

Unit 3 Home Learning Week 11

Wednesday - Reading

Reading for Pleasure. Starting a new novel

Romans On The Rampage.

Chapters 7 and 8

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!

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

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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 FAMOUS BOTTOM

MY BROTHER'S HOT CROSS BOTTOM

MY BROTHER'S FAMOUS BOTTOM GETS PINCHED

MY BROTHER'S FAMOUS BOTTOM GOES CAMPING



7. What Perilus Did Next

I wonder what you would do if you were stuck upstairs in your room while the Emperor – yes, the Emperor of Rome himself – was lying on a divan in the room below, nibbling on grapes being fed into his mouth by a young slave. Would you not want to be there? Would you not want to see?

Whaddya mean, you're not bothered about seeing someone eating grapes? We are talking about THE EMPEROR OF ROME! THE MAN WITH HALF THE WORLD AT HIS BECK AND CALL!! RIGHT THERE IN THE ROOM BELOW!!!

Of course Perilus wanted to see the Emperor. Apart from anything else, he was fed up with the great man.

'He tricked me, Croakbag!' he complained. 'Why was the Emperor wandering round the market dressed like some peasant? I thought emperors wore gold and jewels and crowns. People say that even the Emperor's pants are gold.'

And Perilus gave me such a look, as if his entire world had been shown up as a mirage, a folly, a world of make-believe – which of course it was and still is in many ways. But let us not wander into the world of jaded philosophy and cynicism that is otherwise known as 'being grown-up'.

I draped one wing round Perilus, this time avoiding the nostrils. 'Perilus, I'm afraid I must disillusion you. The Emperor does not wear golden pants. First, it would be impossible to walk in them and, second, gold is so heavy his pants would constantly fall down round his ankles so, all in all, not a good idea.'



‘Huh.’ That was all Perilus could find to say on the matter. ‘Huh.’ In any case, I could tell his mind had already moved on for his eyes were darting about the room. (It’s an expression. Don’t even go there.)

Perilus was considering his next move. Suddenly he got up and went across to his clothes chest. He pulled out all his togas and began tying them end to end, until he had a toga-rope. Then he knotted one end of the rope round his waist and the other to the clothes chest.

‘Whaddya doin’?’ I asked, rather afraid of what his answer would be.

‘There is no way I’m going to miss seeing the Emperor,’ Perilus declared and, with that, he climbed up to his open window.

‘Perilus, I do not think this is a good idea.’

‘You never think anything I do is a good idea,’ Perilus grumbled. ‘I’ve had a rotten day. Why can’t you say something nice for once?’

‘All right, I shall. Perilus, this is not a good idea – you might fall and die.’

‘That’s not NICE! It’s HORRIBLE!’

I shrugged. Surely it was kind of me to warn him. After all, I didn’t want him dead. Where would all my biscuits come from?

‘I don’t want you to be hurt,’ I explained. ‘And fallin’ from a great height on to your noddle is goin’ to be rather painful.’

The daredevil fastened his blazing eyes on me. ‘I am not going to fall. I am going to see the Emperor, Croakbag. I’ll be fine. Trust me.’

