

A Perpetual Resplendence Machine

A Modern Day Travelogue, Being An Account of the Whole Wide World of Ulysses Whimsey & the Purported Magical Properties Therein

By Stirling Harangue

I am, at present, a single man of thirty years, but I was never always so. It is true: in my youth, I was very much a younger person—a child, even—free of the worldly expectations and responsibilities inherent in adulthood. Innocent and wide-eyed, aspirational in regards to a great many number of things, not the least of which was Whimsey.

In reaching an age as young as 4 or 5, or maybe even 3, I became a prime demographic in the eyes of an establishment called the Whimsey Corporation, a multinational, multi-billion dollar conglomerate that provides entertainment and mass media with countless comics, animated and live-action feature films, Saturday morning cartoons, and, most important of all, every bit of merchandising the human mind could possibly conceive. It is a monumental giant of industry, a well-oiled machine whose many cogs and gears and moving parts endeavor to produce a perfectly realized commercial harmony, turning a tidy profit as it goes. Naturally, I am viewing the Whimsey Corporation from the perspective of a grown man, but as a child it existed as something else entirely. Without the hard-nosed cynicisms and raised eyebrows of a semi-established worldliness, Whimsey was, quite simply, a purveyor of joy. Unfiltered, unbridled, unmitigated magic where humorous talking animals bounced about on screen and traipsed across t-shirts, lunchboxes, and baseball caps. Whimsey was childhood incarnate, a lifeboat amidst the boundless uncertainties and fears of growing up. It provided happiness and comfort, familiarity at a time when each day was filled with firsts both terrifying and alien. There is no doubt that I was very much a fan.

A BIT ABOUT THE WHIMSEY CORPORATION

The Whimsey Corporation wasn't always the commercial behemoth it is today. Like all good tales of American can-doism, it began with modest roots and relative squalor in the year 1922, when a struggling young animator by the name of Ulysses Whimsey decided to break away from his salaried position within Powdered Borax & Animated Jollities Co. to found his very own animation studio. What followed was seven years of financial floundering and hardships, a daily struggle to produce privately funded vignettes featuring a plucky cartoon rodent called Ignatius Shrew and the various hi-jinks that followed him. The animated shorts were brilliant, groundbreaking even, and yet for seven long years they went entirely unnoticed. It wasn't until the portentously named *Ignatius Shrew in You Bet Your Bottom Dollar!* that Whimsey's work was at long last discovered and embraced by the general public. Embraced is perhaps too soft a term. From 1929 onward, the country couldn't get enough of the rollicking shrew and his various escapades. In the same year the American stock market crashed and signaled the advent of the Great Depression, Whimsey and his ragtag group of animators struck it rich. The eternal optimism and perseverance of Ignatius Shrew resonated with movie-goers, offering a beacon of hope and harmless escapism in trying times. Soon, a larger cast of characters was introduced and the world-famous dramatis personae of modern day Whimsey was established. Ignatius received a love interest in the form of darling Beulah Shrew— a conspicuously feminine, pearl-sporting iteration of her instantly recognizable counterpart. There was short-tempered but well-meaning Roderick Frog, the ever soporific Agnes Cat, and mononymous, simple-minded Wonky. Imposing, barrel-chested baddies Ada Gator and Cecil Weasel rounded out the antagonistic side of the shorts, bullying and buffeting the heroes every chance they could get.

As the United States progressed, so the Whimsey characters tagged along, soaking up untold amounts of nearby zeitgeist. They became icons, reflecting the times with every major event from 1929 and beyond; unapologetically propagandistic throughout the 1940s, sanguine and saccharine once more in post-war decades, experimental and free-form in the 70s, returning to their classic roots with the dawn of the 80s and 90s. And while the cartoons were flourishing, so too was their parent company. Whimsey Corporation grew into an international powerhouse, branching, expanding, extending its grasp into every facet of ownership imaginable. What had once begun as a frustrated animator with “nothing to his name but a dollar bill in his pocket and a dream in his skull” had burgeoned into a multimedia juggernaut of success.

Of course, all of this was of absolutely no consequence to my younger self. I loved Whimsey for its bright colors and jubilant characters, perfectly content to consume it all at face value. There were two things at that age that mattered most to me. One was to somehow travel back in time and meet the man himself. The second, and only slightly more achievable, was to visit his massive amusement park. The Whole Wide World of Ulysses Whimsey just so happened to be halfway across the country from my childhood home, but it might as well have been on the dark side of the moon. It remained an utterly unobtainable destination as far as my parents were concerned. My mother, a loving, caring soul but ultimately a perfect homebody, my father, equally commendable in all areas of support and parental expertise, but a proud miser of the first order and always one to tell you he “didn’t care for crowds.” Whimsey World was forever out of reach. It was then in the helpless throes of childhood dependency that I fashioned a goal for my future self: just as soon as I became a grown-up and could look after myself, I would use some of my grown-up money to fund a grown-up expedition to Whimsey World. Not only for myself, for my past, present, and future selves, but also for the sheer principle of the thing, to prove to the world—the Whole Wide World—that I had reached a very specific level of success. One ticket of admission to The Whole Wide World of Ulysses Whimsey was the benchmark of self-sufficient maturity. Naturally, my

10-year-old self did not take into account the multitudinous and quotidian requirements of life, and the older I became, the more my world was filled with distractions, prerequisites, and expenses, all of them exceedingly dull, all of them excessively necessary. A trip to Whimsey was not only deemed a Triviality in adulthood, it was on the verge of tipping entirely into the realm of Inconsequential. This is to say nothing of the societal mores to consider in a grown man with no children attending an amusement park with every intent to enjoy himself. It appeared I had missed my window of opportunity.

After twenty odd years, my dream of experiencing the Whole Wide World of Whimsey was impractical at best, under threat of being frowned upon at worst. My going would remain a non-issue in light of other, more pressing concerns until a polite invitation just so happened into casual conversation. The call to action came from the kind and empathetic mouth of V____. I have known V____ for five years, ever since she married into the family during a summer so oppressively humid that our corsages wilted from heat exhaustion. She is a charming and gracious woman, and very much the better half of my brother, W____. Upon our first few meetings, I gleaned precisely two things about V____. One, that she was “*right*” for W____, and two, that she harbored a deep, profound appreciation for Whimsey and wasn’t afraid to proselytize it. As a child, she had sung along to Whimsey tunes and dressed as Whimsey princesses. In college, she had very gladly taken up a position of custodial staff member in the parks themselves, tidying up and experiencing the magic from a purely sanitary vantage point. And now, as a mother of a young boy of her very own, she found herself repeating the process, introducing four-year-old Y____ to the animated adventures of *Ignatius & Friends*, feverishly rewatching old black-and-white episodes of *The Ignatius Shrew Show*, swaddling him in a wardrobe of shrew-styled blankets, caps, underoos, and overalls. It felt only right, then, that V____ would be the person to offer a chance to tag along.

I took it to be a golden opportunity, a fatted calf for the taking. I, being financially solvent yet far too old to go by myself, could make the pilgrimage instead with an excited young nephew and his family in tow, see the sights with fresh eyes both personal and vicarious, matured and naive. A first experience by two-fold. On top of this promise, we were to stay, free of charge, at the home of V____'s sister, V____, who was, in addition to being (*arguably*) an even bigger fanatic of Whimsey than her younger sibling, so well-versed in the ins and outs and specifics and particulars of all the attractions that her expertise would far outweigh anything a professional tour guide or park employee could offer. And so it was settled. We would make the trip in early February, W____, V____, Y____, and myself, leaving behind the snow-choked landscapes of home for warmer climes, in search of sweetly temperate, Whimsey-themed adventure.

And so I board the plane with only a modicum of knowledge and deadpan expectations according to that of a dispassionate adult.

But inside I am brimming. It is happening.

WINTER TO WONDERLAND

There is that initial rush and hum of takeoff, and then the brief ascendancy of altitude finally gives way to a white noise and awareness that there are hours of this sort of thing to come. These hours are whiled with a great many little, niggling things entering one's head. The phrase "the cabin is pressurized for your comfort" flits past, briefly entertained, held up to the light and examined for its odd, banal impression, a bemused wondering of why it was said instead of something to the key of "*There is just a foot or so of fusillage between you and frigid asphyxiation.*" Overhearing the observations of younger ones in rows behind, exclaiming the obvious in only the most adorably abstruse manner: "*This is the closest I have ever been to the moon!*" and while it exists as

immaculately correct, it is still guffawed off the shoulders as amusingly jejune. I give a sly little sniff of knowing better, and my ears pop. And lo! A sudden aural fixation on an inconstant *tic-tic-tic*'ing that can only be one of two things— a brazen passenger who thought it ordinary to clip one's fingernails whilst in mid-flight, or perhaps both of the wings starting to splinter off.

But what is this curious twinge of doom which suddenly accompanies everything? A can of soda is hissed open at the precise moment I move my head, and within microseconds its troubling aluminum creak is attributed to some terrible Eustachian malfunction in my neck and ears. *Our head is going to explode*, a small portion of my brain whispers. It is a spike in concern lingering far longer than should be allowed, especially after common sense has swatted its hindquarters out of house and home. In an effort to solidify the fleeting pith that drifts in and out of consciousness, I bring out my notebook and jot furiously until each idea is transferred into a material permanence, strangely devoid of all initial charm, hopelessly flattened, as if withered by a change in high altitude baking instructions. I have managed to write the following before the plane enters its final, lumbering descent:

THINGS I KNOW OF WHIMSEY BEFORE HAVING GONE:

- The Whole Wide World of Ulysses Whimsey has four uniquely themed quadrants all laid out in a diamond shape: Welcome Boulevard, Fascinationland, Imminent City, and Surprise Island!
- The Whimsey Corporation has a reputation for being vigilantly litigious. There have been reports, rumors, whispers, urban legends of Whimsey lawyers suing for all manner of intellectual property infringement. Little old ladies are sued for using the likeness of Ignatius Shrew on hand-knit sweaters, small-town high schools are sued for Roderick Frog resemblances showing up on homecoming floats, etc., etc.

•Despite Cecil Weasel being a weasel, he looks nothing like a weasel. Liberties have been taken throughout the gradual evolution of all Whimsey character designs, most notably in the direct comparison between Wonky (originally Wonky Dog), and Ignatius Shrew's loyal dog companion, Plato. Both are technically classified as domesticated canines, and yet Wonky is the only one who speaks, is bipedal, and boasts of other, clearly anthropomorphic features. Plato, on the other hand, remains a mute, subservient mutt of indeterminate breed yet at the very least *looks* like one. This begs the question: is Wonky some sort of genetic laboratory experimentation gone awry? Or does Plato have undocumented disabilities? Why would Ignatius keep him as a pet if this were the case? And what in the name of animation is going on with Millard Z. Loon?

•There is a special codename for vomit or any other untoward bodily fluid that needs cleaning up within the Whimsey World park ecosystem. It is known as a "Protein Spill." This strikes me as endlessly amusing. Upon learning this factoid from V____, I could not help but imagine some disembodied voice of authority barking commands through a radio headset: "Unit 798-A, there's been a report of a Level 9 Protein Spill near the south exit of Mama Cavatelli's House of Italian Eats¹. Please be advised, there are undigested noodles present."

•The earliest known character of Ulysses Whimsey was a toothsome fox which predated Ignatius Shrew by at least 5 years. Jolly Olly Oxenfree was originally created to be the mascot for Ox & Sons Universal Powdered Borax Co., but was so wildly popular on his own that the company began creating animated shorts with the character, later changing their name to Powdered Borax & Animated Jollities, Ltd., and eventually eschewing the

¹ Mama Cavatelli's House of Italian Eats - A restaurant situated in Fascinationland that serves Italian and Mediterranean cuisine. Its thoroughly stereotyped figurehead hails from Whimsey animated film *The Adventures of Boy Spaghetti* (1939). Mama Cavatelli is the boisterous, ample-busted wife of Signor Arrivederci Cavatelli, evil butcher who imprisons Boy Spaghetti after he runs away from home. While cruel Arrivederci throws the child into his meat cellar and threatens to chop him up into little pieces, warm-hearted Mama takes pity on the scrawny boy, leaving the door ajar at night with a basket of bread and cheese beside it.

borax business altogether to become simply Animated Jollities, Ltd. In fact, losing the rights to Jolly Olly Oxenfree was what inspired Whimsey to break away from the company and form his own, inventing Ignatius Shrew over a weekend trip to Atlantic City with his wife. While Animated Jollities, Ltd. ultimately folded in 1932, it was only recently that Whimsey Corporation successfully won back the rights to the Oxenfree fox, and so what remains is an unused, unloved character cryogenically frozen in his rather crude, antiquated form. His obscurity delights me. I should like to find a plush toy of him.

