

Unit 3 Home Learning Week 11

Friday - Reading

Reading for Pleasure. Starting a new novel

Romans On The Rampage.

Chapters 9 and 10

Please read and enjoy!

THE KING OF COMEDY

Jeremy STRONG

ROMANS

on the

RAMPAGE!



Contents

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Jeremy Strong once worked in a bakery, putting the jam into three thousand doughnuts every night. Now he puts the jam in stories instead, which he finds much more exciting. At the age of three, he fell out of a first-floor bedroom window and landed on his head. His mother says that this damaged him for the rest of his life and refuses to take any responsibility. He loves writing stories because he says it is ‘the only time you alone have complete control and can make anything happen’. His ambition is to make you laugh (or at least snuffle). Jeremy Strong lives near Bath with his wife, Gillie, three cats and a flying cow.

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ARE YOU FEELING SILLY ENOUGH TO READ MORE?

THE BEAK SPEAKS

BEWARE! KILLER TOMATOES

CHICKEN SCHOOL

DINOSAUR POX

GIANT JIM AND THE HURRICANE

KRAZY KOW SAVES THE WORLD – WELL, ALMOST

THERE'S A PHARAOH IN OUR BATH!

JEREMY STRONG'S LAUGH-YOUR-SOCKS-OFF JOKE BOOK

JEREMY STRONG'S LAUGH-YOUR-SOCKS-OFF EVEN MORE JOKE BOOK

The Hundred-Mile-An-Hour Dog series

THE HUNDRED-MILE-AN-HOUR DOG

CHRISTMAS CHAOS FOR THE HUNDRED-MILE-AN-HOUR DOG

LOST! THE HUNDRED-MILE-AN-HOUR DOG

THE HUNDRED-MILE-AN-HOUR DOG GOES FOR GOLD

My Brother's Famous Bottom series

MY BROTHER'S FAMOUS BOTTOM

MY BROTHER'S HOT CROSS BOTTOM

MY BROTHER'S FAMOUS BOTTOM GETS PINCHED

MY BROTHER'S FAMOUS BOTTOM GOES CAMPING

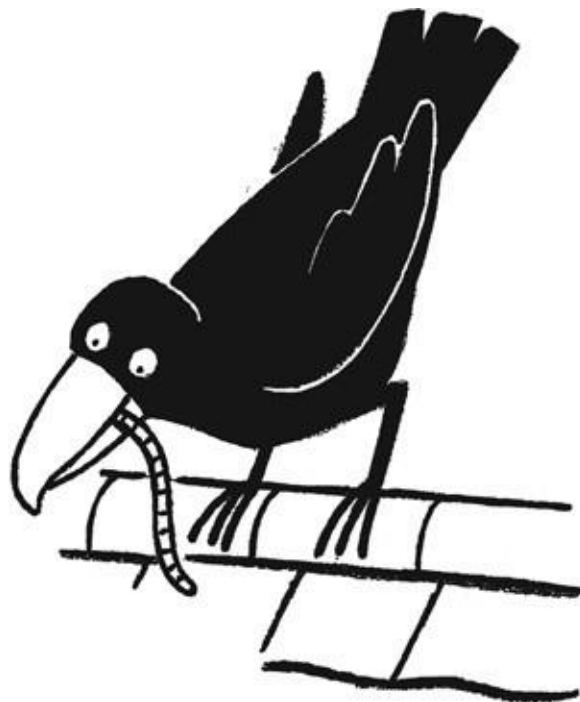


9. Life Starts Throwing Stuff

But life goes on. That's a saying we ravens have: 'Life goes on.' We're stoical creatures, see?

Whaddya mean, you don't see at all? Oh, you don't know what 'stoical' means, do you? Like I said before, GO TO SCHOOL! But back to being stoical. It means, quite simply, that we take things as they come – the good, the bad and the in-between. Life tends to throw things at you sometimes and it doesn't always throw things that are nice. Sometimes it throws young lads into pools and sticks goldfish in their ears. **Kraaarrk!** *Toc-toc-toc.*

Anyhow, today I was having a lovely time going through one of my hidey-holes. Us ravens are always stashing our stuff away somewhere. I've got hiding places all over the place: under rugs, behind chests and so on. So, I was enjoying myself no end, putting stuff in, taking stuff out, putting it back in again. I even found a small lump of dead rat stashed away. That was a tasty surprise. So there I was, up on the roof chewing away on the old rodent when I spotted what looked like a ghost with itching powder down the back of its neck hiccuping across the road at high speed and heading for the house opposite.



I hastily rammed what was left of the rat under a roof tile and floated across the road myself.

‘Your *pater* won’t be very pleased,’ I told the ghost.

