

Thubway Thum Getti Bail

by Johnston McCulley

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OFFICERS assigned to a certain precinct police station enjoyed a long and boisterous laugh when Detective Jim Greecher put in his appearance there and announced that the precinct would be his headquarters henceforth. The men higher up, he inferred, desired at least one competent officer in this particular station.

"What do you mean, competent?" Captain Jones wanted to know. There was a chorus of sniggers from members of the force who stood about in the offing to get a close-up of this latest acquisition to a department that is a wonder for making few mistakes, but which does make one now and then just to show that it is human.

Detective Jim Greecher was an accident such as happens once in a while in municipal circles. How he got on the police force in the first place was a mystery that the entire detective force could not have solved, and how he managed to get appointed a detective was a deeper, darker mystery.

So many unexpected golden apples had been tossed into his lap that Greecher began to think that he must be good. When he reached the precinct to which he had been assigned his egotism was full grown and in the best of health. He was so egotistical that he could not measure his own egotism.

"We need one or two good men down here," Captain Jones announced in a tone more solemn than the occasion warranted. "I've had troubles of my own in this station, Greecher. I'm only a poor, downtrodden captain who has to take what they hand him, and they've handed me an awful force."

"Don't doubt it a bit," Greecher replied.

"Take Detective Michael McCann, for instance. They handed me him five years ago, and he's here yet. That's his chair over there in the corner—he sleeps in it. Mike McCann has been on the force only twenty-five years, and he thinks he's a regular he-cop. He knows every man, woman, and child in the district, and he has pulled off a hundred big arrests, more or less. But what of that?"

"All in the day's work," Greecher admitted.

"And Tim Mulligan has been around here fifteen years or so, and thinks he owns the place. Tim is the boy, you may remember, who shot up a gang of six silk thieves after they had plugged him full of lead, arrested the few still able to gasp for breath, called the wagon, kept them covered until the wagon got there, and then collapsed and had to be carted to the hospital. When it comes to being a cop Tim is a bum in my estimation."

“Oh, I suppose he is all right,” Greecher said waving a hand to indicate that he wished to be charitable. “But a man can only do as much as his brains tell him to do. The application of brains to police work makes a great difference.”

“It was my humble belief, Greecher, that the application of brains to any business makes a great difference, but we’ll let it pass. I take it you intend to apply a few brains around here?”

“Naturally,” Greecher said.

“Want me to tell you a few things about the district?”

“Thanks, but I’d rather form my own impressions.”

“That’s right nice of you, Greecher. Nothing special on now, and so it might be a great idea for you to go out and prowl around and get acquainted.”

Detective Jim Greecher decided to do that. When he had reached a point about one city block from the precinct station there arose from that station a shriek of laughter that shook the roof.

“The poor boob!” Captain Jones exclaimed. “He’s going to reform us, he is?”

Detective Jim Greecher, puffing at a fat cigar, wandered slowly up and down the streets observing pawnshops, dark hallways, alleys, and spots that might lend themselves readily to a crime. It was a district where children played in the streets, and mothers shrieked at them from second-story windows. Not the cleanest, finest district in the city, but one of the most human.

But Greecher was not thinking of humanity. He was thinking that he wished something would happen to introduce him properly to the neighborhood. He wanted to have people point him out as he walked the streets, and maybe shiver when they spoke his name in hushed tones. Greecher had wanted something like that from the

first day of joining the department, but it had been delayed.

He saw a few men whom he considered suspicious characters, but said nothing to them. He did display his shield to one foreign storekeeper when he ordered him to clear some boxes off the sidewalk. The merchant muttered in his own language something to the effect that there might be a bomb outrage at any moment in Greecher’s vicinity.

It was an hour before noon when Detective Jim Greecher saw a man standing on a corner leaning up against a building. Greecher stopped and considered this man well.

“There is a typical vagrant,” Greecher said to himself. “He is a small man, possibly very active, obviously inclined to follow the line of least resistance when it comes to getting a living. I’ll watch this bird a few minutes. If he doesn’t stop somebody and ask for a quarter to get a cup of coffee and a bun, then I don’t know human nature.”

Standing in a convenient doorway Jim Greecher watched. People by the score passed the man leaning against the building at the corner, but he made no effort to speak to one of them. Greecher began to get incensed and, instead of admitting to himself that he had made a mistake in judging the man, he was ready to vent his temper on the object of his scrutiny.