EVE

We arrive between sunbeams and palm trees to find that there has been an itinerary printed off. Eldest V____, upon hearing it will be a first for multiple members of our party, has endeavored to hit every classic ride, event, and attraction on offer in order to impress upon us the greatest, *densest* serving of Whimsey that is humanly doable. There are timestamps attached to each entry; “*Rough estimates*,” she is quick to assure us. V____ takes every measure to present herself as a capable and committed guide. “We’re lucky,” she grins with a certain unplaceable delight. “They’re staying open until 11 on Monday. That’s eleven... *pee emm*. If we head out early, it means we’ll get the *full fourteen*.” She accentuates this last alliterative amount by giving a playful flex of her bicep, and I am almost sure I see muscles rippling. We retire early, after express mention of so many hours all at once.

7:30AM - ARRIVAL

The road to Whimsey is paved with good intentions. It bears a striking resemblance to black asphalt and tire tracks, with quite a lot of traffic to boot. We navigate the myriad lanes and exit ramps, vibrant signage with cartoon heads and hands to point out and promise impatient children a dwindling of minutes left in their trip. Painted arrows,

indicative kid gloves, and diagonal lines all work diligently to box us into a parking spot. Vehicle securely positioned in AGNES CAT LOT (SECTION 12), all at once there is the requisite disgorging of sightseeing paraphernalia from the backseat— sunshades, sunblock, and sun hats, bugspray, strollers, and satchels filled to bursting with drinking water, maps, cameras, phones, chargers, baggies of snack foods, wallets, pedometers, Whimsey literature, along with a rat’s nest of cords, cables, and ergonomic backpack straps. Sweaters and hoodies tied securely around waistlines, we assimilate quickly into a swollen stream of other bodies, filtering with brisk, early morning conviction into ticket queues and information kiosks. Prior to arrival, I had been forewarned on multiple occasions to prepare myself for *WAITING TIMES* (distressingly uncial and italicized, even in speech), but the line to pay is certainly not one to linger. There is little else but punctual, perfunctory exchange between ticket vendor and target, so much so that the precipitous fee to entry barely has time to register. Very much a necessary phenomenon devised through countless board meetings and psychological tests— had a more casual and comfortable environment in the ticket queue been fostered, a potential customer’s fight or flight reflex would surely kick in, scaring off a good percentage of Whimsey hopefuls.

8:25AM - FERRY TO PARK ENTRANCE

One does not enter the kingdom of Whimsey by foot, but rather by way of extravagant watercraft conveyance, coloring the experience significantly. This is due to the entire south half of the park layout being surrounded by an immense, man-made lagoon, rendering all attempts at a dull and pedestrian approach impossible. It calls into mind a most imposing moat-like defense system, which I can only assume is entirely by design. *Everything*, I will come to discover of Whimsey, *is entirely by design*. Ushered aboard an enormous paddleboat with at least 55 head of fellow cattle, the journey across the expanse of stagnant swamp water averages around five minutes. One is whipped squarely in the face with a stiff, exhilarating breeze. Excitable tourists mill about the top

and bottom decks, adults tittering and cooing over bewildered children and complex camera equipment alike. A healthy sense of anticipation is instilled in the chest, stomach, and lung regions. One or two proclamations from individuals in the crowd and everyone rushes to one side with a desperate fluttering of shutter speeds: it is at this point in the journey one receives one's very first glimpse of the towering spires and turrets of not-so-distant-now Whimsey Castle, proud centerpiece of the parks. There is a distinct feeling of giddiness in the air, as if we are impoverished immigrants at long last arriving on the shores of Ellis Island, towering skyscrapers of prosperity growing ever so slowly from the horizon into full-bodied and overwrought view. In the immediate foreground, partially obscured by lush greenery and winsome-shaped topiaries, is the trailing smoke of the steam engine which circumnavigates the entire perimeter of the 50-square mile property. V___ gasps at this and informs us we are mere minutes too late to see the official park-opening ceremony, in which several costumed characters hop off the train and engage in a brief show of mute admiration; hugging, wriggling, and waving at the earliest guests before the doors are flung wide open. As I am naturally wary of costume characters, I am perfectly content in viewing it from several yards afar.

9:00AM - PARK OPENS

Everything is movement. Kinetic and pulsing, electric with the shared enthusiasm, excitement, ecstasy, and outrage of strangers. It is one fluid, monomaniacal torrent which flows from the entrance like seafoam from an increasing tide, sweeping, streaming, swirling with currents and eddies of the young and old, gawking this way and that, sidling and meandering and splitting off from the masses by degrees. We are now a part of the forward-pressing masses, whether we like it or not. The entrance to The Whole Wide World of Ulysses Whimsey is also the entrance to the first park, Welcome Boulevard, designed to mirror the main street of Anytown, U.S.A., circa the turn of the 20th century. Tremendous, street-wide festoons stretch from building to building, each

shopfront establishment utterly adorned with the wholesome architectural fripperies of small-town Americana. To the right, a stately town hall, theatre house, and a brass band playing friendly oom-pahs on endless repeat, to the left, salt water taffy shoppes, fudgemongers, and trinket emporiums as far as the eye can see. Shoeshine boys bark out scripted tiffs with newsies, professional photographers bedecked in straw boaters and striped jackets prowl the main thoroughfare, looking to capture memories in the making for only a modest fee— adjusted, of course, for current inflation. Welcome Boulevard is teeming with activity. Conspicuous stimuli specially crafted to assail every single sense in the human head: popcorn carts waft their buttery odors directly into passing nostrils and onto salivating tastebuds, horseshoes and the clattering of cartwheels ring out against the cobblestones and go vibrating like a drill into every pair of eardrums present, an ongoing connection of elbows here and forearms there bump ever so lightly, gently, fleshlike, but for a split instant as close-quartered park-goers lose track of projected flight paths and careen into foreign bodies. There are twenty million tints and shades splashed across every conceivable surface of the main street, and all of them connecting back in some way or another to the predominant red, white, and blue of American pride. The sky is spackled at regular intervals by swollen clusters of balloons, the sizes and shapes and undulating likes of which range from diminutive to immense, globular and inversely pendulous, not a single one of them inflated without some vibrant splash of attention-seizing color. There are even those that boast of a more intricate design, a balloon-within-a-balloon, semi-translucent latex expertly stretched and molded into the shape of twin shrew ears, all of which contained within the vitreous housing of a more standard, lachrymal shape. These seem to be far and away the most popular with The Crowd, as shrew ears are most commonly seen in singular instances, tethered to petite fists, bobbing just at or mere inches above eye level. So, too, can one spot a stray pair from time to time, in the act of rising like a languid rocket into the upper echelons of the stratosphere. A quick glance down and over to chart the base of its recent trajectory; accompanied, as ever, by either the sharp

reproach of an adult just out 12 dollars, or the screaming, wailing cries of an inconsolable kid. Often it is both.

As we shamble onward, this mass perambulation, molasses-slow with mouths and eyes agape, the greater glut of us seems to, with neither word nor warning, thin *ever so slightly* to a more breathable turgidity. Things ahead can be more clearly viewed without so much of a nodding horizon of hairlines and shirt collars to obscure. It is so gradual, so natural a fractaling outwards that it has occurred without my even being aware of it. But how is this thinning even possible? The street remains the same width as ever— the mass of each guest, their various circumferences. It is only after the fact that I realize the reasoning behind it all. We are losing our heft to the countless souvenir and snack boutiques which line the East and West arcades. Every few feet a family of three or four will succumb to the siren call of chocolates and buttons and magnets and bumper sticker bouquets. Window arrangements laid out within tantalizing reach of the whims of little ones. Where once everything was motion, everything is merchandise. From just within doorways old-fashioned cash registers chime their points of sale while colonnaded racks and hooks and countertops do their darndest to display a never-ending stock of postcards, key fobs, gewgaws, baubles, knick-knacks, simple gifts to folks back home. Undeterred by this sudden but predictable onslaught of almighty mercantilism, I remember my training from the rational minds of V___ and V___: “Never fall for the bric-a-brac early on,” they intone from deep within my brain. “You’ll be stuck lugging it around on every ride and line you go on. Bric-a-brac equals end of day. Less bags, less hassle.”

Much to my dismay, I find one of the V___s missing. Up until this point I have been using elder V___’s fiancé, Q___, as a regular point of reference, navigating in relation to his broad shoulders and colossal height. Every few feet I will catch sight of the others in our group, weaving in and out of unknown scalps, guts, and clothes colors, blending at times so perfectly into the greater camouflage of persons that I must fall back to the

plodding monolith of Q and blindly hope that the others are following suit. But this now is a markedly different feeling, this absence of youngest V____. I have not caught sight of the glint of her ponytail swaggering with veteran confidence for quite some time now, and the thought of having lost her to the mob is encroaching on happier thoughts of park chaos. I reach out with intent to tap the shoulder of her husband, W____, but am quick to learn of the utter futility of such a maneuver, striking instead the rotundity of a nearby neighbor from Idaho or Illinois, most likely, mumbling out a sheepish “*Erm, ‘scuse me, ma’am*” in the mortifying aftermath. Moments pass along with our communal march, each one with mounting concern for her whereabouts, until presently and all at once, the familiar flash and swipe of brownish-blond hair emerges from The Crowd and a round metallic somethingorother is pressed into my palm. It is V____ again, this time with an oversized badge for the neophytes. As W____ helps affix it to Y____’s chest, I turn mine over and examine it with an abashed expression. “I’M A WHIMSEY FIRST-TIMER!” it proclaims in agonizingly bright block letters, a rapturous menagerie of cartoon animals poking out from F’s, I’s, and R’s, hands stretched heavenward with little regard to subtlety. Within seconds of pinning it to my breast pocket, an avalanche of personalized waves and salutations come forth from every corner of the park. “*Hey, hey! Happy first time!*” a sweeper sing-songs along by; “*Hiya first timer!*”, shopkeeps cheer in their rare spare moments; “*Have a wonderful first!*” goes the odd costume character wrangler while my back is turned. It is both sweetly warm and terrible, startling attention paid, a deadly cocktail of spotlight I instinctively admire but want no part of. Have these people no idea of my age, my position in life? What I stand to lose should I allow a grin of appreciation in return? Y____ loves it, answers back, twiddles his fingers merrily. Over the course of the day, my pin will descend to a lower, more surreptitious spot on my pant leg, and then finally to retire within the confines of a pocket after a casual claim of supposed “safety pin malfunctioning.” It is better suited there. *Safer.*

9:35AM - THE CASTLE

V____ now leads us to the distinct right of most everybody, branching off from the main artery and along a less populated street, deemed Victor “Tweeneer” Ickerowicz Way, which is quickly clarified (by elder V____ (never to be outdone in regards to helpful trivia)) to be Whimsey’s right-hand man in the earliest of Whimsey Corporation’s days, and also progenitor of over three dozen unforgettable Whimsey characters. In fact, each sidestreet, avenue, and cul-de-sac in the Welcome Boulevard layout is named after a significant fellow within the vast annals of Whimsey history. Every lamppost, balustrade, streetcar, cornerstone, and second-story window has been in some public way dedicated to a noble figure in the industry, from ample-coffered philanthropists to artisans and tradespeople in the very making of the park itself. Our reason for detour is quite simple: “This angle of the Castle is far superior. You don’t even know.”

This “Castle” in question is none other than *The Castle*, of legend, monumental centerpiece in the most literal of terms, plucked straight from the set designs of Whimsey’s first feature-length animated film, *The Belle of Them All* (1937)². It stands erect with a number of broadly Slavic, onion-shaped turrets and spires. At 213 imposing feet tall, it is a perfect, albeit slightly downsized replica of Tsarina Vasilisa’s magic winter citadel. One can view at least some portion of it no matter what locale they find themselves in, existing dead center of all else, exuding a haughty, taller-than-thou temperament. “We’re talking Eiffel Tower levels of Parisian-grade showmanship,” murmurs brother W____ under breath just as soon as I make mention of seeing one of its glittering azure minarets. “Oh look!” cries Y____ with all amounts of ardor. “Extra

² *The Belle of Them All* (1937), Whimsey’s first feature-length animated film, draws inspiration from popular Eastern Slavic and Baltic folk tales, such as *The Morose Ice Princess Who Could Not Feel Real Happiness*. Beautiful but impoverished urchin girl Vasilisa Geroniya earns the favor of the Queen after she is discovered to look exactly like the Princess, a fair maiden cursed by Old Babushka Winter to feel nothing in life but the drudgeries of cold. It is the Queen’s intent to replace her daughter with Vasilisa, but the young girl insists on meeting with the Princess and ultimately succeeds in breaking the magic spell through the glowing warmth of her optimism. The tale ends with a happy kingdom and Vasilisa elevated to Tsarina status, while evil Old Babushka Winter is thwarted accordingly (red-hot fetters applied to her ankles and wrists, descended into a boiling cauldron of molten metal in the original story, merely driven off a cliff into the icy sea below in the movie).

magic!” It is true. Today, we are treated with a most indecorous-appearing construction crane, slanted at a profane angle against an otherwise picturesque backdrop of the Whimsey Kingdom, dangling some sort of metal cherry-picker basket which houses too-small-to-see Whimsey staff, who, we are subsequently informed, are replacing gold leaf in an ongoing reconstruction project. Well, drat the very idea! It is maddeningly necessary, but thoroughly displeasing to our particular and this, the very fleeting enjoyment of a hallowed Place of Interest! Similar to the outrage involved in reaching the Taj Mahal or Niagara Falls only to find it entirely swathed in tarpaulins and scaffolding. We have been beguiled, inveigled over years into thinking it immaculate from countless postcard portrait representations, only to have our expectations slapped in the face by cluttered, encroached reality. This crane, this *terrible crane*. It defiles the view, the very idea, and all they seek to represent.