The ghost threw back his sheet angrily. ‘How did you know it was me?’ Perilus asked.



I sighed. Sometimes it’s not much fun being as wise and world-weary as me. ‘I could just tell,’ I told him. ‘It’s the way you walk.’

‘I’ve got to help Scorcha,’ Perilus declared. ‘It’s his big day tomorrow. He’s going to race and I’ve got to help him prepare. He’s got some new way of practising.’

‘I see. Does that mean you’ll be borrowin’ Crabbus’s goat again? Is that sensible?’

‘They’re out. I saw them go. Scorcha is getting the goats already.’

That much was true. I could hear an almighty clamour of bleating and blathering going on and I hoped Crabbus and Septicaemia were well out of earshot. Then Scorcha himself appeared, grinning from ear to ear.

‘I’ve got them!’ he cried. ‘Time for a final practice. Croakbag, *salve!*’

(*Salve*. ‘Hello.’ Try and remember. ‘Goodbye’ is *vale*. Aren’t you coming on well?)

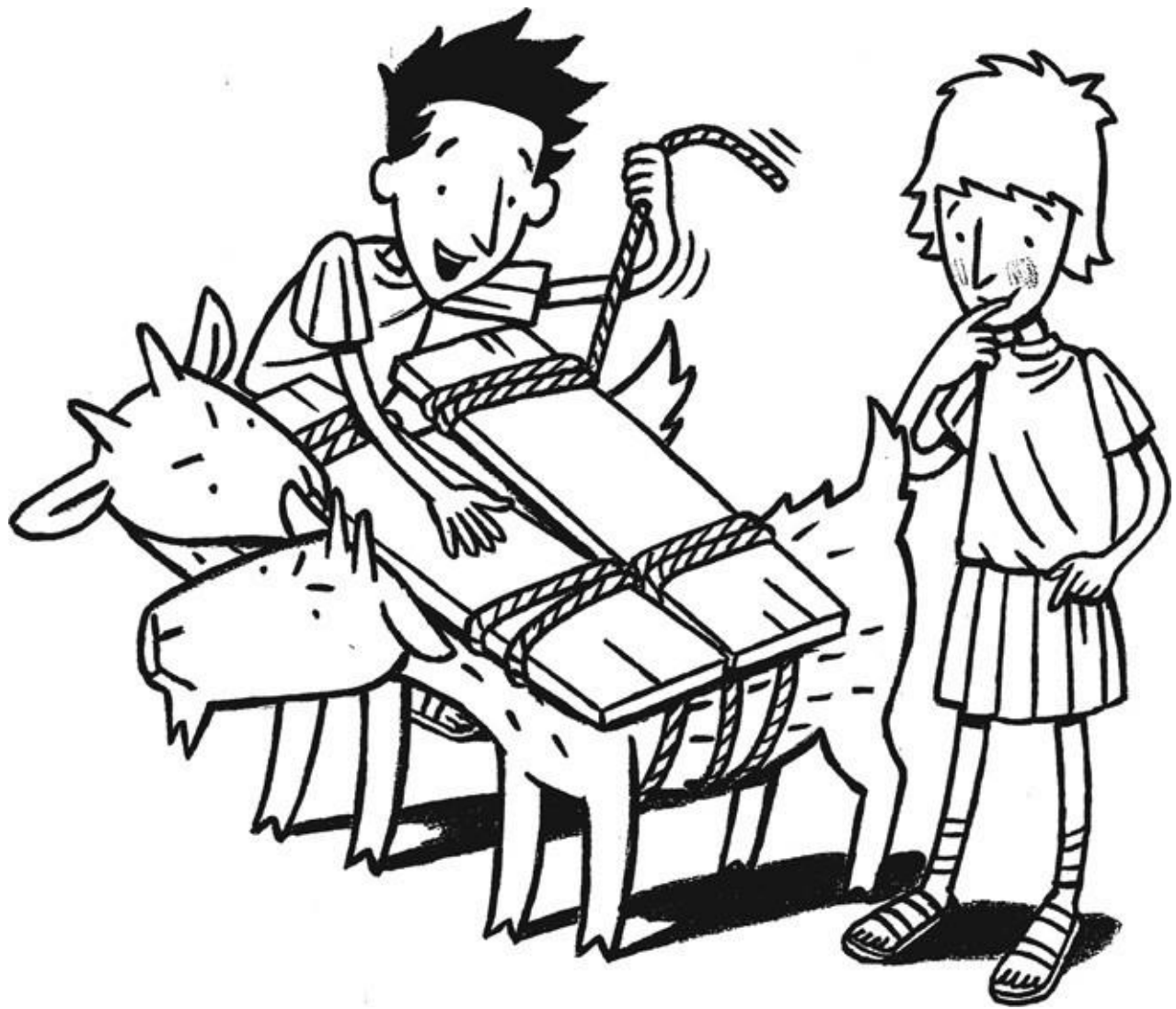
Scorcha grinned at me. ‘How are you doing? Have you come to watch?’

