

## PROFESSOR SLICK

He came into town aboard a gilded covered wagon. There wasn't anyone around who could recollect such an ornate prairie schooner ever showing up in their small town before. A colorful banner stretched from one side of the wagon to the other highlighting the miracle products the professor had in his inventory. When the professor got off his wagon to begin his entrepreneurial oration, he gathered a crowd.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I applaud your courage in coming forth to face whatever ails you. You, sir, in the brown vest, are you in need of a cure?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the man. “I’ve got a game leg.”

The crowd turned to look at the man to see which of their neighbors would make such a claim so public. But the man also appeared to be a recently arrived stranger.

“A game leg?” asked Professor Slick. “What if I told you that a liberal application of this salve to your leg would completely cure your leg in minutes?”

“Can it really do that?” asked the man excitedly.

“Yes, my friend,” the professor responded. “If this miracle salve doesn’t do as I say, I will give you back twice what you paid for it.”

“I’ll take it,” yelled the man, as he hobbled laboriously up to the wagon. The man then walked over to the boardwalk, sat down, and applied the salve quite liberally. Almost immediately, he ran down the street like a young calf kicking up his legs.

The crowd gasped as if Jesus himself had cleansed the man right there, body and soul. Of course, it must be said that not a lot happened in Banner City that would cause a crowd to gasp. So, such a moment must be gauged accordingly.

“You, young man. That’s a mighty impressive gun and holster you’re wearing.”

The young man nodded with pride.

“Are you fast with the draw?” probed the professor.

“Pretty fast,” answered the young man named Billy.

“Well, I have here an elixir that, if taken once a day for a week, will give you the fastest, slickest draw that anyone will ever see.”

Billy, overcome with such a possibility, looked at his friend and then said, “Okay, I’ll take one.”

It was highly likely that Billy didn’t give much consideration to the fact that Professor Slick would probably be long gone by that time.

All day long people came to the hallowed ground around the visiting prairie schooner, bringing almost every known ailment of the time. Professor Slick always slipped into his wagon and emerged with a different package that specifically addressed each problem. With his prices for his elixirs quite reasonable, those standing before him wondered how he could manage to sell so cheaply. He declared that volume sales allowed him to be so magnanimous.

As the sun began its descent to the western horizon, the slick professor did not slow his masterful oratory. Adeptly positioning himself with the orange ball at his back, he continued with full stentorian voice. Yet he appeared different. A bright orange glow now framed his gradually darkening

silhouette to the point that many thought he appeared to embody a type of transformation. Not only did his physical countenance seem to change, but his message took on a more spiritual tone.

“Madam, yes, you in the red dress. Do you feel spiritually empty?”

The woman nodded sheepishly.

“Then please come closer. I hold in my hand an elixir that will strengthen your inner resolve. It will open your eyes to a world in the beyond. Your spirit will feel renewed and emboldened.”

The woman had a look of hope come upon her, and she dug into her bag and pulled out one dollar in coin.

“You, sir. Do you feel like life has dealt you a bad hand of cards? Do you struggle every day just to give your family some food? If so, then I have here an elixir specially formulated with a miracle holy water straight from the land of the Bible. This little bottle will give you the strength, hope, and faith to persevere. You can trust that it will provide you with manna from heaven every day.”

The man pulled off his boot and pulled out a dollar bill. He got his holy water and left with a smile.

“Ah, I see a man of the cloth amongst you. Let me ask you a question, Reverend. Has your God provided you with everything you need for your church? Is your building sound and your membership growing?”

The reverend stood mutely.

“Then I tell you, Reverend. One drop of this faith multiplier elixir in the communion chalice and you will notice a remarkable change in your congregation. Gifts will increase ten-fold. The pews will be full, and soon you will have to build a bigger building.”

The reverend remained silent, but he stayed to listen further. When the night grew inky, the crowd began to thin. Only one person besides the reverend remained. Soon the clergyman became a solitary figure at the feet of Professor Slick who stood on a bale of hay. The reverend glanced left, right, and to the rear. With no one in sight, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a neatly folded dollar bill.

“Ah, Reverend. I see you are indeed a man of faith.”

The next day Professor Slick left the town of hope. As his wagon kicked up a cloud of dust, he passed a solitary rider heading into town. The rider rode up to the front of the hotel and tied up his horse to the hitching post. He went inside and paid for a room for a week with gold coin.

Nothing much happened in Banner City the next week. The buoyant spirits bolstered by Professor Slick’s elixirs began to fade. Yet, few could understand why. They were given such promises, such hope,

The solitary stranger who arrived in town a week earlier checked out of the hotel and walked over to the barber shop.

“What are we doing today, mister?” asked the barber.

“Just a trim,” replied the stranger.

A few minutes into the trim, the barber said, “You’re lucky I could work you in today. The first few days of this week I was swamped. Never had so much business.”

“Slowed down now, huh?”

“Yeah, slowed down. Are you just passing through or figuring on settling down?”

“Just passing through.”

“Too bad. There’s some really good deals on property right now.”

“Yeah? How much do you think they’d want for the whole town?”

“What? The whole town? I don’t think the whole town is for sale.”

“Are you sure?”

“No ... no, I don’t think this whole town is for sale. No ... it couldn’t be.”

“Seems to me I met the man who they sold out to leaving as I was coming into town.”

“What ... what do you mean?”

But the stranger never answered. When the barber finished up, the stranger gave him two bits and walked out the door.

“What do you think, Jarvis?” asked his friend Billy.

“I don’t know, Billy,” answered Jarvis. “You’re a lot faster than me, for sure.”

“He said I’d have the fastest and slickest draw anyone would ever see. I took his elixir for a week like he said.”

“I don’t know, Billy.”

Pulling his coat to the side, Billy said, “Hey, mister. You any good with that gun?”

The stranger squinted and stared at Billy. In a blur, Billy had a Colt 45 pointed at his face.

“I wouldn’t go down this path if I were you,” said the stranger.

“I ... I ... I’m sorry, mister,” whined Billy. “I didn’t mean nothin.”

“Well, I reckon you just temporarily lost your way,” said the stranger, holstering his gun and riding out of town.