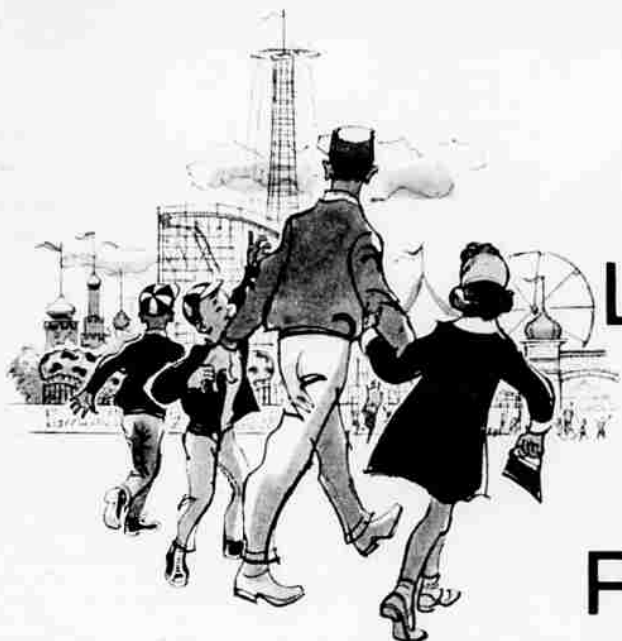




Lark in the Park

by Dick Emmons

FOR REASONS that are now completely obscure to me, I recently took our three prides and joys to an amusement park—a misnomer if ever I heard one. Rather than do it again, I would face a firing squad. Without a blindfold or final cigarette.

Showing a heretofore unsuspected streak of cowardice, my wife, Helen, begged off when the excursion trip came due. I've forgotten her exact excuse, but I think she mumbled something about having 11 of the girls in for bridge that afternoon. When I proposed that she cancel the party in favor of a wholesome family outing, she confided that she also had a touch of bubonic plague and hesitated to spread it throughout North America by visiting a public playground.

"I'll take the kids by myself, then," I grunted, "but when we get back, if it's still light, I'm going to get in nine holes of golf while you baby-sit."

"It's a deal!" she replied, almost too eagerly, it seemed to me.

As soon as the six-year-old twins, our ten-year-old girl, and I arrived at the Land of Enchantment—that was the park's name—I began to sense anew how despicably shrewd my wife is.

"I wanna ride the merry-go-round!" Davie yelped, jerking me thither.

"I wanna ride the ponies!" Dickie hollered, jerking me thither.

"It's the roller coaster for me!" Ann sang out cheerily.

"Tell you what," I started, "why don't we look the place over before we decide which ride to start on and then—" The jerking on my arms stopped as the twins scampered off in opposite directions. "You trail Dickie!" I shouted to Ann, breaking into a run after Davie. "See you at the Ferris wheel!"

After three rides—on a black charger, a zebra, and a cougar—I got Dave off the merry-go-round and started out in search of Dickie.

"Have you seen a small boy wearing khaki pants and a brown-and-white

T-shirt?" I asked the man operating the Ferris wheel.

The man looked at me narrowly. "Sure, Mister, he's standing right beside you, large as life."

I glanced down at Davie. "I mean another one. Just like this one."

"He's up there." The man pointed skyward and my heart jumped when I saw Dickie and Ann at the very top of the Ferris wheel, waving deliriously at us.

"Come down this instant!" I roared. Then I thought better of that and called, "No, stay there, wait until the man brings you down!"

As soon as we were reunited, the three of them broke for a refreshment stand and I ordered a round of cotton candy.

"Now, then, let's take a vote," I suggested. "Everyone who's ready to call it a day and go home, raise his hand!"

Only one arm shot up, so I lowered it reluctantly as Ann drew three votes for a ride on the Caterpillar.

In no time we were wedged into a car seat on the Caterpillar, the canvas top came down over us, and we were being hurtled at terrific speed over an uneven, circular course. Such was the centrifugal force that by the time we emerged I was cotton candy from the waist up.

Things got a bit disjointed after that, but I recall some terrifying moments in the Fun House, the Hall of Mirrors, and a gruesome ride on something called the Whip. When it was over, I was not a broken man, but I confess that I was badly bent here and there.

Using three gas-filled balloons as bribes, I finally lured my charges into the car and drove home.

"And how was the Land of Enchantment?" my wife trilled.

"Great!" chorused the kids.

"Grim," I muttered.

"It's still light," my wife chuckled. "I'll stay with the children while you play nine holes, dear."

I glared at her. "As you well know, I haven't the strength to sink a tee in the ground. I'm going to bed. Call me when Summer is over."



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