

Thubway Tham's Thanksgiving Dinner

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THUBWAY THAM stood across the street from Union Square, his mouth drooping at the corners, his general appearance that of a man who did not have a friend in the world, and but few relatives.

You are acquainted with Thubway Tham, of course, the clever little pickpocket who lisped and who worked at his nefarious pursuit only in the subway during rush hours, two facts that caused his nickname to come into being. That name now was one to conjure with in the city's underworld.

On this, the day before the annual Thanksgiving feast, Thubway Tham leaned against the wall of a building and almost snarled as he looked at the jostling throngs. He scarcely knew whether to weep or curse. He felt that he was experiencing mingled friendlessness, loneliness, and the old-fashioned blues. Thubway Tham was at the point where a man begins to pity himself.

"Well, well, if it isn't my old friend, Tham!" said a voice at his elbow. There was a certain amount of sarcasm in the voice, and Thubway Tham grunted his displeasure as he whirled around to face Detective Craddock.

Craddock knew Thubway Tham for what he was. He had sworn to "get" Thubway Tham and to see that he spent a long term in the big, cold prison up the river. But at every crisis Thubway Tham appeared to be favored of the gods to such an extent that he always escaped. Detective Craddock, to get Thubway Tham, had to "catch him with the goods," and he knew it.

"Thith ith enough," Thubway Tham said now: "Thith ith the lath thdraw! Now I am goin' to butht thomething wide open! Juth ath I wath moanin' to mythelf about not havin' any friendth for Thankthgivin', you come along with your ugly

fathe and make me feel worthe! Thith ith the lath thdraw!"

"Why, Tham, you're not homesick, or anything like that, are you?"

"I ain't even got a home to be home-thick about, you poor thimp!"

"Remorseful because of your mode of life, Tham, old boy?"

"You make me thick," Tham complained. "I ain't got any mode of life, whatever that ith! I ain't nobody and I ain't got nuthin! I'm juth a thilly ath!"

"Aren't you a bit hard on yourself, Tham?"

"And you——" Tham sputtered in his wrath. "You——All you do ith pethter me to death. You follow me around like a dog thmellin' a thteak. I don't thee why they have to have Thankthgivin' anyway. Thilly old idea!"

"Why, Tham, on that day we give thanks because we have had a year of plenty."

"I've had plenty of you the patht year, all right," Tham told him. "It ain't right for a man to be pethtered all the time by the thame fly cop!"

"You know why, Tham. You're going to make a little slip one of these days, and then you are going up the river. It can't last, Tham, old rooster!"

"If I made thith thlipt right under your nothe, you wouldn't thee them," Tham told him. He started to move away.

"Going to take a little ride in the subway, Tham?" Craddock asked. "Because, if you are, I'm going right along. It appears that about every time you take a ride in the subway, some gentleman of means reports that his pocket-book is unaccountably missing."

"I thuppothe I am to blame for every purthe in town that ith thlit," Tham said.

"Perhaps not every purse, Tham, old boy, but for quite a quantity of them."

"Thay! I am on the thquare today, and I don't want to be pethtered. I ain't feelin' well," Thubway Tham explained. "Maybe it ith my thtomach."

"Don't let it be your nerves, Tham. If those fingers of yours begin to itch and tingle, they might get you into trouble. However, you may be a clever dip, but you are not a liar. If you tell me on your word of honor that you are in a blown funk today and do not intend to work, I'll go about my business and leave you alone."

"You got my word," Tham said.

Detective Craddock made an elaborate bow.

"In that case, Tham, go your way in peace," he said. "But may Heaven help you if I find later that I have been double crossed!"

"Did I ever double crothe anybody?" Tham angrily demanded. "Don't I alwayth play thquare? Don't you forget that I'm an honeth crook! Double crothe! You make me thick! Thilly ath!"

