

# CHAPTER XIV - The Circus Boys on the Mississippi

Following a day marred by an accident, the circus folk of the "Marie" and "River Queen" on the Mississippi River adapt with impressive resilience, engaging in the methodical task of preparing for their nighttime journey. Their spirits remain high as they enjoy a shared meal aboard, with the banter and camaraderie evident amongst them. A humorous conversation about the causes of falls among performers quickly shifts to a witty exchange initiated by Teddy, a Circus Boy known for his quick wit and lively spirit. His joke about a ring horse being "hungry" because it "bit the dust" sets the stage for a series of lively events showcasing the close-knit circus community's penchant for entertainment and mischief.

The atmosphere of camaraderie turns into comedic chaos when Teddy, after making a pun, becomes the center of a playful yet bold confrontation with Cummings, the bearded pilot of the "Marie". The altercation, initiated by a proposal to "punish" Teddy for his joke, escalates when Teddy cleverly plasters sandwiches over Cummings' eyes and mouth, rendering the pilot temporarily incapacitated. This act of humorous rebellion leads to a spirited scuffle, drawing the amusement and involvement of the show people, who revel in the unexpected excitement.

Amidst laughter and playful jeers, the tussle between Teddy and Cummings moves through the cabin, inadvertently causing a mess of the meal laid out for the performers. Mr. Miaco, the head clown, intervenes, bringing the skirmish to a halt and emphasizing the importance of maintaining order, albeit with a touch of humor and understanding of the situation's inherent levity.

Teddy's actions, while mischievous, reflect a deep-seated confidence and ingenuity characteristic of circus folk. His ability to turn a potential punishment into an opportunity for jest and bonding among his peers exemplifies the circus community's resilience and spirited nature. Meanwhile, the responses from the show people, ranging from laughter to mock outrage, underscore the tight-knit and supportive environment within which they thrive, even in the face of unexpected challenges and mishaps.

As the chapter closes, Teddy's interaction with Phil, another Circus Boy, along with a conversation between Phil and Mr. Sparling, the showman, touches upon themes of ambition, camaraderie, and the behind-the-scenes dynamics that define circus life. The incident with Cummings, though seemingly a minor event, highlights the unique blend of discipline, humor, and mutual respect that enables the circus community to navigate the complexities of their itinerant lifestyle with grace and unity.