

## *A Mysterious Lodger*

Though we could hardly hope to meet with a model lodger again, like the Rev. Mr. Adolphus, who had been with us ever since we began housekeeping, it was certainly desirable—so Annie and I concluded—to have a lodger of some kind, even if it were an inferior description of the article; for my salary at that time, as junior clerk in the respectable banking firm of Lawes & Fielding, was more prospective than real; sufficient, perhaps, for a bachelor of economic tastes, but sadly out of proportion with the needs of a married man.

It being decided, therefore, that a second lodger was a necessary evil, a card notifying that apartments for a single gentleman were to be let within took its place in our window; but week after week passed away, winter faded into spring, spring lost itself in summer, and still we remained without a single applicant for our very genteel and commodious rooms.

The hot days of June were drawing to a close when, on reaching home one evening from the office, I saw by the sparkle in my wife's eye that she had something particular to tell me, and I was scarcely seated before the news burst out.

“Tom, dear, we have got a lodger at last!”

“Did you say a lodger?” I cried, starting up. “Another poor victim come to the net—to be cheated, worried, bullied and fleeced unmercifully! What is the wretched individual's name?”

“Mr. James Twoshoes.”

“A very ancient and honorable name, well known in nursery history. Describe him.”

“There's not much about him to describe. He's like any other commonplace gentleman who is drawing on toward middle age, with little in his appearance to distinguish him from any one else. He is about five-and-forty years old, as near as I can judge. Short black hair, with just a tinge of gray in it; no beard or whiskers; dressed in a new glossy suit of black clothes; wears black gloves, much too long in the fingers, and an old-fashioned black satin stock, fastened with a little pearl brooch. He has a goodtempered-looking face, lighted up by two quick black eyes. He is deaf to a very slight extent, and you have to elevate your voice when speaking to him. He has a habit of carrying his head forward a little, and partly on one side, which gives him the appearance of being continually listening for something which he is expecting every moment to hear.”

“A description worthy of a passport. When does he arrive?”

“About noon tomorrow. He sleeps at one of the hotels tonight. But I forgot to say that he will only be a temporary lodger. He has engaged the rooms by the week, as his stay in Markhallow will only be a short one. He may want the rooms for one month, two months, or three months, he said—just as the fancy takes him, and dependent on how soon he grows tired of our little town.”

“Ah, well! I suppose a temporary lodger is better than none. What references did he give?”

“References!” exclaimed Annie, in blank dismay. “Upon my word, I was so taken up with the idea of letting the rooms that I forgot all about references.”

“Through which forgetfulness,” I said, severely, “you introduce into the house a person of whom we know absolutely nothing.”

“Oh! he’s thoroughly respectable, my dear; you may tell that at once from his appearance!”

“No doubt. Forgers and genteel pickpockets are generally men of very respectable appearance. Their respectability is part of their stock in trade. This fellow, for anything we know to the contrary, may be one of the two men who broke out of a London prison t’other day, come down to this little place to hide till the affair has blown over.”

Seeing, however, that Annie was inclined to lapse into a “moist relentment,” I added, with my usual good nature:

“But don’t distress yourself about it; it may turn out all right, you know; and I can ask him for his references when he comes tomorrow.”

Punctual to appointment, Mr. Twoshoes arrived at noon the following day; and I may here say that my wife’s description of him was so close and faithful, that I can find nothing to add to it. A portmanteau and a writing-case formed the whole of our new lodger’s baggage.

“Mr. Starling, I suppose?” he said, with a pleasant smile, and a hearty shake of the hand. “I hope we shall suit one another; at least, I am sure it will not be my fault if we don’t. Fine old city this of yours,” he went on, after we had introduced him into his rooms. “I am quite in love with it already. I flatter myself that I have always retained a dash of poetry in my composition, notwithstanding that my life has been such a hard and practical one; and if anything could revive that sentiment within my breast, it would be the sight of your grand old cathedral; and I may tell you, in confidence, that when I, James Twoshoes, was rambling through its aisles this morning, I felt more than half inclined to try my hand at a sonnet.”