But it is too early in the day to remain upset. Soon the narrow, clapboard buildings of Welcome Boulevard give way to the grand castle courtyard, a wide-open area which oversees a great many number of stage shows, trolley roundabouts, and parade routes. The cool, ultramarine gleam of the Castle seems almost out of place in full, 75 degree sunlight. W____, he of pale complexion, is reminded of this fact the moment we step back out into the broadness of day, and bottles of sunblock are jimmed out from underneath the stroller, which has acted thus far as an easy way to transport goods rather than over-exhausted toddlers. Once our numbers are appropriately slathered, we find a relatively less-trafficked spot to compose the first of many pictures, the backdrop of Tsarina’s Castle acting as clear, photographic proof to those logged on to social media websites that *YES, WE HAVE BEEN*.

I will admit to taking certain liberties in using the phrase “relatively less-trafficked,” simply because “less-trafficked” is an outright lie. At Whimsey, there are only absolutes. During park hours, an area—any area you choose—is trafficked. Stolidly and resolutely so. It is not *not* trafficked until the park closes and no guests remain to have a chance to

traffick it. Indeed, it is probably yet *still* trafficked even then, by vast armies of custodial staffers and parade trainees and an entire phalanx of nocturnal pigeons come to scrounge what crumbs and morsels have been left behind. But I digress. Here you will find a world of either extreme. Either your child will pour forth a pure and blissful giddiness upon exiting Roderick Frog's Whistlin' Lilypads³, or your child will experience a crisis of existence upon learning he cannot have another go on the carousel, flying into a tempest of feelings, a tantrum the likes of which is at least 65 horsepower wide and 17,000 amperes long. There is no such thing as "fair-to-middling" wait times. Either you arrive at your destination to find, through no small miracle, a zig-zagging of chain-links ineffably free of all human beings, or you discover that the trickling of bodies out from around a corner half a mile away is, indeed, your starting point of the queue for Cap'n J. S. Sassafrass's Bombastic Log Flume Revue⁴. The World of Whimsey deals in absolutes. Whimsey's nightly fireworks displays are absolutely astounding, the animatronics are absolutely riveting, the public processions are absolutely unparalleled, and the 16 dollar corndogs are absolutely extortionate.

10:02AM - THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

We pass under the concrete and plaster immensity that is Whimsey Castle to a bustling plaza that acts as portal to the remaining three parks. In its center is a hulking, Brobdingnagian beast of a merry-go-round, toodling breathy calliope tunes at a dizzying

³ Roderick Frog's Whistlin' Lilypads takes its theme from animated shorts *Roderick Frog in Swampy Symphonies!* (1934) and *Roderick Frog in A-Croakin' Encore!* (1934). Both of these shorts see Roderick Frog as the much-abused conductor of a pond-based orchestra. Both end with incensed Roderick pitching a humorous conniption fit, only to find that his audience of fish have all thoroughly enjoyed the performance (despite its highly atypical nature).

⁴ Cap'n J. S. Sassafrass's Bombastic Log Flume Revue is an amusement ride situated within Surprise Island! that takes its name from highly controversial live action/animated feature film *Tunes From Outta Nowhere* (1947). In it, ruthless Cap'n J. S. Sassafrass (voiced by gap-toothed Whimsey mainstay Thomas St. Terry-Towling) leads a motley band of bomb-flinging anarchist pirates, sailing across the seven seas in search of booty, adventure, and capitalist status quos to overthrow. The film has been all but lost to time and political correctness; outspoken activists of every decade have sought to bury its existence due to the questionable morals and torrid accounts of cartoon bomb violence found within. Bizarrely, the Log Flume ride, which still features the shamelessly pro-explosive song *To Whom It May Concern: KABOOM!*, seems to have stood the test of time better than its source material.

rate, whirling sanguine as it always has for more than 55 years. On its swirling mares, stallions, and unicorns are perched beaming children of every age, here and there a smattering of laughing old-timers, too; mothers and fathers, aunts, uncles, caregivers, guardians, and au pairs standing dutifully beside each fiberglass steed and mounted child, legs positioned akimbo to counterbalance centrifugal forces, hands and arms gripping at handles, manes, and belt loops. Directly behind the carousel lies the botanical gardens of tropical-safari-flavored Surprise Island! (exclamatory mark required), to the right, hissing pistons and mid-century-inspired robotics herald the retro-futuristic archway to Imminent City. Directly opposite this lies ever classic Fascinationland, home to many of the rides and attractions most regularly associated with the Whole Wide World of Ulysses Whimsey. *Definitive* rides, *quintessential* attractions. The sorts of archetypal marvels one reads about in textbooks and pamphlets, then travels halfway around the world to see. Fascinationland is a family-friendly quarter boasting some of the mildest and tranquil of all the Whimsey amusement rides. At an early hour, with young Y____ still fresh-faced and in high spirits, it is here we head first.

The blacktop paths begin to curve and curl in curious patterns, serpentine diversions around and about the immense attractions that now sprout up in seemingly random sites, no doubt positioned there unaccidentally. Instead of the orthogonal intersections of Welcome Boulevard, we are forced to take winding, scenic routes past ample distractions in every direction, at every turn. I make the novice mistake of calling out a familiar name as we walk by a slatted fence with shrieks and screams of delight emanating out from its gaps: “Well, look! It’s The Littlest Narwhal’s Maritime Delight⁵!

⁵ The Littlest Narwhal’s Maritime Delight takes its theme from the animated hit sensation *The Littlest Narwhal* (1988), generally agreed to be the film that ushered in a renaissance of quality animation from Whimsey Studios after a decades-long financial slump. Blub, a narwhal who is orphaned within the first ten minutes of the film, is continually teased by the other narwhals for his diminutive size. Having swam away from home, he soon meets plucky lobster mob boss Buggy Sealegs, who offers him a position within the infamous Greenland Gang. Upon learning the Gang’s next big target is his old narwhal pod, Blub risks everything to warn them, getting mixed up in an underwater battle which features an inordinate amount of lobster, porpoise, and penguin bottoms getting prodded by narwhal tusks. In the end, Blub uses the power of friendship to unite the feuding parties, his slight stature is at long last overlooked by peers, and

That's on our list, isn't it?" There is a solemn look of disapproval tossed back over elder V____'s shoulder as she maintains a steady pace. "Not an AM ride, not on your life! Narwhal's always at its peak in the morning! We'll hit it up in the afternoon, just after lunch. Then it's no more than a couple of minutes to being seated, you'll see." And the thing of it is she is *entirely right*. A few more feet and we pass by its entrance, noses held high with smug insider know-how (though I dip my head down to sneak a peek)— a solid wall of gridlocked legs and sweat-soaked backs, moving nowhere, going nowhere, stood completely still in agonizing sequence, back and forth and back and forth and back and forth in a frozen volleying of hopefuls. "No, no!" reiterates V____ with iron resolve. "Best bet is still Wide World. We're only 15 minutes behind schedule, anyhow." Here she seems to catch herself in a rare display of self-reproach. "... *suggested* schedule. It's really just a suggestion, obviously. But you definitely don't want to attempt Narwhal this early." I am anything but offended. Truthfully, I am relieved to have a taskmaster in fierce and fearless V____. Without her instinct, her commitment to some semblance of order amidst this carnival havoc, I fear I would have already sought out a public dumpster to panic-weep behind.

10:27AM - IT'S A WHOLE WIDE WORLD

In childhood, I often found myself laid out across a blanket laid out on the floor of my bedroom, head in hands, listening wistful to a portable record player amplify the ingrained soundwaves of *Ulysses Whimsey Presents The Whole Wide World of Ulysses Whimsey's It's a Whole Wide World (In the End)*. It was an ancient record, first pressed in 1963 as a promotional piece, our copy a dusty relic rescued from the 25 cent pile of some unnamed yard sale by my father, and somehow quite miraculously lasting several generations of listeners. Throughout its brief, 15 minute playtime, amidst the relaxing pops and hisses of stylus-against-vinyl (even despite the egregious flutter and wow of a

everyone ends up singing and dancing together. The film is also notable for instigating a spate of illegal narwhal purchases after countless children demanded to have one as a pet.

record player quite past its prime), I was transported to Fascinationland's most iconic ride, It's a Whole Wide World (In the End). I distinctly remember the narrator's voice, a very special kind of 1960s tobacco-enriched tenor, describing in dry, clipped prose the various rooms and chambers each park-goer was treated to as their boat floated along the canals. It was a wholly unsatisfying substitute, to be sure, leaving behind not a happy, sated feeling, but a kind of dolorous, empty void. There was a very real regret each time I listened to it, a sort of *kindlich ennui*, and perhaps my very first foray into depression. As the stylus arm slipped morosely towards the middle of the spinning disc, I would come to the naked realization that I could never quite *be there*, in sunny Whimsey World, never quite imagine myself into existence, *for real*, in one of those boats, no matter how elaborate or well-spoken 1960s man was. It was a bittersweet form of entertainment. Its sting is compounded now not only by a rose-tinted lens of sentimentality, but also by the adult assumption that 1960s man, my one tenuous link with the Whimsey promise, is long-since dead. At the very least, he is well into the throes of senility.

Imagine, then, the exultant twinge I feel as we step right up to the gates of It's a Whole Wide World (In the End). True to V____'s prognostications, the line is nonexistent, the giant flip-clock board for wait times estimates a modest "[1 0] MINUTES," if that. It is oddly exhilarating to walk the weaving path of handrails, an endless slalom from left to right and back again. The completionist must adhere to each and every terraced leg instead of ducking under metal bars and swinging chains like several teen-agers do amidst our trek. After miles of this anticipatory dance, we arrive at the front of the line, a gaggle of foreign families the only thing between us and our maiden voyage. This now, stepping foot into waggling, ungainly boat and taking an emphatic seat, the very consummation of a childhood lust, which, for all intents and purposes, is far more innocent than it ends up sounding. But where now did brother W____ get to? He has gone missing from the picture, his absence apparent only after the rest of us are successfully embarked. V____ gives a mollified roll of her eyes and shrugs with good

nature. “He’s... elected to sit this one out. It’s okay. He’s been on it before.” She leans closer so Y____ will not be privy to such scandalous dissent. “It’s... not really *his cup of tea*.” As if by some flip of an ironical switch, there is a yank and shove, and a healthy dose of pathetic fallacy launches our little vessel into the vague sensation of open water. Away we drift with a surprising buoyancy, trundling indolent along a curve via submerged guidelines. I hear snatches of familiar verse drifting out from the darkened tunnel we are oh-so-slowly sailing towards. I recognize it immediately: it is the theme of unrequited exploit, come now into being not by a grandiose and crescendoing opening number, but on eternal repeat, introduced to us unapologetically *in medias res*. And so our little company is swallowed wholesale into deafening, maddening chorus:

—*We all know*

It's a Whole Wide World

It's a whole wide sing-a-long

It's a whole wide sing-a-long

It's a whole wide sing-a-long

It's a Whole! Wide! World!

Suddenly, there are automated moppets of every size, at every level, perched hither and thither on pastel-painted hillsides, mountains, and skylines. Cherubic faces with cheeks tinted to perfectly circular rosacea, beady little eyes sending out Morse code messages with clockwork blinks. Twenty dozen smiling mouths snap open and shut in perfect time with the song, its infectious melody twisting, turning, worming its way into every crevice of our collective conscience. It bounces up and down, reverberating off of all surfaces, rebounding back from the vaulted ceilings and crashing down all around us, filling every molecule with its message.