Thubway Tham turned his back upon Detective Craddock's laughing face and walked away. He felt the grip of a great loneliness upon him again. It was true that he did not have a relative in all the world, and such friends as he possessed were friends of short standing—acquaintances, rather—and were not to be trusted too far. The only time Thubway Tham had been "sent away" was through a stool pigeon he had taken to his bosom, believing him to be an honest man.

He walked on around Union Square, and finally came to a stop before a large restaurant and cafe. It was time to eat, but Thubway Tham was no slave to habit; he ate when hunger called for food, and not at stated hours.

He glanced through a big window and watched the diners. On the morrow, he knew, several thousand would eat their Thanksgiving dinners in that restaurant, and almost all of them would be eating it with friends. Tham could not remember when he had eaten one except alone, and again his heart grew sad.

He appeared to come to a sudden decision, for he hurried through the door and declared that he wished to speak to the manager. The cashier sent for his superior.

"I want to order a Thankthgiving dinner," Thubway Tham told him.

"Yes, sir—glad to serve you, sir," the manager said, he glanced at Thubway Tham's clothes, which were not of the costliest, but the manager knew better than to judge solely by a man's clothes.

"A regular dinner for ten," Thubway Tham went on. "I want the whole thtuff, with all the trimmin'. And I want the oythterth juth right and the thelery crithp!"

"I shall make it a point to see that you are well served, sir."

"I want that dinner ready at one o'clock," Tham went on. "Ten of uth—at a thpecial table."

"Yes, sir. We can do it for a dollar and a half a plate, sir."

"Thay! I want a dinner," Thubway Tham said. "I want thomething extra thpethial! And, now that I come to think of it, we'll make that dinner for twenty—five dollarth a plate."

"Dinner for twenty—one hundred dollars—yes, sir. And—er—it is usual in such cases for a little deposit—"

"Of courthe," said Tham. He took two ten-dollar bills from his pocket and extended them. "I'll pay you the retht tomorrow when I come to dinner."

"Thank you, sir—that will be satisfactory. And the name?"

"Joneth," said Thubway Tham.

II.

Thubway Tham's breast was swollen like that of a pouter pigeon as he went out upon the street. He had talked and acted like a man of substance. He actually had ordered a dinner for nineteen friends and himself, a dinner that was to cost one hundred dollars, and he had paid twenty dollars down in advance to make sure of the service.

"All I got to do now ith to get nineteen friendth and eighty dollarth," he told himself.

He didn't know where to turn to get his guests and, as for the eighty dollars, he had given his word to Detective Craddock that he would not enter his beloved subway this day with the object of relieving some gentleman of his valuables.

Thubway Tham spent another hour wandering around the streets and considering this problem. And then he thought of newsboys.

It often had appeared to Thubway Tham that Thanksgiving Day was a national institution for newsboys. When the holiday approached, almost everybody planned a dinner for newsies he knew, and grinning ladies and gentlemen stood about the tables and watched them gorge themselves.

Tham knew that some of the newspapers furnished these dinners, and he guessed that the newsies grew tired of them at times. He decided to invite nineteen of them to a special dinner, where they would be treated as honored guests instead of objects of wonder.

Thubway Tham found that the first newsie he approached looked upon him with suspicion. But finally he made himself clear, and the newsie was delighted. He spoke for himself and four friends, and he directed Thubway Tham to a boy on a certain other corner who could supply more guests. Thubway Tham spent another two hours delivering personal invitations to the special dinner to be given by "Mr. Joneth" at a certain restaurant at a certain hour the following day.

That night Tham felt some nervousness as he thought of it. Being host at a dinner for twenty was something new in the life of Thubway Tham. And he had less than two dollars in his pocket, and would have to hand the restaurant manager eighty before his guests could be served. In the event of failure, Thubway Tham could merely remain away from the restaurant and ignore his guests, of course, but Thubway Tham was a gentleman of honor in some things. He had invited guests to a dinner, and he would supply the dinner and funds to pay for it.

It was eight o'clock on the morning of Thanksgiving Day when Thubway Tham, dressed as carefully and as elaborately as possibly, entered the subway far downtown, where he lived, and caught a train bound for a district up the island.

