

Thubway Tham and Elevated Elmer

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ON this particular morning, Thubway Tham—— What's that? You don't know Thubway Tham?

Thubway Tham is the clever little pickpocket who lisps when he speaks. Since he always works in the subway during rush hours, he enjoys the name Thubway Tham, because he lisps when he says it, and shows no offense when other persons do the same. To call him Subway Sam is to affront him; he is Thubway Tham—no less, and he has the reputation of causing several of the police force, particularly a certain Detective Craddock, to gnash their teeth in rage. For, to land Thubway Tham behind bars, it is necessary to "catch him with the goods," and Tham declines to be caught that way or in any other.

To resume: On this particular morning Thubway Tham felt a certain amount of anger. There had appeared out of the nowhere a pickpocket fully as clever as himself, who demanded that he be called "Elevated Elmer." As Tham worked the subway, so Elmer worked the elevated trains. They had tolerated each other at first, but toleration had ended in a feud.

It was common talk in the underworld that Elevated Elmer's daily haul put the efforts of Thubway Tham to shame. That made it a professional matter, of course, and Tham had professional pride. The city was not large enough, despite its size, to accommodate both Thubway Tham and Elevated Elmer unless one of them was acknowledged peer in the line of work they practiced.

Thubway Tham ate breakfast at the usual restaurant, and after a time found himself at Union Square. He was walking aimlessly and thinking of the situation in which he found himself. Between Tham and Elevated Elmer there was a studied courtesy when they met, but each knew that the other held an ax behind his back, so to speak, and was watching for a blow.

"The thimp!" Thubway Tham mused, "I ought to kick in hith ugly fathe! He maketh me thick! Thilly ath!"

At that moment, Elevated Elmer came hurrying around the corner and almost ran into Tham.

"Tryin' to run over the town?" Tham demanded.

"Good morning, Tham! Little early for you, ain't it?"

"The early bird," said Tham, "geth the fatteth wallet! And the thwelleth thtick pin! I underthand you made quite a haul yethterday."

"Well, I aim to be a modest man, Tham, but there are times when a man feels entitled to a little credit."

"Are you tryin' to inthnuate that I am a crook?" Tham wanted to know.

"No insinuation, Tham—mere statement of fact."

"Juth becauth once I wath caught you——"

"Now don't begin that old gag about giving a dog a bad name, Tham. We understand each other, all right. One of these days, old boy, I'm going to catch you right, and then it'll be up the river for

yours! And I'll get this elevated bird, too."

"Get him!" said Tham. "Cut don't pethter me about your old troubleth!"

"Thinking of taking a ride in the subway this morning, Tham?"

"Why?"

"You know. I'll just trail along, if you do. You have a taking way with you, Tham. You took my shield once, don't forget that. But I'll be square with you one of these fine days. Retribution, will come, old boy, and don't you forget it."

"Tho will New Yearth!"

"Better behave, Tham," Craddock said.

And then he shocked and surprised Thubway Tham by walking on down the street. It was not a subterfuge, either. Tham watched him go to the end of the block and around the corner. Detective Craddock had some other business on hand—he did not intend to trail Thubway Tham on this particular day.

"Why, the thilly ath!" Tham said to himself. He had grown so used to working while Detective Craddock was on his trail that it made him feel queer when Craddock turned aside.

II.

Thubway Tham left the neighborhood of Union Square and walked down the street, still aimlessly, still pondering on his troubles. Presently he became aware of a foreign roar, and glanced up to find that he was beneath the hated elevated.

Thubway Tham stood back against the wall of a building and regarded the structure with deep scorn. He felt that it did not have merit enough to be considered as a rival to his beloved subway. There was no romance to it, Tham thought. To plunge into the ground, travel with speed, and to come to the surface again a couple of miles away in a very few minutes—that was romance! The elevated was a sort of, mechanical half wit—neither street car nor railroad train.

"Neither fith nor fowl!" Tham told himself.

A number of persons were starting to climb up the stairs before him, and Tham regarded them with interest, seeking to learn what species of mortal used the elevated. And suddenly he saw Elevated Elmer in the throng. Elmer, it was evident, was trailing a prosperous-looking gentleman. Thubway Tham decided that he would see how this Elevated Elmer worked.

He hurried up the stairs, purchased a ticket, and presently found himself out on the platform. He experienced no difficulty in preventing Elmer seeing him — Elmer saw nobody except that prosperous-looking man he was trailing.

The train roared in, and Thubway Tham got aboard, still watching Elmer, who was ahead of him, standing in the aisle. This was a crowded train, and yet it failed to impress Thubway Tham as furnishing the opportunities a man found in the subway during the rush hours. A feeling of security seemed to be missing.

"Nobody but a thilly ath would work in a plathe like, thith!" Tham told himself.