It was about time for Detective Jim Greecher to assert himself. Making up his mind swiftly he stepped from the doorway, walked to the corner, and approached his man. The other turned in his direction and focused a questioning eye upon him. Jim Greecher exhibited his shield.

“I want to ask you a few questions,” the detective began.

“Yeth thir.”

“What is your name?”

“Tham.”

“Rather peculiar name. Where do you live?”

“In ‘Nothey’ Moore’th lodgin’ houthe.”

“I happen to know that place, and it doesn’t bear the best reputation in the world.”

“If Nothey heard you thay that he would throw a fit. He ith thtraight and thquare now, you thee.”

“I don’t see anything of the sort, and I am not here to discuss Nosey Moore,” the detective declared. “I am here to talk about you—understand?”

“Talk about me?” Thubway Tham gasped. “My goodneth!”

“What do you do for a living?”

“Jutht what do you mean by that?” Thubway Tham demanded.

“Where do you work? Where do you get coin to pay your rent and buy meals? You know what I mean.”

“Oh! I grathp you now,” Thubway Tham declared scratching at his left ear in a characteristic manner. “My name ith Thubway Tham.”

“You told me your name once,” said Greecher. “Tell me the rest, now.”

Tham was puzzled for a moment. Here was a man supposed to be a detective, and he did not know Thubway Tham. He did not know, it was evident, that Thubway Tham was a pickpocket, and that he was the special meat of Detective Craddock. Craddock had sworn to get Thubway Tham with the goods, and other officers were keeping their hands off and watching the contest in which Craddock had been highly unsuccessful for more than a year.

“Well, what do you do for a living?” Greecher again demanded, stepping closer and trying to be gruff.

“I am not workin’ jutht now,” Tham told him.

“I’ll bet you’re not. And I’ll go a few

feet farther and wager that you never work,” said Greecher. “Bum, aren’t you? Vag? Potential crook?”

“What thort of a crook ith that?” Tham wanted to know.

“Are you attempting to get fresh with me, my man?”

“No thir.”

“You’re not working. Got any money? Living on the income from your investments?” There was a sneer in the voice of Detective Jim Greecher, and Thubway Tham resented it.

“Thay!” he exclaimed. “I am all right, and the betht thing you can do ith to let me alone. I am a particular friend of Detective Craddock.”

“Oh! Stool pigeon, eh?”

“Thay!” Tham warned. Greecher had touched him on a raw spot, and Thubway Tham was furious. “Don’t you call me a thtool pigeon, you big thtiff!”

“Who you calling a big stiff?” Greecher demanded.

“You, you thilly ath!” Tham retorted.

“That’ll be enough. I’m going to take you in,” Greecher said.

“For what?”

“Vagrancy, you fool. It’ll be about three months on the island for yours!”

“You are makin’ a pinth?” Tham asked.

“I certainly am making a pinch. I already have made it. You come along with me and we’ll call on the captain.”

“My goodneth! Me pinthd for vagranthy?” Tham gasped. “Thith will kill me thothially.”

“Think you’re funny, don’t you?” Greecher said. “You won’t think it’s so funny when the judge hands you a few months. Come along!”

“Do you mean it? You are goin’ to take me in?” Thubway Tham was amazed.

“I certainly am going to do just that.”

“Very well. It ith nothin’ in my young

life,” Tham told him. “Thomebody ith goin’ to get a good laugh out of thith, and it won’t be you.”

Detective Jim Greecher, being only a few squares from the station, decided to “walk in” his prisoner. Tham walked beside him with his hands in his pockets, aware that Greecher, watching him closely, half expected him to make a break for liberty.

But such was not Tham’s intention. Now and then he grinned, and once he startled Detective Jim Greecher by chuckling. Never was a prisoner more docile than Thubway Tham. He whistled softly, which puzzled Greecher and caused him to wonder whether he had made some sad mistake.

Into the station they walked and up to the desk. The desk sergeant opened his eyes wide when he saw them. Captain Jones, informed that Greecher had made an arrest already, came quickly from his own office and stared in astonishment.

“Charge of vagrancy,” Greecher notified the desk sergeant. “He called me a silly ass and a big stiff, too, but we’ll let that pass. I don’t believe in personal animosity. Never lay a charge for a man’s wild talk, only for assaulting or resisting. That’s me.”

“That ith him,” Tham offered.

“Say, Greecher,” the captain put in, “don’t you know this man?”