It's a Whole Wide World

With a thousand different tongues

At a half a dozen billion

We'll all use our little lungs

*For as long as you're here
We'll repeat our anthem cheer
It's a Whole! Wide! World!*

These lyrics appear to bring a natural close to the song, and so it would end were I at home, age 9, with my record player. But here, in the thick of things, in this belly of the beast, a legion of models, mannequins, and marionettes all rock back and forth with arms flailing like little wooden scourges, and it simply, tenaciously, indefatigably *does not end*. Instead, it elects to continue by way of incessant, interstitial bridges, which toot about in the air to expedite a full and categorical resurrection of the opening notes. From the top they go again with reinvigorated gusto:

*It's a Whole Wide World
'bout a million miles long
It's a great big globe
That we'll sing about in song*

*As everybody thinks
that the global village shrinks
We all know
It's a Whole! Wide! World!*

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!—

I am beginning to center myself within this overwhelming funhouse of ceaseless sights and sounds. Slowly but surely my brain acclimates to the darkness surrounding our boat, and the utter brightness and gaiety that bursts forth on either side of it. As we round a bend and slip lazily into a narrowing corridor, I manage to glimpse a Statue of Liberty standee in the fading distance, splashed all over with a brilliant verdigris and great, jaw-clenching grin. The concept comes flooding back to me: this was meant to be a world tour! Each assembly hall of animatronic munchkins represents a different part of the world, viewed, quite naturally, through the only *slightly* racist telescope of 60s stereotype. What we have just trawled through, that careening, caterwauling onslaught

of children in overalls, button-downs, feather headdresses, and buckled pilgrim hats, was meant to be America, the U. S. of A., the land of the free! I feel a diminished sense of pride for having missed so much of it.

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!

The pitch black corridor has widened out again and now gives way to our first look at, what is it this time?, Great Britain? Yes, it is England, it seems, that stately monarchic rock, as little tousled poufs of black fur hats rise up in rigid formation, red-nosed beefeaters abound, clacking their heels together on every other beat, pasteboard Towers of London and Big Bens in the background, double decker autobuses sliding to and fro on unseen tracks as beehived girls in miniskirts sparkle uncontrollably while moptop mods sporting RAF roundels flail after them.

—It's a whole! Wide! World!

It's a Whole Wide World

With a thousand different tongues—

The southern portions of Europe soon follow, each with its very own tableau, a float-thru diorama at least a story and a half tall, all grinding and clattering away with no intention of stopping. We glide by Spain, with its hordes of toreadors, flamenco dancers, and percussive castanets, on to France with a veritable barrage of berets, baguettes, and can-can high-kicks, further still to Italy with its swarthy crooning gondoliers, swooning Tuscan beauties, and checkered café tables buckling under mountains of spaghetti and meatballs. Everything has been reduced to a thick simmered syrup of essential clichés. There is no time for nuance in this, the tawdry cavalcade of tourism. The biggest and broadest strokes of recognition are slathered across scores of wooden tykes, each of which is displayed with customary attire in their natural habitat: bonnets and dresses and belts and sabres and hats and helmets and

piercings and jewelry and jackboots and sandals and silks and polyesters and cottons and rattans and bare skins and braided hairs and zithers and steel drums and spears and spangles and stilettos and sitars and various animal friends. It is quickly becoming a blur again. My brain no longer wishes to process each individual moving part as it once was happy to attempt in earlier rooms. Now it is more or less a togetherness, but the song, *that tune*, still reigns distinct. Irrefutable in its command, its importance, its absolute omnipresence.

*—At a half a dozen billion
We'll all use our little lungs*

*For as long as you're here
We'll repeat our anthem cheer
It's a Whole! Wide! World!*

We drift down into Africa, several areas abandoning the well-acquainted lyrics for a battering of bongo drum solos, the *dunga-dunga-dungas* probably several degrees of insensitive, but my brain is somehow only registering the basest of impressions, and none of it matters anymore anyhow. Past the turbaned desert peoples and their golden, glittering sand-filled sceneries, and on now to Turkey, India, and then the other Asias, the bold brasses and woodwinds of Western cultures giving way to the plaintive wails of erhus and shamisens, all topped with a plentiful sprinkling of sashes, Nehru jackets, and split-toe socks.

*It's a Whole Wide World
'bout a million miles long
It's a great big globe—*

At minute 846 I finally remember to look over and observe how Y___ is faring. I am instantly glad I do, as the view provides a most welcome and heart-warming distraction to the clinking, clanking cacophony of it all. He is sitting in between V___ and Q___,

still very much alert, staring up at a tree full of macaques and exclaiming something that is lost to the roar of pre-recorded kid tittering. I am sure it is very much worth hearing.

—That we'll sing about in song

*As everybody thinks
that the global village shrinks—*

I glance at my watch, attempting to be discreet to save the feelings of my fellow boatists, and am astonished to learn it is a good 10 minutes past the last time I checked. With my limited functionality I make the appropriate calculations and come to the conclusion that we have been floating through this calamity for a full *twenty-four hours and 10 minutes!* If this is indeed true, then surely I should be feeling pangs of hunger along with nonpareil fatigue. The horrendous notion is quickly superseded by more pressing changes in environment, however, for now we have traveled into Mother Russia, or the Soviet Union, or whatever it was at the time of construction, where there is throng after throng of merrily wobbling ushankas and bristly beards to blithely take in.

*—We all know
It's a Whole Wide World!*

It's a—

Somewhere within the maze of non-distinct Nordic countries, there is an amiable bump to our progress and we come to from our semi-vegetative reveries. Our boat has butted up against the boat in front of us, filled quite expertly with broad-sided American shoulder blades and ample hint of upper buttocks. They are craning their necks forward for some reason. I look to my right to see a pair of Swedish or Norwegian-seeming tots in iridescent fur coats, arm-in-arm and swaying in time as if nothing is the matter; not at all exceptional in the sort of reassurance I'm currently after. I am not entirely certain why it is in *this* direction I look for reassurance first, to the inanimate objects on a fake snow carpet, and the choice troubles me. Looking now to my left I catch the slightest

look of horror in V____'s features before she quashes it with a motherly adeptness and leans down to direct Y____'s attention to something else. So far there are no answers as to why we've stopped, why there is now a long line of boats before us, and several more on their way to greet us from behind.

—whole wide sing-a-long!

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!

I glance over to my newfound friends, the tipsy Scandinavian twins, who are still swaying back and forth, arm-in-arm-in-furs, lip-synching at the top of their little lungs. The soundtrack is far too loud, too pervasive to hear much else, but my mind insists on adding in the little mechanical whirs of their cogs and sprockets whenever I see them move. Back and forth, back and forth. *Zzt!-Zzt! Zzt!-Zzt!* And now a slight tip backwards with arms flailing upward. *Zzzzzzzzt-Zzt!*

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!

Back to the good ol' times, the classic back and forth. *Zzt!-Zzt! Zzt!-Zzt! Zzt!-Zzt!*

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!

The imaginary sound becomes very silly indeed, the same way the word THE or DOOM or FOREVER begins to look when you stare at it for too long.

It's a whole wide sing-a-long!

It has lost all of its meaning now, just a jumble of letters in my mind's eye, and I cannot tell if I missed a line or two, or if the music is genuinely stuck on a loop—an *unplanned* loop, of course—it's already *on a loop*. An unplanned loop. A loop like it's a stuck record; an unplanned loop. *It's a whole wide sing-a-long! zzt! It's a whole wide sing-a-long! zzt! It's a whole*

wide sing-a-long! zzt! It's a whole wide sing-a-long!, this sort of thing. But just when I make the mental fortifications to really *focus in* and begin listening again, it's already at an entirely different spot in the jingle,

—It's a great big globe

That we'll sing about in song—

and I begin to have serious concerns as to whether or not I have blacked out for some of it. The Scandinavian twins have nothing to say on the matter. In fact, they are long gone, and in their place a glacier full of Eskimos(?) are waving goodbye to us as we float about our way, mobile once more. I notice, for the first time in a week, that the lyrics are beginning to subside, the million little voices are drifting away from us, leaving only the tinkling harmonics of an unsung theme tune played over loudspeakers on a solitary harpsichord. Suddenly there are no more congregations of *zzt!-zzt!*ing elfin rugrats to gawp at. Flowers now decorate a narrow exit vestibule, a shower of international farewells printed on their petals: *Auf Wiedersehen!*, *Adios!*, *Au revoir!*, *Shalom!* all in fitting typefaces, interspersed amongst the more exotic counterparts in Hanji, Katakana, and Sanskrit.

And it is over. We have experienced *It's a Whole Wide World (In the End)* in its entirety and now it is *The End*. We unload onto wobbly legs, seeing a far longer line and a [25] MINUTES estimation in front of us before we break free for the exit lanes and skedaddle drunkenly away. Y___ is recounting a riveting tale of seeing elephants and a giraffe somewhere between Sudan and Djibouti, and I am happy for the kid in him, triumphal for the kid in me. It is finished, it is over, and I will quite literally awake two mornings from now singing the song from my sleep.

11:15AM - FASCINATIONLAND, FURTHERED

There is still time, elder V____ assures us, despite the slight deviation in forecasted timetables, to play a little “catch-up” with the rest of Fascinationland. We are, elder V____ continues to assure us, not beholden to the schedule, *never* beholden by any means, but it remains our best bet for acquainting oneself with as much of the parks as is, in her worldly estimation, capable of the human brain and body. “*Reeling*” is the appropriate term to best classify the act in which my body and brain are currently engaged, and so I am willing to take whatever it is that V____ is speaking as gospel truth. Once more, we follow her lead. Fascinationland is positively bustling with bodies, more so than last we left it, and we have no choice but to make our way like persistent trout up a stream of Portuguese sightseers. V____ eyes an opening and slips us into the natural Eastward flow of twenty Japanese women in wide-brimmed sunhats and salad plate-sized sunglasses. From here we shuffle alongside them for an increasingly consternated while, passing by such famous sites as Ada Gator’s Triumphal Fountain⁶, Nicholas Tyme’s Olde Watch Shoppe⁷, and The Wee Tea Cosy⁸. In this way we pass the subsequent two-hour stretch, flitting from one amorphous mass of crowd to another as best it suits our navigational interests, portaging stroller from one end of the park to the other, stopping precisely twice to check off a pair of essentials. The first is Tumblin’

⁶ Ada Gator’s Triumphal Fountain is a water feature in the center of Fascinationland’s Souvenir Square. At 25 feet tall, the fountain depicts the infamous Whimsey reptile spewing an eternal stream of liquid as her five mischievous nephews (Teddy, Eddy, Neddy, Freddy, and Fang) all frolick around similar burbling spigots. Every year, over 3,000 dollars in coinage is collected from the shallows of the fountain. This amount is put towards wetlands conservation initiatives.

⁷ Nicholas Tyme comes from *The Mouse & The Watchmaker*, a 15-minute animated film from a more than slightly obscure anthology of shorts called *Tales From Old Grandpop* (1969). Nicholas Tyme, an elderly watchmaker with failing eyesight, is visited each night by a young mouse who can tell what is wrong with a broken timepiece simply by putting his ear to the back of it. When his highly unorthodox rodent nature is revealed, the old man fearfully runs him out of his shoppe, only to find at the end of the film that it is better to have a helpful friend than to go it alone. Despite its name, Nicholas Tyme’s Old Watch Shoppe only devotes a small back corner of its sales floor to Ignatius Shrew wristwatches and other chronometric paraphernalia.

⁸ This mock pub is a replica of the Irish pub found within live-action Whimsey film *Fitzy McPatrick and The Leprechaun Folk* (1960). Filmed in blazing Spectre-O-Scope ChromatiColor, the film features some of the most brilliantly vivid sets, costumery, sweaty complexions, and excruciatingly long leprechaun dance sequences of its day (with then-unknown actor Doyle Hugheswater in a minor role). The film also depicts one of the most terrifying evil banshee demons in cinema history. A bizarre and pointlessly unnerving slumgullion of early 60s special FX, *Fitzy McPatrick* has irreparably scarred multiple millions of trusting children for over 40 years.

Strummers⁹, a whirligig tour-de-force which combines both the up and down with the round and round for a topsy-turvy helicoid excursion along a giant musical staff and dancing notes. Y___ makes it to the end, thoroughly enthused. The second, Agnes Cat's Very Merry CAT-TASTE-RO-GLEE!¹⁰, a pun-saturated, seated tour ride which takes each cart along the various animatronic repercussions of Agnes Cat and her birthday celebration, from the moment it is sabotaged by envious Opal Stoat and cronies, to the tumultuous food fight climax with champagne corks and strawberry cakes, to the rather predictable denouement of finding common ground amidst the delicious remains and calling it all a quite successful jubilee.

1:30PM - 'THE MAGIC OF WISHES' LIVE STAGE SHOW

If we were not walking with conviction before, there is little doubt we are doing so now, as both V___s have entered into full power stride, passing fellow park-goers with break-ankle speed, trailing eager little *whiff!*s of air in their wake. They are moving with a very definite mission in mind, a personal favorite with an exceedingly slim window of opportunity. I am notified that we are "cutting it very close" to 1:30, which just so happens to be the official start time of Ignatius & Friends' live stage show, *The Magic of Wishes*, located in the center of Whimsey Castle courtyard. "You only need to get there

⁹ Another music-based amusement ride, this time taking its inspiration from *Ulysses Whimsey Presents Phantasmoeuphonia!* (1941). Essentially dialogue-free, the film is a compilation of eight renowned musical numbers brought to life with breath-taking animation, ranging from samplings of classical symphonies by composer Wolfgang VonStrauff, to more contemporary snippets like *Les Tulipes du Printemps* by Rene LeSailles. The eponymous strummers come from a short excerpt which features anthropomorphic cellos, violas, and harps all plucking their own strings in time with a lively rendition of Karl Richard Friedrich Emmanuel Gottfried's *Spurious Fugue in B flat Major*.