He managed to make his way along the crowded aisle and get closer to Elmer. And just before the next station was reached, he saw Elmer make a quick and significant move. Thubway Tham guessed that a wallet had changed owners.

"Coarthe work!" he commented to himself. "He ith an amateur, no leth! He maketh me thick! Thome fly cop ith goin' to nab him one of thethe dayth!"

Elmer left the train at the next station, and Thubway Tham followed him. On the stairs leading down to the street, Elevated Elmer turned and saw Tham.

"Well, well! Left the subway, huh?" he said. "Thought you never rode on the elevated."

"I juth wanted to thee how you worked," Tham told him.

"Well, you saw something, didn't you?"

"Your work ith coarthe!"

"So?"

"Tho! You'll be nabbed in thith manth town before the end of the month."

"If I am it'll be the work of some stool pigeon!" Elmer declared, his eyes narrowing.

"Thay! You needn't look at me like that!" Tham said. "I am no thtool pigeon!"

"I didn't say you were, did I? But you seem to be pretty thick with that detective, Craddock!"

"Well, my thaketh alive!" Tham exclaimed. "The man ith. after me; he hath thworn to get me if it taketh him ten yearth. You make me thome thick, thay I."

Thubway Tham was boiling now. To have it intimated that he was a stool pigeon, which is about the lowest order in the social scale, was the cracking point. Thubway Tham was perilously near to "going up in the air," and he knew it and fought against it, realizing that an angry man cannot carry on a battle of wits with a cool

antagonist.

"You're just living on your past reputation, old boy!" Elevated Elmer remarked. "No class to you any more."

"Tho?"

"Your day is done. You might pick up a nickel now and then from a drunk in the subway, but——"

"Thay! I don't lift leatherth from drunkth!" Tham informed him. "I thtole Craddockth thield once, and that ith goin' thome! And I can get the betht of you any day."

"Do so, Tham, do so!"

"I'll do tho! And I'll let everybody know it when I do!" Tham replied. "I'll thhow you up for an amateur! I'll bet thix bitth you came from Thicago!"

"Well, what's that to do with it?"

"No clath—no clath!" Tham told him. "Juth a flath in the pan! Bright to-day and dark to-morrow! No thayin' qualitieti!"

"And you can get the best of me, huh?"

"You thaid it!"

"When you do, old boy, I'll admit you are some dip. When you do, I'll lift my hat to Thubway Tham, all right!" "Ith that a promithe?" Tham asked.

"It sure is!"

"Very well," Tham said. "From thith moment, friendthip theatheth!"

He walked away, hurried around the corner, turned and looked back. Elevated Elmer had crossed the street diagonally and was walking down an avenue through a crowd. Thubway Tham turned again and followed at a distance.

At a greater distance, Detective Craddock, who had witnessed the conversation from afar, turned and followed Thubway Tham.

III.

Elevated Elmer went down the avenue half a dozen blocks, halting at a cross street now and then, and apparently doing nothing more nefarious than taking the air.

Thubway Tham followed, shadowing Elmer as well as ever detective shadowed a crook. Detective Craddock, chuckling to himself as if at a good joke, came along in the rear. Craddock was beginning to think that he had made a mistake regarding Tham. He always had supposed that

Tham worked alone, and now he began to suspect that Tham worked with another man. This time, he intended to get Thubway Tham.

But it puzzled Craddock that Tham did not make for a subway entrance. This was the rush hour, when Tham was supposed to do his work. And here was Thubway Tham walking along the streets in the wake of another man, as if he had no thought of working.

Then Craddock became aware of the fact that Thubway Tham was shadowing the other man. His actions told plainly that he did not want the man ahead to know he was being followed. Since he had seen Tham and the other man talking together, Craddock began wondering what it might mean.

Elmer stopped at a corner, Tham halted, and Craddock went forward and touched Tham on the shoulder.

"Taking a constitutional, Tham?" he asked.

"You goin' to pether me thome more?"

"That's hard to tell, Tham. I saw your little conversation down the street, with that chap who is ahead of us, and it made me wonder."

"Huh!"

"Friend of yours? Working in pairs now?"

"Thay! Don't you call that man any friend of mine!" Tham said.

"Like that, eh? Well, Tham, when crooks fall out there is some chance for an honest detective!"

"There ain't any thuch animal!" Tham told him.

"Now, Tham, you know that's a lie! Who is the gent ahead you have been watching?"

"That ith a man I hate!" Tham said. "And that ith all I am going to thay!"

"Very well, Tham. I'll have to trail along and gather my own information, I suppose."

Now, what Thubway Tham had feared, came to pass. Elevated Elmer happened to turn around, and beheld Tham talking to Detective Craddock. He knew that Tham had been following him. And Tham, who had grown angry because Elevated Elmer intimated he might be a stool pigeon, knew that Elevated Elmer would think just that from now on. The one great fear of Tham's life was that those of the underworld would believe him to be a dishonest crook.