His lips curled into a sneer as he looked at the others in the car. There was small chance here for Thubway Tham to get his eighty dollars, the crowd having the appearance of not possessing one-tenth that sum.

Thubway Tham rode to Times Square and emerged upon the street. There seemed to be a

sort of unsettled look about the city. Thubway Tham realized that it was because this was a holiday. The same old crowds were not in the same old places at the same hours. The routine of the city was disrupted.

And then a thought of horror came to him. Perhaps because of this condition, there would be no jostling crowds no rush hours in the subway. There would be large theater crowds at the matinee hour, of course, but that would be too late for his purpose. Tham had ordered dinner for one o'clock..

He plunged into the subway again and rode down one station to Grand Central. There were less than half a dozen persons in the car in which he rode, and when the station was reached he found that there was no jostling crowd there. And there he felt a touch on his arm, and whirled around to find Detective Craddock at his elbow.

"Enjoying Thanksgiving, Tham?" Craddock asked. "It's a great old holiday! But don't you think you are a bit far uptown?"

"I've got a perfect, right——" Tham began.

"I know you have, Tham. As I remarked on a previous occasion, your right certainly is perfect—meaning the right hand and the manner in which it can invade a man's pocket, of course. And your left isn't so bad, either."

"Thay! Are you goin' to pethter me again today?" Thubway demanded. "It ith bad enough to have no friendth or relativeth on thuth a day, without bein' pethtered too. It ith about all a man can thtand!"

"Ah! Want to make another little promise pact—word of honor until the holiday is over, or something like that?"

"I do not make any dealth with the devil," Thubway Tham told him. "You talk like a thilly ath!"

"Ah! That means of course, that you are out for the stuff today, since you refuse to give me your word you'll do nothing wrong. Well, I suppose I'll have to toddle along right behind you and protect the wallets of the public."

"Thay! I am gettin' thick of thith! You thtay away from me onthe in a while!"

"Can't afford to do it, Tham. I've got to be handy when you make that slip, you know."

"You and your thlipth!"

"Now, don't get angry, Tham. A man never is fully efficient when he is angry, and when a man is not efficient, slips occur. You want to watch out for that slip, Tham, for if you give the judge a chance he's going to hang quite a number of years on your record."

"If I let you catch me, I ought to get a million yearth," Tham told him.

"Want to make that promise of yours good for today, then?"

"No, thir! I don't promithe nuthin'!"

"On the warpath then, are you?"

"Yeth, thir—I am!"

III.

A train was just roaring into the station. Tham entered a car, Detective Craddock following, went through it rapidly, and sprang through the doorway and out just as the door started to close. But Craddock got out, too.

"A little slow that time, Tham," he said. "You worked that trick on me once, you know."

Thubway Tham made no reply. He was thoroughly angry now. It was almost ten o'clock in the morning, and Tham had to have eighty dollars before one o'clock to keep faith with the guests he had invited. He was commencing to feel desperate. Three hours was a short time in which to accomplish his purpose, especially when the subway crowds were not what they should have been and Detective Craddock was at his heels.

He ascended to the street and for half an hour dodged here and there, but failed to evade Craddock. It appeared that the detective was determined this day—he did not intend to lose sight of Thubway Tham. They did not speak, but now and then they glared at each other.

Tham went over to Broadway again and sought a crowd into which he could plunge and shake off Craddock, but Broadway did not seem to be dealing in crowds today. So Tham gave a sigh of resignation, went into the subway again, and traveled to Union Square.

Craddock was two paces behind him when he went up to the street, and stood looking at the battleship replica and the blue jackets around it. Tham saw one of the newsboys he had invited to

dinner, and the newsie stopped work long enough to wave a hand at him and grin.

Why, they were anticipating that dinner, Tham told himself. He had made friends merely by inviting them. They'd speak to him after this whenever he passed them on the street. He'd have friends!

But, unless he got the eighty dollars what then? They'd point him out with scorn as the man who invited nineteen newsboys to a Thanksgiving dinner and then did not show up to furnish the food.