¹⁰ Perhaps the most noteworthy element of the Agnes Cat attraction is not so much the animatronics within, but the *triple pun* residing in its name. This degree of wordplay is not uncommon in the Whimsey parks, but CAT-TASTE-RO-GLEE is, doubtless, one of the most egregious instances of disproportionate witticism. Attempting to pack a total of three disparate puns into one four syllable word creates such an imbalance of emphasis that it took me several goes of it before realizing its basis was meant to be "*catastrophe*." It is easy to be overly critical of the predominance of the words "CAT" and "TASTE" being so close to one another and the unsettling culinary inferences they conjure, but it is my personal opinion that the real culprit in this travesty is the final "GLEE," so shamelessly thrown in as an impetuous afterthought that it brings the whole precariously balanced monstrosity to shambles. The ride itself, however, is all rather pleasant.

a few minutes ahead of time to get a good spot,” explains younger V____ as we dash through gaggles of the sadly ignorant and unbeknownst. “See, most people don’t even know it’s going to start until it does, they don’t read their little brochures about all the different events going on, so they happen to walk by as it’s *already* going on and *then* oh boy the crowds really pile up. Call it the ‘Oh, What’s This? Effect’. There! Whimsey Insider tidbit for you.”

As ever, she is correct; we re-enter the courtyard at precisely 1:27PM to a downright anemic number of people, most ambling straight past the empty stage without a solitary clue. The only difference in set dressing is the existence of a large, striped tent near the back of the proscenium where once there was none. We find an accommodating spot to stand and wait out the final few moments, in the slight but blessed shade of several hanging planters of geraniums high above us. There are speakers attached to these posts and columns, and presently they begin to thrum an escalating drum roll, turning a fair few heads of passersby. “*LAY-DEES AND GENTLE-MEN, BOYSE AND GIRRULS,*” proclaims an exquisitely enunciated opening. “*PLEASE WELCOME... THE ONE, THE OHNLEE: IG-NAY-SCHUSS! SHREWWW!*” We are suddenly awash in enraptured applause, a dense amalgamation of audience having formed behind us in mere milliseconds. Y____ is transferred to the top of W____’s shoulders for a better view, and the bubbling of a hundred dozen other little youthful heads come sprouting up to the canopy of the crowd in likewise fashion. Hidden jets spew white smoke into an obfuscating fog across the stage, and from the swirling mists bursts forth the costumed characters of Ignatius Shrew, Beulah Shrew, Roderick Frog, and Wonky. The Crowd goes incandescent with admiration. Thunderous music blares at every angle, the bobble-headed actors gadding madly this way and that, cavorting, frolicking with a singular obsession to impress; waving, bending, skipping, curtsying, gamboling, smooching, jumping, and fluttering enormous plastic eyelashes all the while. Y____ is pointing in amorous disbelief, as are a stupefying number of his peers, causing The Crowd to surge and swell with waves of enthusiastic arms.

What follows is a musical production of complete and utter pantomimed hyperbole, the PA systems providing a constant stream of chipper, upbeat colloquies as actors ahead gesticulate wildly with every syllable. For every half-inch of natural limb movement, jaw waggle, and foot step, the costumed performers inflate these lengths by at least three feet, jouncing and wobbling around inside their multi-colored fur chassis with astronomic exaggerations. The script is positively tumid with talk of “wishes,” “imagination,” “magic,” and “dreams.” These terms flow so plentiful from the speakers, so great are their numbers, that they begin to exist as perfectly interchangeable with one another, mixing and mingling into a mad-gab potpourri of Panglossian jargon. One moment Wonky is wheezing out a tentative “Shucks o’ Goshen, Ig! I ain’t never wished a wish’a *magic* before!” while Beulah squeaks in ear-clearing falsetto: “Tee-hee, you silly goose! It’s as easy as pudding pie! Just dream a little dream of pure imagination, and *poof!* the magic of your wish is *sure* to come true!” Soon the doublespeak slip-soars into a musical number of senseless optimism and good cheer:

*Welcome! O, Welcome! Your wishes and all!
To our pageant of magic and dream-tacular ball!
We’re so happy you made it
We’re all hoping you’ll stay!
Now watch us imagine
magical magic all day!*

The refrain is followed by several thousand repeat-after-me *HOO-RAY!*s, cut mercifully short by an impressive blast of green flames from a trap door. Out from underneath the pyrotechnics and quivering string section steps Evil Queen Malcontentia¹¹, ridiculous

¹¹ Evil Queen Malcontentia is the main antagonist in animated feature film *The Princess & The Jackal* (1956). Its plot and characters are very loosely borrowed from the classic fairy tale of the same name, first attributed to prolific Danish author Fødder Agnostiker Olsen. The main differences between the film and story are few, but significant. For instance, the Princess is locked in a high tower in the film, instead of a deep dungeon in the story. The Jackal speaks, spouts wisecracks, and often references popular culture from the 1950s in the film, is silent in the story. The Evil Queen is overwhelmed by her own army of magical vermin in the film, is caught and tortured by being stuffed into a barrel filled with deadly asps,

head horns and all, whose particular presence seems inexplicable, even for a compulsory villainess role. A bitter curse is placed on Wonky's fledgling dream, requiring several more brief ditties featuring a cameo cast of baddies and underlings, before Ignatius and Beulah overcome all odds with the power of their wishful, dream-like imagination magic. The day is saved, Malcontentia harrumphs off into oblivion, and the two shrews are quite literally safety-harnessed into place as a small section of the courtyard hydraulically lifts them twelve or twenty feet into the air. Wonky, Roderick, and half a dozen human back-up dancers are relegated to ground level, yet continue to pirouette and gallivant their very all. "This," quips a heavy-lidded W___ through blasts of finale music, "Is where all the high school show choir kids come to live."

2:00PM - LUNCH, OR, THE MAGIC OF WISHES REALIZED

The crowd decamps into mostly satisfied jetsam, withdrawing by degrees to varied destinations. The vertiginous rush of dramaturgy subsiding from our thoughts, a great hunger creeps in to take its place, sending insistent pangs of physiological desperation to our brains from empty, wailing stomachs. It is 2 in the afternoon! Just when did such an oversight occur? Now there is nothing but the quest for foodstuffs to keep us fueled, and a quick jaunt to Surprise Island! has us queued outside an eatery in no time. "It will do," V___ says of the exterior. "They have chicken." I catch sight of a towering sign with hodge podge font: TAR 'N' FEATHERS' CACKLE SHACK¹². Just below it, a subtitle which drawls: "CHICKIN 'N' FINGS FOR RAVENOUS FOLK." On either side is perched a jet black likeness of the two titular crow characters, one with eyes squeezed

broken glass, and red-hot fetters, then is inserted, barrel and all, into an oven of white-hot coals in the story.

¹² These two wiseacre Cockney ravens hail from the animated feature film *The Birdsgeoisie* (1971), which may very well be Whimsey's most blatant commentary on class struggle in post-war England. In it, a family of canaries are uprooted from their comfortable island lifestyle when they are captured and sold as pets to a blue-collar chimney sweep in dreary London Town. The Canaries soon meet a colorful cast of working birds from the window of their new home, the various antics, personalities, and outlooks of which all work to teach the Canaries the importance of friends, industriousness, and a sense of optimism in the face of soot-stained poverty.

shut (from hysterics, most likely), the other in mute, frozen midst of cracking wise. The line is out the doors, which have been swung wide to accommodate for lack of decent airflow. It is decided that we will go in to procure the main meal, while elder V____, always one for the fullness of times, will split off to a noteworthy waffle fry provider, promising us two baskets of epicurean surplus upon her return. Once inside the Shack, a plump waitress in gingham livery slides by and hands us laminated menus. “Hope you’ll bear with us, *darlin’s*, on account’a some technical difficulties!” she chirrups good-naturedly, despite the mounting temperatures and lackluster results of several overworked ceiling fans.

I have mentally prepared for this moment, the one in which I see specific prices affixed to edibles. It was inexorable, inevitable, entirely unavoidable, and I have squeezed a sizeable peace of mind for it. I will not gawk slack-jawed like some uncultured, unmonied bumpkin. I will glance calmly, coolly at their offerings, and it will be a precise and antiseptic extraction of only the most relevant facts and figures. Entree. Choice of side. Glass, *munificently gratis*, for ice water. I am ready. The damage has already been done in my many hypothetical imaginings. I have pre-visualized this stiffness of fee, am bracing steadfast against its cut to my pocketbook, and so am ready for it when it fiscally solidifies to actual fact. A deep, expectant breath and quick dip down, as if plunging one’s face into a basinful to bob for overpriced apples.

CHICKEN WRAP, WITH CHOICE OF FRIES, BAKED POTATO, OR FRESH GARDEN SALAD . . . 15.99 (ADD 1.69 FOR COLLECTIBLE IGNATIUS SHREW SPORK)

Well then. Not entirely *too* exorbitant. There is merit, after all, to envisioning hundred dollar horrors.

The rustling of gingham returns, this time with pen and paper at the ready, and we, in turn, spout orders of varied and personalized sustenances. At the very end of it all she jerks a weary head to the back of the kitchen, where a war of preparatory attrition is

being waged. “Alrighty folks, we’ll send along your orders and they’ll call out your names when it’s time and—” she pauses ever so slightly with exaggerated use of sotto voce, “Y’all can just call it a *Wish Come True* today.” There is something sly in these words, a vested significance. It is lost to us at face value, taken as insubstantial terms of pleasantries. We remain in line, wallets at the ready, before the crowning rays of our good fortune begin to dawn. The various touchscreen tills situated around the front entryways have been left for dead, entirely unmanned. The presence of the pen and papers now takes on new meaning in our memories. This fleeting mention of “*technical difficulties*,” it was never meant to apologize for a fault in *air conditioning*. There are furtive but exuberant whispers from one ear to another as other members of the public begin to catch on along with us. This “*Wish Come True*” business, it is subtle *code* for something quite miraculous. Q___ is the first to come to grips, his eyes go wide and bulging with downright gladness: “Hey, the system’s *down!* This stuff’s *on the house!*” And it is wondrously so. We reach the counters and collect our food, never once asked for form of recompense. Instead, the harried servers slide trays and high mileage smiles our way, eager to clear the air and move on to the next, so on we go, provender in hand, delightedly free, sans charge, *on the house*. As such, it is the most delectable windfall I have ever had the pleasure of partaking in. We thank God, the freak display of magnetism, whatever solar flare thought kindly enough to cause this, and are gobsmacked anew when elder V___ flounces over to our table, an order of waffle fries in either hand, bursting at the seams to tell us of her own felicitous serendipity: “Guys!” she exclaims with the pride of a lion who has just had an antelope carcass dropped into its paws. “You’ll *never* guess!”

We do, and there is much to be said of it for the next three weeks.

3:09PM - A FULFILLMENT OF ITINERARY

Empowered by this recent surge of good luck and nutriment, we set out to metabolize our influx of calories by covering a good number of attractions yet left on the list of things to see. As promised, we return to a surprisingly unpeopled Littlest Narwhal, then slip back into the labyrinthine pathways of Surprise Island! to relish three or four more of its varied offerings. I am finding that we are averaging a ratio of 1 ride : 1 hour, an impressive feat considering the ever-increasing numbers of the afternoon. Surprise Island! is doused with a sodden heap of the tropical; a whooping and howling soundscape of monkeys and macaws come warbling out from speaker systems nestled in lush, colorful overgrowth. Vines, fronds, and the broad blossoms of exotic flora are strung along from tree to tree while motion-activated animatronic wildlife springs forth from behind hand rails and rickety bridge walkways. Several dozen flesh and blood ibises stalk about the grounds in search of human hand-outs, perched here and there on plastic protrusions of hippo or strutting along the outskirts in a bid to prove their eager acceptance of free hand-outs. Amongst the many grass-thatched tiki huts and bamboo structures of the island are the standard amusements and attractions of its sister parks, this time tinged, altered, flavored in endemic themes of equatorial lifestyle and pacifistic seashores. There is The Polynesian Lounge (For Very Thirsty Grown-Ups)¹³, Millard Z. Loon's No Moai Troubles!¹⁴, The Ookie Kookaburra Jungle Toodle¹⁵. Perhaps most

¹³ A generic island-themed bar, this establishment prides itself in being one of only two areas within the Whimsey parks that serves alcoholic beverages.

