The Free Press Short Story

THE PHILOSOPHERS'

RUSSELL GORDON CARTER

ed with his three cross-leg- close to the behind the Wood house, looked gravely diver ever wore a more interesting or from Jinky Jenks to Custard Peyser to inexpensive helmet than the one Splinter Chilly North. 'Never was a Philosoph- was laboring on. It was made of a ers' Chub at school, far as I know. Ours square box that would fit nicely over

Chilly, "Say, why not make it a liter- George; for want of something better ary club or a hikers' club or somethin' Splinter had used George's saw and

much about philosophy. What good is hole in one end and by dint of much

know things outside the course of George's old raincoat and tacked study." George looked grieved. "If you don't it hung down perhaps two feet. The

know anything about it, that's all the small boy felt no pangs of conscience. more reason why you ought to learn." Why should he? His brother had dis-"How so?" inquired Jinky.

George replied carpestly .- "You know have the tool chest how he is 1 freshest kid in Dobbsville, always doin' something to get a fellow hardest part of his work; plugging up sore, thinks the world is his watermelon, all leaks in the box with paraffin in you know-"

"Just like my kid brother," Custard sea diving. interrupted him, sympathetically. 'He's mean little egg."

Chilly had no small brother, but he George opened the meeting by opening owned a fox terrier named Bobo, and the book. Bobo considered the world his bone. "That dog of mine is worse than any this book!" he said. "I've been reading

kid brother!" Chilly declared. "Well, there you are," said George. "Custard and Jinky and I all have fresh inquired Jinky. kid brothers, and Chilly has a fresh dog; and we all complain about 'em. Now if George," suggested Custard. we were real philosophers we wouldn't let kids or dogs or anything worry us; er him the greatest of all the philoso-

we'd take 'em philosophically." "Huh." said Jinky in some doubt, didn't work."

meet here under this friendly, spread- them and got along fine; when trouble ing oak and read together. It's a great pursued him he crawled into that old idea, fellows - something that'll affect tub of his and left it shivering outside. difference it'll make. We'll all be hapbrothers and fox terriers."

osophy for its own sake.

"All right!" said George enthusiastic- The world was his watermelon, and he ally. "We'll meet here to-morrow after- always managed to alt on top of it. noon at three o'clock."

encountered Splinter in the living-room; but what I want to know is, can we?" the small boy had been christened Edson, but few persons besides his mother beemed to know it. "What great things and began to read. have you been doing to-day, kld?"

George inquired.

"You get fresher an' fresher every |-five or ten minutes perhaps. day, seems to mel" said George.

that's more than some people do." certainly was a thorn in his side! Well, and the skirt of George's raincoat came the kid was due for-a jolt. A few hours down round his shoulders. An Splinter spent with Plato, Aristotle & Co. would peered through the glass at the dim teach George just how to handle him world outside-dim because the glass without pricking his thumb, and before was dim-he felt as he thought a deeplong the Splinter would be eating out set diver must feel when he gets into better than his metaphora.

inquired. He was so filled with the pocket and made ready-to-enap it-round subject that he was willing to discuss his neck; that, of course, would prevent . it even with his insignificant brother. "No." said Solinter.

could get used to his brother's short vance upon his neck from the ground answers. Oh, well, a few hours spent up. So, sitting down, he stretched it

Splinter drew from his pocket a wide his hips; the band considered that the rubber band and with a quick move- limit and parted with a snap. ment jerked it over his head and let it anap ground his neck. For a moment his eyes bulged; then as he got used to a piece of twine that had held many the pressure they popped back where string of sunfish. Splinter didn't think they belonged. Splinter took the band the fish spoiled it for his purpose; on off and put it into his pocket again.

George regarded him curiously, won- suitable. In a few minutes he had the dering what the boy meant to use the twine tied round his neck; it was pretty band for. Splinter always had some crazy plan or other, and George was diving necessitated certain discomforts sure that the rubber band was part of

you something about the old philosoph- six feet deep, and Splinter, who stood ers?" he continued.

coophers! Hult, what did he care about things like that? What he cared about stones for ballast und strode boldly in was deep-sea diving. That old rubber last piece of apparatus. A little more work on the diving belief and he mould be able to walk along the bottom the river and see fishes and maybe sponges and coral and everything!

Early the next morning young Splinter, deep-eca diver, continued work on

ed with his three companions through the meadow at the foot of the under the big oak in the grove slope behind the house. No deep-ses the head; the box had once been ob-"And maybe the last," suggested long and had held tools belonging to George's hammer to make George's tool "Bure," added Custard. "I don't know chest equare. Then he had cut a square labor had fitted a sheet of plain win-"Neither do I," Jinky admitted. "A dow glass into it and puttled it all round. high school junior isn't supposed to After that he had cut the skirt from around the open end of the box so that

carded the coat two winters before "Take my kid brother. Splinter," he had as good as told him he might Now Splinter was engaged in the

And while he was working the Philosophers' Chrb met at the appointed "Yes, and like mine, too," added Jinky. hour beneath the friendly, spreading oak,

order to make the helmet safe for deep-

"It's great stuff, fellows, what's in the chapter on Diogenes-"

"What did he do that he shouldn't?"