He sat down as he said this, and laughed in a hearty way that it did one good to listen to. Who could ask such a man for references? From that moment I gave up the idea as an absurdity.

“Your good lady,” he went on, “has, I presume, told you that I am here only for a short time. My stay may be limited to three weeks, or it may extend over three months. For my part, I’m a fellow who always makes a point of giving way to my whims. So long as a place takes my fancy, there I stick, as fast as a barnacle—till some fine morning a whim pops into my brain, and then, hey, presto! I’m off by the first train—whither I know, at the time, no more than the man in the moon. Rather an uncomfortable, vagabond sort of existence, you probably think. So it is. I grant it. But what can a fellow do whose whims are the master of him? Give way to them, of course; and that’s just what I do. Well, well,” he went on, “I’ve seen many a more lively and populous place than Markhallow that hasn’t pleased me half so well. I’ll take a cutlet for dinner, if you please; and any little pastry you may have on hand.”

I saw nothing more of Mr. Twoshoes that day, for when I reached home in the evening he was seated upstairs in his own room, as my wife told me, smoking an immense meerschaum, in company with some gin-and-water and a newspaper. To say that my wife and I were prepossessed in favor of our new lodger, is merely to state the bare fact of the case. We were delighted with him, and felt sure that he would bear comparison with even such a model individual as the Rev. Mr. Adolphus.

Mr. Twoshoes went out in the course of the following forenoon, and shortly returned, bringing with him a canary and cage, which he proceeded to hang up in his room with evident delight; and on the bird turning out to be a famous whistler, he had Annie and me specially upstairs to listen to it, and give him our opinion as to its qualifications.

In the course of this day, too, we discovered that our lodger was a performer on the flute. We heard him tootle-tootle-ing in his rooms in a wandering, aimless sort of way for some minutes before he settled down into any tune; but he seemed to get into the proper groove at last, and then went on with one tune after another, from tea-time till dusk.

I cannot say that he impressed me as being a very good player; and all his tunes were of an old-fashioned, sentimental kind, such as had had their day, and gone out of vogue, a dozen years before; indeed, to hear him at dusk, tootling feebly through his open window, you would have taken him to be some love-sick swain of eighteen, rather than the hard-headed, practical man of the world he laughingly declared himself to be.

At the end of a week Annie and I were still as far as ever from being able to make out the profession of Mr. Twoshoes, though we considered the question in all its bearings, and gave due weight in our deliberations to the various vague hints thrown out at different times by our lodger. We concluded at last, in lack of all direct evidence, that whatever he might formerly have been, he could now be nothing more nor less than a gentleman living on his private means.

From the first day Mr. Twoshoes had bargained for the use of a latch-key, with free permission to come in and go out at whatever hours of the day and night he might think proper; and he was not long before he made frequent use of the privilege we had so readily conceded him.

Not infrequently he would leave the house at dusk, and not return till two or three o'clock next morning; at other times he would set off early in the morning and remain out the whole of the day.

“When one of my whims lay hold of me,” he laughingly observed to my wife on one occasion, “and whispers to me that I had better take a ramble, then I must obey, and call Shank’s mare into immediate requisition, whatever hour of the day or night it may be.”

I confess, however, that it gave me “a turn,” as my wife would say, when, on reaching home one evening just after dusk, I encountered Mr. Twoshoes on the steps, as he was in the act of closing the door behind him, habited from head to foot in the garb of a groom.

I could hardly believe in the reality of what I saw; but there he stood, benignantly smiling down upon me from the height of the steps, not disconcerted in the least, but calmly puffing away from the little black pipe between his lips.

On his head he wore a Glengarry bonnet; round his neck a blue and white scarf, fastened with a horseshoe pin; a waistcoat low down on the hips; a short cutaway coat, breeches and gaiters; decidedly "horsey."

All these particulars I could make out by the light of the opposite lamp. He remarked that one of his whims had had overtaken him, bade me a cheerful good night, and walked off at a leisurely pace down the street.

It was three o'clock next morning before Mr. Twoshoes returned, and having let himself quietly in, stole upstairs to his bedroom so gently that he would hardly have disturbed a mouse.