¹⁴ There is much debate over the true identity of Millard Z. Loon, one of the oldest Whimsey characters. Loon's personality, that of a clinically insane troublemaker, is markedly different from his castmates, and his presence in the early cartoon shorts was used sparingly. His appearance has undergone the most change out of any of the Whimsey characters, which, in large part fuels the controversy surrounding his exact species. Many argue that Loon is, in fact, a loon of the Gaviidae family, due to his name and trademark laugh. Others theorize that he was originally meant to be a duck-billed platypus, his name merely referencing his lunatic tendencies and penchant for chaos. To date, neither argument has been supported by the Whimsey Corporation, nor has there been official word on what the 'Z' stands for.

¹⁵ The Ookie Kookaburra Jungle Toodle - Ookie Kookaburra originates from the live-action film *The Castaway Family* (1961) in which a Liechtensteinian family of nobles find themselves stranded on a desert island somewhere off the coast of New Guinea. As they slowly come to terms with their tropical surroundings, the young blonde-haired, blue-eyed children befriend a score of local wildlife from the ropes and ladders of their elaborate tree-house domicile. In one scene, the concerned kookaburra bird brings sickly Hans-Günther a sprig of fresh Soda Root, the final ingredient needed for a homemade cold compress cure. On the ride, an Ookie Kookaburra animatronic puppet is sat perched on the bow of each boat and often reacts cheerily to the human guide's constant stream of commentary.

eminent of these attractions is the infamous Hyukin' Buccaneers Tour¹⁶, which features a repetitive sea chanty only a slight step below the insistency of their Wide World (In the End) brethren. The chorus, while catchy in its own right, takes only a trifling of hours to become unstuck from one's head:

We're savage sailors of these seas, we relish aches & pains!

Hurrah!

What one wench winces fearful from is only ours to gain!

Pshaw!

What-ho! We go from here to there, a-seeking strife in spades,

Tra-la!

And whilst we gad & mince about we sport all silks & suedes!

Huzzah!

Our itinerary filled with a satisfactory profusion of checkmarks, we turn our sights to virgin territory: the quaint retro-futurism of Imminent City, the fourth and final park which features the promise and zeal of mid-century forward thinking, replete with boxy robotics, atomic energies, and space-age kitchens of Tomorrow. Indeed, Tomorrow is an idealized dream in these parts, big swooping curvatures of chrome applied to every surface, the oh-so modern-seeming fins, prongs, and antennae of yesteryear fitted into an overly optimistic vision of Much To Come. I like this cheery outlook of clean-burning fuels and heavily-lauded dishwasher technologies (“What once was daily hours of toil, now a mere push-button afterthought for TOBOR here!”). I take great comfort in the ample perspective and hindsight I am afforded as a citizen of the modern day, which now belies these speculative excitements as downright darling. There is very much a certain sense of undeserved superiority, I suppose, that lends much to the

¹⁶ The Hyukin' Buccaneers amusement ride was first designed and built as a Whimsey World attraction in 1969. Its widespread and prolonged popularity then inspired a live-action film, which borrowed only the faintest traces of title and general theme as its basis. A gritty, freewheeling peek into the swashbuckling life of quirky, eternally-tottering pirate captain Sir Francis Krillbeard, *The Buccaneers' Life* (2002) was an unprecedented box office smash, launching the career of equally quirky character actor Tommy Spock, spawning 6 more films in the series, and sparking renewed interest in the Tour ride as well. It was with great outrage to Whimsey purists that the attraction was quickly revamped to capitalize off of the film series' success, including four, brand-new, highly controversial cameo appearances of a Sir Francis Krillbeard animatronic mannequin within the original tableaux.

entertainment one derives from it all, but never in the sense that we are *scoffing*. All of it is sweet, infectious, uplifting. I come to dote most specifically on Ulysses Whimsey Presents Whimsey's Cogwheel of Progress¹⁷, a sentimental relic of the 1964 New York World's Fair, designed almost entirely by Whimsey himself, dismantled after its initial run and meticulously rebuilt on its current site within the park, still running as it always has in exactly the same way with nothing but routine maintenance touching its original message.

Its interior operates as a sort of inverse carousel; the seats of its spectators remain static as the enormous inner wheel of multiple stages rotates in perpetuity. There are six segmented vignettes of equal duration in all, with 6 separate theatres and six unique entrances all along its outer circumference. We skirt along the perimeter, scouting for the shortest line, discover it, and are permitted to enter at the precise moment the beginning pie slice is being wheeled into view. What follows is a journey through time, from a one-room cabin of the 1800s all the way into the technologically fecund living room of *THE FUTURE*, a *zzt!-zzt!*ing mannequin host to detail the astonishing progress made. It is enchanting to watch the decades slip by as each new vignette is ushered in by that most ubiquitous folksy jingle which precedes each quality of life:

Why, it's a big, bold wonderful tomorrow!

Such excitement for the day after today!

Yes, a brand-new magical tomorrow!

Unfolding just a hop and skip away!

The sheer amount of betterment is inspiring. From talk of telephone lines to electric lights to cordless headsets to automaton dogs; most observations historical, some eerily predictive, others chortleworthy by just how far they have missed their mark, yet all of it

¹⁷ Radio personality and professional raconteur Grover Sherman provides the homespun voice of Father in this revolving attraction. Sherman was once quoted as claiming the Cogwheel of Progress to be Ulysses Whimsey's personal favorite attraction, as well as being the one he was most proud of. When it was temporarily closed for repairs in 1982, rumors abounded and a public outcry ensued after it was assumed that the ride was to be demolished. Erroneous SAVE OUR PROGRESS! buttons now fetch surprising amounts on popular auction websites.

transpires as quality entertainment. We exit feeling projected into greatness, and partake in multiple more attractions. There is the exhaust-choked race course for Wonky Karts¹⁸, a decidedly outdated affair having just been tantalized with the prospect of fossil fuel-less futures. Y___ cannot stop giggling as the plastic jalopy shakes and rattles his innards to indelicate extremes. We are succored by the reds, whites, and blues of patriotic empowerment within The Panoply of Leaders¹⁹, a theater featuring the most American of all short films, ending in a piccolo-infused choral composition of every one of our presidents singing (in wax statue form). Then we are off to test our strengths in depth perception at the three-dimensional shooting gallery funhouse Binary Force AstralBase Blast Pad²⁰, in which I perform abysmally, despite—or perhaps as a direct result of—the fraternal ribbing of W___ from the next pod over.

Imminent City, as with the parks before it, is a whiz-bang blur of action. It is in hour ten of our day-long marathon that I am sorry to discern a dire need for a *breather*, a break, a sedentary spate in which to simply “people watch.” I bide my time, seeking out a subtle excuse so as not to seem the desperate lightweight type, and presently, a reasonable objection interjects itself. It so happens that Q___, V___, V___, and

¹⁸ This Wonky-themed race course features two-seater go-karts fashioned to look like dilapidated jalopies. Each car jostles along a fixed rail with approximately two to three feet of space in which to swerve. Once the vehicle reaches this limit, the entire kart is violently jerked back into straightforward submission and a randomized sound clip will play. As such, the entire attraction is filled with the constant din of deafening motors, noxious exhaust fumes, vibrating bodies, and a collection of Doppler affected *BOI-I-I-I-ING!*s, *HOOOO-EEE!*s, and *DURR-HAR-HAR-HAR!*s from passing deathtraps. Just one lap through the twisting, turning track and pitch-black tunnels is enough to disorient the driver into temporary insanity. Repercussions of such a stupefied condition can be disastrous, leading to very poor life decisions, not the least of which include: attempting to swerve into adjacent karts, eating sugary foods directly after riding, or even getting back into line for a second go.

¹⁹ Positively swelling with American pride, The Panoply of Leaders is a large indoor theater built in traditional Colonial style carpentry which features a hybrid film/animatronic performance of past and present presidents. Each leader of the Free World gets an adoring nod from a continuous narration of patriotism, pride, and dewy-eyed nostalgia. Bald eagle screams and the slow-motion stars and stripes of countless zephyr-caressed flags complete the experience, but not before a rousing, wholly egalitarian anthem sung by a cyborg chorus of commanders-in-chief.

²⁰ The Binary Force AstralBase Blast Pad - *Binary Force Go!* (1996) provides the central theme for the interactive shooting gallery amusement ride Binary Force AstralBase Blast Pad, as well as being the first ever feature-length film to be entirely reliant on computer generated imagery. It was originally produced by independent venture Creative Rendering Techniques (CRT Studios), but the success of their debut film caught the attention of Whimsey Corporation, who bought the studio outright in 1997. The movie depicts a space-age consortium of crime fighters who rid the galaxy of its nefarious evils.

W____ all wish to continue the revelries with a go on Vladimir Blasdov's Cosmic Vault-O-Rama²¹, and here I am afforded a perfect extenuating circumstance inherent in the selfless act of staying behind with the only one of our numbers not quite tall enough to reach the safety bars. Seeing as how I have never been one for the terrifying free-falls and tumultuous loop-de-loops of the roller coaster ilk, it is only natural to sit this one out. The others do not need much convincing, so off they go. Y____ and I take this opportunity to partake in the restorative powers of ice cream, two cones of nearby Binary Force AstralBase Tasty Blast Slake Paste, one pineapple and one plain. We are treated to a tantalizing view of our order, sitting unattended on the counter as an employee flounders over the many, troubling buttons of her cash register. She is unsure of which ones to press to ring us up a bill of receipt, and though I have cash in hand, quite willing to transact without the aid of electronics, her standard operation procedures will not allow it. The line behind me lengthens, the furrows in her brow crease deeper still. A second employee is called over in a fit of furtive panic, and while their murmured counsel falls short of resolution, our cones begin to droop under the oppressive heat. They slump unhappily, dripping sad puddles of deliquesced soft serve, which only works to distress the waitstaff further. At last a third of their kind steps briskly into view, takes one look at the depreciated mess, bats them into a plastic-lined waste basket and produces two more, stiff and glossy with freshness, thrusting them in our direction. "*Here,*" she says, a concession in more ways than one. "Just *take* them. Go on— *wish come true!*" We depart at once, giddy with profitable happenstance, to enjoy the spoils of yet another freak occurrence of nullified fare. Y____ giggles from the gleeful face I pull, though does not quite comprehend the extent of such good fortune. We sit back on the curbside to suckle and lick victorious. Some day, when Y____ is old enough to appreciate the finer points of freeloading, I will regale him of our mighty

²¹ The character of Vladimir Blasdov comes from Whimsey animated short *Roderick Frog in Rockets, Red Glares* (1961) in which Roderick finds himself crash-landed in Soviet Russia. As he attempts to find parts to repair his rocket, he raises the ire of red-nosed, equally irascible cosmonaut Blasdov, who proves to be worthy adversary in tantrum-throwing. Soon, the two are racing against one another to complete their respective spacecraft, hurling insults and monkey wrenches all the while. The short ends with both rockets exploding in stars, stripes, hammers, and sickles somewhere between the Earth and the moon while the jettisoned survivors throttle each others' throats.

triumph. When the others return, light-headed and stumbling from the lingering effects of g-forces, not a trace of our complimentary indulgences remain. Our smug claims fall on deaf ears; they think my baseless braggadocio a joke. “Very *funny*,” Q____ retorts, wholly unconvinced. “You couldn’t possibly bottle *that* lightning twice.” No matter, though. I have no doubts that we have derived the entirety of joy from our priceless quarry. And anyway, it is always easy come and easy go.

9:45PM - MAIN STREET PARADE

At some point between the jostling of shoulders, the twiddling of thumbs, the thrill of amusements, the sun has slipped down behind the horizon. Day has signaled its defeat, sent up desperate flares of pinks and oranges in an immodest gloaming, and none of us have noticed. Now there is nothing more than a thick, black mantle drawn over our heads, suspended, it seems, by the brilliance of floodlights, lanterns, and lampposts below. They have blinked into being at some indeterminate, post-crepuscular moment, holding back the darkness, scattering various shadows by way of man-made lambency. We find ourselves pressing ever onward in these advanced hours, desperate profiteering from this extension of venture that flies in the face of creeping drowsiness. After all the sky has ceased to function, Whimsey churns on, prolongs its staying power, belittles the gloom. There is no winding down, no lessening of energy for something as irrelevant as nightfall. Shop windows and signage throw out their artificial rays of refulgence, paths and stairs and sloping inclines are lit at prideful, shining intervals by fluorescence, sodium vapor, electric filament, prismatic LED. Brilliant radiance of a thousand trillion lumens to maintain control, to perpetuate enterprise, to bring imitation clarity to the resounding blindness of night. It is a different splendor than all of it before, a brand of wonder which glistens and shimmers out of sheer stubbornness to submit, to fall to slumber with the rest of its surroundings. Suddenly, familiar sights from hours prior are contrived entirely anew, hitherto undocumented absolutes springing forth from the contrasts of light and dark. Now we begin to spot silhouettes of shrew heads in the

simple outlines of entrances, string lights, waste bins, skylines, and all of it made possible by the absence of our daytime presumption. Sundown discoveries abound; we see them in the clouds of frittering glow-sticks, the nocturnal adaptations of park-goers. We see them in the sugar-fueled manias of those past their bedtime, the endless strollers of those already fallen, the dead-eyed stares of those who will all-too-soon submit.

