



II

OUR Teacher MEETS a MAGNIFICENT FRIGATE BIRD

The next morning, Our Teacher returned to the beach with MD. While the beagle sniffed a jellyfish, Our Teacher explored tide pools alive with barnacles, starfish, spiky sea urchins, and hermit crabs. The Thinking Cap was far from his mind.

As the tide turned, a large bird glided low overhead. Our Teacher had never seen a shorebird such as this one. It was slender with brown feathers. The span of its narrow wings was six feet or more.

The bird banked and sailed back over the beach. Like a glider plane, it turned again, drawing an oval in the sky.

MD leaped at the bird and barked.

Here is the Magnificent Frigate Bird Our teacher saw:



Our Teacher waved his arms. "Good morning, bird," he called. "What are you doing here? What are you looking for?"

Through its long narrow bill, the bird said, "Are you the boy who wishes to find the Thinking Cap?"

Our Teacher lowered his arms. "A sea lion told me about the Thinking Cap," he said. "But..."

Before Our Teacher could say another word, the bird reached down a webbed foot and grabbed him by the shoulders. It looped around and picked up MD with its other foot. With MD barking and Our Teacher peddling his legs, the bird swooped upward into the misty sea air.

"What's happening, bird?" Our Teacher cried out. "Why did you do that?"

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went MD.

The bird turned its long neck. "Sorry about the rough grab," it said. "I don't like land, so I don't like landing. But have no fear, I have a firm grip on both of you."

Our Teacher stopped struggling. "You surprised me, that's all. And you surprised MD."

"MD?" said the bird.

"He's my dog," said Our Teacher. "MD stands for My Dog. He's a beagle."

Our Teacher looked upward and studied the large bird from its long bill to its long tail.

"What type of bird are you?" he asked. "You're not in any of my Western United States bird books."

"I'm a magnificent frigate-bird, and I rarely fly this far north. I'm doing this as a favor for a sand crab who owes a favor to a jellyfish who owes a favor to the sea lion who owes a favor to you."

"It sounds conceded calling yourself *magnificent*," Our Teacher said.

"Ha! Don't blame me for my name," said the bird. "Humans are the only animal who name other animals. I guess you call us magnificent because we can fly hundreds of miles, day and night without needing to land."

"That *is* magnificent. Are you really taking us all the way to Lapland?"

"The distance is far, but I'm a fast flyer. I'll have you back on the beach before sunset."

The frigate bird caught a warm thermal and glided at a remarkable speed. With only an occasional flap of his broad wings, he sailed through the cloudless sky.

Our Teacher enjoyed dangling beneath the bird. The cool air brushed his face. He was glad he had studied the globe his mother bought him for his birthday. He knew the shortest route from Oregon to Finnish Lapland was northward across Canada and Greenland. Below was an endless vista of mountains and evergreen forest.

"There's Winnipeg, Canada, MD," he said, pointing downward. "And there's Hudson Bay, and there's Nuuk, Greenland."

MD barked at a V of Canadian geese flying in the opposite direction.

Our Teacher called out to the frigate bird, "Bird, I have a few questions about the Thinking Cap."

"I've never seen the cap myself," the bird said. "But a spouting whale, who heard it from a wild seahorse, who heard it from a cuddling fish told me much about it."

"The sea lion said the Thinking Cap can tell me my calling. But maybe my calling is too hard for me to do. I could fail. Maybe I am meant to become a writer, but no one reads my books. Or maybe I am supposed to be an artist, but no one likes my drawings."

"Failure is a risk you take following your passion," said the bird. "But I hear if you can beat that fear, doors can open you didn't know were there."

Our Teacher thought some more. "What if I put on the Thinking Cap and learn my calling is to be a bad person, a bully or a thief?"

The frigate bird flapped his wings. "I heard from a barnacle, who heard it from a hammerhead shark that no humans are born to be bad. Humans must learn that behavior."

"But the sea lion said the Thinking Cap reveals what you ought to do, not what you will do," Our Teacher said. "What if a person never follows his calling?"

"A hummingbird once told me that humans who don't follow their bliss can live unhappy lives," said the bird. "A life full of regrets. Some humans grow old and say *I should have done this* or *I could have been that*?"

"Like my grandfather," Our Teacher said. "He's always grumbling about things. Mom says he's angry about choices he made in his life."

Below, jagged ice floes clumped together like so many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle covered the sea. MD barked at a group of walruses resting on one sheet of ice.

A short time later, a low shoreline appeared on the horizon.

“Land ho!” Our Teacher cried. “

“Ruff! Ruff!” went MD.

The frigate bird glided downward. Soon it was gliding over some flat green ground.

“I don’t like land, so I don’t like landing,” it said. “That means I must drop you.”

“But it looks lonely down there,” said Our Teacher. “Won’t I get cold? I didn’t bring a jacket or a hat.”

“I heard it from a sparrow who heard it from a wolf who heard it from a snail that the Lapland weather is mild this time of year,” said the bird. “Midsummer is not far away.

“But how can I find the Thinking Cap?” Our Teacher asked. “Where do I begin?”

At that moment, the frigate bird released the boy and beagle. They landed on soft mossy ground and rolled forward before stopping.

“Ask the Riddling Fox,” called the bird as it glided away. “The Riddling Fox can help you.”