

The Taming of "Doughnuts"

By C. T. Jordan

"DOUGHNUTS" DAWSON, owner of a dozen more or less picturesque aliases, was strolling down Market Street with no particular notion in his pear-shaped cranium. With the exception of his hands, there were only two dollars in his pockets.

In front of the Turner Theater a brightly colored lithograph, tastily decorated with small, impish forms, hovering about the person of a good-looking man in full dress, attracted his attention. The poster announced:

"For one week. Professor Duprey, the mystic, will set before the theatergoers of San Francisco a glittering, bewildering array of illusions and feats of magic. Seats, twenty-five cents to one dollar. Matinee every day."

Thought Doughnuts: "It's been a long time since I've witnessed anything of the sort. Who knows but it may give me an idea? Resources are getting low."

With Doughnuts, as with most fiction heroes, "to think was to act." He looked at the face of a jeweler's clock across the street, and noted that the hour was two p.m.

"Gallery seat, please," he said to the man in the box office. Two minutes later: "Gee! It's the real thing, all right," referring to the diamond scarfpin he had rescued from the tie of an orchestra-seat patron who had crowded past him on the way in. "Good for thirty-five at Doc Stringer's, I guess. One week's velvet, anyway."

As he took his seat the five-piece orchestra came from beneath the stage, and began to tune up. Five minutes later

the curtain rose, disclosing a handsome stage setting of plush and velvet. For an hour Doughnuts watched the tall, mustached man as he glided back and forth across the stage, culling rabbits, handkerchiefs, and the like from the most unexpected places.

"Good show," he commented silently during the intermission.

The second part was not far under way when one might have observed that Doughnuts was taking more than ordinary interest in the performance. "What! Do a thing like that with me in town?" he grinned.

The magician had asked the assistance of a member of the audience, and some one down in front had volunteered. "Take this wand," Doughnuts heard the conjurer say, "and borrow half a dozen diamond rings from the spectators." The man obeyed, and Doughnuts smiled as he noted how readily folks trusted the Great Duprey.

Hammering the rings flat, and ramming them into his blunderbuss, the necromancer fired at an empty box. At the report, the lid flew open, and a rabbit hopped out, the borrowed rings hanging from a ribbon encircling its throat. Great applause when the sparklers were returned to their owners.

"Gee, what a pipe!" muttered Dawson on the way out. "An' unmerciful cinch. Why, it'll stake me for three months at least. Winter's coming, too."

In Juneau's lunch room, an hour later: "Beef stew," instead of "Coffee and doughnuts"—an innate appetite for which latter delicacy had earned him his

nickname. “And now”—supper finished—“a bed in a decent lodging house; a good breakfast and lunch tomorrow, and the Owl Limited tomorrow night.” For his visit to the Turner Theater had indeed contributed some ideas that were cashable; and those were the only kind Doughnuts classified as ideas.

“Good ones now, Stringer,” he admonished that necessary link in his business ventures—the “fence.” He was looking over a tray of imitation diamonds, set in rings. “These won’t do.”

Without a word Doc Stringer removed the tray and replaced it with another whose contents were more to the liking of Doughnuts Dawson.

“I’ll take these six,” he said. “How much?”

“ ‘Bout twelve bucks.’ ”

“Holy codfish! You don’t believe in soaking a guy, do you? How much’d you say?” fingering the scarfpin he had not yet disposed of.

“Eighteen bones. Can’t you hear?”

“I thought you said two——”

“Never mind what you thought. It’s eighteen or nothing.”

“And what’s this worth?” displaying the scarfpin.

Stringer weighed it in his hand, then stowed it away in the safe, and passed a medium-sized gold piece to Dawson.

“What! Only a tenner? What do you take me for?”

“Makes twenty-eight with the rings, you boob! Take this jewelry and beat it while running’s good. I don’t want ‘em to see you hanging ‘round here.”

There never was any use arguing with Stringer, so he asked meekly: “Will you be here at half past five this aft’?”

“I’m always here, and you know it.”

Evidently Doc Stringer was in bad humor over something. “Called to court this morning,” surmised Doughnuts, and

correctly, if the afternoon papers were to be believed.

II.

WITH a respectable suit rented from Matt Travers’ clothing emporium, and a dollar and a half in currency, and six near-diamond rings, Doughnuts arrived at the theater lobby at a quarter to two.

“Got a good aisle seat, toward the front, left side?”

“Yes, second row. One dollar, please. Yes; it’s reserved.”

Across the street, at the Turnkey bar, Doughnuts invested his fifty cents while waiting for show time. At two-thirty he occupied his seat; and at three-forty-five, when the performer asked for assistance, he ventured to proffer his services. He mounted the runway to the stage, and took the wand from the hand of the magician, who, turning to the audience, addressed it thus:

“One of yourselves is now coming down among you to borrow a few diamond engagement rings. I assure you no harm will befall them. Simply place your rings on my wand as Mr.—What is your name, sir? Payton? As Mr. Payton walks up the aisle. Six will be enough. Thank you. A waltz, please, Mr. Conductor.”

