

## [The Dancing Turkey]

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— Earl Bowman

Mr. Naylor's Story of "The Dancing Turkeys"

(Unedited)

"When a man's in the carnival business its a good deal like when he's playing the races; he's either in the mazuma big or he's on his heels and washing his own shirts. There doesn't seem to be any half-and-half spot he can land in. He's either broke or flush; he either makes it fast or don't make it at all.

"But that don't mean that a real carnival man is ever on the town. He keeps a front and eats...not because it is handed to him from a back door or in a bread-line, but because he figures out some way to make it on his own.

"You don't see any genuine old-time carnival bird working the street for a dime, or picking up crumbs from a kitchen back door. They're independent and even if they're down to the last two-bits you'd never know it by looking at them, or hear it from their own lips. They might do a lot of cussing in private; to themselves, but never a hard-luck story to the outsiders....

"They've always got some kind of an idea tucked back in their head that they can pull out and turn into ham-and-egg

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money somehow.

“Even if the show goes flat, they'll raise tickets to the next burg someway and that without passing the public collection plate.

“And they'll raise it on the square...according to the 'ethics' of the profession which is: “[?] give the 'suckers' nothing... [??????] for their money, but when you give them nothing...you give them something!” Just like Barnum with his [?] 'horse with its [?] tail where its [?] head ought to be' (with its head at the back of the stall and its tail in the manger!) gave the suckers nothing and still he gave them a dime's worth of 'experience' for looking at the broncho in reverse!

“That's the way a carnival man is; he don t give them any thing, yet he gives them 'something'... [?] entertainment, experience, or amusement for the chicken feed he takes away from them at his rack, or wheel or ring-board. And if he has a run of 'mud-luck' he always finds a way to get out somehow, raise a stake and climb back into the game.

“That's the way it was when I invented the 'dancing turkeys' when I got into the carnival racket after quitting Doc Porter's [?] Medicine Show.

“It was down in the Ozark Hill country of Arkansas at a country fair and it was one of those 'dry hauls .' None of us were dragging in enough to even pay ground rent.

“I was running a rack but none of the yokels [?] in that

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neighborhood seemed to have ambitions to be big league baseball pitchers and they'd just stand around and look at my babies, grin and never spend a dime for a handful of balls. Even when I'd [?] spiel 'free throws' they'd back off, look suspicious and hang onto their dimes....

"It got under my skin and I figured there must be [?] something they'd go for if I could only frame it up.

"Well, I finally got my inspiration.

"The town was one of those backwoods places like there used to be along in [?] late 1990's 1890's where there wasn't any 'stock laws' , and cows, hogs, horses, chickens and turkeys...and hound dogs...ran around without restraint.

"The turkeys wandering around the street, gawky and dumb looking, gave me my big idea... I'd invent 'dancing turkeys!' The natives ought to go for [?] that sort of a show... They did.

"I got a big dry goods box, about four feet square, fixed it up with a wire cage on top; the back of the box open; bought a couple [?] turkeys, a Tom and a hen; put 'em in the cage and was ready [?] to exhibit my 'dancing turkeys.'

"Those natives fell for it in droves...at a dime a piece. And it was a good show!

"I'd spiel a crowd in — had 'em roped off so they couldn't get too close to the cage, then start the performance. The turks would be standing or squatted there as sleep and stupid as 'common' turkeys are, then I'd start playing on a tin flute, something like an Indian snake charmer, sort of slow and soft

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at first. The turks would perk up, as if listening to the music, then they's [?] start to step around, jerking [?] up first one foot then the other just as if they were keeping time to the tune. I'd watch 'em and as they stepped faster I'd play faster and pretty soon those darned birds would be doing a regular tap dance or...maybe you ought call it a 'turkey trot' around that cage[?] Then I'd ease down on the music, shoo the crowd out, and fill the tent with a new bunch of suckers...

“Pretty soon I had plenty of dough. And my dancing turkeys was a senstation!

“How'd I train 'em so quick?’

“Simple: I just had a tin bottom in the cage and a big coal oil lamp under it; [?] a negro kid inside of the the box to turn the lamp up when I'd start to play, and turn it down when I'd kick the side of the box after the turks had danced long enough...

“It was worth the money and the natives got all they paid for... You know a turkey can lift his feet awful quick when he's standing on something hot; and [?] he looks darned funny while he's doing it....”

(more Naylor to come)