

## **The Dummy-Chucker**

*By Arthur Somers Roche*

From *The Cosmopolitan*

There were many women on East Fourteenth Street. With the seeing eye of the artist, the dummy-chucker looked them over and rejected them. Kindly-seeming, generously fat, the cheap movie houses disgorged them. A dozen alien tongues smote the air, and every one of them hinted of far lands of poverty, of journeys made and hardships undergone. No better field for beggary in all Manhattan's bounteous acreage.

But the dummy-chucker shook his head and shuffled ever westward. These were good souls, but--they thought in cents. Worse than that, they translated their financial thoughts into the pitiful coinage of their birthplaces. And in the pocket of the dummy-chucker rested a silver dollar.

A gaunt man, who towered high, and whose tongue held the cadences of the wide spaces, had slipped this dollar into the receptive hand of the dummy-chucker. True, it was almost a fortnight ago, and the man might have gone back to his Western home--but Broadway had yielded him up to the dummy-chucker. Broadway might yield up such another.

At Union Square, the dummy-chucker turned north. Past the Flatiron Building he shuffled, until, at length, the Tenderloin unfolded itself before him. These were the happy hunting-grounds!

Of course--and he glanced behind him quickly--there were more fly cops on Broadway than on the lower East Side. One of them had dug his bony fingers between the shabby collar of the dummy-chucker's coat and the lank hair that hung down his neck. He had yanked the

dummy-chucker to his feet. He had dragged his victim to a patrol-box; he had taken him to a police station, whence he had been conveyed to Jefferson Market Court, where a judge had sentenced him to a sojourn on Blackwell's Island.

That had been ten days ago. This very day, the municipal ferry had landed the dummy-chucker, with others of his slinking kind, upon Manhattan's shores again. Not for a long time would the memory of the Island menu be effaced from the dummy-chucker's palate, the locked doors be banished from his mental vision.

A man might be arrested on Broadway, but he might also get the money. Timorously, the dummy-chucker weighed the two possibilities. He felt the dollar in his pocket. At a street in the Forties, he turned westward. Beyond Eighth Avenue there was a place where the shadow of prohibition was only a shadow.

Prices had gone up, but, as Finisterre Joe's bartender informed him, there was more kick in a glass of the stuff that cost sixty cents to-day than there had been in a barrel of the old juice. And, for a good customer, Finisterre Joe's bartender would shade the price a trifle. The dummy-chucker received two portions of the crudely blended poison that passed for whisky in exchange for his round silver dollar. It was with less of a shuffle and more of a stride that he retraced his steps toward Broadway.

Slightly north of Times Square, he surveyed his field of action. Across the street, a vaudeville house was discharging its mirth-surfeited audience. Half a block north, laughing groups testified that the comedy they had just left had been as funny as its press-agent claimed. The dummy-chucker shook his head. He moved south, his feet taking on that shuffle which they had lost temporarily.

"She Loved and Lost"--that was the name of the picture being run this week at the Concorde. Outside was billed a huge picture of the star, a

lady who received more money for making people weep than most actors obtain for making them laugh. The dummy-chucker eyed the picture approvingly. He took his stand before the main entrance. This was the place! If he tried to do business with a flock of people that had just seen Charlie Chaplin, he'd fail. He knew! Fat women who'd left the twins at home with the neighbor's cook in order that they might have a good cry at the Concorde--these were his mutton-heads.

He reeled slightly as several flappers passed--just for practise. Ten days on Blackwell's hadn't spoiled his form. They drew away from him; yet, from their manners, he knew that they did not suspect him of being drunk. Well, hurrah for prohibition, after all! Drunkenness was the last thing people suspected of a hard-working man nowadays. He slipped his hand in his pocket. They were coming now--the fat women with the babies at home, their handkerchiefs still at their eyes. His hand slipped to his mouth. His jaws moved savagely. One thing was certain: out of to-day's stake he'd buy some decent-tasting soap. This awful stuff that he'd borrowed from the Island----

The stoutest woman paused; she screamed faintly as the dummy-chucker staggered, pitched forward, and fell at her short-vamped feet. Excitedly she grasped her neighbor's arm.

"He's gotta fit!"

