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# The Rope Dance

by Rex Stout

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It was on a bright October afternoon that Rick Duggett got off at Grand Central Station, New York, with eight hundred dollars in the pocket of his brand new suit of clothes. But first of all it is necessary to explain how he got there and where the money came from.

He was one of those men who never do anything by halves. He ate prodigiously or fasted, he slept eleven hours or not at all, he sat in a poker game only when it was expressly understood that the roof was the limit and you might blow that off if you had enough powder.

Whatever he did he went just a little farther than any one else, so it was only natural that he should reach the top of his profession. He was the best roper in Eastern Arizona, which is no mean title even in these days when good ropers are as scarce as water holes in a desert.

When a prize of one thousand dollars cash was hung up in the great roping contest held at Honeville last October everybody expected Rick Duggett to win it, and he did not disappoint them. He roped and tied ten steers in fourteen minutes and twenty-eight seconds, seven full minutes better than the nearest competitor.

There had been considerable speculation as to what Rick would do with the money. Of course he would entertain the crowd at Ogilvy's, but even a gang of thirsty ranchmen can't drink a thousand dollars' worth of whisky. The rest would probably find its way into a poker game; but then Rick Duggett was a surprising sort of fellow and you couldn't tell. He might get married, or even take a trip to Denver.

As a matter of fact, Rick bought one round of drinks at Ogilvy's, made arrangements for his horse to be returned to the ranch, and entrusted a comrade with the following note to the foreman:

Dear Fraser:

I won the big prize all right. I'm going to take a month off for a little trip to New York. I've never been there. Yours truly,

R. Duggett

Even from Rick, that was amazing. Denver or K. C., yes. People did go to those places, and sometimes even to St. Louis. Indeed, it was understandable that a man might conceivably undertake, for pleasure, a

journey to Chicago.

But New York!

Absurd.

You might as well say Constantinople and be done with it. However, it was just like Rick Duggett. Having decided to visit a big city, you might know he would choose the biggest. He never did anything by halves.

Thus it was that Rick arrived in New York, with a roll of bills amounting to eight hundred and eighteen dollars in his pocket, about two o'clock of a sunny October afternoon.

Having stopped off in Chicago to buy a suit of clothes, his outward appearance, as he emerged from the Grand Central Station onto Forty-second Street, was not as startling as you might have expected of the champion roper of Arizona. But he had not thought of discarding the floppy broad-brimmed Stetson, and the ruggedness of his brown countenance and the flashing clearness of his eye were patently not of Broadway.

So it was that before he had even reached Times Square, threading his way through the throng westward on Forty-second Street, he was accosted by a dapper white-faced person in a blue serge suit who murmured something, without preamble, concerning "the third race at Latonia," and a "sure thing," and "just around the corner."

"Listen, sonny," said Rick, not unkindly. "I don't bet on horses unless I can see 'em. Besides, if I'd wanted to gamble I'd of stayed in Honeville. I came to New York to see the sights, and I guess you're one of 'em. Much obliged. Here's two bits "

And he thrust a quarter into the hand of the astonished "runner."

After he had tramped around for a couple of hours and got his eyes full he took a taxicab to the Hotel Croyville, which had been recommended to him by some one on the train.

It is too bad that I can't describe his timidity on entering the cab and his novel sensations as the engine started and the thing shot forward. The trouble is that the owner of the ranch on which he worked was also the owner of two automobiles, and Rick was a pretty good hand at driving a car himself. Yet he was indeed impressed by the chauffeur's marvellous dexterity in threading his way through the maze of whirling traffic down Fifth Avenue.

Rick ate dinner, or supper, as he called it, at the Croyville, and a little later sallied forth for a look at the town by electric light. He had a sort of an idea that he might go to a show, but, having perused the amusement columns of an evening newspaper, found himself embarrassed by the superabundance of material. His final decision rested between a performance of *Macbeth* and a Broadway dancing revue, and about half-past seven he dropped into a cafe to consider the

matter over a little of something wet.

It was there that he met a person named Henderson. One thing Rick must admit, it was he himself who addressed the first words to the stranger. But then it is also a fact that the stranger, who was standing next to Rick at the bar, started things by observing to the bartender and whoever else might care to hear:

"We don't use those nonrefillable bottles out West, where I come from. We don't have to. We know the men that sell us our drinks, and by --, they know us. But that's the way it is in New York. You got to watch everybody, or you'll get your insides all filled up with water."

