

They're Back:

You may remember the nefarious case of the wicked circus ladies who stole Ralph Haggerdahl's '67 Dodge and left it for dead, face down, in the Root River. They went on to attack Arlene and Verl Torgerson (who turned them in) when they subsequently met at Rudy's Oyster Bar. Arlene had dispatched the tougher of the two with a crass but effective wrestling move (a head butt) and both of the tipsy troublemakers were packed up and sent off to Hennepin County to stand trial and reap their specific reward. You may also remember that the two dames were people of small stature, circus midgets.

Well, as luck would have it, the tiny duo conveniently disappeared on their way to sentencing at the courthouse. Some say they disguised themselves as school-aged twins and wandered away with an outing from Mrs. Dimple's Day School. Who knows? But if I were there, I think I would have noticed two first graders smoking cigarettes and wisecracking in the restroom line at the County Court House. I would think that their references to a year without a date and the blue-gray Virginia Slims smoke surrounding them would have been a tip off to their chaperones. But teachers have lives too and are distracted and are often dateless themselves. Who am I to cast blame?

The little cons never exited the restroom with the others. They simply stayed until closing time and left the building in the now empty warming trays of a hot dog cart. A little lesson for all you mystery writers out there. No one ever inspects the hot dog cart. Never. Sure, the diminutive duo developed cramps where no one should get a cramp. Sure, they reeked of wieners. But that was nothing compared to the fresh air of freedom, the sweet smell of life on the lamb. But freedom isn't always free, is it? Sometimes it is sausage scented.

Life in the circus had prepared them for the ups and downs of navigating a world on the fringes of the law. Little people are not anywhere near the top of the totem pole among the road show and carnny performers. They are often assigned menial tasks like mucking the animal pens and giving pedicures to the bareback riders. And as for their diet, well let me just say that Spam is a luxury. The far more common brand name on the littles' vittles is Purina. Yup, that's a fact. Their only moment of glory is when dozens of them come scrambling out of that miniscule VW Beetle in the center ring under the big top.

But, truth be told, the price they pay performing that stunt can be steep. More than one circus midjet has incurred serious injury at the bottom of the pile, under all the other bottoms, trying to hold their breath until the doors swing open. That's how they squeeze so many people into a car you know, they all exhale before getting in. Circus trick. The show is full of them.

Our subjects, the crafty duet, are currently holed up in a musty little efficiency somewhere in Dinkytown. One room, bath down the hall, they're sitting either side of a cheap microwave. Tonight's fare is pigs in a blanket washed down with Grain Belt ponies. As is her wont, the taller one is thinking out loud for both of them. "We should be OK here. You can stay lost in Dinkytown, pretty much indefinitely. Maybe we should get one of those vote recount jobs. They need lots of people to do the addition in that Senate election from last month. They got themselves a real mess. Wonder how much they pay; wonder if there's bonuses if you recount more in one direction than you do in the other? If you catch my drift."

The shorter one nods absently. She's used to Louise being the concept lady, the big thinker, the brains behind her brawn. If something can be figured Louise will figure it.

This vote counting angle might be a winner. Louise continued with her musing.

"Let's say, for instance, you could put one vote in your purse for every ten you counted. In a few hours you might have a very nice package of ballots in your possession. Now let's say one of those guys wins the recount by a hundred votes but you got a hundred and seven votes stashed in your bag. I'm thinking you maybe could get a nice price for those votes. With all the money these guys have already spent, you think they're gonna' grouse about a few thousand more? A few thousand bucks for an entire election? I think not."

"You're a genius, Louise. It's a wonder you ain't the Senator from somewhere your own self."

With that vote of confidence the two pint sized plotters bedded down, each in her own drawer, in the large dresser that came with the apartment. "Goodnight, Thelma." But there was no answer as Thelma was already soundly asleep dreaming about buying a big new handbag to bring to their first day on the job as servants of Democracy.