"Don't pether me!" he told Craddock, appearing angry for the sole benefit of Elevated Elmer. "Everybody'll be thayin' I am your thtool pigeon."

"I'll tell them differently, Tham, old boy."

"And they'll all believe you, of courthe!"

Tham sneered.

"How does it happen, Tham, that you are not at work?"

"Thir?"

"You heard me, Tham. The subway is jammed and there are wallets to be had for the picking."

"Thay!"

"Don't begin that again, Tham. We understand each other, all right. I'm beginning to think that you are the fellow who is pulling off those elevated jobs."

"Thay! Don't pethter me, now! You make me thore!"

"Well, it looks a bit suspicious, Tham."

Thubway Tham was doing some fast thinking. He wanted to follow Elevated Elmer, watch him work, and square accounts, but he did not care, as much as he disliked Elmer, to lead Detective Craddock to him and have Elmer arrested. For word certainly then would go forth that Thubway Tham had fallen from grace and was hand in glove with the police. Thubway Tham would find himself ostracized afterward. All his friends would desert him; every man and woman of the underworld would look upon him with suspicion.

Elmer had seen him speaking to Craddock. Tham would have to make Elmer believe that it was merely a "stand up," that the detective was questioning him. Moreover, Elmer would be leaving his present location before long, and Tham wanted to follow without having Craddock trailing along.

"I am feelin' a bit thick!" he told the detective. "And I don't want you to pethter me, I thaid!"

"Well, Tham, why were you following that chap? You said you hated him. Not turning gunman, are you? Going to plug him when he isn't looking? Got a gun on you?"

"Thearch me!" Tham offered. "I never had a gun in my life. I don't know which end of one thoots."

"Tut, tut! You are far too modest, Tham. Well, don't let me detain you longer. On your way, old boy!"

"And I thuppothe you will be right behind," said Tham.

"You said it!"

"You make me thick, I thaid!"

"If you are very ill, Tham, you'll find a drug store on almost any corner. Or shall I ring for an ambulance?"

Thubway Tham almost choked. He whirled around on one heel and deliberately crossed the street. Detective Craddock, still chuckling, just as deliberately followed.

Elevated Elmer sneered as he watched the maneuver, he sneered at Tham, and at Craddock, and at conditions in general. And then he went on down the street, stopping to purchase cigarettes, and glancing back.

But Thubway Tham was not following him now. Thubway Tham had decided that his first duty was to lose Detective Craddock. He disliked Elmer, but wished to show him that he, Thubway Tham, was as far above the elevated dip as the stars above the earth, when it came to being a professional pickpocket.

Tham hurried up Sixth Avenue through the crowds, now and then flinching a bit when an elevated train roared by overhead. Every train that passed made more firm his determination to win over Elmer. The fame of his beloved subway was at stake in a way, he had decided. He'd show Elmer!

He seemed to be having some difficulty in losing Craddock on this day. The detective was continually at his very heels, and now and then spoke to him.

Tham put match to cigar. That was an indication that he did not intend entering the subway for some little time, since smoking in the subway is something that is not done. But Craddock did not relax his vigilance. Tham might be up to something else, so far as Craddock knew. Crooks have been known to change their methods of work overnight, with success.

Presently Tham hurried over to Broadway, turned down it, plunged through the throngs on the corners, and tried in every way to throw Craddock off the trail. Then he stood on a corner for half an hour, until he had finished his cigar, trying to "wait him out," but Craddock refused to tire.

Thubway Tham began to be disgusted with himself. Often before he had managed to lose Craddock in a crowd. He went over to Ninth Avenue, and came once more to the hated elevated.

Suddenly Thubway Tham darted up the stairs. For the second time that day he bought a ticket for the elevated. He rushed to the platform just in time to spring aboard a train, and he turned and grinned at Craddock, who was just too late to get aboard.

Well, he had escaped for the time being. Then horror came to him!

Craddock and the police knew that there was

a clever pickpocket working on the elevated. And he, like a fool, had taken the elevated before Craddock's eyes, when all the underworld knew that he hated the structure above the ground. If a trick was turned within half an hour, Craddock would suspect him.

And then came a feeling of relief. If he made Craddock believe that he had changed his scene of operations to the elevated, perhaps Craddock would watch there, and Thubway Tham would be able to work in the subway, unmolested.

"Life," said Tham to himself, "ith juth one darn disappointment after another. Thome day I'm goin' to turn honeth! Thith thort of thing ith bad for the nervth!"

And then he saw Elevated Elmer again.

IV.

Elevated Elmer recognized Thubway Tham at the same time, and made his way to his side.

"Got your detective friend along?" he whispered.

