

Unit 3 Home Learning Week 11

Monday - Reading

Reading for Pleasure. Starting a new novel

Romans On The Rampage.

Chapters 5 and 6

Please read and enjoy!

THE KING OF COMEDY

Jeremy STRONG

ROMANS

on the

RAMPAGE!



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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

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MY BROTHER'S HOT CROSS BOTTOM

MY BROTHER'S FAMOUS BOTTOM GETS PINCHED

MY BROTHER'S FAMOUS BOTTOM GOES CAMPING



5. Who Wants Lumpy Milk?

There's something amiss. Krysis has got problems. He keeps disappearing from the house and he's looking worried. There's something bothering him, but he won't let on what it is. He tells Flavia he's got a big workload at the moment, but most of this so-called workload seems to take place in one or other of the local taverns. **Kraaarrrk!** I know that because I use the taverns a lot myself when I'm on fly-about. That's when I head off to see what's what and where's where and who's who, if you get my meaning. Plus, people are always dropping bits of food all over the place so I can zip down and grab something tasty, like half a stuffed dormouse.

Whaddya mean, that's disgusting? There's nothing tastier than stuffed dormice and the Romans love them. Anyhow, what did YOU have for lunch, eh? Chicken? Tuna? What's the difference? You think dormice are cute? **SO ARE CHICKENS!** Well, they were until you ate them, you brute. Unless you're a vegetarian, of course, and even that just means you kill vegetables instead **WHICH IS EVEN WORSE.** At least animals can run away. Vegetables just sit there, plonked in the earth. No chance of escape at all. Now that **IS** what I call **CRUEL.** Get over it!

Anyhow, Krysis is worried and I think it's to do with work. After all, he's a very important man. He's the big boss at the Imperial Mint.

Whaddya mean, does he make sweets? Of course he doesn't, worm-brain! The Mint is where all the money is made, and I mean that literally. It's a factory that makes money – coins, cash, ackers, dosh, dough, whatever you like to call it. Making a mint – ever heard that expression? No? Well, you have now. That's where it comes from. The Mint. Krysis is head of it. Imagine being in charge of all that doodly doodah! Shame he can't bring it home with him. *Toc-toc-toc.*



It's a big responsibility and Krysis has to report to the Emperor himself. Anyhow, he's looking well and truly haunted, as if there's a ghost in his toga just when he's trying to be in it himself.

Kraarrk!



Just to add to his worries, his one and only son and heir, namely Perilus the daredevil, keeps disappearing and guess where he's going? To see Scorcha and learn how to be a charioteer. I bet that's giving Krysis a few grey hairs too.

Perilus is desperate to be a charioteer; either that or the god Jupiter, so he told me. There's ambition for you – he wants to be a god.

'You can't be Jupiter,' I said.

'Why not?'

‘Because Jupiter is already Jupiter and he’s King of the Gods. I wouldn’t pick an argument with him if I were you. He’s got a temper and he likes chuckin’ thunderbolts around.’

Perilus pulled a face and told me I’d shattered his dreams so I told him it was better to have his dreams shattered than have his whole body blown to bits by an angry god hurling thunderbolts at him.

‘Yeah, well ...’ he muttered, like eleven-year-olds do. And also when they’re twelve, thirteen, fourteen, *et cetera, et cetera*.

(Did you spot the Latin at the end there? Well done! Go on, have a biscuit! **Kraaarrk!**)

Perilus is spending more and more time with Scorcha. Flavia just lets him get on with it. ‘Boys will be boys,’ she keeps saying, which is bloomin’ obvious if you ask me. I mean, they can’t suddenly be girls, can they? Or giraffes. But that’s Flavia for you, as calm and beautiful as a fluffy white cloud in a blue, blue sky. (I really should be a poet. I could be the first raven poet in the history of the world. *Corvus poeticus romanticus*.)

Scorcha was suggesting that they should go and have some practice races out in the yard.

‘But Trendia only has one goat we can borrow,’ Perilus pointed out.

Scorcha raised his eyebrows several times, making Perilus laugh. ‘Ah, that’s true, but luckily for us Crabbus and his darling Septicaemia are out. They’ve gone shopping in the forum.’ (*Forum* – your actual Latin again. It’s like a market square, but can be used for anything.)

Scorcha ruffled Perilus’s mass of floppy hair. ‘So, while they’re away we can pinch their goat.’

I thought I’d better put in a word or three. ‘There’ll be trouble,’ I warned, fluffing up my feathers for emphasis. (Feather-fluffing is very good for that sort of thing. Take my word for it.)