Rick turned and asked the stranger--a ruddy-faced, middleaged man in a gray sack suit and soft hat--what part of the West he came from. That was enough. Ten minutes later they were having their second drink together.

Mr. Henderson, it appeared, was from Kansas, where he owned an immense wheat farm. He was much interested in what Rick had to say about Arizona. They discussed the metropolis, and Rick, by way of comment on Mr. Henderson's observation that "you got to watch everybody in New York," told of his encounter with the poolroom runner on Forty-second Street. Then, as it was nearing eight o'clock, he remarked that he was intending to see the revue up at the Stuyvesant Theater, and guessed he would have to trot along.

"That's a bum show," declared Mr. Henderson. "I saw it the other night. Lord, I've seen better than that out in Wichita. Why don't you come with me up to the Century? A fellow at the hotel told me it's the real thing."

So after Mr. Henderson had paid for the drinks--despite Rick's protest--they left the cafe and took a taxi to Sixty-second Street, where Henderson allowed Rick to settle with the chauffeur while he entered the theater lobby to get the tickets.

Rick liked the man from Kansas. He appeared to be an outspoken, blunt sort of fellow who liked to have a good time and knew where to go for it. Lucky thing to have met up with him. Mighty pleasant to have for a companion a chap from the right side of the Mississippi.

The show was in fact a good one, and Rick enjoyed it hugely. Pretty girls, catchy music, funny lines, clever dancing. Rick applauded with gusto and laughed himself weak. The only drawback was that Mr. Henderson appeared to have an unconquerable aversion to going out between the acts. It was incomprehensible. The man actually seemed to prefer sitting in the stuffy, crowded theater to stepping out for a little air. But then he was a most amusing talker and the intermissions were not so very long.

After the final curtain they pushed out with the crowd to the sidewalk. Rick felt exhilarated and a little bewildered in the whirlpool of smiling faces and the noise of a thousand chattering tongues.

"This is certainly New York," he was saying to himself, when his thoughts were interrupted by his companion's voice:

"What do you say we go downtown for a little supper? I know a good place. Unless you'd rather turn in--"

"I should say not," declared Rick. "I had my supper at six o'clock, but I'm always ready for more. Lead me to it. This is on me, you know."

So they found a taxi at the curb and got in, after Mr. Henderson had given the chauffeur the name of a cabaret and supper room downtown. A little delay, and they were out of the crush in front of the theater' a minute later the cab turned into Broadway, with its glaring lights and throngs of vehicles and pedestrians, and headed south.

Suddenly Mr. Henderson pulled himself forward, thrust his hand into his hip pocket and brought it forth again holding something that glistened like bright silver as the rays of light through the cab window reflected on it. Rick's curious glance showed him that it was a nickel-plated whisky flask. He watched with a speculative eye as the other unscrewed the top, turned it over and poured it full of liquid.

"Some stuff I brought with me from Kansas," explained Mr. Henderson. "The real thing, this is. I always keep it in the sideboard. If you'd care to join me, sir--"

Rick hesitated. Then he blushed for the base thought that had entered his mind. It was all right to be cautious and all that, but it was carrying it a little too far to be suspicious of a man like Henderson. Still--

"Sure," said Rick. "After you. I'd like to sample it."

The other proffered the tiny nickel-plated cup.

"After you," Rick repeated with a polite gesture.

"Here's how, then," replied Henderson, and emptied the cup at a gulp. "Nothing to rinse with, you know," he observed as he filled it again from the flask. "The stuff's too good to waste it washing dishes."

"That's all right." Rick took the cup, brim-full, in his fingers. "Here's looking at you."

And, following the other's example, he swallowed it with one draught.

About three hours later, a little after three o'clock in the morning, the lieutenant at the desk of the Murray Hill Police Station was conducting an investigation. The chief witness was a taxicab chauffeur, whose face was flushed with indignation at the iniquity of a wicked world, and whose tone was filled with injured protest.

"I was in front of the Century," said the chauffeur to the police lieutenant, "when two guys took me. One of 'em, a short, red-faced guy, told me to hit it up for Shoney's cabaret. I got 'em there as quick as I could, of course bein' careful, but when I pulled up in front of

Shoney's the red-faced guy leaned out of the window and said they'd changed their minds and guessed they'd drive around a little. 'Maybe an hour,' he said, and told me to go up the Avenue to the Park. So I beat it for the Park.