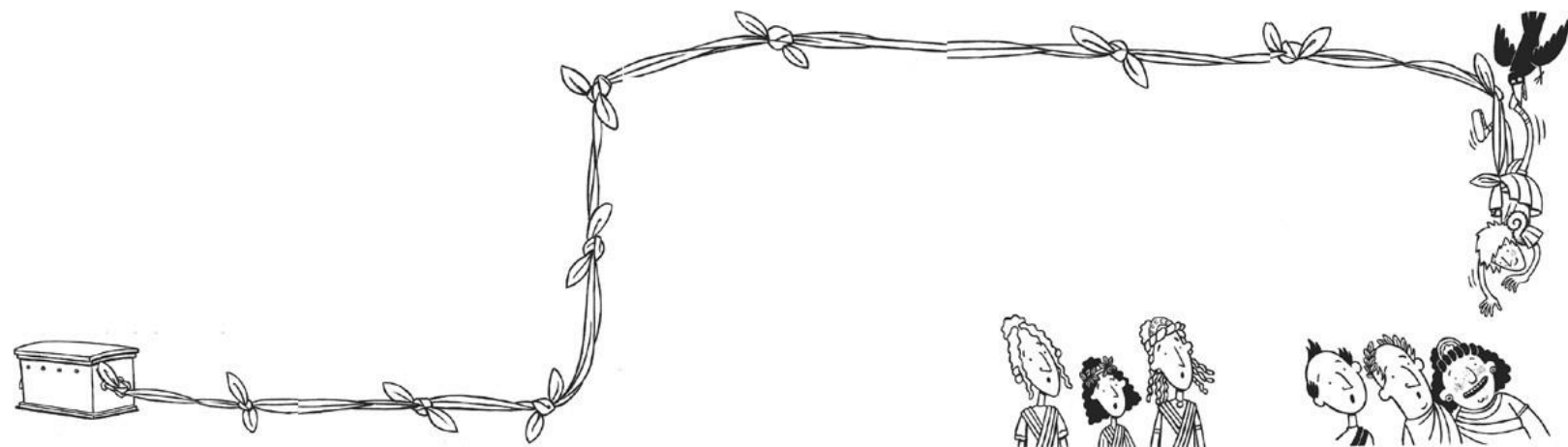
I groaned. ‘Trust me.’ That’s the last thing a person says before they do something REALLY STUPID. I once heard a gladiator say it just before he went into the arena at the Colosseum to face twenty starving lions. Needless to say, the lions weren’t starving for long and the gladiator never

came back out. Hurr hurr hurr. That's the kind of joke that gets us ravens cackling like crazy! *Toc-toc-toc!*

Next thing, Perilus has started to let himself out of the window on the end of his toga-robe and he's lowering himself down, bit by bit. That was when the clothes chest started to move towards the window, being pulled by Perilus's weight at the other end of the rope.

The chest goes sliding across the floor faster and faster and suddenly it comes up BANG! against the wall, then gets pulled UP the wall until it reaches the window. The lid flies open and the rest of Perilus's clothes fall out of the chest and rain down on him below, not to mention half a dead squirrel I'd stashed away in there several weeks earlier.

Perilus loses his grip on the toga-robe and the next minute he's hanging bottom up and swinging from side to side, looking like some weird washing line invented by Maddasbananus. Half his clothes are draped round him and his upside-down bare legs and pants are on display to everyone in the dining room.



Everyone, including the Emperor, was staring at Perilus, slowly swinging backwards and forwards with half a dead squirrel peering out from beneath his left armpit. Finally, a knot in the toga-robe slipped undone and Perilus fell – *PHWEEEEEEEE – SPERLASSHH!* – straight into the atrium pool.



Which was a Good Thing if you ask me. If that had been the ground, poor Perilus would have been well and truly hurt. As it happened, the water broke his fall and all he got was a couple of bruises, a complete soaking and a goldfish stuck in his right ear. What with that and the dead squirrel, Perilus was rapidly turning into a zoo on legs.

‘It’s that funny boy, Mater!’ cried Clumpia. ‘Oh, I do think he’s such a hoot. Can we live here and make him our clown?’

While Clumpia was asking for a clown for Saturnalia, (otherwise known as the Roman Christmas), Krysis was growling orders at Flippus Floppus and Fussia, Hysteria’s maid. The two slaves hurried

out to the pool, bundled up Perilus between them and hastily took him back to his bedroom. The togas were removed and Perilus was left locked in his room.

Flippus Floppus whispered to him quickly as he left, 'I'll get some food to you later, master, don't you worry. I'm glad you're all right. Just stay put for now and please don't try anything else.'