Scorcha chuckled. ‘Listen to the Voice of Doom, Perilus! Are you scared, Croakbag? Nobody will catch us because YOU, dear raven rascal, are going to be on lookout duty.’

‘Kraaarrk!’

‘Don’t swear,’ laughed Scorcha. ‘You be our watchman and I’ll give you a biscuit.’

‘That’s bribery,’ I snapped, making my beak clack noisily. ‘How many?’

‘Three.’

‘Four. *Toc-toc-toc!*’

‘It’s a deal,’ agreed Scorcha. ‘Keep an eye out for The Ghastlies. I’ll get the goats and young Perilus here can fetch the chariots and harnesses.’

They’re not real chariots of course. These are small practice carts for children, but Scorcha is short and light. Charioteers have to be. (That’s why that puffed-up pudding, Jellus, is such a waste of space!) The carts are made of wood and leather so they’re light and fast, like the real thing.

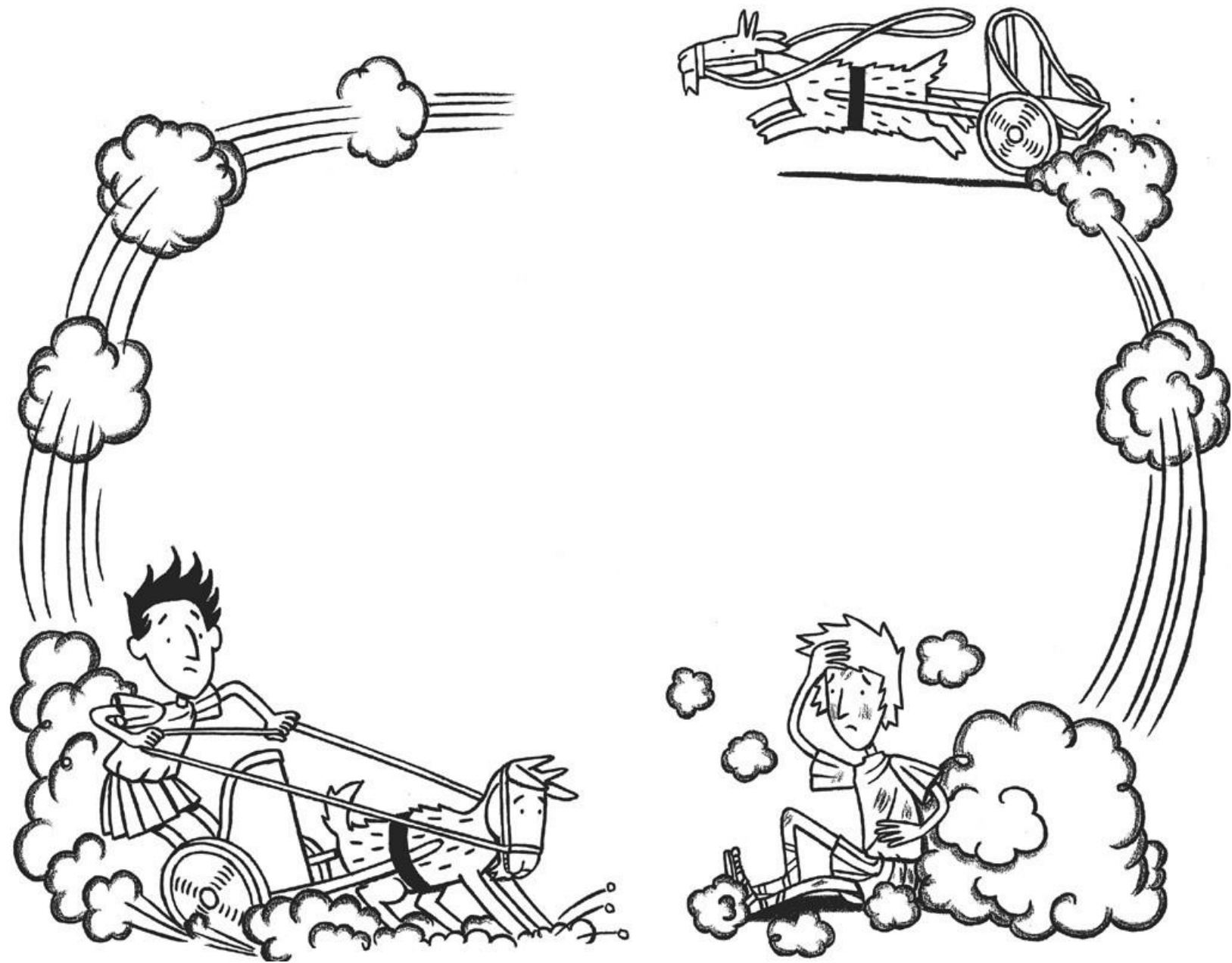
There was a lot of bleating going on behind Crabbus’s place. Scorcha may be a good charioteer, but he’s hopeless at goat-rustling. Nevertheless, he soon reappeared with Trendia’s white goat and Crabbus’s brown one.