Thubway Tham felt a lump come into his throat, and it startled him, for he had not believed himself capable of emotion. Why, he simply *had* to get that eighty dollars, he told himself! He couldn't fool those expectant newsboys! If that confounded Craddock——

He turned around to find Craddock grinning at him. It was almost as if the detective had read his thoughts. Thubway Tham never resorted to violence in his work, but he felt now that he would like to have Detective Craddock walking through a dark alley, and be waiting there himself with a club in his hands.

He started walking around the square. Craddock followed, of course. Tham glanced at his watch, and saw that it was almost eleven o'clock. He had only two hours.

Once more he turned toward the subway entrance; this time to find some sort of a crowd there. Thubway Tham plunged into it gracefully, like a swimmer plunging into the ocean's ample waters. He darted here and there on the platform below. A train dashed in, and Thubway Tham got into one of the cars without Craddock noticing him. The train started. Thubway Tham caught a glimpse of Craddock on the platform outside, and Craddock saw him. But Thubway Tham was on an express train, and Craddock would have to wait for the next—nor did he know at which station Thubway Tham would get off.

Tham scarcely knew that himself. He decided, finally, to change and go as far uptown as Columbus Circle. That was territory that meant trouble if Craddock saw him there, for Thubway Tham had been warned to remain away from that district. The warning had followed some particularly bold thefts around the Columbus

Circle station.

Tham was gratified to find this train was more crowded than the others had been. He left his seat and stood not far from one of the doors. He saw an elderly gentleman of prosperous appearance in whose face was reflected the spirit of the holiday. Tham felt sure the elderly gentleman could afford to lose a few dollars, and that perhaps he was the sort of man who would have fed a group of newsboys himself, had he happened to think of it.

The train stopped, and the crowd surged from the cars. Thubway Tham brushed against the elderly gentleman for a moment, and an instant later he had a fat wallet in his own pocket.

Thubway Tham's heart exulted as he reached the street. He could return to Union Square and keep faith with his newsies now. He could eat with them, and make sure that they enjoyed it, and he would make friends.

He made his way quickly to a convenient saloon, sat down at a table, and ordered a drink. Waiting until he was sure that nobody was observing him, he took the wallet from his pocket. He wanted to remove the money and get rid of the damning purse; it wouldn't do to have Craddock or some other detective find that on his person. As for the money itself, bills are hard to identify.

He opened the wallet and searched it quickly. And once more hope fled his breast.

The wallet contained no money at all. In it were newspaper and magazine clippings furnished by a clipping bureau, and having to do with some art collection.

Thubway Tham was almost sobbing now. He looked at his watch again and found that it was noon. Within a few minutes his guests would be gathering at the restaurant in Union Square. They would wait patiently for him at first, and then doubt would begin to enter their hearts; finally they would decide that Thubway Tham had worked a cruel hoax on them.

Tham considered his watch. At a certain place far downtown he could get ten dollars on that watch; he knew, because he often had done it before. But ten dollars would do no good in the present emergency.

He tried to think of other resources, and failed to do so. Given several hours, he might

have been able to borrow the sum in small amounts from acquaintances in the underworld, but he did not have time for that.

Thubway Tham threw the wallet into a cuspidor and hurried from the place. He went into the subway again, traveled downtown, and got out at Union Square. And there he met Craddock again.

"You've got to stand a frisk, Tham," Craddock told him. "You went uptown, and it's a safe bet that you nicked somebody for his roll."

"Thearch me," said Tham.

"This is no bluff, Tham. I intend to do it. Stand back here!"

Craddock searched and found a dollar bill and some change, and that was all.

"Thee?" Tham asked him. "I just got enough to get my Thankthgivin' dinner."

"Um! How does it come you are so nearly broke, Tham?"

"Expentheth ith thomething awful," Tham explained. "I gueth I will have to get a job thome plathe."

"Well, why not?"