"I drove around till I got dizzy, nearly two hours, and it seemed funny I wasn't hearing sounds of voices inside. They had the front curtains pulled down. Finally I slowed down and took a peep around the corner through the side window. I couldn't see no one. I stopped and jumped down and opened the door. The red-faced guy was gone and the other guy was sprawled out half on the seat and half on the floor. I yelled at him and shook him around, but he was dead to the world. So I brought him--"

"All right, that'll do," the lieutenant interrupted. "You've got a license, I suppose?"

"Sure I have. I've been three years with the M. B. Company--"

"And you don't know when the red-faced man left the cab?"

"No. Unless it was at Sixth Avenue and Forty-second Street. They was a jam there and we was held up a long time. He might of ducked then--"

"All right." The lieutenant turned to a policeman. "See if that man is able to talk yet."

As the policeman turned to obey, a door leading into an inner room opened and Rick Duggett, champion roper of Eastern Arizona, appeared on the threshold. His face was pale and his eyes were swollen and dull, like those of a man roused from a long sleep; his necktie was on one side and his hair was rumped into a tangled mass.

"Here he is now," said the policeman.

"Oh, so you've come to." The lieutenant looked the newcomer over. "What's the matter with you? What kind of a game is this?"

Rick Duggett approached the desk.

"Listen here," he said, gazing at the lieutenant with a melancholy eye. His voice was slow and labored, but he made it distinct. "Listen here," he repeated. "I see by the clock yonder that it's after three. So I've been knocked out for three hours. I came to in there fifteen minutes ago, and they told me where I was. I guess I'm straightened out now. A gazebo named Henderson gave me a drink of something from Kansas, and when I closed my eyes because I enjoyed it so much he lifted a roll of eight hundred dollars and a return ticket to Arizona from my pants pocket. You got to watch everybody in New York. It was Henderson said that. Perhaps he meant--"

"Wait a minute." The lieutenant arranged the blotter and dipped his pen in the ink. "What's your name?"

Rick achieved a weary smile. "My name is Billy Boob. Write it down and let me see how it looks. That's all you'll get, because I'm not exactly anxious to get myself in the papers in this connection. My name is Billy Boob, and I come from Ginkville on Sucker Creek. If that's all I guess I'll trot along."

"I guess you won't," said the lieutenant sharply. "How do you expect us to get your money back for you if you don't tell us anything? What kind of a looking man was this Henderson? Where did you meet him?"

"Nothing doing." Again Rick smiled wearily. "Strange to say, I forgot to brand him. He wore a gray suit of clothes, and he had a red face and white teeth, and I met him somewhere talking about nonrefillable bottles. No use writing anything down, because I'm not making any holler. I've always had a theory that if a man can't take care of himself he's not fit to have any one else do the job. The boys would run me off the ranch if they heard of this. I guess I'll trot along."

The policeman grinned. The lieutenant expostulated and argued. But Rick was firm.

"No, Cap, nothing doing on the complaint. You wouldn't catch him, anyway. I'm going home and get some sleep. So long and much obliged."

He made for the door. But on the threshold he hesitated, then turned.

"There's one thing I'd like to know," he said slowly. "Henderson took a drink just before I did, and it didn't seem to make him sleepy. Is it a general practice around here to carry two kinds of booze in one horn?"

At that the lieutenant grinned, too. "Oh, that's one of our eastern refinements," he explained. "You see, the flask is divided in the middle. If you press the button on the right side you get Scotch and if you press the one on the left you get something else. Men like Mr. Henderson have them made to order."

"I see," said Rick. "Much obliged."

And with a farewell nod he turned again and disappeared into the street.

It was noon when he awoke the next day in his room at the hotel. He first felt a vague sense of depression, then suddenly everything came back to him. He jumped out of bed, filled the washbowl with cold water and ducked his head in it, then washed and dressed. That done, he descended to the dining room and ate six eggs and two square feet of ham. After he had paid the breakfast check he went into the lobby and sank into a big leather chair.

"Let's see," he said to himself, "that leaves me fourteen dollars and twenty cents. Thank heaven Henderson didn't look in my vest pocket, though he did take my watch out of the other one. That watch would have got me back to Honeville. The fare is fifty-eight dollars. I'll starve before I'll telegraph Fraser. Well, let's see."

He spent the entire afternoon loitering about the hotel, trying to get his mind to work. How to make some money? The thing appeared impossible. They don't hold roping contests in New York. He considered everything from sweeping streets to chauffeuring. Could he drive a car around New York? No money in it, anyway, probably. But surely a man could do *something*.