The neighbor bent over the prostrate dummy-chucker.

"Ep'lepsy," she announced. "Look at the foam on his lips."

"Aw, the poor man!"

"Him so strong-looking, too!"

"Ain't it the truth? These husky-looking men sometimes are the sickliest."

The dummy-chucker stirred. He sat up feebly. With his sleeve, he wiped away the foam. Dazedly he spoke.

"If I had a bite to eat----"

He looked upward at the first stout woman. Well and wisely had he chosen his scene. Movie tickets cost fractions of a dollar. There is always some stray silver in the bead bag of a movie patron. Into the dummy-chucker's outstretched palm fell pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters. There was present to-day no big-hearted Westerner with silver dollars, but here was comparative wealth. Already the dummy-chucker saw himself again at Finisterre Joe's, this time to purchase no bottled courage but to buy decantered ease.

"T'ank, ladies," he murmured. "If I can get a bite to eat and rest up----"

"Rest up!" The shrill jeer of a newsboy broke in upon his pathetic speech. "Rest up again on the Island! That's the kind of a rest up you'll get, y' big tramp."

"Can't you see the man's sick?" The stoutest one turned indignantly upon the newsboy. But the scoffer held his ground.

"Sick?' Sure he's sick! Eatin' soap makes anyone sick. Youse dames is easy. He's chuckin' a dummy."

"A dummy?"

The dummy-chucker sat a bit straighter.

"Sure, ma'am. That's his game. He t'rows phony fits. He eats a bit of soap and makes his mouth foam. Last week, he got pinched right near here----"

But the dummy-chucker heard no more. He rolled sidewise just as the cry: "Police!" burst from the woman's lips. He reached the curb, rose, burst through the gathering crowd, and rounded a corner at full speed.

He was half-way to Eighth Avenue, and burning lungs had slowed him to a jog-trot, when a motor-car pulled up alongside the curb. It kept gentle pace with the fugitive. A shrewd-featured young man leaned from its fashionably sloped wheel.

"Better hop aboard," he suggested. "That policeman is fat, but he has speed."

The dummy-chucker glanced over his shoulder. Looming high as the Woolworth Building, fear overcoming the dwarfing tendency of distance, came a policeman. The dummy-chucker leaped to the motor's running-board. He climbed into the vacant front seat.

"Thanks, feller," he grunted. "A li'l speed, please."

The young man chuckled. He rounded the corner into Eighth Avenue and darted north among the trucks.

At Columbus Circle, the dummy-chucker spoke.

"Thanks again, friend," he said. "I'll be steppin' off here."

His rescuer glanced at him.

"Want to earn a hundred dollars?"

"Quit cher kiddin'," said the dummy-chucker.

"No, no; this is serious," said the young man.

The dummy-chucker leaned luxuriously back in his seat.

"Take me anywhere, friend," he said.

Half-way round the huge circle at Fifty-ninth Street, the young man guided the car. Then he shot into the park. They curved eastward. They came out on Fifth Avenue, somewhere in the Seventies. They shot eastward another half-block, and then the car stopped in front of an apartment-house. The young man pressed the button on the steering-wheel. In response to the short blast of the electric horn, a uniformed man appeared. The young man alighted. The dummy-chucker followed suit.

"Take the car around to the garage, Andrews," said the young man. He nodded to the dummy-chucker. In a daze, the mendicant followed his rescuer. He entered a gorgeously mirrored and gilded hall. He stepped into an elevator chauffeured by a West Indian of the haughtiest blood. The dummy-chucker was suddenly conscious of his tattered garb, his ill-fitting, run-down shoes. He stepped, when they alighted from the lift, as gingerly as though he trod on tacks.

A servant in livery, as had been the waiting chauffeur downstairs, opened a door. If he was surprised at his master's choice of guest, he was too well trained to show it. He did not rebel even when ordered to serve sandwiches and liquor to the dummy-chucker.

"You seem hungry," commented the young man.

The dummy-chucker reached for another sandwich with his left hand while he poured himself a drink of genuine Scotch with his right.

"And thirsty," he grunted.

"Go to it," observed his host genially.

The dummy-chucker went to it for a good ten minutes. Then he leaned back in the heavily upholstered chair which the man servant had drawn up for him. He stared round him.

