

Fly Catching

It is as Mr. Brown of the Stock Exchange that I am now addressing the public. I had occasion some few months back to go to my bankers in Saint James street to draw the sum of fifty pounds in gold, for the purpose of defraying certain household expenses. The banker—although it was during panic time—delivered it to me without a murmur. I kept my hand over the pocket in which it lay, as a bird forsakes not her nest when it has eggs within it, from the very door to that of my own, on Ludgate Hill; yet when I got home it was gone. The loss itself did not affect me nearly so much as the method of the losing. I knew where another fifty pounds was to be got without much inconvenience, but whither that fifty pounds was gone, and by what miraculous means, was indeed a question. The pocket which my hand had covered was inviolate and without a hole in it. It could scarcely have happened that any thief, having ripped it open, would have the courtesy, as well as the skill, to sew it up again as I came along.

The problem so worried me, took so strong a hold upon my mind, that I sent for Inspector Ferret, of the detective police.

“Ferret,” I said, after I had put him in possession of the circumstances, “now, who can have got this money?”

“Tom Daddles, or else the Spider, sir,” he replied coolly, and without the least hesitation; “one of those two—certain; which one of them, depends upon whether you lost the money east or west of the Bar. Tom takes all the Strand, and the Spider has Fleet street and the Hill here.”

“Well, now,” I said, “let me have a personal interview, Mr. Inspector, if you please, with the gentleman who has transferred this property of mine to his account. Of course, I will pass my word not to employ the arm of the law against him. But I very much want to know how the transfer was effected.”

On the same afternoon the Inspector informed me that Mr. Daddles was the new proprietor of the sum in question, and that he would pay me a visit on the following morning, early, with explanations.

Accordingly, while I was at breakfast, Mr. Daddles called. He was a thin, not ungentlemanly looking young man, soberly dressed, and having a rather conspicuous air of modesty and diffidence.

“With regard to the money, Mr. Brown,” he said, “I saw you going westward along the Strand, with the intention of procuring specie—”

“How did you know that?” interrupted I.

“You bought, sir, at a shop close to Somerset House, a saffron-colored linen bag, such as is used for carrying money, and you dangled it in your hand when you came out.”

“Ass that I was!” I cried.

Mr. Daddles smiled forgivingly; “I never left you,” he continued, “from that moment until you reached Saint James’ street. When I saw you go into the banking-house I backed myself at two to one that I should relieve you of your money. When I saw you come out with the money in your left coat-tail, instead of buttoned up in a breast-pocket, the odds rose to five to one. I knew it was in your left coat-tail, because you kept your hand there.”

“And,” I said, impatiently, “I never took it out again; that I can swear to.”

“You did not take it out for a long time, sir,” replied Mr. Daddles, applauding moderately; “you gave me a great deal of anxiety, I must confess. But you did take it out at last.”

“Where?” cried I, “where? If I did before I got home, I’ll be hanged.”

“Don’t say that, sir,” replied my new acquaintance, rather severely, “don’t use an expression of that kind, whatever you do. You stopped at a print shop on the west side of Temple Bar, and then my last hope began to expire; for a few steps more would have taken you into the Spider’s territory, and my chance would have vanished.”

“Why did you not cut the bottom of my pocket?” I asked, intensely interested.

“Because you would have missed the weight of the coin,” explained Mr. Daddles. “Nothing remained for me but to try the fly-dodge.”

“A fly, Mr. Daddles, explain yourself; I saw no fly.”

“You felt it though, Mr. Brown, if you remember, upon the left cheek, and you took your hand out of your pocket to remove it.”

“I see it all now.”

“That was it,” assented Mr. Thomas Daddles, in conclusion, “and a very neat thing it was, too, though I say it.”

Honor prevented me from giving Mr. Daddles into custody; but I feel bound to warn all pedestrians against any attempt at fly-catching when a quiet, thin, too observant pickpocket is by.

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