"Thay! I want you to know that I am no thttool pigeon!" Tham told him. "Craddock wath thtandin' me up, that ith all! He pethterth the life out of me, that man doth! Thome day I am goin' to thmath in his ugly fathel!"

"That'll do to tell!"

"Well, it ith tho! I juth dodged him."

"I saw it," Elmer admitted. "Maybe you're on the square, but I'm going to keep my eyes on you, just the same."

"You talk like you amounted to thomething!" Tham complained. "You runnin' thith town?"

"If I was, I'd run you out of it!"

"Yeth?"

"Yes! You've had your little day!"

Thubway Tham choked and turned his back. Oh, he'd get even with Elevated Elmer, all right!

Elmer went on down the aisle of the car. He was intending to work; and Tham knew it. Tham sat down and watched. He saw Elmer brush against a portly man who swayed from a strap. He saw Elmer's hand make a lightning-like movement. Thubway Tham grinned.

When the next station was reached, Elmer got off one end of the car and Thubway Tham at the other: Tham followed him down the stairs, went across the street and shadowed his man. He had forgotten Craddock for the time being. He had

forgotten everything except that he meant to humble the boasting youth who had come out of the nowhere with loud talk and was trying to take a reputation away from Thubway Tham.

Elmer walked east, and Tham followed, keeping himself from being seen by the man ahead. Elmer came to Broadway and started for a subway entrance.

Thubway Tham exulted. He guessed that Elmer intended to hurry downtown and get away from the scene of his latest crime. Thubway Tham plunged into the entrance after him.

He was on ground he knew, now. Every subway station in the city, every subway exit, every subway flight of steps, was familiar to him. He knew where there were posts and pillars behind which a man could dodge, where tracks could be crossed and where they could not. Thubway Tham knew more about the subway than the men who owned it and worked on it.

He dodged behind a pillar and watched Elevated Elmer pass through to the platform. A train roared in. Tham waited until the last moment, then dropped his ticket and darted into a crowded car as Elmer entered it through another door.

It was a car of the sort in which Tham loved to work. There was scarcely room to move about. Tham was a short man, and he hunched his shoulders and made himself shorter, and worked slowly and carefully toward Elevated Elmer, who was standing near the door.

He moved with great caution, being careful not to attract the suspicion of Elmer or of anybody else. And in time he stood directly behind the dip.

It was merely a matter of waiting for the right moment, now. Tham allowed two men to get between himself and Elmer and effectually hide him. Station after station was passed, and still Elmer remained on the train.

"City Hall next!" the guard announced.

Elmer made a slight movement, just enough to tell Thubway Tham that he intended leaving the train at that station. Tham made ready for work. He got between the two men and gently urged them aside so that he stood directly behind Elevated Elmer again.

The train roared into the station and stopped. The doors flew open. The crowd surged forward. Thubway Tham jammed himself close against Elmer as the surge began. His experienced hand darted down—and up. His heart exulted.

When Elmer made for the stairs, Thubway Tham was just behind him. They reached the

street, and Elmer started walking down it. Thubway Tham kept his hand in his pocket, opened the wallet under cover, felt bills, and took them out. Then he drew a notebook and a piece of pencil from his pocket and wrote as he walked along. His hand went into his pocket again, and the sheet of paper he had torn from the notebook went into the wallet.

Thubway Tham was chuckling to himself now. He walked a bit faster and came closer to Elmer, who had not observed him. There was a crowd at the corner, and there Tham brushed against Elmer again, and slipped the wallet back into Elmer's pocket. A moment later he stepped up to Elmer's side.

"Tho you had to take the thubway when you wanted to make thpeed, did you?" Tham asked.

"You here again?" Elmer countered. His face started to turn white, and he felt in his pocket. An expression of relief came into his countenance when he felt the wallet still there.

"The thubway hath the elevated thkinned every, time," Tham went on. "Kindly remember the wordth, for you are goin' to thee them thoon."

"You make me sick!" Elmer said.

"Then I am thatithfied!" Thubway Tham remarked.

He turned up the next street, and Elevated

Elmer walked on, and after a time reached the room he called home. There was a look of keen anticipation in his face when he took the wallet from his pocket. It was a fat wallet and gave the appearance of being much used. Elmer opened it quickly.

He found some receipts, a railroad ticket, but no money. Then he noticed a sheet of paper torn from a notebook, and on it was a message written with a lead pencil. It read :

The subway has the elevated skinned every time.

T. T.

Elmer gasped and sat down weakly on the bed. He knew there had been money in that wallet and that Thubway Tham had it now. But the money was not everything. Thubway Tham would spread the story. From one end of the underworld to the other it would be known that Thubway Tham was the superior of Elevated Elmer in all things pertaining to the picking of pockets.

In his own room, Thubway Tham was counting a fat sheaf of currency. And he was chuckling again.

"Oh, the thilly ath!" he said.