"Smoke?" asked his host.

The dummy-chucker nodded. He selected a slim panetela and pinched it daintily between the nails of his thumb and forefinger. His host watched the operation with interest.

"Why?" he asked.

"Better than cuttin' the end off," explained the dummy-chucker. "It's a good smoke," he added, puffing.

"You know tobacco," said his host. "Where did you learn?"

"Oh, we all have our ups and downs," replied the dummy-chucker. "But don't get nervous. I ain't goin' to tell you that I was a millionaire's son, educated at Harvard. I'm a bum."

"Doesn't seem to bother you," said his host.

"It don't," asserted the dummy-chucker. "Except when the police butt into my game. I just got off Blackwell's Island this morning."

"And almost went back this afternoon."

The dummy-chucker nodded.

"Almost," he said. His eyes wandered around the room. "Some dump!" he stated. Then his manner became business-like. "You mentioned a hundred dollars--what for?"

The young man shrugged.

"Not hard work. You merely have to look like a gentleman, and act like----"

"Like a bum?" asked the dummy-chucker.

"Well, something like that."

The dummy-chucker passed his hand across his stubby chin.

"Shoot!" he said. "Anything short of murder--anything, friend."

His host leaned eagerly forward.

"There's a girl--" he began.

The dummy-chucker nodded.

"There always is," he interrupted. "I forgot to mention that I bar kidnaping, too."

"It's barred," said the young man. He hitched his chair a trifle nearer his guest. "She's beautiful. She's young."

"And the money? The coin? The good red gold?"

"I have enough for two. I don't care about her money."

"Neither do I," said the dummy-chucker; "so long as I get my hundred. Shoot!"

"About a year ago," resumed the host, "she accepted, after a long courtship, a young man by the name of--oh, let's call him Jones."

The dummy-chucker inhaled happily.



"Call him any darned thing you like," he said cheerily.

"Jones was a drunkard," said the host.

"And she married him?" The dummy-chucker's eyebrows lifted slightly.

"No. She told him that if he'd quit drinking she'd marry him. She stipulated that he go without drink for one year."

The dummy-chucker reached for a fresh cigar. He lighted it and leaned back farther in the comfortable chair.

"Jones," continued the young man, "had tried to quit before. He knew himself pretty well. He knew that, even with war-time prohibition just round the corner, he couldn't keep away from liquor. Not while he stayed in New York. But a classmate of his had been appointed head of an expedition that was to conduct exploration work in Brazil. He asked his classmate for a place in the party. You see, he figured that in the wilds of Brazil there wouldn't be any chance for drunkenness."

"A game guy," commented the dummy-chucker. "Well, what happened?"

"He died of jungle-fever two months ago," was the answer. "The news just reached Rio Janeiro yesterday."

The dummy-chucker lifted his glass of Scotch.

"To a regular feller," he said, and drank. He set his glass down gently. "And the girl? I suppose she's all shot to pieces?"

"She doesn't know," said the host quietly.

The dummy-chucker's eyebrows lifted again.

"I begin to get you," he said. "I'm the messenger from Brazil who breaks the sad news to her, eh?"

The young man shook his head.

"The news isn't to be broken to her--not yet. You see--well, I was Jones' closest friend. He left his will with me, his personal effects, and all that. So I'm the one that received the wire of his death. In a month or so, of course, it will be published in the newspapers--when letters have come from the explorers. But, just now, I'm the only one that knows it."

"Except me," said the dummy-chucker.

The young man smiled dryly.

"Except you. And you won't tell. Ever wear evening clothes?"

The dummy-chucker stiffened. Then he laughed sardonically.

"Oh, yes; when I was at Princeton. What's the idea?"

His host studied him carefully.

"Well, with a shave, and a hair-cut, and a manicure, and the proper clothing, and the right setting--well, if a person had only a quick glance--that person might think you were Jones."

The dummy-chucker carefully brushed the ashes from his cigar upon a tray.

"I guess I'm pretty stupid to-night. I still don't see it."

"You will," asserted his host. "You see, she's a girl who's seen a great deal of the evil of drink. She has a horror of it. If she thought that Jones had broken his pledge to her, she'd throw him over."

