

A Quiet Evening at Home with the Children

It's uncanny how things pile up on a man when the little woman is away

by Jamie Buckingham



I haven't been able to figure out why it is that my wife always picks the night of her class meeting to serve us the biggest supper of the week. Nor why it is that I am invariably left with the dishes.

In our house we have a system called the Buckingham Demerit System, whereby each of the five children has certain assigned duties that must be performed. These duties, among other things, include clearing the table, washing and drying dishes, sweeping the kitchen floor.

However, certain things supersede these tasks—and eating everything on your plate is one of them.

On the particular night in question—the night of the large supper and the class meeting—we ran into another problem. Large, green, English peas.

No one likes them. That is, no one but my wife. Her explanation to our scowling looks was that occasionally she likes to fix something that she likes. And with that she left for the class meeting. I was left with a sinkful of greasy pans; a table full of dirty dishes; four plates scraped clean, except for the serving of English peas which remained untouched; and the faces of four unhappy children.

As soon as the door closed behind my wife, I benevolently announced that if the children would eat their peas I would wash the dishes. More scowls.

Then I firmly announced that if they didn't eat their peas they could go straight to bed.

Seven-year-old Timmy took one more look at that mountain of green balls on his plate and got up and left the room, head down, bottom lip poked out. In a moment he was back with his pajamas on. He tried once more, "Do I have to eat them all?"

"All!" I sternly replied. He took one more look and said with resignation, "Then good night, Daddy," and left.

He Had a Suspicion

I got up and started on the dishes. In just a moment, ten-year-old Robin announced she was through. She handed me her clean plate and hastily left the room. I'm not normally suspicious of my daughter, but something prodded me to follow her as she walked down the hall. I found her in the bathroom with an empty napkin in her hand. Peering into the toilet, I saw floating on top of the water like a navy arrayed for battle—the peas.

Robin was assigned to her bed, also.

Back in the kitchen the contest was gaining momentum. Bruce had counted his peas and found he had six more than Bonnie. I ruled that he could leave six peas on his plate.

I busied myself with washing dishes; and in a moment, I heard a great coughing and gagging from Bonnie, accompanied by Bruce's wilder laughter.

I rushed to the table and pounded Bonnie on the back. She was close to strangling. I shouted for an explana-

tion. Bruce quit laughing long enough to explain that Bonnie was trying to swallow her peas one at a time—whole—so she wouldn't have to chew them up. One had gone down the wrong way.

"Here," said Bruce, "let me show you how to do it." And with that, he placed a pea on the back side of his tongue, like a capsule, and gulped it down with milk.

"Aghhhh!" he choked. And sprayed milk all over the table. The pesky pea dislodged and flew across the table into Bonnie's plate—where it found a resting place among its brothers.

Bonnie began to scream. Now she couldn't eat her peas, because she didn't know which one Bruce had spit in her plate. I was about to suggest that Bruce divide his peas with her when he turned over his milk and most of the peas floated over the edge onto the floor.

I gave up. Somehow these four children had not only conned me into doing the dishes, but had completed supper without eating a single pea.

I went in and got Timmy and Robin out of bed. No sense in punishing them when the others got away scot-free for the same crime.

The children watched Batman while I finished the dishes and mopped and swept the floor. I don't remember which child it was that prayed during our prayertime before bed, "Lord make little Sandy glad she's away visiting friends where she doesn't have to eat peas."

And I added, "Or do the dishes." ■