

Seats of the Haughty

Being the Gloomy Story of a Traveling Showman

By O. HENRY

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Golden by day and silver by night, a new trail now leads to us across the Indian ocean. Dusky kings and princes have found out our Bombay and the west, and few be their trails that do not lead down Broadway on their journey for to admire and for to see.

If chance should ever lead you near a hotel that transiently shelters some one of these splendid toning grandees, I counsel you to seek Lucullus Polk among the republican tuft hunters that besiege its entrances.

I first saw Mr. Polk coming down the steps of the hotel at which sojourned his highness the gawkward of Baroda, most enlightened of the Maharratta princes, who of late ate bread and salt in our metropolises of the accident.

Lucullus moved rapidly as though propelled by some potent moral force that imminently threatened to become physical. Behind him closely followed the impetuous—a hotel detective.

Safe on the sidewalk, Lucullus Polk turned and shook a freckled fist at the caravansary, and, to my joy, he began to breathe deep invective in strange words:

"Rides in howdahs, does he?" he cried loudly and sneeringly. "Rides on elephants in howdahs and calls himself a prince! Kings—yah! Comes over here and talks horse till you would think he was a president and then goes home and rides in a private dining room strapped on to an elephant!"

I murmured a few words of sympathy.

"The last one I sold," continued the displeased one, "was to that three horse tailed Turkish pasha that came over a year ago. Five hundred dollars he paid for it, easy."

As soon as Lucullus Polk got cool enough I picked him up, and with no greater effort than you would employ in persuading a drowning man to clutch a straw, I inveigled him into accompanying me to a cool corner in a dim cafe.

And it came to pass that men servants set before us beverage, and Lucullus Polk spoke unto me, relating the wherefores of his beleaguering the antechambers of the princes of the earth.

"Did you ever hear of the S. A. and A. P. railroad in Texas? Well, that don't stand for Samaritan Actor's Aid Philanthropy. I was down that way managing a summer bunch of the gum and syntax choppers that play the idled parks in the western hamlets. Of course we went to pieces when the soubrette ran away with a prominent barber of Beoville. I don't know what became of the rest of the company. I believe there were some salaries due, and the last I saw of the troupe was when I told them that 43 cents was all the treasury contained. I say I never saw any of them after that, but I heard them for about twenty minutes. I didn't have time to look back. But after dark I came out of the woods and struck the S. A. and A. P. agent for means of transportation. He at once extended to me the courtesies of the entire railroad, kindly warning me, however, not to get aboard any of the rolling stock.

"About 10 the next morning I steps off the ties into a village that calls itself Atascosa City. I bought a thirty cent breakfast and a ten cent cigar and stood on Main street juggling the three pennies in my pocket—dead broke.

"All of a sudden, while I was standing on the edge of the wooden sidewalk, down out of the sky falls two fine gold watches into the middle of the street. One hits a chunk of mud and sticks. The other falls hard and flies open, making a fine drizzle of little springs and screws and wheels. I looks up for a balloon or an airship; but, not seeing any, I steps off the sidewalk to investigate.

"But I hear a couple of yells and see two men running up the street in leather overalls and high heeled boots and cartwheel hats. One man is six or eight feet high, with open plumed joints and a heartbroken cast of countenance. He picks up the watch that has stuck in the mud. The other man, who is little, with pink hair and white eyes, goes for the empty case and says, 'I win.' Then the elevated pessimist goes down under his leather leg holsters and hands a handful of twenty dollar gold pieces to his albino friend.

"The little man hustles away with a kind of Swiss movement toward a jewelry store. The heartbroken person stoops over and takes a telescopic view of my handiwork.

"Them's a mighty slick outfit of habiliments you have got on, Mr. Man," says he. "I'll bet a how you never acquired the right, title and interest in and to them clothes in Atascosa City."

"Why, no," says I, being ready enough to exchange personalities with this moneyed monument of melancholy. "I had this suit tailored from a special line of coatericks, vestures and pantings in St. Louis. Would you mind putting me same," says I, "on this watch throwing contest?"

"Me and George," he explains, "are up from the ranch, having a spell of fun. Up to last month we owned four sections of watered grazing down on the San Miguel. But along come one

of these oil prospectors and begins to bore. He strikes a gusher that flows out 20,000—or maybe it was 20,000,000—barrels of oil a day. And me and George gets \$150,000—\$75,000 apiece—for the land. So now and then we saddles up and hits the breeze for Atascosa City for a few days of excitement and damage.

"You must have knocked around a right smart," goes on this oil greaser. "I shouldn't be surprised if you have saw towns more livelier than what Atascosa City is."

"Then this Mother Cury's chick of the desert sits down by me and we hold a conversation feet. It seems that he was money poor. He'd lived in ranch camps all his life, and he confessed to me that his supreme idea of luxury was to ride into camp tired out from a roundup, eat a peck of Mexican beans, hobble his brains with a pint of raw whiskey and go to sleep with his boots for a pillow. When this barge load of unexpected money came to him and his pink but perky partner George, and they hid themselves to this clump of outhouses called Atascosa City, you know what happened to them. They had money to buy anything they wanted, but they didn't know what to want. Their ideas of spendthriftiness were limited to three—whisky, saddles and gold watches.