Perilus and Scorcha hitched up the carts and climbed in. Scorcha turned to me.

‘You can start us off, Croakbag. Then hop away and watch that road for The Ghastlies.’

I raised one wing in the air and brought it down. The goats stuck out their tongues, made rude noises and they were off. Scorcha let Perilus race on ahead, watching him carefully all the time. They got to the post where there’s a tight U-turn to come back. Perilus went thundering into the corner and

his cart overturned, throwing him to the ground, while the goat and cart went careering ahead. Scorcha immediately pulled up short or he might have run over him.



‘Perilus! Are you OK?’

Perilus nodded, although he was holding his side. ‘I went into the corner too fast.’

‘No, no. You were fine, but lean over hard as you go into it. That keeps the weight on the inside wheel. Don’t stay upright except on the straights.’ He reached down and pulled Perilus to his feet. ‘Try again?’

Perilus nodded. Scorcha collected the goats and walked them back to the start.

‘Hey, Croakbag! Do your wing-thing again,’ he called, so I did and off they went, goats blathering, wheels and hooves raising clouds of dust. Perilus was tearing along. He reached the corner. I was sure he was going to crash again, but he leaned in, like Scorcha had told him, and when he came round the other side I could see him grinning like a maniac. That’s because he is a maniac! He’s a real speedster, that boy; he lives for adventure and risk.

Round and round they went, with Perilus just in front. I knew Scorcha could get past him if he really wanted to, but he was letting Perilus taste victory and why not? I was so busy watching the two

daredevils I almost missed seeing The Ghastlies coming down the street.

I spread my wings and swooped over the charioteers, cawing an alarm and pointing back up the road. They screeched to a halt and while Perilus pushed the carts away and hid them Scorcha led the two overexcited goats to their backyards, bleating and jumping. Unfortunately, Crabbus not only heard the goats but saw them. He broke into a run, waving his arms so much I thought he'd take off.



‘Hey! Hey! What are you doing with my goat? I know you, Scorcha! You’ve been racing my goat again, haven’t you? I’ll tell the magistrate. Just you see!’

‘Crabbus! Good afternoon! What a lovely day. Are you well? You don’t look well. You look – peevish. Are you feeling peevish?’ Scorcha stood there, calmly holding both the goats by their harnesses. One of them began nibbling the hem of Crabbus’s tunic, making him even crosser.

‘Peevish? Peevish? No, I’m not peevish. I’m hopping mad. I know you, Scorcha!’

‘Yes, you do and I know you, Crabbus. That’s probably because we’re neighbours.’ Scorcha smiled. My goodness, that young man was certainly keeping his cool!

‘You were racing our goat!’ accused Septicaemia, wrinkling her nose until it was even thinner than normal. ‘All her milk will have turned into butter! It’ll come out in lumps. Who wants to buy lumpy milk?’

‘Crabbus, Septicaemia, how could you make such an accusation? As a matter of fact, your goat was being very naughty. She saw Trendia’s goat in her backyard and decided she liked the look of her – not Trendia, of course, but her goat. She jumped over the fence to see her and Trendia’s goat jumped over the fence to see your goat and if it hadn’t been for me they would have both run off to Britannia together. Luckily, I came outside at that very moment and was able to catch them. I was just taking them back when you arrived and made the unfortunate but understandable mistake of thinking I had been so wicked as to race them. As if I would!’



Scorcha smiled and looked steadily at Crabbus, who fumed and stamped and glared first at Perilus and then at me. As if I might be to blame! Me! A raven!

'Kraaarrk!' I said, raven-like.

Crabbus narrowed his eyes and carried on steaming while Septicaemia grabbed the harnesses from Scorcha and they marched off to their little house (and their one slave, who had watched the whole thing from the balcony and was silently laughing her head off). Go on, give the poor slave a biscuit! She can have one of mine.