"'Throw him over?' But he's dead!" said the dummy-chucker.

"She doesn't know that," retorted his host.

"Why don't you tell her?"

"Because I want to marry her."

"Well, I should think the quickest way to get her would be to tell her about Jones----"

"You don't happen to know the girl," interrupted the other. "She's a girl of remarkable conscience. If I should tell her that Jones died in Brazil, she'd enshrine him in her memory. He'd be a hero who had died upon the battle-field. More than that--he'd be a hero who had died upon the battle-field in a war to which she had sent him. His death would be upon her soul. Her only expiation would be to be faithful to him forever."

"I won't argue about it," said the dummy-chucker. "I don't know her. Only--I guess your whisky has got me. I don't see it at all."

His host leaned eagerly forward now.

"She's going to the opera to-night with her parents. But, before she goes, she's going to dine with me at the Park Square. Suppose, while she's there, Jones should come in. Suppose that he should come in reeling, noisy, drunk! She'd marry me to-morrow."

"I'll take your word for it," said the dummy-chucker. "Only, when she's learned that Jones had died two months ago in Brazil----"

"She'll be married to me then," responded the other fiercely. "What I get, I can hold. If she were Jones' wife, I'd tell her of his death. I'd know that, sooner or later, I'd win her. But if she learns now that he died while struggling to make himself worthy of her, she'll never give to another man what she withheld from him."

"I see," said the dummy-chucker slowly. "And you want me to----"

"There'll be a table by the door in the main dining-room engaged in Jones' name. You'll walk in there at a quarter to eight. You'll wear Jones' dinner clothes. I have them here. You'll wear the studs that he wore, his cuff-links. More than that, you'll set down upon the table, with a flourish, his monogrammed flask. You'll be drunk, noisy, disgraceful----"

"How long will I be all that--in the hotel?" asked the dummy-chucker dryly.

"That's exactly the point," said the other. "You'll last about thirty seconds. The girl and I will be on the far side of the room. I'll take care that she sees you enter. Then, when you've been quietly ejected, I'll go over to the maître d'hôtel to make inquiries. I'll bring back to the girl the flask which you will have left upon the table. If she has any doubt that you are Jones, the flask will dispel it.

"And then?" asked the dummy-chucker.

"Why, then," responded his host, "I propose to her. You see, I think it was pity that made her accept Jones in the beginning. I think that she cares for me."

"And you really think that I look enough like Jones to put this over?"

"In the shaded light of the dining-room, in Jones' clothes--well, I'm risking a hundred dollars on it. Will you do it?"

The dummy-chucker grinned.

"Didn't I say I'd do anything, barring murder? Where are the clothes?"

One hour and a half later, the dummy-chucker stared at himself in the long mirror in his host's dressing-room. He had bathed, not as Blackwell's Island prisoners bathe, but in a luxurious tub that had a head-rest, in scented water, soft as the touch of a baby's fingers. Then his host's man servant had cut his hair, had shaved him, had massaged him until color crept into the pale cheeks. The sheerest of knee-length linen underwear touched a body that knew only rough cotton. Silk socks, heavy, gleaming, snugly encased his ankles. Upon his feet were correctly dull pumps. That the trousers were a wee bit short mattered little. In these dancing-days, trousers should not be too long. And the fit of the coat over his shoulders--he carried them in a fashion unwontedly straight as he gazed at his reflection--balanced the trousers' lack of length. The soft shirt-bosom gave freely, comfortably as he breathed. Its plaited whiteness enthralled him. He turned anxiously to his host.

"Will I do?" he asked.

"Better than I'd hoped," said the other. "You look like a gentleman."

The dummy-chucker laughed gaily.

"I feel like one," he declared.

"You understand what you are to do?" demanded the host.

"It ain't a hard part to act," replied the dummy-chucker.

"And you can act," said the other. "The way you fooled those women in front of the Concorde proved that you----"

"Sh-sh!" exclaimed the dummy-chucker reproachfully. "Please don't remind me of what I was before I became a gentleman."

His host laughed.

