



XIII

OUR Teacher Listens To an OLD CROW

A new search for the Thinking Cap began. The flying carpet had left Our Teacher and MD near the end of the Great Wall of China where it stuck out into the Pacific Ocean. The frothy sea lapped upon a sandy beach thirty feet below.

While MD continued to sniff bricks in the wall, Our Teacher stared out at the ocean.

"We've followed the Thinking Cap across Europe and Asia, old pal," he said. "We can't search much farther east than this. The White Cow said the Thinking Cap was near the end of the Great Wall. It must be close by."

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went MD. He was barking at something on the beach. "*Ruff! Ruff!*"

Our Teacher lowered his gaze. There it was. The black mortarboard lay on the sand, not far from the water's edge.

"Quick, MD! We must get down there. The tide is coming in. Soon the Thinking Cap will be washed out to sea."

The boy and beagle ran along the top of the Great Wall searching for a way down. They hadn't gone far when an old crow landed on the wall beside them. His black

feathers were dulled and ruffled. His large bill was messy with the remains of his latest meal.

“What’s the problem, son?” the bird asked.

“We must get to the beach before the hat down there is swept off the sand,” Our Teacher said.

The Old Crow hopped forward on short, spindly legs. “That’s a problem, all right. But that’s nothing compared to my problems.”

Here is the Old Crow Our Teacher saw:



Without taking his eyes off the cap on the sand, Our Teacher asked, “What problems could a crow have?”

“My problems are many, son. My nest needs constant fixing. My feathers need constant cleaning. And the cawing of the other crows keeps me awake at night.”

Our Teacher leaned against the wall. He was a good listener. At home, he often listened to his mom talk about her day at work. At school, he listened to his classmates talk about their fun weekends and vacations.

“It’s a problem being an old crow,” the crow said. “I just returned from a short flight along the wall, and I’m exhausted. My wings ache, and my back is sore.”

Still, despite his concern about the Thinking Cap, Our Teacher listened. It would be impolite to interrupt. The tide had reached within a few feet of the hat, but he had to be patient.

“When I was young, son, I could fly for miles,” said the crow. “I once flew along the Great Wall all the way to Beijing. Now there’s a city. But the pollution is terrible. Hard to breathe. Too many cars.”

Minutes passed, and the crow kept talking. Our Teacher began to worry. The waves crept closer to the Thinking Cap. A few wave tongues touched it.

He was about to excuse himself when the Old Crow said, "Nice to have someone to talk to. Most people on the wall are simple sightseers and are too busy to listen. An old crow like me gets lonely."

Our Teacher sighed. He listened to the crow some more.

Patience. Patience he told himself. *I must be patient.*

"And that's only half my problems," said the bird. "The weather has been lousy lately. Cold and foggy. My wings get drenched each time I fly. Ever tried flying with soggy wings, son? It's not easy."

Our Teacher checked the Thinking Cap. It now lay on damp sand. He gasped when a large wave lifted it. Another wave like that, and it would be washed away.

But the crow rambled on.

"I should tell you about my Aunt Raven. Now there's a boring crow. She never goes anywhere. Born and raised right near the Great Wall. Never has any stories to tell. She's never done anything interesting, so she never has anything interesting to say."

Our Teacher spied a guard walking toward him. Maybe his luck will change.

"Here comes one of my biggest problems, son," the Old Crow said. "Watch yourself."

The wall guard, who wore a black uniform with silver stars on his shoulders, smiled at Our Teacher. He swished his white-gloved hand at the crow, but the bird only hopped backward.

MD whimpered.

The guard removed a wooden club from his belt and knocked it against the wall. Finally, the crow flapped his broad wings and flew off.

"Pesky birds," the guard said. "It leaves messes on the wall. It's too loud."

As soon as the guard left, Our Teacher and MD took off. They ran along the Great Wall, looking for a way to the beach. The Thinking Cap now bobbed in shallow water.

Finally, they came to a flight of stone steps. A chain with a sign written in Chinese characters blocked the entrance. Although the sign most likely read KEEP OUT, Our

Teacher stepped over the chain and MD ran under it. Together they raced down to the beach.

The moment they reached the sand, a whistle blew. Above them, the Chinese guard leaned over the wall, waving his gloved hands.

Our Teacher sprinted toward the water. But too late. The Thinking Cap was gone. It floated on the waves, about fifty yards from shore.

"No! Not again," he said.

"Ruff! Ruff!" went MD.

The beagle leaped into the water. He paddled straight toward the hat with his head above the surface. He hadn't gone far before a wave knocked him back. Barking and growling, he swam out again. This time a larger wave washed over him.

"Come back, old pal," Our Teacher said. "Good try. But the Thinking Cap is too far out. It's gone."

MD returned to the sand and shook himself dry. Silently, the dog and boy watched the Thinking Cap drift away. Smaller and smaller it grew until it was a small black dot far off on the blue sea.

The Old Crow glided overhead. "What's the problem, son?" he called. "That was just an old hat. It was blown onto the beach about an hour ago. Why worry about an old hat? I have much more to worry about than that."

Our Teacher patted his dog. "Mom says patience has its rewards, MD. But if I hadn't kept listening to the Old Crow, I'd have the Thinking Cap in my hands. Patience, what good is it?"