"Who was he? Tell us about him, George cleared his throat. "I consid-

phers." Jinky and Custard and Chilly leaned "I've tried that lots of times, but it a little forward as George, full of enthusiasm for his subject, began to tell "That's because you're not a phil- about the little man of Athens whoosopher," George pointed out, "Didn't preferred a tub to a steam-heated you admit you didn't know beans about upartment. Diogenes was great! He philosophy? I've got a book on it, and just didn't care at all. No matter how what I propose is that every week we unpleasant things were, he laughed at

your whole life. You'll see what u big "I sort of like him," Jinky admitted. George nodded eagerly and told how pler, and"-George paused impressively the little cynic would crawl forth from -we'll know just how to handle kid his tub at night, light a lantern and begin a still hunt for an honest man; The others made no immediate reply, how he met Alexander the Great, and but it was clear that the remark about | the ruler said if he weren't Alexander kid brothers und fox terriers had im- he should like to be Diogenes; und how pressed them. In the end they agreed once when somebody came and stood in to form the club. Jinky and Custard front of him Diogenes said, "Hey you said they didn't care much about phil- get out of my sunlight!" No, the little tub philosopher just didn't care at all.

"But, George," said Chilly doubtfully, That evening after supper George "maybe Diogenes could act like that,

"Course we can!" George lowered his gaze to the book

Meanwhile Splinter had finished work on the helmet. The small boy was satisto tell you?" retorted the fled with it. Of course it wasn't so boy, with a lift of his nose and a fiash watertight as he should have liked, but he didn't intend to stay under very long

He had put on his bathing suit and a "I mind my own business, though; pair of "sneakers." Now he lifted the helmet with both hands and lowered it George bit his lips. Young Splinter gently till it rested on top of his head his apparatus for the first time. Splinter was thrilled.

"Ever litear of philosophy, kld?" he He fished his rubber band from his water from sceping up between his neck and the skirt of the raincoat. The band Again George bit his lips; he never was too small, the boy thought, to adround both feet and worked it up to

> "Doggone," said the boy ruefully. More fishing in his pockets produced the contrary, perhaps they made it more tight and uncomfortable, but deep-see

A few yards downstream the brook But he know better than deepened into one of those convenient pools that seem to exist mainly to please "Bay, kld, don't you want me to tell small boys. In the middle it was almost three feet ten without stretching, had Splinter grinned. Philosophy! Phil- decided that it would be just right Reaching the pool, he chose two heavy

> The water came to his kneed-to his walst-to his chest. Another stride and the boy could feel it round his neck. Thereupon he reached upward, tugged twice on an imaginary line, waved his hand at a group of imaginary onlookers and, with a little jump, submerged him-

his helmet; his workshop was a thicket durkness all round him except for a little

patch of green in front. The next instant the light went out, and he was Splinter had stopped upward, and now day. and, clawing at the helmet, came spirt- to anger. tering and gurgling to the surface. He turned blindly and started for the shore.

Water cascaded down his shoulders and flew from him in a sparkling shower. He stumbled up the bank and, dropping to the ground, made all sorts of strange, choking noises that sounded all the more strange because they were coming from inside the box. He tried to loosen the twine, but he couldn't do it; the water had tightened the knot. For a while he picked at it; then at last he started back toward the place where he had

left his penknife. It was at that important moment that the Philosophers' Club concluded first meeting. George closed the book and stood up, eager and triumphant. "Great stuff, what? I tell oou Diogenes had the right ideal . Now remember what I said: if anything bothersome comes up, keep cool and-

George dropped the book. Happening to glance down towards the brook, he had seen to his amazement a strangelooking box floating among the willows that fringed the stream! He didn't realize that it was his tool chest; he didn't realize anything. He was dumbfounded. For the lower part of Splinter's body was hidden by the bank, and as far as George was concerned the box was just simply bobbing along as if it were filled with some strangely buoyant

"What what's the matter, George?" cried Jinky, starting up. The others got hastily to their feet.

"Ohl" said George in a weak voice float. His amazement changed swiftly

"My kid brother!" he cried. "My tool

"Hey, George-"

The tool chest had stopped and was staring out of its square, single eye at

the indignant, onrushing brother. As he drew close it said in a hollow voice, "George, cut this hunk o' string around my neck, will you?" George stopped short; his eyes were

blazing, and his hands clenched. Tool thest ruined! Tools all scattered about! And if he weren't mistaken, that looked like part of his raincoat. Gone now was all thought of Diogenes. Unable to speak, George selzed the deep-sea diver by the arm, gave him a pull and then a push that sent him reeling toward the water. As Splinter went to his knoes up came both hands, and eight fingers closed

boy gave a yank that certainly would ave guillotined him if the twine, forunately, had not broken. Splinter bent over and scraped the helment from his

round the stubborn twine. The small

hat?" he demanded. George simply glared at him.

could not express his thoughts.

-Splinter glared back at his brother; then, whistling in an ostentalously causual manner, he started slowly up the his son, gruciously.

He had had enough thrills for one

Jinky and Custard and Chilly, who had been silent onlookers, tried hard not to grin; it was especially hard because Jinky and Custard each could see in Splinter his own brother, and Chilly thought he could see in him his for terrier. Only when the savage glint had gone from George's eyes, and he was beginning to look as if he realized that he hadn't acted quite as a philosopher should have, did one of them venture

to speak. Then-"Say George, would old Diogenes have acted the way you did toward Splinter just now?" Jinky inquired slyly.

"No," replied George. would have banged him over the head with that tub of his! Anyway, Diogthat's why he was so happy."

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of toast, neatly piling the crusts on the edge of his plate.

"When I was a little boy," said father reprovingly, "I always ato my crusts." "Did you like them?" asked Arthur. "Of course I did," lied the father,

"Then you may have these," replied

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Uncle: "And what are you going to be when you grow up, John?" Nephew: The same as you, unc un insulting engineer."



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