We hurry at the behest of both V____s to the middle of glittering, glistening Imminent City. It has been four short hours of accomplishing great things, and now there is to be one, final parade before the end of times. One, final splendiferous display of resolution before we may call it a day. Whimsey's Spectacle of Lights Parade is a nightly celebration of floats, costume characters, dancers, musicians, mirth, and marching formations, beginning from the main avenue of Imminent City, curling along the entrances of Surprise Island! and Fascinationland, and terminating after twenty minutes in the streets of Welcome Boulevard. In order to witness the absolute freshest performances from of its players first hand, one must stake one's spot precisely at its starting point, instructs V____ (and sister V____ most assuredly agrees). We make it fifteen minutes beforehand and still there is a sea of people to contend with. The procession, when compared to mere stage shows, is *something else entirely*. In a matter of sixteen and a half minutes, I will have no choice but to agree.

Positioned amidst two double-wide strollers, a thigh, several flanks, a perm, and three shoulder-saddled children, I am treated once more to a familiar voice from speakers high above: "*LAY-DEES AND GENTLE-MEN, BOYSE AND GIRRLS: THE WHOLE WIDE WURHLD OF WHIMZEE IS PROUD TO AH-NOWNSE... WHIMZEE'S SPEC-TA-CALE OF LIGHTS!*" The announcement is showered in hand-clapped adoration, the pre-show anticipation mounting to superhuman levels. At this moment, every shopfront, streetlamp, restaurant sign, and ride goes dark, plunging the entire park into the full grasp of nighttime. Before our eyes have time to adjust, there is a great upswell in music, the disembodied voice of Ignatius Shrew is heard to say "*Oh boy! Let's*

get this show on the road!” and the first of many monstrous floats careens out from behind a nearby building. It is bedecked from prow to transom in a million winking lights, bejeweled all over with a dizzying blur of luminescence. It spews an incandescent flickering out over the crowds, flashing whites and reds and neon greens in brilliant, stroboscopic interludes, freezing in brief instants innumerable human expressions of awe, recognition, unbridled joy, acid reflux, sleep deprivation, glee, giddiness, terror, captive enchantment.

And now there are fifteen acrobats in light-up vests, following close behind by way of somersaults and backflips. As they go they leave behind frenetic trails of spiraling lines, burning great big bouncing streaks into our retinas. They grin and wave at certain youngsters, regaining their balance for a moment or two before launching into a second, a third, a fourth flurry of activity. Now there looms another float, this time in the shape of a globe, with half a dozen costumed souls inside, all flapping kid gloves and pantomimed giggles. The musical accompaniment is changing from spectacle to spectacle; first light and airy for nonsensical dancers, then fierce and fiery for the malevolent appearance of Hysteriella du Plissatessa²² and her thoroughly empurpled barge of simpering cronies, then to refined and stately for a float of Whimsey princesses throwing kisses to a marching line of their princely beloveds. There is a teetering, tottering float for Wonky, which twists and topples on cylinders and pistons, a towering pillar of illuminated cushions for Agnes Cat as she pretends to drift to sleep between waves and other excitable gesticulations. There are zooming, swerving go-karts for each of the troublesome Gator nephews, and a gleaming bird cage twelve feet tall for Mr. and Mrs. Canary. Jugglers keep flashing projectiles aloft while a squadron of flag fliers

²² The Countess Hysteriella du Plissatessa continues the curious Whimsey tradition of conspicuously evil female antagonists, this time starring in the animated feature film *The Ten Thousand and Ten Squirrels of Sycamore Park* (1962). The story centers around the Countess and her sadistic plan of rounding up the squirrel population within a vast city park. Her goal is to systematically exterminate them and harvest their tails in order to support her unhealthy addiction to animal-skin rugs. Naturally, the anthropomorphic squirrels enlist the help of neighboring wildlife in order to thwart du Plissatessa's efforts, driving her into a publicly apparent fit of madness by the end of the film, wherein she is swiftly ushered off to a “funny farm” by way of padded wagon.

billow electric pennants and sparkling banderoles. A gliding stage of blood red lights features Cecil Weasel shaking fists and stalking about, taken aback each time by the routine booms of his quadruple confetti cannons. Onward plods and prances a veritable Who's Who of Whimsey personas. Both the popular and obscure are represented in this roisterous procession, either throwing kisses and salutes from the lofty heights of personalized conveyances, or hopscotching and leapfrogging about on ground level in fuzzy and oversized clodhoppers. It follows in this fashion of on float/on foot/on float/on foot performers for miles and miles, a gradual, sauntering cavalcade of multifarious character and exquisite choreography.

Atop an abundance of foam rubber logs a long line of beaver ballerinas²³ bob up and down in endless en pointes and demi-pliés. Swimming close behind is a writhing school of hungry alligators, slavering jaws snapping open and shut as multiple performers shuffle in quick succession under each 20-foot costume. Piles of sparkling rubies, diamonds, and golden coinage support a gadding Cock O'Feathers Chanticleer²⁴, who doffs his top hat and throws fistfulls of lucre high into the air. In his glorious wake struts the rest of the Loopy Coop family: Winifred, Gwendolyn, Wanda, Guinevere, and Wilhemina, as sly Reynard skulks behind them and gooses their tails from time to time. More and more and more file past to a mercurial score: dancing chew toys and rag dolls from *That Goldurn Dog!* (1999)²⁵, a marching band of trumpeter swans and drumming

²³ These balletic dam-builders hail from live action/animated film *The Magical Governess* (1965). Their on screen time is brief, however, appearing amongst the other wooded background creatures during the tongue-twisting musical number "Anti-Archetypal Prestidigitation," wherein Nanny Longbloomers sings polysyllabic stanza after polysyllabic stanza alongside loquacious Professor Codswalloppe, the Oxford don who is joining the Fusspot children in a riverside picnic.

²⁴ The Loopy Coop Chickens - Originally titled *Chanticleer & Reynard* (1948) for its theatrical release, this animated feature film was later renamed *The Loopy Coop Chickens* some 40 years later for its VHS tape debut. Despite the change in names, the story remains the same: vainglorious Cock O'Feathers Chanticleer is a rooster who profits from the other barnyard animals by charging them for his daily crowing. Chanticleer spends his days reveling in the piles of riches he's amassed, until crafty trickster Reynard Foxglove spreads vicious rumors of his obsolescence by peddling alarm clocks to the gullible hens. With his reputation in ruins, Chanticleer finally learns humility and the dangers of complacency. In the end, he wins back the favor of the other barnyard animals by performing his newly perfected crowing skills for free.

²⁵ This straight-to-video reboot of *That Goldurn Dog!* (1966) follows young Zoe Campbell and her family as she brings home a stray mutt. While Mr. Campbell suffers the worst of the ensuing canine-related

hunters from *Quackpots 'N Birdshots* (1982)²⁶, a trolley car of black-and-white jackalopes from *A Railway Awry!* (1927)²⁷.

There is a top-heavy dragon breathing real flames of blue fire, a regiment of clownish, bumbling dwarves locking arms and dancing circles with willowy elves. There is a barge of prancing sealife amidst fluttering strips of liquid-looking silk, a free-wheeling trio of fairy godmothers with huge hoopskirts concealing motorized scooters, a clip-clopping selection of knights in shining armor. A flashing expanse of forested mountains rolls past with Native Americans dancing tribal gyrations, a merry band of New Englanders in buckled hats and pantaloons twist, swivel, and spin in its wake. A cadre of porcine bankers in pinstripes and walking canes. An association of somnolent sheep which take turns leaping over a section of fence. A cotillion of giggling debutantes in brilliant dancing gowns. Giant-size numerals with flailing arms and legs engage in countless jigs, an alphabet of majuscules goosestep steadily past. There are twice as many footfalls to move from point A to point B, a swirling, swerving weave of swaggering U-turns which ensures an optimal period of observation at all angles for each and every spectator. Despite the flashing lights and darkened crowd, each performer seems to have no trouble singling out young individuals from the masses and paying them special attention. At regular intervals, a famous owl or squirrel or sentient piece of silverware will lock eyes with a particular child, throwing out a personalized smile and amiable

hi-jinks at first, Rex finally cements his position within the family after he scares away two bumbling cat burglars. The two versions of this movie share an identical plot, yet the more contemporary adaptation makes ample use of backwards ball caps, lost cellular telephones as plot devices, and even includes a scene in which Rex performs an internet web search.

²⁶ This was one of five largely unsuccessful attempts by Whimsey Corporation to bring back the classic animated short before each theatrical showing of a feature length film. In this short, a musical war is waged between swans and human hunters, each comical attack accentuated by a jazzy soundtrack of brass instruments, snare drums, and hi-hats. Ultimately, *Quackpots 'N Birdshots*, failed to capture the interests of theatergoers and was ignored until a special edition compilation DVD was released in 2003.

²⁷ In this animated short, a community of jackalopes attempt to run, ride, and service a trolley, often with humorously squashed-and-stretched results. *A Railway Awry!* is notable in that it does not feature a well-known Whimsey celebrity, instead relying on the antics of nameless characters— none of which were ever utilized again in subsequent cartoons. The short enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in 2003 when musical artist Le Terry used multiple scenes in an accompanying music video. Whimsey Corporation sued for copyright infringement, lost the case, then re-released the official short and introduced a line of lunchboxes and backpacks featuring the jackalopes.

sweep of an arm for the express benefit of whosoever has just caught their attention, before it is straight back to a generalized parading past and the glazed eye look of existing for all. This effect is positively shattering, as I am soon to learn from firsthand experience— in the span of three to four brief seconds, I alone am plucked from obscurity for cheery inspection by Princess Saffron²⁸ as she glides by on a flying carpet. The once impregnable sense of anonymity bursts into a million pieces as she issues a playful gasp of recognition and performs an exquisite wave of her arm just for me. I am stricken; she has destroyed the illusion of my safety in insignificance with the simplest of looks. A lightning twinge of guilt, panic, fear electrifies me, induces a shudder, and I automatically grasp for the place on my shirt pocket where once the betraying label of my FIRST TIMER pin was affixed. To dispel this stark and singular feeling of sudden onset bashfulness, I allow the perpetual fervor of the crowd to intoxicate me once more. In doing so, I overcompensate, acting out on an instinct I did not know I had, all in a desperate bid to show the performer that her indecent proposal of eye contact did not affect me in the way it really did. Thus, in a rare moment of appreciable weakness, I find myself fixated in the opposite direction before letting out a whooping cry of “*Wha-hey!*”, as I at long last pinpoint a rather recherché Jolly Olly Oxenfree costume amidst a toddling formation of other, lesser-loved cartoon fossils.

And then, at long last, from behind several buildings rolls the hulking mammoth of finality, provoking an upsurge in delighted screams and shrieks of realization from the crowd. It is a grand, two-story staircase of chasing lights, banisters, balusters, spiraling volutes, and twinkling finials— marble treads and risers all ascending in grandiose fashion to display a pair of golden thrones on the final landing, atop of which are seated

²⁸ Princess Saffron is the royal love interest in animated feature film *The Djinn of Al-Rasheed* (1993). When a lowly street urchin is mistaken for a thief, he is run out of town and happens upon a magic bottle containing a genie. The genie then grants the urchin three wishes, the first of which is used to help save the life of a camel sinking in quicksand, the second for the overall prosperity of the city which turned its back on him. Impressed by the selflessness of the urchin, the genie pretends to grant his third wish (for the heart of lovely Princess Saffron), even though the act of true love is beyond his powers. After the urchin wins over the princess by his own determination and charm, the genie confesses and is granted his own freedom with the last remaining wish.

an exuberant Ignatius and Beulah Shrew in royal regalia, waving, waving, forever waving to each and every boy and girl in the endless aggregation of dumbstruck kids. I am pulled from my stupor by a quick grasp and tug to my arm, and soon I find that I am weaving quite automatically now in and out of stationary crowds in a frantic attempt to keep up with the V____s. I see the dim outline of Q____ lumbering along beside me, and know that I am, at the very least, going in the right direction.

We appear to be headed straight to the heart of Whimsey Castle while all other faceless shapes stay put. Try as we might, we cannot overtake the plodding speeds of the floats, rooting our way through droves at the same 2 mile per hour trundle as the Shrewmobile. At times I snatch fleeting glimpses of the Shrews, still atop their irradiated contraption, grinning down upon the various darkened heads of their constituency. There is a brief parting of bodies and I am swallowed once more into a standstill, this time in full view of Tsarina Vasalisa's unlit citadel. The reasoning behind our migration will become apparent just as soon as Ignatius' float reaches the castle courtyard. It is in this very spot, high above us, that the fireworks begin. At first a battery of trifling, spitting-sparking novelties, then growing and blossoming into indescribable blooms of light and sound. There rises an audible oohing and ahing from the crowds, even over the deafening crackle and bang of pyrotechnic missiles. The last remaining leg of the parade is meaningless now, as all heads tilt upward, eyes trained to the heavens and the magnanimous pageantry that is blistering, throbbing, pulsing across the sky.