“Can’t say that I do, captain—never saw him before. Watched him and decided that he was a bum; talked to him, and he admitted that he wasn’t working just now, and that he lived at Nosey Moore’s. Got fresh, too, so I brought him in.”

“But this is the famous Thubway Tham, noted pickpocket, and we don’t want him on a vagrancy charge. We want him dead to rights for lifting a leather so he can be put away. Craddock has been after him for some time.”

“Can’t help what Craddock is doing, or trying to do,” Greecher said.

“Then you want the charge to stick?”

“Certainly.”

“All right, you are the arresting officer. Tham, you’re charged with vagrancy. Court at ten in the morning, old-timer.”

“Yeth, thir,” Tham said.

“Bail a hundred and fifty, Tham—and I’d not worry about the outcome if I were you. It’s a cinch you ought to be in the big pen up the creek, and that’s where you’ll be one of these days, but we don’t want you held for vagrancy. Got the hundred and fifty with you, Tham?”

“No, thir.”

“What’s that? I supposed you always were flush with money.”

“Not jutht now, thir,” Tham told him.

“The charge is made, Tham, and I’ll have to hold you in jail unless you dig up that hundred and fifty dollars for bail. You’ve got a record so I can’t release you on your own recognizance though I know you’d show up.”

“I can get it,” Tham said.

“Good enough.”

“If you can thend an offither out with me, thir, I can get that bail.”

“I’ll stretch a point, Tham, to accommodate you. I’ll send Detective Greecher out with you.”

“That will be fine,” assented Tham with a broad grin.

II.

Detective Jim Greecher was commissioned to go out with the prisoner. Tham had to see certain of his friends to obtain the necessary hundred and fifty dollars that he might remain at liberty until his case was called in court, instead of eating and sleeping in a detention cell.

Greecher was impressed by the fact that Thubway Tham did not seem at all

worried about his arrest. Apparently Tham considered it a lark, and the detective felt that behind his back somebody was making game of him. He did not fail to observe the unusual smile on the face of the captain as they turned to leave the station.

"We will take the thubway," Tham said. "I've got thome change in my clotheth for thubway fareth, but not enough to wathte on any taxicab."

"Subway it is," said Greecher. "And let's make it quick. Start for the friend you think will dig up that money the quickest. Understand?"

"Yeth, thir. I'll get that coin jutht ath quick ath I can," Tham told him. "I mutht go downtown firht."

They reached the nearest subway entrance and went down the steps in the midst of a throng. Greecher did not think of an attempt to escape now. Tham was so well known that if he did escape he could be picked up easily and given a longer sentence for his temporary flight. But Greecher kept an eye on him just the same.

It was the rush hour they found when they got out upon the platform. A jam of humanity of all ages, sexes, and degrees of servitude, was fighting to get into trains, and off them. Thubway Tham waited for a downtown express and crowded into one of the cars with Detective Jim Greecher at his heels.

Tham seemed to be a bit preoccupied as he stood in the aisle of the car, but he was nothing of the sort. Through his half closed eyes he was watching those around him. Tham was there for business despite the close proximity of one Detective Greecher. Tham had to have bail money, and he was out to get it.

Another station was passed and into the car crowded a prosperous-looking man of middle age who crushed back against Thubway Tham and almost smothered

him. Tham thrilled with joy, because he felt a fat wallet in the other man's hip pocket.

But at that instant Detective Greecher addressed a remark to him, and Tham was obliged to turn and give him an answer; before he could turn back some one had got between him and his prospective victim. And then the train rolled into the station which Tham had mentioned, and he was forced to get off.

"Let's hurry and find that friend of yours," Detective Greecher directed. "And I sure hope that you get the coin there. I don't want to have to nurse you around the town all day through these subway crowds."

"I thertainly hope we can get it here," Thubway Tham told him. "But a man never can tell. If I can't, thereth other friendth of mine we can thee. It ith only a quethtion of whether they happen to have any coin."

Thubway Tham led the way into a cross street and along it. As a matter of plain fact he did happen to have a few acquaintances in the district, but none he knew well enough to ask for a hundred and fifty dollars. He had not intended to get the bail money in that manner anyway.

Around a corner they went—and stopped. They had come face to face with Detective Craddock.

"What's this?" Craddock asked.

"It ith a pinth," Tham explained. "Thith offither thaw me on a corner and took me in for vagranthy."

"Great Scott!"