By evening he had decided on nothing. After dinner he strolled up Broadway and bought a ticket for the revue. He was determined to find it amusing, for Mr. Henderson had said it was a bum show. It really bored him to death. But he stayed till the final curtain. Then he found himself on Broadway again.

Just how he got into Dickson's is uncertain. He wanted a drink, and he wandered into the place and found himself in the presence of "the most famous cabaret in America." Rick sat at a small table at one end of the immense, gorgeous room, watching the antics of the dancers and singers and other performers on the platform, and it was there that his idea came to him. Before he went to bed that night he had decided to give it a trial the very next day.

Accordingly the following morning he sought out a hardware store on Sixth Avenue and purchased thirty yards of first grade hemp rope and a gallon of crude oil. The cost was eight dollars and sixty cents. These articles he took back to the hotel, and for three hours he sat in his room rubbing the oil into the rope to bring it to the required degree of pliancy and toughness.

Then he spliced a loop in one end, doubled it through and made a six-foot noose--the size of the room would not permit a larger one--and began whirling it about his head. A sigh of satisfaction escaped him. Ah, the nimble wrist! And the rope would really do very well; a little limbering up and he would ask nothing better.

He pulled his traveling bag from under the bed, dumped out its contents and put the rope, carefully coiled, in their place. Then, with the bag in his hand, he descended to the street and made his way uptown to Dickson's. At the entrance he halted a moment, then went boldly inside and accosted one of the young women at the door of the cloakroom.

"I want to speak to the manager of the show," said he, hat in hand.

"You mean the headwaiter?" she hazarded.

"I don't know," replied Rick. "The man that runs the show on the platform. I saw it last night."

"Oh," she grinned. "You mean the cabaret."

"Do I? Much obliged. Anyway, I want to see him."

"It ain't so easy," the young woman observed. "The boss tends to that himself. I'll see. Come in here."

She led the way down a narrow, dark corridor to an office where stenographers and bookkeepers sat at their desks and machines, and turned Rick over to a wise-looking youth with a threatening mustache. The youth surveyed the caller with ill-concealed amusement at his ungraceful appearance, and when he finally condescended to speak there was a note of tolerant sarcasm in his voice.

"So you want to see Mr. Dickson," he observed. "What do you want with him?"

"Listen, sonny." Rick was smiling, too, quietly enough. "No doubt we're having a lot of fun looking at each other, but my time's valuable just now. I'm Rick Duggett from Arizona. Report the fact to your Mr. Dickson."

Thus did Rick make his way into the presence of Lonny Dickson, the best known man on Broadway and the owner of its most famous cabaret. He was a large, smiling individual, with a clear countenance and a keen, penetrating eye. As Rick entered the inner office where he sat at a large flat desk heaped with papers, smoking a long thin cigar, he got up from his chair and held out a hand in greeting.

"Jimmie just told me," he observed genially, looking Rick in the eye, "that a wild guy from the West wanted to see me. I'm kind of wild myself, so I don't mind. But Jimmie didn't get the name--"

"Duggett," said Rick, taking the proffered hand.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Duggett. What can I do for you?"

Rick hesitated.

"It's this way," he said finally. "I'm from Arizona. I'm a son of misfortune. Two days ago I had a roll big enough to choke a horse, but night before last I let it out to pasture, as though I wasn't green enough myself. So I'm broke, and it's a long, long way to Arizona. Last night I happened in here and saw your show, and an idea came to me. It's a new stunt for the show, and it ought to be pretty good. So I thought I'd--"

"What is it?" interrupted Mr. Dickson, whose cordiality had rapidly disappeared as he became aware of the nature of the visitor's errand. This was just some nut looking for a job.

"Something new," said Rick placidly. "I can't tell you very well; I've got to show you. It'll take five minutes. All I want is a room with plenty of space, say twenty feet on each side, and a high ceiling--"

"But what is it?" the other repeated impatiently.

Rick looked at him.

"Gosh, you're not wild," he observed with a twinkle in his eye. "You're just plain sassy. Didn't I say I had to show you? Haven't you got a room around here somewhere of the general size I indicated? Haven't



you got a pair of eyes to look at me with?"

The frown left Dickson's brow, and he laughed.