But worse was to follow.

Mr. Twoshoes had been with us about a month, when I was one day sent to R— , a neighboring town about thirteen miles away, on business for the firm.

There being no railway between the two towns, I had to hire a horse and gig. I had finished my business at R— , and was setting out late in the afternoon on my return, when it began to rain heavily, for which reason I determined to take the shortest road home.

The road in question was not a very pleasant one, running, as it did, through a wide tract of barren moorland, dreary and desolate in the extreme, with not more than half a dozen houses on it in a distance of as many miles.

The weather, however, decided me to adopt this route; and I had got half way across the moor on my return, when my horse, which was but a poor innkeeper's hack, betrayed such unmistakable signs of distress, that I pulled up at a roadside inn, the only one within a distance of several miles, in order to have my horse baited before continuing my journey.

While the hostler was busy outside, I entered the little taproom to obtain some refreshment for myself.

On one side of the room sat two or three individuals in the dress of laboring men, while opposite to them, and quite alone, sat a man on whom the whole of my attention was immediately concentrated. If not Mr. Twoshoes himself, it was his living presentment!

I started back in amazement, as though I had seen a ghost, when my eyes first fell on him; and the next moment was about to accost him familiarly, but some inward feeling made me hesitate just as the words were forming on my lips. The stranger, if stranger he were, gave me one long, steady glance, and then resumed his perusal of a ragged county newspaper.

Was I right or wrong in imagining that a faint gleam of surprise shot for a moment out of his eyes, to be immediately quenched in that dull, unrecognizing stare?

As far as dress went, he certainly bore no resemblance to Mr. Twoshoes, for he was habited in a suit of blue cloth with gilt buttons, after the fashion of a mate or captain in the merchant service.

He sat in silence during the whole time I was there, neither speaking to, nor being addressed by, any of the company. To make his likeness to the genuine Mr. Twoshoes still more startling, he had the very same slight stoop forward with his head and shoulders, and the same intent look about his eyes—as though he were listening to some imaginary conversation—which I knew so well.

In about ten minutes the hostler announced that my horse was ready. As I quitted the room I cast another long inquisitive glance at the seafaring man, sitting so silent and grim; but he never looked up again, and I left him still intent over his newspaper.

When I reached home I found that Mr. Twoshoes was out, and had been for several hours. At whatever hour he might return, I determined to be on the watch for him, and judge from his dress whether it was really he whom I had seen in the roadside inn.

I sat up patiently till twelve o'clock, but as he had not then returned, I put out all the lights and stationed myself in a bedroom upstairs; and after waiting there three more hours, my patience was rewarded by seeing Mr. Twoshoes come down the street. Thanks to a friendly lamp opposite, I had no difficulty in seeing how he was dressed. It was still raining a little, and the first I perceived was that he carried an umbrella; but when, he put it down on nearing the door, all I could make out was that he wore his ordinary black hat and a waterproof cape that reached nearly to his heels. He let himself in with his latch-key, and stole upstairs to bed in his usual stealthy manner.

These mysterious and suspicious proceedings on the part of our lodger naturally became a source of much disquiet both to Annie and myself; indeed, my wife began to get quite nervous on the point, and to imagine all kinds of terrible and unlikely things as the results of our harboring such an unaccountable personage in our house.

Mr. Twoshoes was, however, as I said before, such a model lodger in every other respect, so kind and considerate in every way, such a punctual and liberal paymaster, that, debate the question as we would, we could by no means make up our minds to part with him.

So we decided at last to keep our apprehensions and suspicions to ourselves, and mention them neither to Mr. Twoshoes nor to any prying neighbor, and to put down everything in our lodger's ways of life for which we could not find a natural solution to the score of eccentricity—a term of very wide application, indeed.