‘I wouldn’t miss it for the world.’



‘Good. I’ve got a great plan. Perilus, help me with these two planks. We’re going to tie them across the goats.’

I studied the goats carefully. They were now joined together by two short planks lying across their backs. I tried as hard as I could, but I failed to see how a pair of goats with two planks was going to help Scorcha win his place in the Green Team.



Scorcha tightened the ropes holding the planks in place. ‘Just think, by this time tomorrow I could be a fully paid-up member of the Green Team, with a real chariot and real horses, thundering round the ring at the Circus Maximus. It would be a dream come true.’

‘Indeed,’ I said. ‘But what is this new contraption of yours?’

‘Aha! Brilliant, isn’t it? You see I had this idea in the night.’

‘You haven’t been talkin’ to Maddasbananus, have you? You do realize that some of his ideas are, well, unusual?’ I suggested.

‘No, no. This came to me in a dream. It’s brilliant. You see chariot racing is so much about balance.’

‘Balance?’ I repeated, and I remembered Perilus walking on the washing line.

‘Yes. The track is rough. The chariot gets thrown all over the place so what I’ve tried to do here is to imitate the roughness of the road.’

‘Ah! So you’re tryin’ to get the goats to throw you all over the place?’ Light was dawning in my brain, like the sun rising from the obscuring mist of the early morn, allowing its radiant beams to burst forth upon the world. Oh, I really should be a poet.

‘Exactly, and I must keep my balance while standing on these planks. That’s the trick of it. If I can stay on my feet while these giddy goats do their best to throw me to the ground, then riding a proper racing chariot will be easy.’

Perilus grinned at me. 'Isn't Scorcha brilliant!'

Hmmm. I can't say I was completely convinced about Scorcha's brilliance or the goat-balancing idea, but one thing was quite obvious: Scorcha was going to go for it and go for it he did.

I have never seen so much dust. Scorcha and the goats set off at breakneck speed, with the planks bouncing about like two crocodiles having a wrestling match.



'I am the champion!' Scorcha grinned back over his shoulder at us as he lurched from one foot to another, standing upright on the planks while the two goats carried on thundering round and round, faster and faster. It was a blur of frantic fur, flapping tongues and one wildly whooping, would-be charioteer. Huge clouds of dirt and grit rose from beneath the pounding hooves of the two goats and settled on all the washing that had just been hung out to dry by The Ghastlies' slave, Putuponn.

The poor girl screamed with dismay. 'NOOOOOO! MY WASHING!'

She came tearing out to try and rescue it all and ran right across the path of Scorcha's thundering plank-tank. He yelled in horror, swerved violently to avoid her and just missed the terrified girl. Unfortunately, Scorcha was now heading straight for The Ghastlies' home at high goat-speed, with no time to stop. He plunged headlong through the front door that had been left half open by the slave. I covered my ears.