"You're all right." He looked at his watch. "I'll have to leave now. I'll send the car back after you. Don't be afraid of trouble with the hotel people. I'll explain that I know you, and fix matters up all right. Just take the table at the right hand side as you enter----"

"Oh, I've got it all right," said the dummy-chucker. "Better slip me something on account. I may have to pay something----"

"You get nothing now," was the stern answer. "One hundred dollars when I get back here. And," he added, "if it should occur to you at the hotel that you might pawn these studs, or the flask, or the clothing for more than a hundred, let me remind you that my chauffeur will be watching one entrance, my valet another, and my chef another."

The dummy-chucker returned his gaze scornfully.

"Do I look," he asked, "like the sort of man who'd steal?"

His host shook his head.

"You certainly don't," he admitted.

The dummy-chucker turned back to the mirror. He was still entranced with his own reflection, twenty minutes later, when the valet told him that the car was waiting. He looked like a millionaire. He stole another glance at himself after he had slipped easily into the fur-lined overcoat that the valet held for him, after he had set somewhat rakishly upon

his head the soft black-felt hat that was the latest accompaniment to the dinner coat.

Down-stairs, he spoke to Andrews, the chauffeur.

"Drive across the Fifty-ninth Street bridge first."

The chauffeur stared at him.

"Who you given' orders to?" he demanded.

The dummy-chucker stepped closer to the man.

"You heard my order?"

His hands, busily engaged in buttoning his gloves, did not clench. His voice was not raised. And Andrews must have outweighed him by thirty pounds. Yet the chauffeur stepped back and touched his hat.

"Yes, sir," he muttered.

The dummy-chucker smiled.

"The lower classes," he said to himself, "know rank and position when they see it."

His smile became a grin as he sank back in the limousine that was his host's evening conveyance. It became almost complacent as the car slid down Park Avenue. And when, at length, it had reached the center of the great bridge that spans the East River, he knocked upon the glass. The chauffeur obediently stopped the car. The dummy-chucker's grin was absolutely complacent now.

Down below, there gleamed lights, the lights of ferries, of sound steamers, and--of Blackwell's Island. This morning, he had left there,

a lying mendicant. To-night, he was a gentleman. He knocked again upon the glass. Then, observing the speaking-tube, he said through it languidly:

"The Park Square, Andrews."

An obsequious doorman threw open the limousine door as the car stopped before the great hotel. He handed the dummy-chucker a ticket.

"Number of your car, sir," he said obsequiously.

"Ah, yes, of course," said the dummy-chucker. He felt in his pocket. Part of the silver that the soft-hearted women of the movies had bestowed upon him this afternoon found repository in the doorman's hand.

A uniformed boy whirled the revolving door that the dummy-chucker might pass into the hotel.

"The coat-room? Dining here, sir? Past the news-stand, sir, to your left. Thank you, sir." The boy's bow was as profound as though the quarter in his palm had been placed there by a duke.

The girl who received his coat and hat smiled as pleasantly and impersonally upon the dummy-chucker as she did upon the whiskered, fine-looking old gentleman who handed her his coat at the same time. She called the dummy-chucker's attention to the fact that his tie was a trifle loose.

The dummy-chucker walked to the big mirror that stands in the corner made by the corridor that parallels Fifty-ninth Street and the corridor that separates the tea-room from the dining-room. His clumsy fingers found difficulty with the tie. The fine-looking old gentleman, adjusting his own tie, stepped closer.



"Beg pardon, sir. May I assist you?"

The dummy-chucker smiled a grateful assent. The old gentleman fumbled a moment with the tie.

"I think that's better," he said. He bowed as one man of the world might to another, and turned away.

Under his breath, the dummy-chucker swore gently.

"You'd think, the way he helped me, that I belonged to the Four Hundred."

He glanced down the corridor. In the tea-room were sitting groups who awaited late arrivals. Beautiful women, correctly garbed, distinguished-looking men. Their laughter sounded pleasantly above the subdued strains of the orchestra. Many of them looked at the dummy-chucker. Their eyes rested upon him for that well-bred moment that denotes acceptance.

"One of themselves," said the dummy-chucker to himself.

Well, why not? Once again he looked at himself in the mirror. There might be handsomer men present in this hotel, but--was there any one who wore his clothes better? He turned and walked down the corridor.