To the strains of “The Merry Widow,” Doughnuts made his way up the aisle, grasping tightly the wand in his left hand. On the end of the wand under cover of his hand were the six fakes. Slowly he walked, taking only the choicest rings offered, pretending not to notice the others that were held out to him.

Six gigantic sparklers hooked, he turned toward the stage. In turning, he grasped with his right hand the end of the wand holding the booty, and releasing with his left hand the pasties, he strode

nonchalantly down the aisle and up the runway. Here he allowed the fakes to slide off the wand onto a plate held by the conjurer, whom he also allowed to take the wand, retaining the spoils in his own hand.

Being informed that his services were required no more, he returned to his seat, fairly beaming, if it were possible to say such a thing of him.

He knew that in a moment the house would be darkened long enough for him to walk quietly out; so, hat in hand, he waited patiently while the conjurer hammered the rings and placed them in his pistol. Then a small box was brought forward and placed on a slight stand. An incandescent bulb attached to the stand suddenly glowed, and Doughnuts Dawson and the house lights went out together.

As he sauntered down the lobby to the sidewalk, Doughnuts heard a light step behind him, and a hand fell heavily on his shoulder. He looked up in fright.

"Come along, Doughnuts," came from the burly form, in tones habitual with but one person Dawson knew—Plain-clothesman Clarence Morton, of police headquarters.

III.

LISTLESSLY Dawson walked beside the policeman until they reached the stage door, then he looked up in wonderment. The door opened, and they were on the stage, behind the wings. The lights were on now, and Doughnuts could see the Great Duprey. He had the rabbit in his hand, and was removing some rings from its neck—the fakes. Doughnuts knew. Then Dawson was hurried down a short flight of steps leading under the stage.

He was told to step onto a small platform, which he saw was a miniature elevator. Looking above, he could

distinguish the outlines of a trapdoor in the stage floor. He could plainly hear the conjurer as he pattered on. He was saying:

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, I will go even further. James, wheel forward that cabinet, and demonstrate its emptiness. This harmless little rabbit I toss into the cabinet, so, and close the door."

Doughnuts heard it slam; then the platform on which he stood started upward. In a second he was inside the cabinet, still listening to the conjurer.

"These rings I rub between my palms. Slowly they disintegrate, and in their place I have— What is this? Why, the rabbit of course. And what has he in his mouth? A sheet of paper. I'll unfold it.

"Well, I declare! Why, it's a warrant. A warrant for the arrest of one Doughnuts Dawson, alias The Frisco Steed, alias The Rabbit!" Doughnuts trembled. "A warrant for the arrest of Doughnuts Dawson. The charge? The theft of six diamond rings from members of the audience now assembled in the Turner Theater! Is there an officer in the house?"

A moment's silence—Doughnuts could imagine the craning necks—then he heard a heavy pair of feet tramping down the aisle.

"Is this warrant correctly made out, officer?"

"Perfectly."

"And do you know Doughnuts Dawson by sight?"

"I do."

"Very well. Stand aside." His voice grew deeper. "I command the spirits of evil to materialize the form of Doughnuts Dawson, and at once. One, two, three!"

A deafening crash, and the cabinet door flew open, and, white-faced and shaking, Doughnuts Dawson tumbled out.

"I guess you've got me dead to rights," he said, casting a frightened glance at the magician. "Here's your rings."

The curtain fell amid reverberating handclapping and foot stamping.

IV.

DOUGHNUTS, it will be remembered, was elated after he had handed the fake jewelry to the conjurer and kept the real articles; that elation was due, of course, to the fact that he had not seen the conjurer step to the wings as he returned to his seat, and speak a few words to a man behind the scenes. He would have been still less delighted had he seen this second person hurry around the corner to the police station. But Doughnuts had observed none of these things.

Now he had to admit that he was a bungler as he faced the magician.

"A pretty neat customer, you are," commented Duprey; then he turned to the policeman. He whispered a minute, and passed him something, whereupon the peace guardian left them. Then he tore up the warrant.

"Ain't you going to have me pinched?" whimpered Doughnuts.

"Come, come; brace up, man! Thieving's not the thing for you. You're too good for that. Why, you've given me more free advertising than my press agent could have thought up in a year, I used to live in Frisco myself, and I knew you the minute you offered to help me, so I watched you. You turned that trick as neatly as I could have done it myself. Now I'm going to give you a chance to be straight. From now on you're one of the company. Is it a go?"

"You mean you'd take me? And what am I to do?"

"Same stunt you did to-day, of course," grinned the wizard. "And now you'd better come along with me, and have some eats as soon as I change my make-up. And it won't be coffee and doughnuts."

"You're on," said Mr. Dawson, warming to the idea of becoming an honest magician to whom the dinner bell would always mean something.