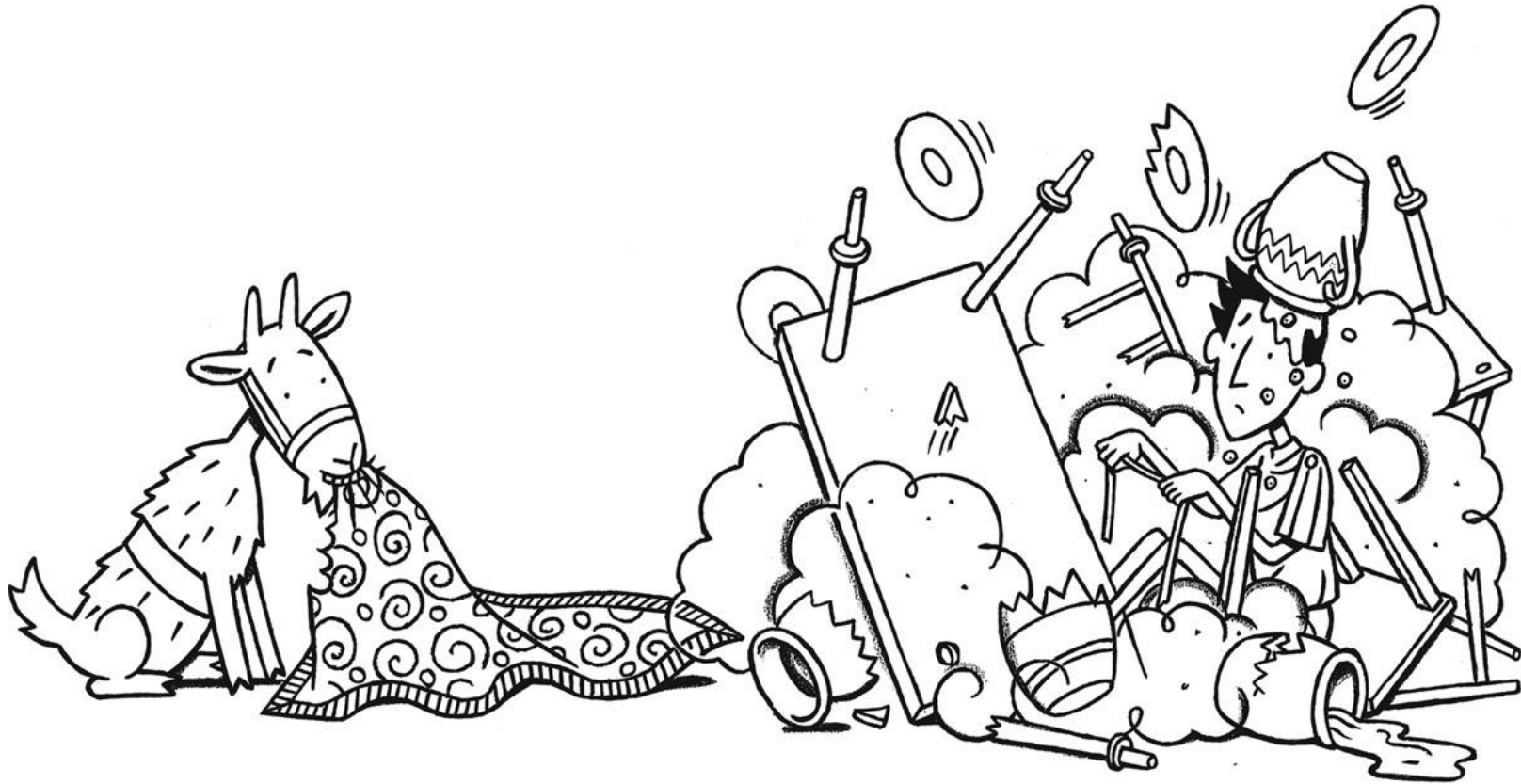
KERRUNCH! BANGG!

The door came off its splintered hinges.

SKRUNNKK!! OW! THUDDD!! OUCH! OOH! SPLANNGG!

Assorted bits of broken furniture came tumbling out through the door and into the yard. Just as the dust began to settle, who should come yelling into the yard, waving their arms as if it was the end of world? Crabbus and Septicaemia, The Ghastlies themselves.

Poor Scorcha. There was no escape this time. Crabbus found the young charioteer half buried beneath a broken table, two chairs and a pile of smashed pottery, including the olive jar. Scorcha had olives and olive oil plastered all over his head and chest. Meanwhile, Trendia's white goat, quite unharmed by it all, was busily eating Septicaemia's best rug.



Crabbus's eyes narrowed to tiny slits and a joyless smile spread across his thin lips. 'This time you're for it, Scorcha. It's the magistrate for you and then JAIL.'

Oh dear and, as I keep saying, life throws things at you, sometimes quite literally. First it was a weaving machine. Then it was an upside-down Perilus. Now it was two goats, two planks, a charioteer and a jug-load of olives. **Kraaarrk!** Nice one, Scorcha!



10. Just Big Goats!

The yard over the road was empty and silent apart from the odd bellow from Crabbus as he yelled at Putuponn. It seemed impossible for him to ask the poor girl to do anything without roaring at her.

‘FETCH THE WATER!’

‘IT’S TOO HOT!’

‘IT’S TOO COLD!’

‘TELL THAT STUPID BIRD TO STOP STARING AT ME!’

‘THAT BIRD’S JUST DROPPED A DOO-DOO ON MY HEAD!’

‘DON’T YOU DARE LAUGH AT ME, GIRL! GET ME A RAG!’



Oh dear, did I drop a doo-doo? Would I drop a doo-doo? Of course I would! Give us a biscuit. Give us fifty biscuits! **Kraarrk!** *Toc-toc-toc-toc.*

But *tempus fugit* and it was almost time for the chariot racing. (*Tempus fugit* – yes, indeed, it’s the old Latin again and it simply means ‘Time flies’, and so do ravens. *Corvus fugit*, hurr hurr.)

