion, and their daughter, though interested, did not part in my investigations after her

However, the oldest Miss St plowever, the oldest Miss Stoneman, being of an age to be attracted by such a curious circumstance, the next day pointed out to me a man pacing the deck whom she said she thought might be the smuggler. She had been watching him, and he looked very uneasy. She was give he had semething on his She was sure he had something on his mind. The moment I looked at him I was of the same opinion. Moreover, he stared at me as I passed him. I wondered if he could know that I was in sion of the valuables.

After that Miss Stoneman and I, having a secret together, spent considerable time in each other's company, sitting on deck together. The man she had pointed out walked the deck much of the time, and whenever he passed us would look at us uneasily. I felt sure that he was my quarry. I asked Miss Stoneman how she came to light upon the man so quickly, and she said she didn't know herself. I told her it was that unaccountable power of intuition which women possess in lieu of the reasoning power of men.

But if the fellow knew that I had his property he took no steps, so far as I could see, to possess himself of it. Every time he passed me he looked at me harder than before, and I seemed to have a very disturbing effect upon him. One evening I approached the stern of the ship. Some one was looking over the taffrail, but I did not notice who he was. Suddenly he looked up at me. was the smuggler.

"I can stand this no longer," he said. "I know you are from Scotland Yard, and I may as well give myself up first

"How do you know that?" I asked, not wishing to commit myself. "It was that young lady who put you on to me. It's wonderful how these

women can know things." "Well, are you ready to confess?" "Will I gain anything by confession?"

"Certainly. I'll see to that." "Well, I lost the money on the stock exchange."

This was a surprise, but I kept my countenance. "Then it is all gone?"

"Every cent. I can't gain anything by restoration." The plot was thickening. In looking for the owner of the property I

held, I had stumbled on a criminal. I did not propose to mix myself up in this second affair, one was enough, so "My friend, you have made a mis-

take. I'm no Scotland Yard man, and I have no interest in your crime. Why have you been staring at me?"

"Why have you been staring at me?" he asked, with great apparent relief. I did not satisfy him. He had a guilty conscience, which Miss Stone-man had observed, so the moment we looked at him curiously he took it for granted he had been spotted. I told him I would not give him away, for which he thanked me. I didn't think it prudent to intrust Miss Stone man with his secret, so I told her that I had discovered that he was the

Our last day of the voyage came, and I was at a loss to know what to do with the laces and the diamonds. I spoke to my confidante about my property, and she suggested that so long as I had nothing to fear from the customs officers I might carry the package about as it was. After doing so the rightful owner might claim it, and then it would be time enough to decide what action to take. I replied that the rug would probably be unrolled and examined by the customs officers, whereupon she offered to take the lace and diamonds ashore herself.

Since she seemed inclined to this plan I reluctantly consented to it, yet fearing that if she got into trouble would be blamed. Her object seemed to be to serve me, though I fancied she supposed in case the property re mained with me she would fall heir to a part of it for getting it through free of duty. I handed it over to her, and she must have concealed it well. for she took it through without being

The criminal who had mistaken me for a Scotland Yard man did not fare so well. Officers who had been cabled that he was on the steamer took him in charge as he left the vessel.

When I parted from the Stonemans the mother gave me a pressing invitation to call upon them in New York before they departed for home, which they expected to do in a few days after landing. I called on them at their hotel and was graciously received.

Since my attentions to Miss Stone man on the steamer had been noticed, presently the others one by one excused themselves and left us alone to-

"Well," said the young lady, "have you discovered the owner of the prop-

"No one has applied for it." "Probably not, since it is mine." "Yours?"

I looked at her aghast. "You have no need to smuggle "It's the fascination of it. I was bound to get those things through free

of duty. When we went aboard the ship I got a fright. I saw the man I pointed out to you looking at me while I was carrying my rug. I dropped it and failed to find it again. That's all I knew about it till you told us it had

found its way into your stateroom."
"There were two of you." I said, laughing. "with a guilty conscience. though one was a thief, the other only a smuggler, which seems to be quite fashionable among the upper classes just now."

"Bo it seems There is nothing more to the story except that in time I married the girl fooling me ever since.

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