"If I did you'd petther me juth the thame," Tham told him. "I thuppothe I am due to be petthered by you ath long ath I live in thith town."

"Huh! Why not move?"

"And leave the thubway?" Tham asked.

Such a thought was horrifying. Since the day when it had been thrown open for the use of the public, Thubway Tham had worshiped the big line. Life away from the subway was something too awful for Tham to contemplate.

He wished Craddock would leave him. It was almost one o'clock, and Tham knew that the newsboys were gathering for the feast he had promised them. He wished now he had had only ten guests at a dollar and a half a plate, but it was too late for that now.

"Tham, if you're really broke, I can slip you a five," Craddock told him. "I expect to send you up the river some day, but I can't get any glory out of tracking down a hungry man. A hungry man, you know, will make mistakes a man who has had his dinner will not make. This is a square fight between us, Tham."

"You couldn't make it eighty dollarth, could you?" Tham asked.

"Do you think I'm the First National Bank, my boy? Why do you want eighty dollars?"

"Oh, I don't," said Tham quickly. "I wath juth talkin'. Thankth for your kindneth, but I can get along without the five."

"Well, be mighty careful how you replenish your funds, Tham."

"You juth keep your eyeth open," Tham advised him. "I can borrow, and I can collect what thome men owe me. And I can get me a job thome plathe when all other hope ith gone."

Thubway Tham turned away—and Detective Craddock turned after him. Tham was near to tears. Why, he'd not dare look a newsie in the face after this, he told himself. They'd hate the sight of him. And he didn't have the nerve to go across to the restaurant and tell them the truth; he knew what sort of a reception that would earn for him.

He passed the subway entrance, where there was quite a throng now, and Craddock moved closer. But, Tham continued on through the crowd instead of going underground.

And then the heart of Thubway Tham almost ceased beating. In front of him a man was getting out of a taxi-cab. He paid the chauffeur from a roll of bills and thrust the remaining bills carelessly into the outside pocket of his overcoat. Thubway Tham, desperate, willing to take a chance despite the nearness of Detective Craddock, darted his hand forward and got the bills, transferred them to his own pocket, and went on through the crowd with Craddock at his heels. He walked briskly toward the Restaurant, and once, where there was another crowd, he glanced at the bills to find he had ample for his present needs.

"And I did it right under hith thilly nothe!" Tham exultingly told himself. He turned and faced Craddock boldly. "I am going in thith plathe to get my Thankthgivin' dinner, and I don't want you around," he told the detective. "I ain't got much money and I want to enjoy my meal. And I can't

do it if you are near. You give me indigethtion."

"Fair enough, Tham. Go ahead and eat!" Craddock said.

Tham turned into the restaurant.

"Ah, Mr. Jones, we were beginning to get a bit worried about you," the manager said. "Your little guests are here, and looking hungry."

"Here ith the eighty," Tham told him, and counted out the bills, finding that he had some fifteen dollars remaining, And then he hurried to the long table where nineteen grinning newsies shouted a welcome that warmed Thubway Tham's heart.

The manager stepped to the door and nodded to Detective Craddock. "There's the kind of man I like," he said.

"Who's that?" Craddock asked.

"At the head of the long table back there. He's giving a dinner to nineteen newsboys. I was a bit leary of him for a time, but he's all right. Showed up at the last minute and paid me the eighty dollars he owed for the dinner."

"Just now?" Craddock asked.

"Sure!"

"And when I searched him less than ten minutes ago he didn't have two dollars in his clothes. And he spoke to me about borrowing eighty. I wonder where he got it?"

One of the newsies hurried out and handed Craddock a cigar.

"Mr. Jones sent it to you, sir," the boy explained, "He's giving us a dinner, and he's some prince. And he said that, if you were hungry, to come in and he'd have another plate set."

Detective Craddock snorted.

"You tell your friend Mr. Jones," he said, "that I'll get him yet!"

"Yes, sir."

"And I hope all of you enjoy your dinner. I don't care to eat just now. You see, I'm afraid I couldn't relish the grub just at the present time."