This was Scorcha’s **BIG DAY** and he was nowhere to be seen. Where was the lad? I was just preening my primaries (that is to say the long feathers on the ends of my wings) when I heard a terrible screeching sound approaching fast. Was it the emergency Rome fire brigade dashing to a conflagration on all six legs, that is to say three men pulling a hose and water cart? Was it Hysteria perhaps, I hear you ask?

Whaddya mean, you didn't ask? It doesn't matter, my question was rhetorical and, if you don't know what that means, you know where you can go, don't you? TO THE DICTIONARY! Hurr hurr hurr. Nice one, Croakbag, even if I say so myself. Which I do.

So, no firemen and no Hysteria. You'll never guess – it was Perilus! The boy daredevil himself! The boy who chases Scorcha round and round at breakneck speed and at great threat to his life. The boy who likes to hang upside down from his bedroom window. There he was, rushing towards me IN TEARS! Great gushing floods of them. Cascades! Torrents! Entire waterfalls!

'SCORCHA'S BEEN PUT IN JAIL!' sobbed Perilus. 'It's the day of his race, his big chance, and Crabbus has had him taken to JAIL!' He threw himself in a blubbering heap on the ground at my feet.



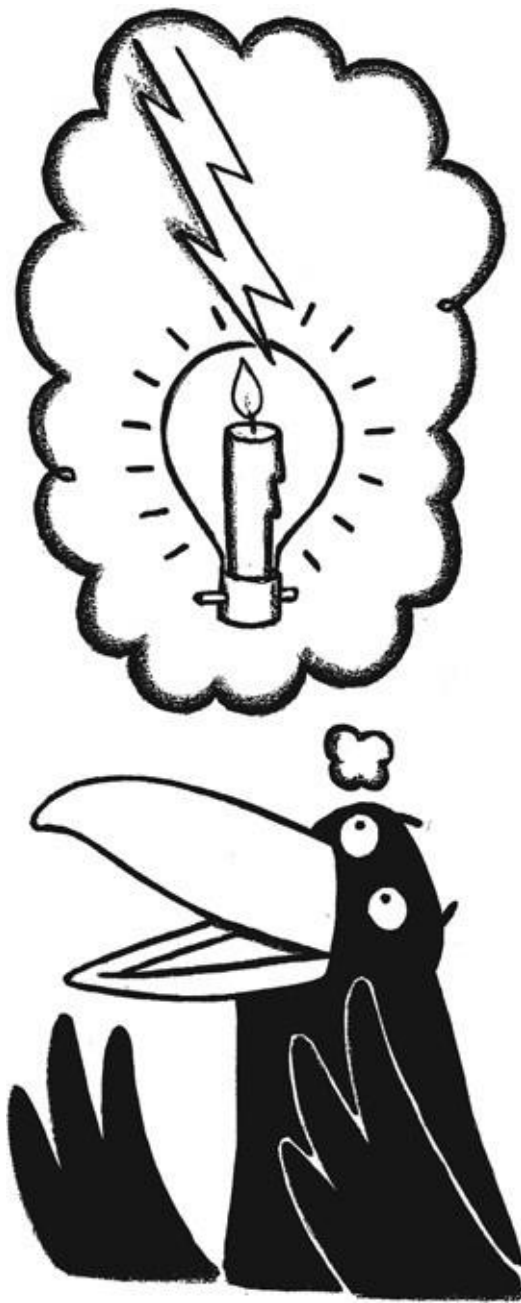
My eyes narrowed. Those wretched Ghastlies! They must have been to the magistrate and told him about Scorcha smashing up their home. I gazed down at the trembling young lad at my feet and considered the situation. It was deeply troubling. This called for the biggest, brightest, best brain in Rome. In other words, *CORVUS BRAINUS GIGANTICUS*! And in other, other words – me!

There are many things a raven can do. I can soar like an eagle in the brilliant blue azure of a Roman sky. I can turn my head upside down and get my hooter jammed under a door. I can scratch my head with one claw. (Go on, you try and do that, hurr hurr.) I can talk, even better than you sometimes. But sadly I cannot get people out of jail, nor do I know of anyone who can, certainly not quickly enough for Scorcha to make his race. Therefore, *ipso facto*, we had a problem. (*Ipsa facto*. It's actual Latin again. It sort of means 'by the fact', though it's easier to think of it as meaning 'therefore'.)

Whaddya mean, I've already used 'therefore' once and *ergo* I can't say it twice? Whaddya mean, I'm saying 'therefore, therefore?' Listen, who's telling this story? I am, that's who. So I'd be most pleased if YOU STUCK YOUR HEAD IN THE BREAD OVEN! Thank you. Toasted togas! You try to educate someone and all they can do is pick holes. Get over it!