"Yeth, thir," Tham said. "That ith my thentimerith, too, only I could expreth them thtronger."

"Vagrancy!" Craddock repeated. "Greecher, how did it happen?"

"I asked him a few questions, convinced myself he was a vag, and took him in," Greecher said.

“Better let him go.”

“I can attend to my own business, Craddock, thank you.”

“All right. Have it your own way. Tham, I suppose you’ll manage to get out of it all right. I can’t arrest you for being a dip if you are in the jug for vagrancy. What are you doing down here?”

“I wath booked and everything,” Tham explained, “and Captain Joneth could not let me go on my own recognithanthe, thinthe I have a record. He fixed bail at a hundred and fifty. I didn’t happen to have it in my clotheth, tho I came down with thith offither to get it from my friendth.”

“What friends?” Craddock asked.

“Jutht thome friendth,” Tham explained. “It ith nothin’ for you to trouble yourthelf about.”

“I’m sorry that this happened,” Craddock said, glaring at Detective Greecher. “I suppose you are guilty of vagrancy, technically, but we want to land you on something more serious.”

“Yeth, thir.”

“I’ll see the judge, Tham.”

“Say, Craddock, are you going to try to get this man off?” Greecher demanded. “What sort of police work is that?”

“I’ll try to explain it to you some day, Greecher, when you are older and better able to understand,” Craddock said. And then he went up the street venting anger in every step.

Tham and Detective Greecher went on down the street.

“Craddock is an ass,” Greecher offered.

“He ith not!” Thubway Tham replied. “He ith a cop, and maybe I am a crook, but Craddock ith an honeth cop and hath got thome brainth. You take it from me.”

“Well, he isn’t going to get a fresh young fellow like you off so easily,” Greecher stated. “You’re going up for

there months or so unless you can show decent means of support. Get that?”

“I heard what you thaid,” Tham replied.

“And if you have a record maybe you’ll get six months. Believe me, boy, I’m going to look you up.”

“We court invethigation,” said Tham. “Our bookth are open to the public.”

“Do you realize that you are being impertinent to an officer of the law?”

“Tho? There are offitherth, and then again there are other offitherth,” said Tham. “Thome are and thome are not, if you can grathp my meanin’. Craddock ith, and you are not.”

“I’ve had about enough of your insolence.”

“If you hadn’t run me in for vagranthy you wouldn’t have to put up with it,” Tham said blandly.

They came to a sort of combination pool hall and cigar store, and Tham stopped.

“Do me one favor,” he begged. “Don’t thtand too clothe when I thpeak to my friend. A cop maketh him nervouth.”

“I’ve not the slightest doubt of it. Go ahead and attend to your business, but don’t try to make a get-away.”

“There ith no intention of ethcapin’,” Tham told him. “I don’t want to ethcape. I want to thee thith thing through. Get me?”

They entered the store. While Detective Jim Greecher stood near the front door Thubway Tham went to the end of the counter and engaged the proprietor in a subdued conversation.

“Theen ‘Nifty’ Noel around here thith mornin’?” Tham asked.

“Haven’t seen him for a week, Tham.”

“Or George Brown?”

“Haven’t seen him, either.”

“Jutht talk to me a minute,” Tham directed in a whisper. “I am runnin’ a bluff

and playin' a joke at one and the thame time."

"What kind of joke?"

"I'll tell you later. And you'll have one laugh, believe me."

"Is that a dick came in here with you?"

"Tho he thayth, but thome doubt it,"

Tham responded. "Don't you worry. He ith jutht waitin' for me."

"Pinched?"

"It ith a joke," Tham replied, and would say no more.

Tham often played jokes, and so the proprietor talked to him for a moment, and then Tham, his face long and serious, went back to Detective Greecher.

"Nothin doin' here," Tham said.

"Hard luck! Where do we go now?"

"I've got a friend down on Wall Thtreet."

"Doing the town?" Greecher wanted to know. "Merely seeing the sights before being put away for three months or so?"

"Thay! Didn't Captain Joneth thend you out with me to get bail money?" Tham wanted to know. "Very well, then. A man can't alwayth raithe a hundred and fifty dollarth in ten minuteth, can he?"

Greecher said no more. Back to the subway entrance they walked, then down to the crowded platform and the jammed cars.

Once more they crowded into the train and stood in the thronged aisle while the express roared through the tube. Once more Thubway Tham found himself standing behind a corpulent man of evident prosperity, and brushing against him made certain that there was a wallet in the other man's pocket.