"Was I on to the opportunity? Listen. In thirty minutes I had dashed off a word picture of metropolitan joys

to the two men. They were looking at me with a lot of respect. I was a little side street, where there was no street and no sidewalks and no houses, he finds what he is looking for. We go into a shanty and sit on high stools among stevedores and boatmen and eat beans with tin spoons; yes, sir, beans—beans boiled with salt pork.

"I kind of thought we'd strike some over this way," says Solly.

"When we had succumbed to the beans I leads him out of the tarpaulin steam under a lamppost and pulls out a daily paper with the amusement column folded out.

"But now what he for a merry round of pleasure, says I. 'Here's one of Hall Caine's shows and a stockyard company in 'Hamlet.'"

"But what does this healthy, wealthy and wise man do but reach his arms up to the second story windows and gape noisily.

"'Reckon I'll be going to bed,' says he. 'It's about my time. St. Louis is a kind of quiet place, ain't it?'"

"Oh, yes," says I; "ever since the railroads ran in here the town's been practically ruined. Guess we might as well go to bed. Wait till you see Chicago, though. Shall we get tickets for the Big Breeze tomorrow?"

"'Mought as well,' says Solly. 'I reckon all these towns are about alike.'"

"Well, maybe the wise cicerone and personal conductor didn't fall hard in Chicago! Loooolville on the Lake is supposed to have one or two things in it calculated to keep the rural visitor awake after the curfew rings, but not for the grass fed man of the pampas! I tried him with theaters, rides in automobiles, sails on the lake, champagne suppers and all these little inventions that hold the simple life in check, but in vain. Solly grew sadder day by day. And I got fearful about my salary and knew I must play my trump card. So I mentioned New York to him and informed him that these western towns were no more than gateways to the great walled city of the whirling dervishes.

"After I bought the tickets I missed Solly. I knew his habits by then, so in a couple of hours I found him in a saddle shop.

"At the depot I telegraphed a cigar store man I knew in New York to meet me at the Twenty-third street ferry with a list of all the saddle stores in the city. I wanted to know where to look for Solly when he got lost.

"Now I'll tell you what happened in New York.

"I began with him like you'd feed a starving man. I showed him the horse cars on Broadway and the Staten Island ferryboats. And then I piled up the sensations on him, but always keeping a lot of warmer ones up my sleeve.

"At the end of the third day he looked like a composite picture of 5,000 orphans too late to catch a picnic steambot, and I was writing down a collar every two hours wondering how I could please him and whether I was going to get my thou.

"Once I thought I had him. I nailed a pair of cuffs on him one morning before he was awake, and I dragged him that evening to the palm cage of one of the biggest hotels in the city to see the Johannes and the Alice-Sit-by-the-Hours. They were out in numerous quantities, with the fat of the land showing in their clothes. While we were looking them over Solly divested himself of a fearful, rusty kind of laugh, like moving a folding bed with one roller broken. It was his first in two weeks, and it gave me hope.

"'Right you are,' says I. 'They're a funny lot of postcards, aren't they?'"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of them duds and cuffs on the hoof," says he. "I was thinking of the time me and George put sheep dip in Horsehead Johnson's whisky. I wish I was back in Atascosa City," says he.

"I felt a cold chill run down my back. 'Me to play and mate in one move,' says I to myself.

"I made Solly promise to stay in the cafe for half an hour, and I hid out in a cab to Lolabelle Delatour's that on Forty-third street. I knew her well. She was a chorus girl in a Broadway musical comedy.

"Jane," says I when I found her, "I've got a friend from Texas here. He's all right, but—well, he carries weight. I'd like to give him a little whirl after the show this evening—bubbles, you know, and a buzz out to a casino for the white bait and pickled walnuts. Is it a go?"

"Can he sing?" asks Lolabelle.

"You know," says I, "that I wouldn't take him away from home unless his notes were good. He's got pots of money—bean pots full of it."

"We were in the main dining room, and there was a fine dressed crowd there.

"He gazed across the table at me. There was four square yards of it looking like the path of a cyclone that has wandered through a stockyard, a poultry farm, a vegetable garden and an Irish linen mill. Solly gets up and comes around to me.

"'Luke,' says he, 'I'm pretty hungry after our ride. I thought you said they had some beans here. I'm going out and get something I can eat. You can stay and monkey with this artificial layout of grub if you want to.'"

"Wait a minute," says I.

"I called the waiter and slapped 'S. Mills' on the back of the check for \$13.50.

"What do you mean," says I, "to serving gentlemen with a lot of truck only suitable for deck hands on a Mississippi steambot? We're going out to get something decent to eat."

"I walked up the street with the unhappy plainman. He saw a saddle shop open, and some of the sadness faded from his eyes. We went in, and he ordered and paid for two more saddles.