It is like no fireworks display I have ever witnessed. It is light and sound and excess all at once. Splintering, twisting curlicues spiraling, spasming, rocketing in every direction. Combustion after combustion, complex paroxysms of color turning their blackened, charred background into an epileptic fit of light. Countless, ceaseless incendiary salvos, skywide plumes of sulfuric smoke marking the self-satisfied ghosts of mighty outbursts just moments before. Howling screams tear through the night, at first invisible, undetectable to the naked eye, only to burst forth seconds later in triumphal sprays of

fractaling slivers and fizzling sparks. Some whistle at the moment of their inception, others screech shrill protestations seconds after kickoff, but all of them end their trajectories with the familiar sharp cracks and stentorian reports of detonation. It is not one modest string of singular eruptions like those from home on the fourth of July. Here it is a neverending extravaganza of volatile skill, a relentless barrage of seven here and nine there, six to the North and eight in southwesterly support. They unfurl their spidery brocades all over, all at once, no beginning or end, an interminable vista of visual intemperance. Spitting and scating and soaring over one another, creating shrew ears and shrew snouts and shrew eyes of colors I did not think were present in the spectrum. Slashes, strokes, angled striations of light to the left, bulbous, tumescent, expanding spheres of effulgence to the right. Intertwining arabesques dead center. Swimming whorls above. An undulating mass of cell phone screens below. It is a rendering unto Whimsey, a grand immolation of the atmosphere. It lasts centuries, ages, aeons. It goes on and on and on, well into the evening until every last pellet, rocket, and Roman candle of chemical compound has been ignited in mid-air.

The comets and dahlias and chrysanthemums of light are smearing and streaking in my vision; my eyes are beginning to leak. What is this bothersome liquid which pools in my periphery and makes it difficult to blink without spilling? It is the saltwater manifestation of *thirteen and one-half hours* in a constant wash cycle of resplendence, finally coming to a head. I quickly count my blessings that my brain has decided to emote under cover of darkness; the stolid, sensible, and Midwestern way. A sniff of feeling, a subtle brushing, and then a single stream of hot tears to feed one's human longing to pontificate. I think now on the regularity of it all, this concept of ritual expenditure and overwrought routine, occurring not just this once on a night we so happened to attend, but on *all nights*, on *every* night, every week, and month, and year for *fifty-five years and counting*. They shoot man-made greatness into the sky like it is as ordinary as the taking out of trash bins, the tying of one's shoes, a brushing of teeth. All of this, all of it administered like clockwork at the strike of a certain numbered hour.

This bacchanalia of excess and profusion, this incredible, ostentatious celebration of utterly rococo explosions is played out with perfect efficiency to a heterogeneous sea of people. We are, after all, the only variable in this tried and tested formula; just who the Us will be on any given evening. For I will leave this place in thirty minutes, having feasted, feeling full, a fattened, happy customer. Tomorrow, and the day after, and ever onward someone else will take my place, standing in this exact spot, rubbernecking up into the heavens and gawping at it all. I am not the first to make these observations, to feel these feels, to comment slyly on the fact, just as I will not be the last. I come from a long line of those who have paid their dues, who have traveled the distance and have seen the sights. This Spectacle of Lights will continue on without me, long after I have departed, whether I exist several states away, at home, quiet, and enjoying a book, or find myself on a completely unrelated pleasure cruise of equal excitement. Come 10:33PM, local time, this precise portion of the sky will erupt in strontium-fueled amusement, to the delight of whoever happens to be here. This is a maddeningly existential thought, both sobering and infinite. A microcosmic example of one's place in the universe, man's miniscule slice of celestial real estate, fireworks or not.

Having shed an appropriate tear for this notion, I am adequately humbled. Any further emotion on the matter would serve as unbecoming. It is fortunate, then, that a rousing end to the festivities presents itself: Ignatius Shrew's closing line "*Golly gee, now that's excitement!*", a conclusion that has been on everlasting repeat for decades, blared over loudspeakers to an ecstatic crowd to signal the closing bell, the mass exodus of all its denizens. And so it is over. The lamps and lightbulbs blink back to life and reveal a communal coming-to. There is a strange roaring which ripples over The Crowd like that of the crash of a far-off surf. It is the return of white noise, the general thrum which accompanies the simultaneous activity of thousands as they walk and talk and roll strollers. Against all effort to prevent, Y___ has, out of sheer overstimulation, managed to drift off in the midst of fireworks, neck bent at an egregious angle that would instill an abominable crick in anyone past the age of youthful elasticity. The nap is not long-lived,

but exquisitely terminated. The slight jouncing of his buggy rocks him back to torpid wakefulness, and just in time to witness all his hopes and dreams solidify into the shape of a well-worn suit of fur. V___ gives an elaborate gasp and leans down to speak in his ear: “Y___, look! *Look who it is!*” All sleep leaves him in this instant, as his eyes focus and he sees who is mere feet away from him. There, wading in a pool of nearby children, is none other than Plato, fiercely loyal pup companion to Ignatius Shrew, and the far superior character as far as Y___ is concerned. An ecstatic grin splits open and shatters his exhaustion. For a moment, he does nothing but clap his hands. V___ undoes a clasp and leads him out into the open, taking him by the hand to meet the superstar.

Without a word, the rest of us advance upon the scene, cameras in hand, a priming of digital flashes and autofocus to capture every fleeting moment of his conference. Within minutes, it is Y___’s turn to interact, the costume character handler keeping up a constant commentary of narration, suggestion, and kindly urging to indulge. Plato takes a knee, bringing a massive lumpy head to Y___’s eye level. The child steps back ever so slightly with uncertainty, still beaming. He has his hands clenched close to his chest, hesitant but willing to entertain the behest of six adults all egging him on from behind their various recording devices. The first seven hundred stills depict Y___, smiling from ear to ear, his eyes trained sheepishly on Mommy, who exists just out-of-shot. Then, for the next eight hundred and three, Y___ is staring lovingly at Plato from a comfortable distance, just out of reach of outstretched paws, before giving in entirely to his delight and producing one hundred sixteen long exposure blurs from jumping up and down. Now the other children and parents have joined in our cause, and a collective coaxing comes from all around him: “Go on Y___, he wants a hug! Give him a high-five! It’s okay! Touch his nose, he won’t bite!” It is all too much to keep from. The remaining uncertainties evaporate and he launches himself into a full-body hug, enmeshed at last in the plentiful folds of fuzzy dog limbs. The grown-ups swoop in to chronicle the glowing moment, all abuzz with instructions on where to look, how long to

hold it, certain ritual phrases to repeat. This meeting of the minds, this choice encounter with child and ideal is almost *too* saccharine to stomach; I shed no tears, but am gladdened beyond belief, to the point of superlative satisfaction. Y___ is euphoric, and we, the party indirect, are wholly gratified. All other accomplishments pale in comparison by the look on his face. His day is made, our months-long efforts of pain, preparation, and payment have been, in an instant, justified.

After several moments of melted hearts and spines of shivering frisson, Y___ breaks away quite naturally, has decided he has had his fill, and so is scooped into the arms of an accompanying parent and deposited, sleep drunk and reeling, into his stroller for the long ride home. Silent, smiling, exhausted, we follow the natural flow from whence we came, back towards the main gates of Welcome Boulevard. It is only now that we are made all too aware of the physical shortcomings of our feet and arches. One last public address from the omnipresent speakers above us, spoken with utmost care and certitude: “*LAY-DEES AND GENTLE-MEN, BOYSE AND GIRRLS, FROM ALL OF US IN THE WHOLE WHY-UD WURHLD OF WHIM-ZEE... HAVE A MAGICAL NIGHT AND SAFE TRAH-VELLS HO-EM. GOOD EVE-UH-NING, AND WE HOPE TO SEE YOU, SOON.*” The musical score which plays us out is maudlin, haunting— has curious, Pavlovian qualities to the melodramatic reactions it elicits. V___, I believe, is quietly blinking back tears of motherly joy, or perhaps she is merely wiping away the pixie dust that has collected in her eyes. W___ looks haggard, yet bumptious-chested, visibly pleased with the overall behavior of his offspring. V___ and Q___ are arm in arm, one leaning on the other, resting assured, I can assume, in the confidence that they have done their very best as guides, as relations, as veteran pursuants of the Full Whimsey Experience. It has been, after all, exactly that. The itinerary has been very nearly crossed off in its entirety, and what little remains could never have been as significant as that which we’ve accomplished.

EPILOGUE

The calm, cool complacency of modern flight is all around us, and, once again, I am subjected to several hours of nothing better to do than to sit upright and reflect. My notebook is out, laying flat across the seatback tray, struggling for my attention as focus is routinely pulled towards an elderly hand which just so barely holds its sloshing drink steady. This neighboring cup, it exists well within spilling distance of my thigh, yet I forge on with my primary task, the insistence of aloof penstrokes double-dog daring a sudden wetness to occur.

THINGS I KNOW OF WHIMSEY AFTER HAVING GONE:

- Whimsey Corporation prides itself on its meticulous upkeep. The systematic removal of unwanted waste is peerless, unparalleled. Not once did I see a single scrap of trash on the streets of any of its parks. No wind-blown piles of wrappers against a curb, or receipt stubs fluttering against park benches, or food crumbs speckled around a public waste bin. Naturally, I saw a micronation's worth of wrappers, refuse, and folderol *in the hands* of passersby, saw their myriad fists lazily unclench to loose unwanted bits of packaging or detritus whenever they thought no one was watching, but never once did I see the sedentary *aftermath* of such heinous crimes. It was as if all unwanted bits and bobs evaporated the instant they left the consumer, routinely swallowed into miniature black holes in the blink of an eye. I saw plenty of sanitation workers—droves and droves of them—walking briskly from one end of a throng to the other, dust pans and garbage pails in hand, but never once did I see them *in action*, in the unsightly throes of actually stooping over and collecting, or sweeping messes aside. This, I am now convinced, is where the real magic of the parks comes into play, and I suppose much of it is in large part because...

- The Whole Wide World of Ulysses Whimsey is built upon an enormous subterranean system of service tunnels; a kind of utility catacombs. These underground corridors act

as the unseen means of transportation for hundreds of park laborers, from costumed characters to food services to emergency units. The various portals of entry and exit are generally concealed behind movable walls or ornamentation, and the entire system is closely guarded from general view. Their behind-the-scenes nature is very much a point of interest for seasoned park-goers “in the know,” and as photography underneath is **STRICTLY PROHIBITED**, documentation of their existence is limited to only a scant handful of illicit snaps, covertly circulated around the World Wide Internet via some of the “less-than-authorized” fan web-sites. It was only after much cajoling that V____ very begrudgingly shared with me one such shred of pictorial evidence: a gloomy, grainy composition of monstrous exhaust and electrical pipes in the foreground, a blurred figure with shrew ears lurking in the distance near a dim source of artificial light. I was instantly enthralled; it looked like at any minute a scene from a slasher flick could break out. V____ would not say who had taken the picture.

- Not a single Whimsey employee was witnessed unhappy. Flustered, perhaps. Bewildered, at times, but nothing so far as sour-faced, and *never* disagreeable. Each and every performer, whether center stage or back-up dancer, had nothing but a beaming smile plastered across their face. The waiters and waitresses, the float drivers, the ticket takers, the photographers, the queue enforcers, the cashiers, the restroom restockers, the costume character wranglers, the servicemen, the nurses, the greeters, the guides, the engineers, the security guards. All of them appeared concerned not only for the safety and well-being of their guests, but personally responsible for each guest’s express enjoyment in the day. The surfeit of goodwill was dizzying, intoxicating—and terribly addictive—as I began to wonder what I had done wrong after the woman at the airline check-in desk treated me as though I had murdered her dog.

- It will take some time to recuperate from this trip. The Whole Wide World no longer revolves around me. Come Monday, I will be back into the natural rhythm of things, the general schedule, the almighty Itinerary of Life where people react accordingly and there

will be both the good and the bad to engage in. Doubtless, this has been a thrilling ride, an edifying experience, a fascinating study into the various shades of human amusement, and, like all things, it has come and it has gone. We must be mindful to store the remaining mental remnants as priceless memories, bringing them out from time to time to re-examine them with shades of hindsight, to cherish them privately, to parade them about for the entertainment others, to quietly contemplate or publicly repent upon the many facets that have transpired. I have spent much in the way of time and funds and energy to capture these fluttery things, and now I will go to work to cement them into sense.