The mÃ©tre d'hÃ´tel stepped forward inquiringly as the dummy-chucker hesitated in the doorway.

"A table, sir?"

"You have one reserved for me. This right-hand one by the door."

"Ah, yes, of course, sir. This way, sir."

He turned toward the table. Over the heads of intervening diners, the dummy-chucker saw his host. The shaded lights upon the table at which the young man sat revealed, not too clearly yet well enough, the features of a girl.

"A lady!" said the dummy-chucker, under his breath. "The real thing!"

As he stood there, the girl raised her head. She did not look toward the dummy-chucker, could not see him. But he could see the proud line of her throat, the glory of her golden hair. And opposite her he could see the features of his host, could note how illy that shrewd nose and slit of a mouth consorted with the gentle face of the girl. And then, as the maître d'hôtel beckoned, he remembered that he had left the flask, the monogrammed flask, in his overcoat pocket.

"Just a moment," he said.

He turned and walked back toward the corner where was his coat. In the distance, he saw some one, approaching him, noted the free stride, the carriage of the head, the set of the shoulders. And then, suddenly, he saw that the "some one" was himself. The mirror was guilty of the illusion.

Once again he stood before it, admiring himself. He summoned the face of the girl who was sitting in the dining-room before his mental vision. And then he turned abruptly to the check-girl.

"I've changed my mind," he said. "My coat, please."

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He was lounging before the open fire when three-quarters of an hour later his host was admitted to the luxurious apartment. Savagely the young man pulled off his coat and approached the dummy-chucker.

"I hardly expected to find you here," he said.

The dummy-chucker shrugged.

"You said the doors were watched. I couldn't make an easy getaway. So I rode back here in your car. And when I got here, your man made me wait, so--here we are," he finished easily.

"'Here we are!' Yes! But when you were there--I saw you at the entrance to the dining-room--for God's sake, why didn't you do what you'd agreed to do?"

The dummy-chucker turned languidly in his chair. He eyed his host curiously.

"Listen, feller," he said: "I told you that I drew the line at murder, didn't I?"

"'Murder?' What do you mean? What murder was involved?"

The dummy-chucker idly blew a smoke ring.

"Murder of faith in a woman's heart," he said slowly. "Look at me! Do I look the sort who'd play your dirty game?"

The young man stood over him.

"Bannon," he called. The valet entered the room. "Take the clothes off this--this bum!" snapped the host. "Give him his rags."

He clenched his fists, but the dummy-chucker merely shrugged. The young man drew back while his guest followed the valet into another room.

Ten minutes later, the host seized the dummy-chucker by the tattered sleeve of his grimy jacket. He drew him before the mirror.

"Take a look at yourself, you--bum!" he snapped. "Do you look, now, like the sort of man who'd refuse to earn an easy hundred?"

The dummy-chucker stared at himself. Gone was the debonair gentleman of a quarter of an hour ago. Instead, there leered back at him a pasty-faced, underfed vagrant, dressed in the tatters of unambitious, satisfied poverty.

"Bannon," called the host, "throw him out!"

For a moment, the dummy-chucker's shoulders squared, as they had been squared when the dinner jacket draped them. Then they sagged. He offered no resistance when Bannon seized his collar. And Bannon, the valet, was a smaller man than himself.

He cringed when the colored elevator-man sneered at him. He dodged when little Bannon, in the mirrored vestibule raised a threatening hand. And he shuffled as he turned toward Central Park.

But as he neared Columbus Circle, his gait quickened. At Finisterre Joe's he'd get a drink. He tumbled in his pockets. Curse the luck! He'd given every cent of his afternoon earnings to doormen and pages and coat-room girls!

His pace slackened again as he turned down Broadway. His feet were dragging as he reached the Concorde moving-picture theater. His hand, sunk deep in his torn pocket, touched something. It was a tiny piece of soap.

As the audience filed sadly out from the teary, gripping drama of "She Loved And Lost," the dummy-chucker's hand went from his pocket to his lips. He reeled, staggered, fell. His jaws moved savagely. Foam

appeared upon his lips. A fat woman shrank away from him, then leaned forward in quick sympathy.

"He's gotta fit!" she cried.

"Ep'lepsy," said her companion pityingly.

FOOTNOTE:

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