"Then he goes out and heads toward the river, following his nose. In a little side street, where there was no street and no sidewalks and no houses, he finds what he is looking for. We go into a shanty and sit on high stools among stevedores and boatmen and eat beans with tin spoons; yes, sir, beans—beans boiled with salt pork.

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"Can he sing?" asks Lolabelle.

"You know," says I, "that I wouldn't take him away from home unless his notes were good. He's got pots of money—bean pots full of it."

"Bring him around after the second act," says Lolabelle, "and I'll examine his credentials and securities."

"So about 10 o'clock that evening I led Solly to Miss Delatour's dressing room, and her maid let us in. In ten minutes in comes Lolabelle fresh from the stage, looking stunning in the costumes she wears when she steps from the ranks of the lady grenadiers.

"As soon as Solly saw her he got up and walked straight out through the stage entrance into the street. I followed him. Lolabelle wasn't paying my salary. I wondered whether any body was.

"'Luke,' says Solly outside, 'that was an awful mistake. We must have got into the lady's private room. I hope I'm gentleman enough to do anything possible in the way of apologies. Do you reckon she'd ever forgive us?'"

"She may forget it," says I. "Of course it was a mistake. Let's go find some beans."

"That's the way it went. But pretty soon afterward Solly failed to show up at dinner time for several days. I cornered him. He confessed that he had found a restaurant on Third avenue where they cooked beans in Texas style. I made him take me there. The minute I set foot inside the door I threw up my hands.

"There was a young woman at the desk, and Solly introduced me to her. And then we sat down and had beans.

"Yes, sir, sitting at the desk was the kind of a young woman that can catch any man in the world as easy as lifting a finger. There's a way of doing it. She knew, I saw her working it. She was healthy looking and plain dressed. She had her hair drawn back from her forehead and face—no curls or frizzes; that's the way she looked. Now I'll tell you the way they work the game; it's simple. When she wants a man she manages it so that every time he looks at her he finds her looking at him. That's all.

"The next evening Solly was to go to Coney Island with me at 7. At 8 o'clock he hadn't showed up. I went out and found a cab. I felt sure there was something wrong.

"Drive to the Back Home restaurant on Third avenue," says I. "And if I don't find what I want there take in these saddle shops." I handed him the list.

"'Boss,' says the cabby, 'I et a steak in that restaurant once. If you're real hungry I advise you to try the saddle shops first.'"

"I'm a detective," says I, "and I don't eat. Hurry up!"

"As soon as I got to the restaurant I felt in the lines of my palms that I should beware of a tall, red, damfool man, and I was going to lose a sum of money.

"Solly wasn't there. Neither was the smooth haired lady.

"I waited, and in an hour they came in a cab and got out hand in hand. I asked Solly to step around the corner for a few words. He was grinning clear across his face, but I had not administered the grin.

"She's the greatest that ever sniffed the breeze," says he.

"'Congrats,' says I. 'I'd like to have my thousand now, if you please.'"

"Well, Luke," says he, "I don't know that I've had such a skyhookin' fine time under your tutelage and dispensation. But I'll do the best I can for you—I'll do the best I can," he repeats. "Me and Miss Skinner was married an hour ago. We're leaving for Texas in the morning."

"'Groat,' says I. 'Consider yourself covered with rice and congress gaiters. But don't let the so many satin bows on our business relations that we lose sight of 'em. How about my honorarium?'"

"Missis Mills," says he, "has taken possession of my money and papers except six bits. I told her what I'd agreed to give you, but she says it's an irreligious and illegal contract, and she won't pay a cent of it. But I ain't going to see you treated unfair," says he. "I've got eighty-seven saddles on the ranch what I've bought on this trip, and when I get back I'm going to pick out the best six in the lot and send 'em to you."

"And did he?" I asked when Lucullus ceased talking.

"He did. And they are fit for kings to ride on. The six he sent me must have cost him \$3,000. But where is the market for 'em? Who would buy one except one of these rajahs and princes of Asia and Africa? I've got 'em all on the list."

"It's a long time between customers," I ventured.

"They're coming faster," said Polk. "Nowadays when one of the murdering mutts gets civilized enough to abolish suttee and quit using his whiskers for a napkin he calls himself the Roosevelt of the east and comes over to investigate our Chautauquas and cocktalls. I'll place 'em all yet. Now, look here."

From an inside pocket he drew a tightly folded newspaper with much worn edges and indicated a paragraph.

"Read that," said the saddler to royalty. The paragraph ran thus:

His highness Seyyid Feysal bin Turkes, imam of Muskat, is one of the most progressive and enlightened rulers of the old world. His stables contain more than a thousand horses of the purest Arabian breeds. It is said that this powerful prince contemplates a visit to the United States at an early date.

"There!" said Mr. Polk triumphantly. "My best saddle is as good as sold—the one with turquoise set in the rim of the cantle. Have you \$3 that you could loan me for a short time?"

It happened that I had, and I did.

If this should meet the eye of the imam of Muskat may it quicken his whim to visit the land of the free; otherwise I fear that I shall be longer than a short time separated from my dollars three.

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AS SOON AS SOLLY SAW HER HE GOT UP AND WALKED OUT.