I was touched. A mere slave was expressing concern for my floppy-haired friend and I could not help but have a word with Flippus myself. 'Flippus,' I said. 'You are a good, kind man. Thank you for lookin' after Perilus and, when you bring him some food, do you think you could also manage a few biscuits? Thank you very much. **Kraaarrk!**'



8. The Beak Squeaks

Poor Perilus. It's tough being eleven. I should know. I'm only twelve myself. Of course, in human years, that's about – well, a bit more. So, moving on swiftly, hurr hurr, poor Perilus. First of all he's been mistaken for a slave by the Emperor of Rome no less and then he falls out of the sky, goes swimming in the atrium pool and completely ruins Pater's dinner party.

Now he's in Krysis's study and he's getting such a telling-off. The study door was firmly shut and I could hear Krysis working himself up into a rage, but I couldn't make out EXACTLY what he was saying. That was a trifle annoying so I padded over to the study door and leaned my feathered earhole against it.

'But, Pater, how was I to know the peasant was the Emperor? That's cheating!' wailed Perilus.

'You know perfectly well that you never, ever pretend to be a slave. It's so – common!'

'But the Emperor can pretend to be a peasant!' Perilus shouted back, which was pretty brave of him.

'It's different for an Emperor, Perilus. Emperors can do anything they like! Besides, you are my son. I have friends in high places. If they knew you'd been pretending to be a slave, I'd never live it down!'

Ah, I thought, nodding my beak, friends in high places, eh? I'm only a lowly raven and I've got lots of friends in high places. Trees mostly. **Kraaarrrk!** There's another one. What a cracker! But back to the door – or rather ear to the door.

'You behaved abominably, Perilus. And at dinner too! What on earth were you doing? Hanging upside down from your window, looking like some awful bit of roadkill that wretched raven of yours might have brought in. It was hideous.'

Hmmm. What was he going on about? Roadkill? I'd been saving that squirrel for weeks, if you don't mind. And it was VERY tasty, thank you very much!

'I only wanted to see the Emperor,' I heard Perilus mutter.

By this time, I could hear Krysis pacing up and down the room and I really wanted to find out what was going on so I poked my beak beneath the door, trying to see what was happening.

Now then, things I must tell you. Us birds have very clever necks that can twist in all directions. In fact, we can turn our heads upside down, which is very useful when you're trying to see beneath something low down, like the bottom of a door. However, I have to admit that my honker is on the

larger side of big and unfortunately it got wedged beneath it. Uh! Ee! Oooh! I tugged and tugged, but I couldn't get free. I'd been trapped by my own beak! This was insane, not to mention embarrassing.

At this point, I was upside down with my claws planted firmly against the door above me and my wings flapping about uselessly like bits of old wrapping paper, and me tugging away and making muffled squeaks and squawks.

'Go to your room!' Krysis bellowed at Perilus. 'I don't want to set eyes on you all day. And next time I bring an emperor into this house you'd better not behave like that again or you'll be out on the street with no home at all. Go on! Get to your room!'



I heard Perilus padding my way. HELP! Any moment now he'd try and open the door and there's me with my hooter still jammed under it. I'd be scraped to bits, dragged beyond deadness. All-powerful Diana, Goddess of All Creatures, save me!

ERRRRRKKKKKK!

The door was yanked inwards.

'Aaaarrgh! My deak!'

'Croakbag?' Perilus stared down at me as I struggled to my feet. Ungainly. That's the word for it. I was completely lopsided owing to my neck having been twerked and twisted beyond neckability.

'My deak!' I repeated.

'Your – deak?'

'Yed! My deak!' It wasn't my fault I couldn't speak properly. It felt as if my hooter had been squeezed until the top bit had got stuck to the bottom bit and I could barely move it at all.

‘Get that blasted raven out of my office!’ yelled Krysis.

‘I think he’s hurt his deak, Pater.’

‘Jupiter! Save me from this madhouse!’ Krysis yelled, but more worryingly he was now eyeing me with increasing suspicion. He was trying to work out how this situation had come about.