Mr. Twoshoes had been with us about five weeks, when Annie's brother, Mr. Dick Dereham, came down from London to spend his holidays with us, for the sake of the fishing for which the neighborhood of Markhallow is celebrated. He was in those days a tall, raw-boned young fellow,

with fair complexion, large blue eyes, cold and skeptical in expression, and a nose as sharp and inquisitive as that of a ferret; with, to crown all, a most excellent opinion of his own acuteness and general abilities, dashed with that slight superciliousness of tone and manner which, especially toward homely country-folk, is such a common characteristic of the middle-class cockney. He had not been three hours in the house before he had wormed out of Annie everything that we knew, surmised and imagined concerning Mr. Twoshoes.

Here was a promising pie ready for an acute young cockney to poke his finger into! No fishing to be done till it was disposed of to his satisfaction. Really the country was not such a dull place after all! He met me that afternoon at the bank-door, and, linking his arm in mine, unburdened his mind as we walked home together.

“Nan has been opening her mind to me this afternoon about your lodger, Mr. Twoshoes,” he began.

“Indeed,” said I, dryly; “you were immensely interested, no doubt.”

“Oh! you may jest about it if you like, but the question is a serious one. There’s something bad about that fellow, you may depend upon it; and if I were you I’d either report him privately to the police or else give him a week’s notice, and so get rid of him altogether.”

“Thank you,” I replied; “but as I have no particular fault to find with Mr. Twoshoes, I don’t feel quite inclined to adopt either of your suggestions.”

“But consider, my dear fellow; it’s really not safe to have a man like that in your house—who frequently stays out all night—who dresses one day as a groom, another day as a merchant seaman, and the next as a curate or private gentleman. It arises from no mere eccentricity, you may depend on it. There’s some villainy afloat, and it will be well if you are not implicated in it when the *exposé* comes—and come it must, some of these fine days.”

“Now, see you here, my pert young cockney,” I replied; “Mr. Twoshoes is my lodger, and a man whom I respect, so don’t attempt to pull him to pieces in my presence. You always were a tolerable hand at discovering mare’s-nests, but please don’t try to find any in my house. Whatever may be the little eccentricities of Mr. Twoshoes, they are no business of yours or mine. That he is a very worthy gentleman, and thoroughly honest and upright, I am fully convinced. My advice to you, therefore, is to go back and look after the little fishes and let my estimable lodger alone.”

Dick was terribly huffed by my plain speaking, and did not fail to complain to my wife about it; but what annoyed me more was to find that he had contrived to affect her to some extent with his own absurd fears, so that when we went to bed that night she would insist on having the bedroom door locked, a precaution she had never cared to exercise before, saying, in her circumlocutory, feminine way:

“There’s no knowing what may happen with such mysterious people in the house.”

A day or two after my conversation with Dick, our senior partner sent for me into the parlor, and requested me to set out for France by the mail that evening, on business of importance, which would probably occupy me about a week. Having received my instructions, I hurried home, dined, made my few preparations as speedily as possible, sent for my aunt Barbara to come and stay with Annie during my absence, and then lingered a moment to give a parting injunction to my wife and Dick respecting Mr. Twoshoes. I would not go till I had received an assurance from both of them that matters should go on as usual during my absence—that Mr. Twoshoes should be allowed to come and go as he might think proper, without notice or comment. Dick's promise of neutrality was given too readily to satisfy me, and I thought I detected a malicious twinkle in his eye, as I shook his hand at parting, which boded no good to somebody. But there was no help for it; business called, and I must obey.

My visit to France, instead of occupying a week, lasted for a fortnight; and during the time I was away Markhallow races took place, the great festival of the year at our little town.

On the third and last day, Mr. Dick Dereham, growing tired of the monotony of rod and line, betook himself for a little variety to the racecourse. The last race was over, and Dick had just turned his face homeward, and lighted a cigar to beguile the dusty way, when he was accosted by a fashionably-dressed individual, who politely requested the favor of a light.

Having obtained what he wanted, it was only natural, as they both happened to be going the same way, that the stranger should enter into conversation with Dick respecting the events of the day.

