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Sucker Day At _____

By Kate Jackson Lewis

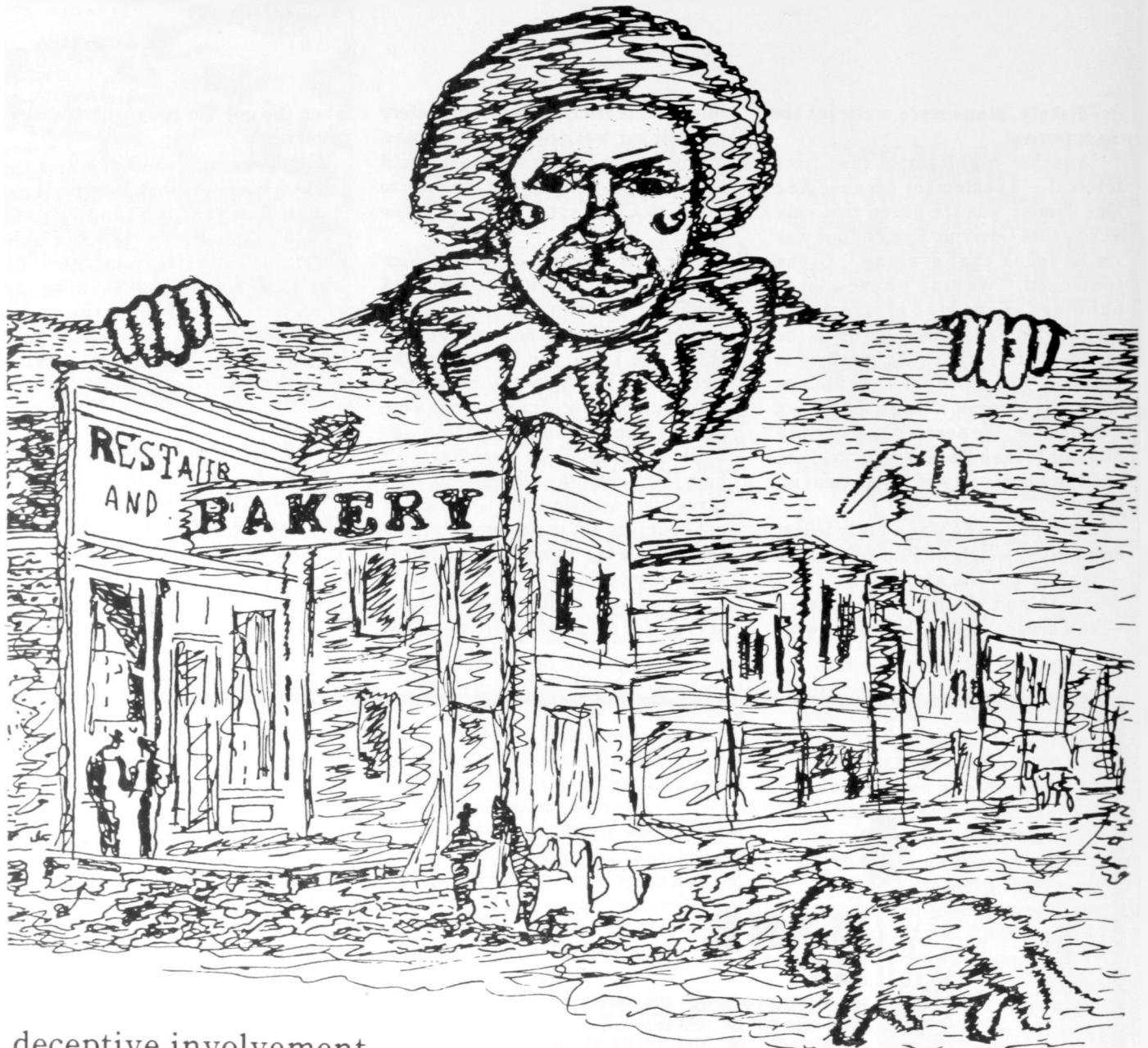


Illustration by Jeff Johnson

deceptive involvement

Even if you've never been the object of an April Fool's prank — isn't it true that you look at April 1 with a suspicious eye?

But when an outlandish prankster hoodwiners the populace of an entire town the size of _____ population 1687, it just about proves "that a sucker is born every minute."

Back in 1950, _____ folks were like those in most other small towns — they could always use a boost in business. That was a natural setup for one J. Bam

Morrison, master craftsman in the art of grafting. His clean, neat look and suave manner could have sold electric fans to Eskimo sledders near the Arctic Circle.

What he did was sell people in _____ the idea of a circus, complete with tent, animals, and performers. It would draw crowds from a hundred miles around — he promised the _____ County residents.

The idea sown by J. Bam grew and blossomed as the conniving man patiently waited for the desired effect. At the proper time, he casually mentioned that he was a bit short

on cash since he hadn't been home for some time. The unsuspecting men of the town thought nothing of supplying the entrepreneur with a little folding money to take care of his board, lodging, and a few other incidentals. They even went so far as to tell him where the classier people traded, ate, and slept.

Thanking his new friends for their generosity, J. Bam Morrison had his hair cut, his suit cleaned, and bought himself a new shirt. He even paid the dentist a visit and had his teeth brightened. To businessmen who extended credit, he promised exclusive concession rights under or nearest the biggest tent.

The small town became a whirl of activity as the haystack for elephants grew. Every business in town heaped up enormous stacks of goods in preparation for the big day. Boy Scouts tacked up thousands of posters and distributed handbills to every address in town.

J. Bam spent his time strolling up and down Main Street as if he were a movie idol lately returned home. He made a big point of remembering names and repeating stories of his renowned and eventful life, concluding each by touting the upcoming circus.

The promised day of celebration arrived — but no circus!!!!

Crowds of people flocked in from nearby Western Oklahoma communities as well as from faraway communities — but still no J. Bam Morrison there to greet them. In fact, J. Bam had vanished.

Hay was there in abundance for the elephants — but no elephants!

Plenty of gloom was evident that day in _____, and no more joy prevailed than was prevalent on the day that mighty Casey struck out.

The crowd milled around in stunned disappointment until noon. A few ate hotdogs but made no headway on the large quantities of franks and buns.

Somewhere in the midst of this mess, up stepped the least likely to be seen or heard person. Mounting the platform, this "What's-His-Name" character gained a few listeners to whom he made a likely suggestion, "Why not admit we're suckers," he said, "and promote a SUCKER DAY, advertise it, stage a ropin' and ridin', put on a parade, and then sell our soda pop and hotdogs?"

One can imagine some ironic person shouting out degradingly, "And sell a ticket to J. Bam Morrison!"

After the fog cleared, plans were made and carried out for several successful Sucker Day money makers. Then, someone remembered hearing the jab about selling a ticket to J. Bam Morrison. Perhaps that wasn't a bad idea, after all. So a move began to locate the notorious character. His address found, a letter was sent, inviting J. Bam to return to the scene, not for punishment, but to act as Parade Marshal down Main Street.

Sending his regrets, he explained that it would be impossible for him to attend, for he was in an Arkansas jail.

When August 28, 1989 rolls around, _____ will once again celebrate "Sucker Day" with the usual parade, Sucker Queen Coronation, and other fanfare.

It is doubtful that J. Bam Morrison will grace the townspeople by making a surprise appearance.

KATE JACKSON LEWIS of Purcell is a retired Western Oklahoma public-school Language Arts teacher. Her works have often graced the pages of this journal. ■

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