Ahem. I shall continue. I looked down upon the sobbing creature and, wonder of wonders, a little thought began to grow in my feathery, black-as-black noddle. The brain is a wonderful thing and mine, of course, is particularly wonderful and intricate in its performance.

'Perilus,' I said, 'I do believe you have given me an idea.'



Perilus shot upright and wiped his eyes with his fists. ‘You’re going to save Scorcha?’

‘No,’ I croaked. ‘You’re goin’ to save Scorcha.’

‘Me? But how? I’m eleven. I’m only a boy.’

‘Perilus, you are a boy with a man’s heart – a man’s heart for adventure,’ I told him. ‘What is more, you are a boy who is tall for his age, almost as tall as Scorcha. Not only that, you are a would-be charioteer, a boy who can handle a chariot at high speed, almost as well as Scorcha.’

I stopped clacking, cocked my head on one side and fixed Perilus with one beady, glittering, INTELLIGENT eye.

His mouth fell open. His eyes widened. ‘You want me to take Scorcha’s place in the race?’ he whispered. ‘But I could never – horses! Horses, Croakbag! I’ve never driven horses! And, and, and they’d see I’m not Scorcha. One look at my face! No. No, it’s no good, I can’t do it – it won’t work!’

‘In that case, all is lost,’ I declared, rather philosophically I felt. ‘Scorcha won’t race and he’ll never get his place with the Greens. Unless –’ I began and Perilus lifted his head hopefully – ‘unless you just so happen to be wearin’ all Scorcha’s charioteerin’ gear, which is still hangin’ up in his

room. Your head will be mostly hidden by his helmet. Keep your chin down and nobody will realize you're not Scorcha, the greatest charioteer ever.'

Perilus was definitely feeling the weight of destiny now because he was holding his own head in his hands. 'The horses!' he repeated over and over again.

I sighed. 'Just think of the horses as large goats. Very large goats. That's all you have to do! They're horses. They like gallopin' about. They won't even notice you're not Scorcha. I mean, horses are not bright creatures, not like us ravens.'

Perilus got to his feet. He clenched his fists at his sides and stared back at me with grim determination written right across his face. (Not literally, obviously. It's just an expression.)

'Right!' he declared. 'I'll do it! I'll take Scorcha's place and I'll win the race! They're just big goats, aren't they, Croakbag?'

'Yeah,' I nodded. 'Horses! Easy-peasy. Just big goats. Go for it, my son – and may this biscuit go with you. **Kraaarrk!**'





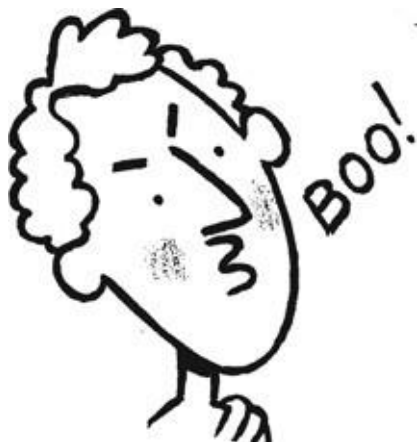
11. Wedding Presents?

The villa had become rather gloomy that morning. Outside, people were rushing past on their way to the Circus Maximus for the races. They were chatting and yelling at each other.

‘Up the Blues! Blues are best!’



‘You’ve got to be joking. Blues don’t have a clue!
Yellows are the fellows!’



And so on. But everyone in the villa now knew that Scorcha was in prison, thanks to The Ghastlies, Crabbus and Septicaemia. Perilus was a nervous wreck, trying to big himself up for his Scorcha impersonation. Krysis was going round banging his fists against his skull as if some dreadful

problem was coiling itself round him like a monstrous python. As for Flavia and Hysteria, they were clutching at each other and sobbing wildly over Scorcha's fate.



'I shall never see him again!' Hysteria wailed. 'I shall wither away and die from a broken heart!' And so on. Die from a broken heart? Unlikely, I thought. She'd drown in her own tears first.

I was about to point this out when I happened to notice Maddasbananus across the road. I was, in fact, at that moment very busy at my morning preening and had my head stuffed halfway up my left wingpit – that's armpit to you humans. I just caught sight of Maddasbananus as he went across the yard towards Trendia's house, dragging some strange bit of wooden machinery with him. This definitely required investigation, so I flapped over to see what was going on.

'It's my latest invention,' Maddasbananus said, his face wreathed in smiles. 'I've made it for Trendia. It's a sewing machine.'

'Really? A sewing machine? What does that do?'

'It sews,' Maddasbananus told me.

Hmmm. I fixed the inventor with my most glittering, piercing eye (that's the left one, by the way) and told him that somehow I had already managed to work that bit out since the clue was in the name. *Ergo*, I required to know more.