Dick was charmed at once with his new acquaintance, who seemed to be thoroughly at home on all matters connected with the turf, and proved by a simple sporting equation how, instead of losing his little bet of eight half-crowns, Dick might just as easily have won as many pounds. In ten minutes they were on the footing of old friends; mutually pleased with each other, and each doing his best to impress the other with the extent and variety of his information and the brilliancy of his remarks—a friendly rivalry in which Dick, self-conceited as he was, could not help feeling himself considerably distanced by his affable friend.

When they had reached the town, nothing would suit Captain Julius—for by that name the stranger had introduced himself—but that they must call in at the first hotel and have a bottle of champagne together. One bottle necessitated another; and by the time the second was half empty, Dick had grown very talkative, indeed; and ranging, with a loose and glowing tongue, from one topic to another, found himself at last, almost to his own surprise, for he could not remember by what pleasant but devious path he had reached that point, dilating to his fashionable friend on the whims, eccentricities, and unaccountable vagaries of that mysterious Mr. Twoshoes.

Captain Julius seemed mightily interested in the subject, and cross-questioned Dick upon it in a smiling, affable way, and reverted to it again and again whenever Dick felt inclined to wander off into some other mazy streamlet of talk, till there was really nothing more to be learnt.

Having finished their wine, they left the hotel, and strolled arm in arm through the streets, now lighted up and thronged with a busy crowd, till they reached the house of Dick's brother-in-law;

and then, after a hearty shake of the hand, and an arrangement that Dick should call on the captain at his hotel at eleven the next morning, they separated.

Dick, who was still in a somewhat elevated mood, lingered at the door for a few minutes to finish his cigar. While thus standing he heard the Minster clock strike ten, and put his hand to his pocket to draw out his watch. But there was no watch left for him to find—his pocket had been neatly and dexterously picked of his gold repeater, value twenty-five guineas.

Quite sober by this time, and in a very queer humor, Master Dick walked down to the police-station to give notice of his loss. How Captain Julius would laugh at him in the morning for being such a greenhorn as to allow his pocket to be picked! If he could only induce the captain to go fishing with him, he would let him see that with a rod and line he knew a thing or two—that in matters piscatorial he was not altogether a novice! But when he reached the hotel on the following morning the captain had flown, leaving a message that he had been telegraphed for, and obliged to depart by the six A.M. train; but that he hoped to revisit Markhallow in the course of a few weeks, and would not then fail to hunt up his friend Mr. Dereham.

Dick returned home in a pensive mood, and spent a melancholy day in the manufacture of artificial flies.

A certain evening, about a week later, found Dick enjoying his cigar as usual on the step outside the door. Mr. Twoshoes was from home on some mysterious errand; my wife and her aunt were drinking tea at a neighbor's in the next street; the servant was supposed to be gone to see her mother, but was in reality taking a pleasant ramble among the lanes with her "young man," so that Dick had the whole establishment to himself.

The shadows were creeping up the streets, and Dick was thinking about turning in, when his attention was drawn to the peculiar movements of a stranger on the other side of the way. Dick had noticed him, a minute or two before, staring very earnestly at the house; had then seen him move slowly down the street; then slowly return a sidling, purposeless sort of way; and now, for a second time, he had planted himself directly opposite the house, and seemed to be taking a mental photograph of it.

While Dick was still looking at him, and wondering what he could possibly be about, the stranger, in a cautious manner, beckoned him to approach; and on his repeating the movement, Dick quitted the steps and lounged across the street, by no means pleased at receiving so undignified a summons.

The stranger was a burly, whiskerless man, with shifty, quick-glancing eyes, and a mouth seemed purposely formed for the imbibition of strong waters; his voice being a *basso profundo*, with a slight chronic wheeze in the lower notes.

"Your name is Richard Dereham, is it not?" he said, seizing Dick by a button as soon as the latter got within arm's-length.



“I have reason to believe that it is,” answered Dick, “but would not like to take long odds on the point.”

“None of your chaff, young gentleman, if you please. All I want is a few straightforward answers from you. Attend. Is there not living in the same house with you an individual who goes by the name of Mr. James Twoshoes?”

Dick rubbed his nose; he began to feel interested.

“I cannot answer any of your questions,” he said, “till I know what your object is in asking them; and something more about you.”

