

At the Chigger Festival

There was a tiny trapeze, barely a quarter inch tall, with a swing hanging from cords so fine you couldn't see them, and the nearly microscopic bar seemed to float in mid-air. A beautiful young female chigger in sequined leotard and striped tights swung from it, executing perilous pirouettes and flips that showed off her shapely carapace.

Donna and Brad were touring Iowa, and their adventure led them to an empty flat town, where they had heard many tourists come to enjoy the chigger festival.

The man at the door waved them inside enthusiastically. "You'll love this show, folks," he said.

"What's a chigger festival?" said Donna. The room was large and nearly empty, except for half a dozen folding tables with small glass boxes, resembling terrariums.

"It's like a flea circus," the man said. He spread his arms wide. "Only smaller."

"I see," said Donna.

Brad glanced at the nearest glass box. "Is that one of them?" he said.

The man grinned. "You betcha. That's the high wire act."

Donna tugged at Brad's hand. He allowed her to drag him over to the first table.

The box was about eight inches square, and almost as tall. Inside was a very tiny wire construction less than an inch high. With your nose against the glass it looked like a crude playground swing.

"They're so small you can hardly see them!" said Donna.

"You can see them?" said Brad.

“Well, I think so. See the little swing?”

“That’s a trapeze, not a swing.”

“Yes, but you can kind of see the chigger on it.”

“You can see one on there?”

“I think so. Isn’t that him?”

“What? That little dot?”

“Yes, a little to the left. That’s him.”

“No it isn’t.”

“Sure it is. It can’t be smaller than that. Not so small it’s invisible. That’s ridiculous.”

“Well, I think it is.”

“I thought you couldn’t see it.”

“No, I mean it is smaller, so small we can’t see it.”

“You’re just being obstinate.”

“No I’m not.”

“You’re still wearing those old glasses, aren’t you?”

“I guess so.” Brad pulled off his glasses and wiped them on his T-shirt and held them up to the light, squinting.

“Then no wonder you can’t see it,” said Donna.

“Sure. OK.”

“Well, I think they’re cute.”

“OK.”

“It’s such a charming idea.”

“Right.”

“Just like a flea circus, actually, like the man said.”

Brad yawned and began to move subliminally toward the next exhibit.

“Little chigger acrobats,” Donna said. “They should make little sequined outfits for them.”

“They don’t even have outfits in a flea circus,” said Brad.

“It’s so cute having one on that tiny little swing.”

“Trapeze.”

“You said that.”

“Well, OK.”

“Just like a flea circus.”

“Yeah.”

“Only smaller, like the man said.”

“Much smaller.”

“Yes.” Donna pressed her nose against the glass. “Cute as a button!” she said.

“Hey look,” said Brad, pulling at Donna’s sleeve. “They’ve got a lion tamer.”

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