'Oh,' he said. 'Well, at the moment Trendia does all her stitching by hand. It takes a long time. This machine will stitch things faster – twenty times faster. The cloth goes in here. The thread passes through this needle. Trendia turns this handle and the needle goes up and down, putting the thread in the material. It's my brilliant idea and it's going to make me a fortune. But now I'm giving it to

Trendia and she will be so impressed she'll fall madly in love with me and we'll get married and live happily ever after while I make sewing machines for the rest of the world.'

Of course! I should have worked it out before. Maddasbananus was probably the only person, apart from The Ghastlies, who liked the idea of Scorcha going to jail, because if Scorcha was in jail he wouldn't be a rival for Trendia's attention. I couldn't blame Maddasbananus for taking advantage of Scorcha not being there. I would have done the same myself. Hurr hurr hurr!

However, I wanted to see what Trendia would do with this amazing machine so I went along with the inventor.

Trendia answered her door, looking both shocked and worried. 'They've put Scorcha in jail,' she told us breathlessly.

'Yes,' began Maddasbananus, rather too excitedly, 'but I've brought you a sewing machine.'

'Poor Scorcha. Do you think he's all right?' Trendia wasn't even looking at Maddasbananus.

'It makes clothes much more quickly,' persisted the desperate inventor, with rather less excitement.

'What will he have to eat in jail? Has anyone taken some food for him?' Trendia wrung her hands.

'Perhaps I could stuff a dormouse for him. Do you think he likes stuffed dormice?'

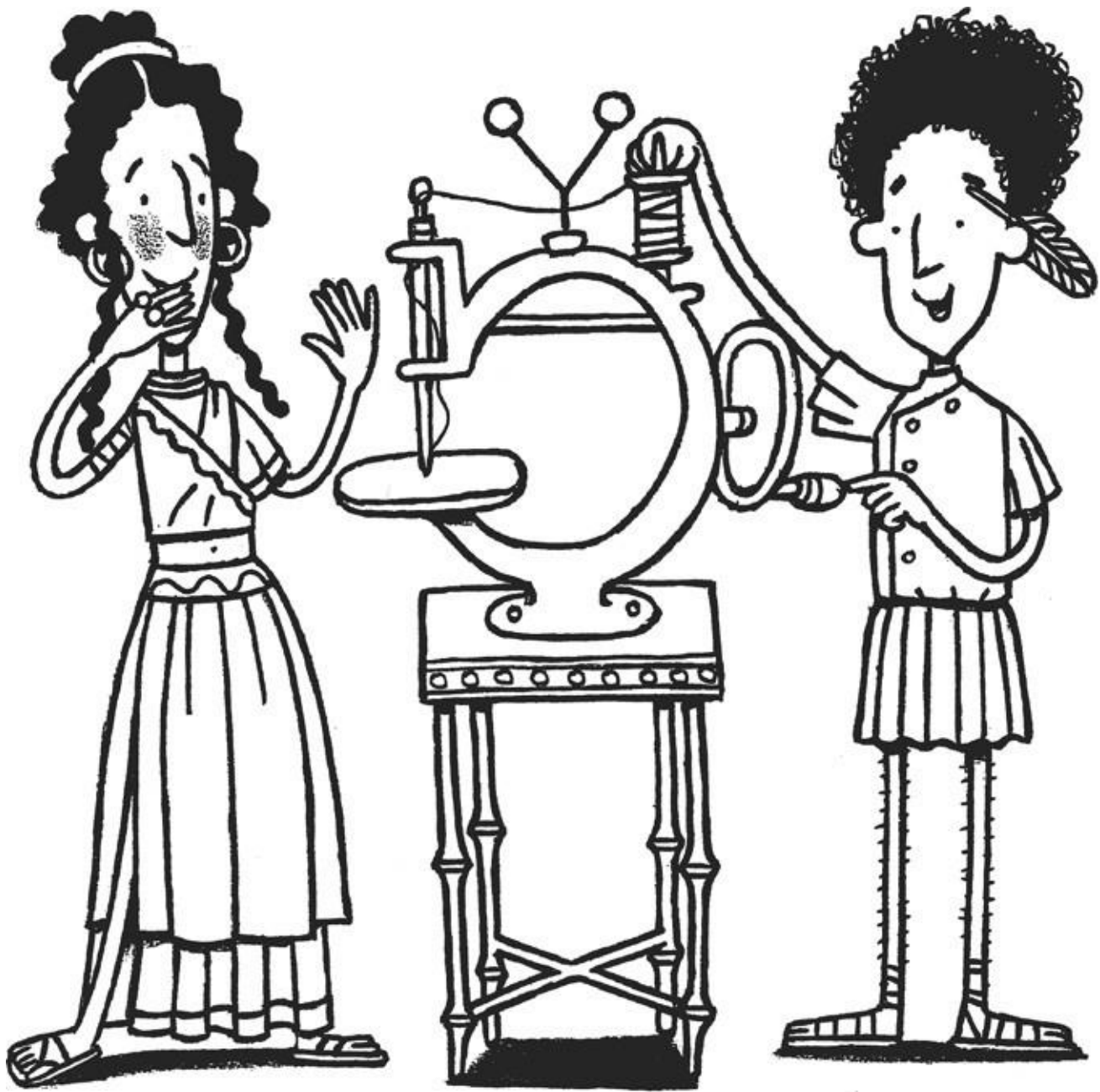
'It's a sewing machine,' Maddasbananus repeated, and excitement had now turned into desperation.