So that was that. Not even a word of thanks from The Ghastlies for saving their goat. Do we live dangerously? Yes, we do. **Kraaarrk!**



6. One Big Secret and an Upside-down Surprise

Perilus is in big trouble with his *pater*. (*Pater*. Remember that one? Well done.) It's got nothing to do with that business with the goat and Crabbus and Septicaemia. There were guests due for dinner, in particular a VERY IMPORTANT GUEST. Krysis's boss. Have you worked it out yet? Exactly. It was supposed to be hush-hush-don't-tell-anyone-stitch-your-lips-together-top-secret, but I knew who it was because I have eyes and ears everywhere. (Mostly eyes and ears from dead animals I've stashed away in my secret hidey-holes. Very tasty, hurr hurr hurr!)

Our hush-hush visitor was going to be none other than the Emperor himself! Yes! Tyrannus, in person, wearing his own feet and legs an' all. And he was bringing his wife, Trumpetta, and his daughter, Clumpia.

So Flavia decides on a menu for the big supper and sends Flippus Floppus off to market to get all the necessaries. Basically, that means a whole pile of dormice for stuffing, an ostrich and plenty of vegetables. Perilus, who was as bored as bored as could be this morning, decides he's going to go with Flippus Floppus, to help.

'He doesn't need help, Perilus,' Flavia pointed out with a graceful twirl of her hand. 'He's a slave. That's what he's for.'

'Mater,' said Perilus. (*Mater*. Now you've got a matching pair!) 'Mater, I am so bored I shall probably die. In any case, I'm not going to carry anything. I shall just watch.'

Flavia raised one eyebrow. (She's bloomin' clever, you know. I've tried that. It's impossible! All that happens is my tail feathers go up and my toes curl.)

'As long as you do just watch,' she warned. 'On no account carry anything. That's what slaves do and I don't want the neighbours thinking you're a slave.'

So off went Perilus and Flippus Floppus and I went with them.

'What's it like being a slave?' Perilus asked Flippus.

'Hard work.'

'Do you have to be strong? I bet I'm as strong as you.'

Hurr hurr. That wouldn't be difficult. Flippus Floppus is as thin as a broom and looks like one too. If you held a broom upside down next to Flippus, you'd get a set of twins. All those bristles would be just like Flippus's hair. Mind you, brooms don't have ears like that slave's. Do they stick out? Yes. You could catch fish with them if you took him out to sea.



Oh, don't you want to just die laughing? I do crack myself up! I should be on the stage.

'I'm stronger than you,' muttered Flippus. 'I might look stringy, but I'm made of muscle. Do you know how heavy an ostrich is? It's like carrying a small hippo.'

'I bet you I could carry all the shopping. No problem,' boasted Perilus.

'All the way back to the villa?' asked Flippus, thinking ahead with a smile.

'Of course!'

I thought that maybe I should say something. So I did. '*Ahem, ahem.*' (That was me clearing my throat and trying to get their attention, as by this time they were comparing their rather puny arm muscles.) '*Ahem.* This is not a good idea, Perilus. You heard what your mother advised. You should not appear in public, conveyin' comestibles for consumption.'

Perilus and Flippus Floppus both stopped, stared at me and then back at each other.

'Do you know what he's talking about, because I don't?' asked Flippus.

Perilus shook his head. ‘Croakbag is like that sometimes. He’s a blabber-beak and loves the sound of his own voice.’

Me! A blabber-beak? My use of language is beyond compare! However, I decided not to lose my tail feathers and I carried on. ‘I am simply warnin’ you not to be seen carryin’ anythin’. You know what your mother said – no slavin’. You’re the son of a very important man, not a common slave.’

‘Who’s going to see, Croakbag? Stop worrying. Now why don’t you flap off and find yourself a dead dog to eat.’ And Perilus waved a dismissive hand at me. Oh dear. The innocent ignorance of the young. They just can’t see trouble coming.

I did ‘flap off’ as Perilus so kindly suggested, but I didn’t go far. I wanted to know how this little contest would finish. Besides, I felt it my duty to keep an eye on the lad.

They got to market and Flippus Floppus headed straight for the butcher.

‘Your biggest, fattest ostrich,’ he said, giving the butcher a sly wink.

‘Special occasion, is it?’ the man asked and Flippus nodded.

‘Big dinner party. Important people. Nothing but the best. You know how it is in Rome. It’s all showing off really, isn’t it?’

The butcher was not impressed by this familiarity I am pleased to report.

‘You’d better mind your manners,’ he suggested and his eyes swivelled towards Perilus.

‘Oh, this one’s OK. He’s going to carry it all. Says he’s stronger than I am. That’ll be the day.’