"Well, you're wild enough for both of us," he declared. "I guess you'll get back to Arizona all right, some way or other. As for your stunt for the cabaret, it's a thousand to one that it's rotten. Naturally you can't be expected to know anything about cabarets. However, I'll take a look. Come on, we'll go up to the banquet room on the next floor; I guess you'll find it big enough."

"Much obliged," said Rick.

He picked up his traveling bag and followed the restaurant proprietor out of the office.

The evening of the following day the patrons of Dickson's of Broadway were treated to a surprise.

Do you know the main room at Dickson's?

The first thing you notice about the place is the light--dazzling, glaring, bold; a perfect riot of light, whitish yellow, that comes from four immense chandeliers suspended from the ceiling and innumerable electric lamps on the marble pillars, attached to the walls, on the tables, everywhere.

Then your ears are assaulted, and you hear the clinking of glasses, the muffled footsteps of waiters, the confusing hum of conversation from half a thousand tongues, and mingled with all this a sound of music, now suppressed, now insistent, that comes from the orchestra on the rear of the raised platform at one side. On the front of this platform, of which a fair view may be had by each of the hundreds of diners and drinkers packed in the immense room, the cabaret performers appear in turn.

It was the height of the dinner hour, a little after seven. A young woman in a low-necked blue dress with cowlike eyes had finished three verses and choruses of a popular sentimental song, and the orchestra had rested the usual three minutes. Then they struck up again for the next "turn," and a girl appeared on the platform, followed by a man.

The girl--a lively little black-haired creature with sparkling eyes and a saucy, winning smile--was no stranger to the habitués of the place; she had been dancing there for several months. But always alone. Who was this fellow with her? They opened their eyes at his strange appearance.

He was a tall, ungainly chap, wearing the costume of a moving picture cowboy, and in his hand he carried a great coil of rope. There was an expression of painful embarrassment on his brown face as he glanced from side to side and saw five hundred pairs of eyes looking into his from all parts of the large, brilliantly lighted room.

The girl began to dance, swinging into the music with a series of

simple, tentative steps, and the man roused himself to action. He loosened the coil of rope and began pulling it through a loop at one end to form a noose. Then slowly and easily, and gracefully, he began whirling the noose in the air. It was fifteen feet in diameter, half as wide as the platform.

The girl, quickening her steps with the music, swerved suddenly to one side and leaped into the center of the whirling coil of rope. Then the music quickened again and the rope whirled faster, while the dancer circled round and round its circumference in a series of dizzy gyrations. Suddenly the man twisted to one side, with a quick and powerful turn of the wrist, and the rope doubled on itself like lightning, forming two circles instead of one. The girl leaped and danced from one to the other.

The music became more rapid still, and the rope and the dancer, whirling with incredible swiftness in the most intricate and dazzling combinations, challenged the eye to follow them. The nooses of the rope, which had again doubled, came closer together, until finally two of them encircled the girl at once, then three, then all four, still whirling about her swiftly revolving form.

All at once the orchestra, with one tremendous crash, was silent; simultaneously the man gave a sudden powerful jerk with his arm and the dancer stopped and became rigid, while the four nooses of the rope tightened themselves about her, pinning her arms to her sides and rendering her powerless. One more crash from the orchestra, and the man ran forward, picked the girl up in his arms and ran quickly from the platform.

The applause was deafening. Dickson's had scored another hit. All Broadway asks is something new.

Back of the platform the man had halted to place the girl gently on her feet and unwind the coils of rope. That done, she took him by the hand to lead him back to the platform for the bow. He hung back, but she insisted, and finally she dragged him on. They were forced to take another, and a third. When they returned from the last one they found Lonny Dickson himself waiting for them at the foot of the platform steps.

"Great stuff, Duggett," he said enthusiastically. "You put it over fine, especially with only one day's rehearsal. It'll improve, too. I've been paying Miss Carson fifty a week. I'll make it a hundred and fifty for the turn, and you and she can split it fifty-fifty."

"Much obliged," replied Rick calmly. His face was flushed and his brow covered with perspiration. He turned to his partner.

"Shall we have a drink on it? Miss Carson?"

They found a table in a corner back of the platform Miss Carson, a rarity among cabaret performers, was even more pleasing to look at when you were close to her than on the stage. Her sparkling eyes retained all their charm, and the softness of her hair, the daintiness of

her little mouth, the fresh smoothness of her cheeks, became more apparent. She was panting now from her exertions, and her flushed face and disarranged hair made a lovely picture.