'It sews. It will help you. I made it for you.'

'I don't think they have any washing facilities in jail. Poor Scorcha. He'll start getting smelly if he doesn't wash. I'll stuff a dormouse and take some soap as well.'

Maddasbananus perked up. 'Actually, we haven't invented soap yet,' he pointed out.

At last Trendia looked at Maddasbananus and I was astonished. Trendia began to BLUSH. Oho, I thought, there is more to this than I realized. I'm beginning to think that maybe Trendia likes Maddasbananus. She's just so shy she doesn't know what to do about it. Ah! Poor things! *Toc-toc-toc*.



I wondered if there was anything I could do to help and for a moment I considered giving both of them some biscuits I had stashed away or a bit of my dead squirrel to share, but in the end I decided it wasn't appropriate. Wedding presents could come later.

Now that he had Trendia's attention, Maddasbananus began explaining his wonderful invention to her all over again. Her eyes lit up at last. 'For me?' she exclaimed.

It was Maddasbananus's turn to blush and he did – like a bloomin' rose. Sweet! He pulled the machine into Trendia's house and showed her how to thread the needle and where to put the dress she was making.

'It will get it done in no time!' Maddasbananus declared proudly. 'Just turn the handle, slowly at first, then faster.'

Trendia did as she was told and soon the dress was whizzing through the machine and the needle was going up and down so fast my eyes couldn't watch it any longer. Amazing!

There it was. The dress was finished, stitched in a flash.

‘It’s brilliant!’ declared Trendia, jumping up and planting a kiss on Maddasbananus’s surprised and delighted cheek. She pulled the new dress from the machine, held it up and, oh dear, the whole thing fell apart.



‘Hmmm,’ I muttered. ‘I’m not sure anyone would want to wear that.’

Maddasbananus’s face turned as white as a toga. ‘NO! WHY? WHY?’

Trendia was looking at the two pieces of material. ‘There’s only stitching on one side,’ she said, giving the inventor a quizzical glance.

‘So? I don’t understand,’ Maddasbananus answered.

Trendia giggled. ‘You don’t know much about sewing, do you? You have to have stitching on both sides otherwise the thread comes out. The thread goes through the material, turns round and comes back out from another hole. Your machine puts the thread in the material and then takes it straight out again so it doesn’t stay in there and hold everything together.’

Maddasbananus was blushing again, but this time it was because he was so embarrassed, poor man. Once again, his invention had failed and he’d let himself down.

Trendia laid a hand on his arm. ‘It’s all right,’ she said softly. ‘It was a lovely idea and so kind of you to make it for me.’

‘I’m such an IDIOT!’ Maddasbananus gave the sewing machine a mighty kick. ‘OW!’ He staggered back into the yard and hopped away, back to his inventing room.

I was about to say something to Trendia about Maddasbananus being such a nice chap and quite handsome in an odd kind of way when I became aware of a lot of noise coming from my villa. So I

left Trendia staring at the useless sewing machine and flapped back across the road, trying to avoid the chanting crowd heading for the Circus Maximus.

Flavia was in a panic, rushing from room to room with Fussia and Flippus Floppus trailing after her, and they were all shouting the same thing.



‘Perilus!’ (That was Flavia.)



‘Perilus!’ (That was Flippus Floppus.)



‘Perilus!’ (That was Fussia.)

See? I told you they were all shouting the same thing.

Whaddya mean, you knew that without being told? I AM telling you. I said it like that for effect.

Don’t you know anything about storytelling? Obviously not.

But we must hurry on because *tempus* is *fugitting* all over the place now. (Remember that one? I do hope so.) Perilus had completely disappeared from the villa and only I knew where he’d gone – and I’m NOT TELLING! Hurr, hurr! Give us a biscuit. **Kraaarrk!**