“If you must know, you must,” said the other, “My name is Jibble. I am, in fact, Inspector Jibble, of the Metropolitan Detective Force, and I am not asking these questions without a purpose in view.”

“Now I can answer you,” said Dick. “Mr. James Twoshoes does live in the house opposite.”

“Good. Have you noticed anything out of the common, anything eccentric or mysterious in the conduct or habits of this Mr. Twoshoes?”

“I have,” replied Dick, eagerly. And without further questioning he told all that he knew, suspected and surmised respecting the unhappy Twoshoes.

“Quite coincides with the information I have received from headquarters,” remarked the inspector, patronizingly, when Dick had finished. “One or two more questions, and I have done. Is Mr. Twoshoes in his rooms at the present time?”

“He is not. He will probably not be home for several hours; in fact, there’s no one in the house at present—and that reminds me that I have left the front door open.”

“No one in the house at present, eh?” said the inspector, musingly, as he balanced himself on his heels, and jingled the loose cash in his pocket. “Now, Mr. Dereham, I’ll be frank with you. I have in my pocket at the present moment a warrant for the apprehension of Mr. Twoshoes. You may well start. He is one of the cleverest and most thoroughpaced rogues going. I have been on his track for a long time, but he is such a slippery customer that I have hitherto had nothing tangible to go upon. I have never been able to take him in the act. But I have got something certain to work on at last, and I should have taken him this morning had I not received a telegram from headquarters requesting me to wait till tomorrow. This little delay will probably enable us to secure the whole gang of forgers with which he is connected, and of which he is the chief. They are all to meet at a certain place at noon tomorrow. At present Twoshoes is out—a fact, by the way, of which I was perfectly aware before I came to see you; and what I now want is to make an investigation of his rooms before he returns, for I have reason to believe that among his papers there is a list of names of which I am exceedingly desirous of having a private view before going on my little expedition tomorrow. Will you, therefore, my good Mr. Dereham, just wait outside the door for a few minutes, while I proceed upstairs and do my duty? and should

Mr. T. arrive in the meantime, you must contrive to detain him for a minute or two, till I have time to get out of the way. I must really compliment you, my young friend, on your powers of discrimination in this matter. You were not deceived by the specious pretenses of this clever rogue!”

They walked across the road together, and Dick stationed himself outside the door, while Jibble went about his little perquisition upstairs.

He was not away more than five minutes, and Dick was still on the watch when he came down.

“Just as I expected,” he said. “Most valuable information. Must say good-bye for the present. Shall be happy to take a glass of wine with you when this little affair is over. In the meanwhile, silence—secrecy!” and, with an affable wave of the hand, the burly inspector lumbered rapidly down the street, and was quickly lost to view.

In a happy frame of mind, and perfectly satisfied that he had just rendered an important service to society, Dick lighted another cigar, and still maintained his post of observation outside the door.

His thoughts had gone wandering off by degrees toward a certain young lady, and he felt himself getting quite sentimental, a most unusual frame of mind for him, when, much to his surprise, he saw the cheery figure of Mr. Twoshoes bearing down on him from the other side of the way.

“How innocent he looks—the cunning old fox!” murmured Dick to himself. “He little thinks how neatly the trap is baited for him. I durst wager five yellow boys that he won’t look quite so cheerful tomorrow night at this time.”

Mr. Twoshoes was evidently in a hurry, for, without pausing, he bade Dick a pleasant goodnight, and then passed rapidly upstairs to his own room, where Dick heard him the next minute striking a light.

“Mr. Richard Dereham,” called Mr. Twoshoes, gently over the balusters, a minute or two afterward, “will yon oblige me by stepping upstairs?”

Wondering greatly, Dick complied, though not without some hesitation. Mr. Twoshoes was slowly rubbing his chin with one hand as Dick entered the room. His eyebrows were contracted, and there was a perplexed look on his face, such as Dick had never noticed before.

“Are you aware, Mr. Dereham, that during my absence this afternoon my room has been rifled of various articles belonging to me—among other things, of a set of gold studs, a silver lever watch and a portemonnaie containing two five-pound notes?”