"Really," she said, as she sat down, "I ought to ask you to wait till I go to the dressing room and repair damages."

"Oh, that can wait," declared Rick. "If you knew how nice you look right now you wouldn't want to fix up anyway. I suppose we ought to drink to each other with a bottle of champagne, but to tell the truth I was kind of hungry this evening and I'm afraid I about finished my little stake. I'll corral Dickson for an advance tonight and we'll have the wine later."

But Miss Carson protested with a gay smile that she never drank anything stronger than mineral water, so that was all right. More, a little exclamation of horror escaped her when she saw Rick swallow three fingers of whiskey straight, after clinking glasses with her.

"That awful stuff!" she exclaimed. "It'll kill you. I thought you mixed water with it or something."

"I haven't got that low yet," Rick declared. "But there's a funny thing, I was thinking just then that I've been drinking too much since I came East. Out home I don't touch it oftener than once in two months, though I do fill up pretty well then. You know, he hesitated--and blushed! "You know," he went on, "I'm glad you don't drink."

"Yes? Why?"

"Lord, I don't know. I'm just glad."

"Well, so am I. I never have. But listen, Mr. Duggett. Mr. Dickson said he was going to give us a hundred and fifty and we could split it fifty-fifty. I won't do that--divide it even, I mean. I was only getting fifty alone, so it's quite evident that the hundred belongs to you."

"You don't say so," Rick smiled at her. "Now, that's just like you." (How in the world could he have known what was just like her, having met her only twenty-four hours before?) "But you've got it wrong. The hundred is yours. I wouldn't be worth two bits without you."

"Mr. Duggett, the increased value of the turn is due entirely to you, and you must take the extra money. I insist."

"Miss Carson, you really ought to have the whole thing, only I need a stake to get back home, so I'll agree to take one-third. Not a cent more."

They argued about it for twenty minutes, and at the end of that time compromised on an even split.

"It must be terribly exciting out in Arizona," observed Miss Carson after a pause.

Rick lifted his eyebrows.

"Exciting?"

"Yes. That is--well *exciting*."

"Not so as you could notice it. Oh, it's all right. I don't kick any. Plenty to eat, a good poker game whenever you're loaded and a dance every once in a while. And of course lots of work--"

"But I didn't mean that," Miss Carson put in. "Working and eating and playing cards and dancing--why, that's just what the men do in New York. I meant Indians, and things like that."

"Yes, the Indians are pretty bad," Rick agreed. "You've got to keep your eye on 'em all the time. They'll get anything that's loose. Worst sneak thieves in the world. But I don't call that very exciting. In fact, I guess I'm having the most exciting time of my life right now."

"Oh, so you like New York?"

"I should say not. That is, I didn't mean New York. I meant right now, here at this table."

"My goodness, I don't see anything very exciting about this," the girl smiled.

"Of course not. You're looking in the wrong direction. You're looking at me and I'm looking at you. You know, it's a funny thing about your eyes. They look like the eyes of a pony I had once, the best that ever felt a saddle. The only time I ever cried was when he stumbled in a prairie dog hole and had to be shot."

This was not the first compliment Rick had ever paid a woman, but you may see that he had not practiced the art sufficiently to acquire any great degree of subtlety. It appeared nevertheless not to be totally ineffective, for Miss Carson turned away the eyes that reminded Rick of his lost pony. She even made inquiry about the pony's name and age, and why his stumbling in a prairie dog hole necessitated his death; also what is a prairie dog and a hole thereof?

At their next appearance on the platform they repeated their former success. There seemed little doubt that they were to be talked of on Broadway, and that meant profitable popularity. Miss Carson was delighted, and Rick found himself echoing her pleasure. Besides he was pleased on his own account, for two reasons: he was going to have no difficulty getting back to Arizona without revealing his disgraceful adventure to the boys, and he was going to get back from Broadway itself at least a part of that which Broadway had taken from him.

After this second performance they would not be needed again for more than two hours, and Rick changed into his street clothes and went out for a walk. It may as well be admitted that his thoughts during this long stroll were mainly of his cabaret partner, but there was another idea in his mind at the same time. He did not leave Broadway, and his

eye ran ceaselessly over the faces of the passersby; also he stopped in every café, though he drank not at all. He was hoping that he might run across Mr. Henderson.

At eleven o'clock he was back at Dickson's. Miss Carson found him in front of the dressing room and informed him that their call would be at 11:24. The immense dining room was filling up rapidly with the supper crowd from the theaters.