The butcher fetched the most enormous ostrich I have ever seen. Made me feel very pleased they can’t fly. I’d hate to meet one of those coming towards me in mid-air. It’d be like meeting a flapping elephant. **Kraaarrk!**

Together the butcher and Flippus loaded Perilus with the bird. He almost vanished beneath it. All you could see was a dead ostrich with two thin, knobbly-kneed legs crumpling under the weight. Worse was to come. Flippus added three dozen dormice for stuffing, plus a mound of vegetables.



They set off back to the villa with Flippus whistling and looking very cheerful while Perilus panted and puffed and sweated beneath that night's dinner. They had only just left the market when who should come sauntering up to them but Tyrannus – THE EMPEROR! Only of course it was Tyrannus in disguise. The Emperor was well known for dressing up as an ordinary citizen and wandering around Rome. He liked to eavesdrop on what people were saying about him.

‘Ah!’ he cried on spotting Flippus Floppus. ‘That’s a splendid ostrich your slave is carrying.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ nodded Flippus, dipping his head politely. He had no idea he was talking to THE EMPEROR OF ROME, poor creature. I think Flippus would have fainted on the spot if he’d known who it was.

Whaddya mean, how did I know it was Tyrannus if he was in disguise? Because I have eyes, very beady eyes, you doubting duddledunce. Nothing escapes my notice. I am a one- bird secret service. Hurr hurr. *Toc-toc-toc!*

‘So who’s carrying that heavy load for you?’ asked Tyrannus and he rifled through the ostrich’s many feathers until he revealed Perilus’s anxious face peering out.



‘Oh! It’s a young lad! Well done, slave. I guess you’re learning your work from your master here. Off you go then.’ And he patted Perilus on the head and sauntered on.



Well now, perhaps you think that was a lucky escape. Of course it wasn't because that very same evening the hush-hush-don't-tell-anyone-stitch-your-lips-together-top-secret special guests arrived at the villa and Krysis was at the door, wearing a worried smile, as he introduced the whole family to the Emperor, Trumpetta and Clumpia.

'Clumpia is looking forward to meeting your son, Krysis,' said Tyrannus. 'They are much the same age, I believe. Who knows? They might even marry one day, ha ha ha!'

'Ha ha ha!' echoed Krysis nervously. (There's definitely something bothering that man. I've never seen him look so jittery.)

'Here's my son now. Perilus, come and meet the Emperor.'

Tyrannus immediately recognized Perilus and Perilus immediately recognized the man from the market. Oh dear. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. One can never say that too many times so I'll say it again. Oh dear.

The Emperor stared. He opened his mouth and shut it again. Then he opened it and shut it again. He did that five times. If you'd peered into one of his ears, you would probably even have seen the machinery of his brain (what there was of it) creaking round and round. Finally, he found some words.

'Aren't you ...? You are, aren't you? You? Yes. You. You are.'

As I said, the Emperor found some words. Obviously, he didn't find very many of them. However, it was enough for Flavia to sweetly enquire if there was a problem.

'But surely this is one of your slaves?' declared a puzzled Tyrannus. 'I met this lad in the market this morning, carrying an ostrich, three dozen dormice and a pile of vegetables. He's a slave, surely? A common slave?' Tyrannus grinned manically, thinking the whole thing an uproarious joke. If only.

All eyes were on Perilus. My heart went out to him. Not literally, of course, otherwise I'd be dead. It's an expression.

Krysis's voice took on a flat and deathly tone, as if he'd just been sat on by an elephant.

'Is this true, Perilus?'

'I was – helping,' Perilus said in a very quiet voice. Both Trumpetta and Clumpia burst into peals and squeals of laughter.



‘The silly boy was helping a slave!’ chortled Trumpetta, while Clumpia clung to her mother’s dress as if she was about to die from laughing.

‘Oh, Mater, what a pinkypoo he is. I would never, ever marry anyone as dippy-diddly as that. Go away, slave!’ Clumpia waved the chubby fingers of one chubby hand at poor Perilus, who had turned as red as a beetroot with sunburn.

Krysis growled, ‘Perilus, GO TO YOUR ROOM! I do not wish to see you until tomorrow morning when you will appear in my study, first thing. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, Pater,’ whispered Perilus and he crept upstairs like a one-man funeral procession.

Was that a disaster? Yes, it was. But it was going to get worse. Oh yes, because, as I have mentioned before, young Perilus is an impulsive daredevil with reckless adventures coursing through his veins. He has the bravery of the greatest gladiators. Go on, give him a biscuit. He’s going to need it.

Kraaarrk!