“Rifled!” gasped Dick. “Really I was not aware of it!”

“I don’t suppose you were. But are you aware whether any one, not an inmate of the house, has had access, either directly or indirectly, to this room while I have been out?”

“As far as my knowledge goes, there has only been one person here beyond the ordinary inmates of the house.”

“And who may that one person have been?”

“Inspector Jibble, of the London police.”

“Inspector Jibble! And what might be the fellow’s business in my room?”

“Why, to tell the truth, he said he had got a warrant out for your apprehension, and came up to search the room for some document or other which he wanted.”

Mr. Twoshoes gave a long, low whistle.

“And where were you, Mr. Dereham, during the time this person was in my room?”

He looked very grim as he asked this question, and Dick quaked in his shoes as he replied:

“Outside the door—keeping watch, in fact.”

“Just so—to prevent his being disturbed. Neat, by Jove! uncommon neat! Perhaps it will be as well to see how you yourself have fared, Mr. Dereham. Oblige me by taking the light, and leading the way into your own room.”

Dick complied in fear and trembling; and on looking round his room, found that a ring and a breastpin had vanished—the only available property there.

“Then you have contrived to save your watch?” said Mr. Twoshoes.

In sorrow and humiliation Dick related the story of his meeting with Captain Julius, and how he had taken more wine than was good for him, and had had his pocket picked as he came home through the crowd.

“And served you right, too!” was the comment of Mr. Twoshoes. “Here comes Mrs. Starling. It will be as well to inquire whether she has lost anything.”

Search was made downstairs, which resulted in the discovery that our few silver spoons and forks had been taken; as also—sorrow of sorrows!—the silver teapot, my rich uncle’s wedding-gift.

“A tolerably clean sweep,” remarked Mr. Twoshoes, when the search was ended; “and—I say it again—an uncommon neat stroke of business. As for you, sir,” turning to the disconcerted Dick, “like the man in the play, you may ask your friends to write you down an ass. You have been most transparently duped, and if you had been the sole sufferer, it would only have taught you a useful lesson. Your particular friend, Captain Julius, was without doubt a member of the swell mob; he it was who took your watch; and the impudent rascal who came here tonight was probably instructed by him, and will hand over to him a fair share of the plunder.”

“I see it all now! What a fool I have been!” groaned poor Dick. “But you, sir,” turning on Mr. Twoshoes—“had it not been for your mysterious goings-on—had you only acted like any other reasonable man—this would never have happened.”

“So long as my good friends, Mr. and Mrs. Starling, are satisfied with their lodger, I do not recognize your right to interfere in my concerns. As, however, my business in this neighborhood will be over in a few days, I will at once give Mrs. Starling that explanation which, under the circumstances, she has a right to expect; and which you, Mr. Dereham, are at liberty to listen to, if you think well to do so. Know, therefore, all persons whom it may concern, that I, James Twoshoes (though whether that is my real name or not does not in the least matter), am a member of the Metropolitan Detective Force—not a sham officer like your friend Jibble, Mr. Dereham; that I came down here to hunt out a certain nest of forgers, whose handiwork we had traced to this part of the country, without being exactly able to lay our fingers on the rogues themselves; that, as a natural consequence, a certain amount of secrecy and mystery were essential to my plan, which plan, I am happy to say, has proved completely successful. And now, Mr. Dereham, you and I had better step down to the police-station, and furnish the details of the robbery. Perhaps we may succeed in tracing the rascals. Anyhow, we have been charmingly sold.”

Mr. Twoshoes had quite recovered his good humor by breakfast-time next morning, and could afford to laugh as heartily as anyone at his mishap; but Dick was nowhere to be found. He had, in fact, risen with the lark, and set out for London by the train; and from that day to this we have never seen his face in Markhallow.

Of Captain Julius and his confederate, it is only necessary to say that they were captured some three months later, in consequence of a second robbery in which they again acted as partners; and that they finally met with the reward which their peculiar talents merited so well.

*Frank Leslie's Pleasant Hours*, 1867 p. 387

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