

# CHAPTER XVI - The Circus Boys on the Mississippi

In Chapter XVI of "The Circus Boys On the Mississippi," titled "Betrayed by a Sneeze," chaos unravels when a donkey named January finds its way into the pilot house, causing havoc. This incident turns into a moment of jest among the circus crew, with Mr. Sparling and Teddy sharing a light-hearted exchange over the donkey's adventurous ascent. Following this event, Phil Forrest, motivated both by a request from Mr. Sparling and personal stakes due to previous dangers faced by himself and Little Dimples, embarks on an earnest investigation to uncover the source of the troubles plaguing the show.

Despite contemplating the potential involvement of certain individuals, including the Spanish clown, Phil is cautious about levying accusations without solid evidence. Little Dimples, the star bareback rider, encourages Phil, praising his cleverness and asserting her faith in his ability to unravel the mystery. Their camaraderie is evident as they joke about rescuing each other from hypothetical dangers, showcasing a blend of affection and mutual respect.

Later, Phil's investigation takes a turn when, while seeking solitude to ponder his next moves, he overhears a suspicious conversation between two men discussing a sinister plan. Concealed behind a knoll, Phil listens intently as the men plot to sabotage a critical piece of circus equipment—the net used by the aerial performers, intending to weaken it gradually until it fails. Their scheme is to exact revenge and remove obstacles to further, undisclosed plans, indicating a deep-seated vendetta against Phil and possibly others in the circus.

This chapter serves as a pivotal point in the narrative, intensifying the mystery and danger surrounding the circus. The themes of friendship, loyalty, and determination are woven through the interactions between Phil, Teddy, and Little Dimples. The menace lurking behind the scenes escalates the tension, setting the stage for the Circus Boys to confront their unseen adversaries in a showdown between cunning and malice.