A tale told by an idiot

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“The Sheriff at the Gates: A Farce in Three Acts”

Act One

(A street in Cambridgeham. Most Exalted University Professor HENRY LOUIS GATES, freshly returned from the Land of the Asian Khan, is rattling the door of his keep. Enter a WENCH.)

WENCH: Alarum! Alarum! A thief is about!

GATES: Peace, ye fat guts!

(Enter SHERIFF CROWLEY)

CROWLEY: Stay, now! Who disturbs our peaceful shire?

GATES: I disturb no man. My key unlocketh not.

CROWLEY: Forsooth, thou breakest and enterest.

GATES (entering his castle): I break not for witless constables. Begone!

CROWLEY: Back speaks no man to the Sheriff; I arrest thee!

GATES: Knowest thou whom I am? That I am coy with the Daily Beastmistress, Milady Tina? That I am most down with Lady Oprah, the Queen of afternoon tele-dalliances? That I am sworn liege to Dr. Faust, of whom Marlowe wrote? That I unravelest literary mysteries at the Greatest University Known to Man?

CROWLEY: Of Tufts you speak? Even so, thou art under arrest.

GATES: Thou detaineth me because I am a Moor!

CROWLEY: Some of my best friends are Moors. Your pleas availeth not.

GATES: You shall rue the day you crost my threshold.

CROWLEY: Thou dost protest too much. (Escorts the handcuffed GATES offstage.)

Act Two

(Inside the faraway White Palace, where KING BARACK and his faithful DUKE...
AXELROD confer in an egg-shaped hall.

AXELROD: The people are restless, sire.

BARACK: Aye, I offereth free poultices and physic to every man, woman, and child, but they spurn my generosity.

AXELROD: Their minds are elsewhere, at the ocean strand, or the playing fields of Fen.

BARACK: Yet I promise them health and long life. With but small increases in the annual tithes.

AXELROD: The people need distraction, my lord.

BARACK: A conflagration perhaps? My Israelite allies yearn to strike Nineveh.

AXELROD: Nay, the peasants tire of foreign entanglements. Forget not the disastrous reign of the House of Bush. (A page enters, and hands AXELROD a scroll.) What here? A saucy tale from Cambridgeham. The Sheriff has arrested a Moor for crimes unbefitting a gentleman.

BARACK: Stupid sheriffs arrest many Moors.

AXELROD: Perhaps in the Chicagoland of our youthful acquaintance, my lord. Not so many in Cambridgeham. 'Tis a most gentil and parfit place.

BARACK: Who is the man, and what is his crime?

AXELROD: 'Tis the Most Exalted University tutor Gates. Back has he spoken to the Sheriff, unbidden.

BARACK: Gates? I know this man. We have supped together on the enchanted Isle of Martha's Vineland. I have seen him with Lady Oprah, prating about his ancestry.

AXELROD: Perhaps a photo op, my lord? We invite Gates and the Sheriff here, quaff ale in the summer heat, and proclaim peace and brotherhood among all men.

BARACK: And savor tobacco from the Duke of Marlboro?

AXELROD: Not with the people watching, sire. (Turns to page) Summon them here!

Act Three

(In the garden of the White Palace, GATES, BARACK and CROWLEY are sipping ale, joined by the FOOL.)

FOOL: What? No beer nuts?

BARACK: Silence, Fool! Or back to Delaware with you.

FOOL (sniffing his glass, suspiciously): What beer is this? I smell the filth of Antwerp and Bruges.

BARACK: 'Tis our nation’s finest, lately of St. Louis, now in foreign hands.

FOOL (Aside): 'Tis a light man that drinks a light beer.
BARACK: Enough prattle! We gather to share ale, and indulge in manly talk of harmony among our tribes.

FOOL: This is no manly talk. Women speak of harmony and quilt-making. Men speak of Signors Ortiz and Ramirez, and the forbidden magic elixirs of the Fen.

BARACK: Enough, Fool! (To GATES and CROWLEY) Now let us raise our cups and swear eternal friendship.

GATES (lifting his glass): I hail the Sheriff and the worthy constabulary! But for them, my name would not have spread beyond our shores, even to the Indes, Cochin, and beyond.

CROWLEY (toasting): I hail the learned tutor! That his castle door may henceforth spring open at his touch, and his neighbors mind their own knitting.

BARACK: All hail the new era of hope and change, when Moor and Sheriff like buds are hugging.

FOOL (belching, loudly): Another round, perhaps? We have only started chugging . . .

(Exit ALL, laughing.)

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