This time Tham had better luck. At a certain station more persons jammed into the car, and there was a moment of confusion. During that moment Thubway Tham's hand made a quick movement and the other man's wallet came into Tham's

possession.

Tham was a bit worried about it, however, for he knew that he was by no means safe yet. He put his hand into the pocket where he had put the wallet, inserted his fingers and pried the wallet open, and felt inside it.

A wave of disgust seemed to engulf him. The wallet was filled with papers, but there was no currency in it. And just then the train roared into the station Tham had mentioned, and he was obliged to get out with Detective Greecher.

Tham managed to drop the wallet on the floor of the car. He ascended to the street with the detective, and led the way through the jam. Tham was feeling a bit bitter. Was he to lose his chance, spend a night in jail, and in addition fail to make a fool of Detective Greecher?

They came to a cigar store on a corner, and Tham stepped inside while Detective Greecher stood at the front door and watched him narrowly.

"Then Nifty Noel?" Tham asked the clerk.

"Not for several days," the clerk admitted.

"I want a package of thigarette."

When Tham paid for them he asked, "Then George Brown?"

Knowing that Detective Greecher was watching him Tham had to make it appear that he was attempting to negotiate a loan.

"Haven't seen George," said the clerk.

"Thankth," said Tham.

Once more, with a long face, Thubway Tham turned and walked up to the detective.

"No uthe," he said. "He ith a good boy and I could have it in a minute if he had it, but he ain't got it."

"It's a day's job, I suppose," Greecher said. "Where do we go now?"

"Timeth Thquare."

"Way uptown again?"

"The only plathe I know," Tham said. "If we don't get it there I'll have to thpend the night in the jug. Let'th go!"

They jammed into a car for Times Square. Tham was almost in despair. He could get the bail money from Nosey Moore he supposed, but he did not care to have all his underworld friends know that he had been arrested for such a thing as vagrancy. That to Thubway Tham was the last insult.

He expected to get off as far as the court was concerned, and none of his friends would learn of his predicament if he did. Craddock he knew would say nothing of it. And he did not have a hundred and fifty dollars in his pocket because the night before he had had an idea that he could play poker.

The stations began to slip by and still Tham saw no opening. And then another prosperous-looking gentleman brushed against him, and Tham took heart again.

Detective Greecher was beginning to relax his vigil. Tham took a long chance and obtained possession of another wallet. This time his exploring fingers encountered a sheaf of bills. Tham slipped them out, watched his chance, and dropped the empty wallet to the floor. He had no opportunity to look at the bills he had removed and consequently did not know their value.

At Times Square they got out and ascended to the street. Thubway Tham led the way into Forty-second Street and along it for two blocks. Once more they came to a combination cigar store and billiard parlor, and Tham entered while Detective Greecher waited near the front door.

Standing with his back to that door, Thubway Tham leaned over the counter and engaged a cigar clerk in conversation. He asked for a package of cigarettes.

"Theen George Brown?" he asked.

"Don't know him," replied the clerk.

Tham paid for the cigarettes and pocketed them. The clerk returned with his change and handed it to him. Detective Greecher saw that much of the transaction. And Tham's heart was singing. He had glanced at the bills and had found that they amounted to a hundred and eighty dollars. He had his bail and a profit.

When he turned to face Detective Greecher this time, his face was beaming.

"Get it?" the officer asked.

"Yeth, thankth. I got it," said Thubway Tham.

"I'm glad of that," said the detective. "I was commencing to think we were going to prow around all day. Let's hurry back to the station now."

Tham was glad to go along with him. He struck a match, lighted a cigarette, and blew a cloud of smoke upward.

"Thome day," he said to Greecher, "you are going to know that you are an ath."

"No more insolence now or I'll prefer charges against you," the detective warned him.

"Ath if I cared," said Tham.

At the station Thubway Tham counted out one hundred and fifty dollars, and received his bail receipt.

"Ten in the morning, Tham," Captain Jones told him winking. "And I'd not worry about that vagrancy charge if I were you. I have an idea you'll get off with a reprimand and a warning."

"Thankth," Tham said.

"Didn't have any trouble raising that bail?"

"Jutht a little, but it didn't amount to anything," Tham said.

"I had a hunch you could get it," the captain informed him. "What do you think of our new detective?"

"About the thame that you think of him," Tham returned, and this time he winked, and the captain laughed.