Waiters and omnibuses trotted swiftly up and down the aisles, there was a continuous line of new arrivals streaming in from the doors at both ends, and corks were beginning to pop. Two numbers of the supper cabaret had already done their turns, and the sentimental soprano was standing at the rear of the platform squeezing the bulb of an atomizer and half choking herself.

When the time came for the Rope Dance, as Lonny Dickson had decided to call it in his advertising copy for the following day, Rick Duggett was surprised at the ease with which he walked out on the platform, bowed and began loosening his coil of rope.

Miss Carson was daintily performing her short opening dance to the music of the orchestra. Rick got his noose arranged, stepped forward to his position in the center of the platform and started the rope slowly whirling. This was easy. He got it a little higher and went a little faster. There would still be at least a minute before the music cue came for the dancer to leap into the whirling circle, and Rick allowed his gaze to wander over the throng of faces turned toward him from every side. The scene spread out dazzlingly from the raised platform.

All at once Rick's head became rigid and his eyes fixed themselves in an unbelieving stare. This lasted for half a moment; then suddenly he started and jumped forward and shouted at the top of his voice: "*Damn!*"

Miss Carson stopped short with amazement in the middle of her dance. The orchestra wavered and was silent. The clinking of knives and forks and the hum of conversation was suddenly hushed all over the room. Rick stood at the front edge of the platform, still staring at something with a wildly inquiring eye, his arm still moving mechanically around his head as the noose whirled in a great circle.

And then those who followed the direction of Rick's gaze saw a man--a stout, red-faced, middle-aged man--suddenly rise to his feet from a table near the center of the room, cast one quick, startled glance at the cowboy on the platform and dart madly down the aisle toward the door.

The rest happened so quickly that no eye was swift enough to follow it. There was a lightning gleam from Rick's eye, a powerful, rapid movement of his arm, and the whirling circle of rope shot out and whizzed through the air over the heads of the amazed throng. Leaving behind it, like the tail of a comet, the line whose other end was firmly grasped in Rick's hand.

It was a perfect throw, worthy of the champion of Eastern Arizona.

Straight as an arrow the noose went to its mark, dropping with precision over the head of the red-faced man, far across the room. Rick lunged backward, jerking in his arm, and the noose tightened about the man's body, below his breast.

Rick leaped from the platform and dashed down the aisle, pulling in the rope as he ran to keep it taut. In a second he had reached the side of his captive, thrown him to the floor and sat on him.

"Hello, Henderson," said Etick calmly to the prostrate form under him. "I want eight hundred dollars and a ticket to Honeville, Arizona, and I want it quick."

Henderson, panting with exertion, glared and was silent. Not so the other diners. Women were screaming, and two or three of them were trying to faint. Men were calling out, "Get the police!" at the same time crowding down the aisles to be in at the death. Waiters were running distractedly in every direction; their chief pushed his way through, calling meantime to his lieutenants to get the police.

"You'd better act quick, Henderson," said Rick, shaking the head waiter off. "Somebody's gone to get a policeman. I don't like 'em any better than you do, and they'll have to catch you if they want you. Better come across."

"D'ye mean that?" gasped Henderson.

"I sure do."

There was some more quick action then. Rick arose and pulled the noose off. Henderson scrambled to his feet, thrust his hand in his pocket and handed his captor a roll of bills. Rick skinned back the edges, nodded and released his hold. And then you should have seen Mr. Henderson of Kansas get out of that restaurant. He overturned three or four tables and knocked down a dozen men and half as many women, but he certainly got out.

"Much obliged!" Rick yelled after him as he disappeared through the door.

Of course Rick lost his job. Worse, Lonny Dickson had him arrested for disturbing the peace, and he was taken to the night court. But the magistrate released him, after a reprimand for not having turned Henderson over to the law.

And what did he care for his job with nine hundred and thirty dollars in his pocket? That is an actual fact; instead of diminishing, the roll had grown. Perhaps Mr. Henderson had made another haul. And the railroad ticket was there too. Rick pocketed the hundred and thirty dollars profit without a word; you who understand ethics, which I don't, may argue about it if you want to.

Another thing. One o'clock the following afternoon found Rick Duggett eating luncheon--yes, luncheon--with a young lady named Carson. I wouldn't be surprised if it ended by his marrying the girl and taking her

back to Arizona with him. He never did anything by halves.

*(All-Story Weekly, June 24, 1916)*

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