You know that awful feeling you have in your stomach when you think you’re about to be found out? That’s what I had. Rumblings below.

‘Croakbag,’ Krysis began. ‘Were you listening at the door?’

I pulled my wings together, gave my feathers a quick preen and slowly raised my head until I was peering at Krysis with one bright and beady eye.

‘No,’ I said. It wasn’t a very good ‘no’. It came out as a sort of half-croak, half-squeak – what you might call a squoak.

Krysis frowned. ‘So what were you doing down on the ground with your beak stuck under the door?’



‘Peckin’,’ I said. Aha! See, I was going to talk my way out of this one. I’m not just clever, I AM SUPER-RAVEN! My beak was beginning to loosen up at last.

‘Yes,’ I went on. ‘I was peckin’, for food. I was walkin’ this way and just happened to be strollin’ past when I spotted some escaped crumbs of the biscuit variety, to which I am quite partial, as you well know. So I bent down and started peckin’, followin’ the trail of crumbs as it were, and the next thing I knew my beak was stuck beneath the door and Perilus opened it, freein’ my beak, and for that I thank you both. And now, if you don’t mind, I shall go and wash all this floor dust off my feathers. Good mornin’.’

How do you like that then? I just walked away, a free raven, as innocent as a raven could be, which is not a lot. Am I clever or am I clever or am I SUPER-RAVEN? **Kraaaaarrrkkk!** Go on, give us a biscuit!

Anyhow, it left Perilus in a bit of a pickle. Krysis seems determined to keep the boy shut away in his room, staring across the road. As was big sis Hysteria. You know why she was staring, don’t you? Scorcha was out in the courtyard, sorting all his charioteer bits and pieces and getting ready for his big chance to race with the Green Team. Hysteria’s heart was full of dreamy love for the young charioteer. Ah! Sweet!



And, of course, it's Perilus's dream too and I don't mean he wants to marry Scorcha, but he does want to be a charioteer. Well, we all have our dreams, don't we? Mine are mostly about biscuits and sitting down.

Whaddya mean, birds can't sit down? That's exactly the point! You humans can't fly, no matter how much you flap your puny little featherless arms, but flying is what you often dream about. Unlike you lot, birds can't sit down, so that's what we dream about: sitting around in armchairs.

Anyhow, Perilus wants to be a charioteer and you'd think there was nothing wrong with that. But Krysis? Oh no, being a charioteer isn't good enough for Pater. Pater's got his dreams. Krysis sees his son following in his footsteps and becoming boss of the Imperial Mint like him.

It's a very important, high-up job. That's why he's got such a big villa and so many slaves. But there's a problem, see? People in high-up jobs mostly like to be with other people in high-up jobs. When you're one of the high-ups, you start feeling special, like you're above everyone else 'cos they're not as high-up as you are.

I'll tell you what, though, none of you humans can get up as high as me because I can fly!
Kraaarrk! Ah, I crack myself up. I am just SO clever sometimes. *Corvus brainus giganticus* – that's me!

Anyhow, charioteers are definitely NOT high-ups, even though some of them earn fantastic amounts of money. You ask Krysis and he will tell you that more than half the charioteers here in Rome are actually slaves, or used to be slaves until they were freed. Definitely NOT high-ups.

Now Krysis – he's not a bad dad and he's not a bad man either. He looks after his slaves. He always frees them after they've been with him for ten years, and some of them choose to carry on working for him. Maddasbananus, across the road – he used to be one of Krysis's slaves. Krysis helps his slaves get educated and find good jobs. But that's as far as it goes. They'll always be slaves as far as Krysis is concerned.

Do you think high-up Krysis wants his son Perilus to become a charioteer? Big NO-NO. But Perilus is only eleven and boys will be boys, so perhaps he'll grow out of his dream. On the other hand (or should I say 'the other wing?'), I haven't grown out of mine. I still dream about sitting in an armchair. **Kraaarrk!** Get over it!