



III

OUR Teacher TRICKS a LAZY REINDEER

Our Teacher stood and brushed off his jeans. MD sniffed a blueberry bush. In the cloudless sky, the sun shone almost straight overhead.

Our Teacher, who knew a lot about the sun and the seasons, said, "We're far north in the Land of the Midnight Sun, MD. The sun won't set for weeks. It will remain light out even at night."

"Ruff! Ruff!" went MD, and he ran after a rabbit.

In the distance, stood a cluster of brown buildings. A village perhaps.

"Maybe someone there will know where we can find the Riddling Fox," Our Teacher said. "Let's go see, MD."

The boy and beagle walked across the spongy tundra. They came upon a road that took them in the direction they wanted to go. Before long, a yellow school bus stopped beside them. The bus door folded open, and the driver, a young man with a blond ponytail, said something in Finnish. When he saw the look of confusion on Our Teacher's face, he switched to English.

"Do you need a ride? I'm taking these children to school in town."

Our Teacher thanked the driver and, with MD under his arm, climbed onto the school bus. He sat in the front seat with his dog beside him. The children on the bus laughed and pointed at the beagle. Many wore the traditional red, yellow, and blue jackets, pants, and hats of the Sámi people.

The school bus took off but stopped shortly. Two more Lapp children climbed on board. Farther down the road, however, the bus stopped where no one was waiting. Instead, a herd of reindeer lay on the asphalt, blocking the way. The large beasts with antlers like tree branches paid not the slightest attention to the bus.

Inside the bus, the children grew silent.

"Ruff! Ruff!" went MD.

The bus driver honked his horn, but not a single reindeer budged.

"This happens at times," the driver told Our Teacher. "The reindeer lay on the road for warmth. The asphalt is a lot warmer than the permafrost of the tundra. Nothing will move them. They might block the road for hours, and the children will be late for school."

The driver honked the bus horn again. MD barked some more. But still, the reindeer remained on the road.

Meanwhile, Our Teacher studied the herd. He counted seventeen reindeer in all. They looked contented where they lay. It was clear none of them had any intention of rising to let the school bus pass anytime soon. Something had to be done.

"Let me off the bus," Our Teacher said. "I have a plan to solve this problem."

"OK, but be careful out there," said the driver. "Reindeer can get grumpy if you disturb them."

The door folded open. Our Teacher and MD stepped down to the asphalt. They approached the nearest reindeer, a huge creature with the largest rack of antlers. It rose onto its hooved feet.

Here is the Lazy Reindeer Our teacher saw:



Our Teacher knew a lot about mammals of the Northern Hemisphere. He knew both male and female reindeer grew antlers. This was a concern. How should he address this reindeer without offending him or her? Should he say sir or ma'am?

He chose his words carefully. "Good day, my friend."

"What's good about it?" the reindeer said. "The sun never set last night, and I can't sleep when it's light out. I didn't get a wink of sleep."

Our Teacher paused to think. This is something he often did before speaking. "I know something that will cheer you up," he said at length. "I know a game you can play."

"Nothing will cheer me up but this nice warm pavement."

Our Teacher walked up to the reindeer and tapped him or her on the back.

"Tag. You're it," he said.

The reindeer looked annoyed. "I beg your pardon. My name is not *It*."

"This game is called Tag," Our Teacher said. "The reindeer who is *It* tries to tag another reindeer who then becomes *It*."

The reindeer brightened for the first time. "Your game of Tag sounds like fun."

"Sure, it's fun. Now you're *It*, so try to tag another reindeer. Then say, '*Tag, you're it.*'"

To Our Teacher's delight, the reindeer looked toward the rest of the herd. The other reindeer, who must have been listening, stood.

With a front hoof, the first reindeer tagged one of the other reindeer and said, "Tag, you're *It*."

"Well done," Our Teacher said. "Good job."

This set the entire herd prancing in all directions.

"Tag! You're *It*," said one reindeer.

"Tag! Now you're *It*!" said another.

MD ran among the lumbering beasts, barking and wagging his long tail.

"*Ruff! Ruff!*"

"Tag! So, now you're *It*," said a third reindeer

"And I tagged you," said a fourth.

With each tag, the herd moved farther from the road. When the pavement was

clear, Our Teacher and MD returned to the bus. The Sámi children cheered. Soon the bus was rolling down the road again.

“That was quick thinking,” the bus driver said to Our Teacher. “And brave.”

“Everyone likes a game of Tag,” Our Teacher said.

He looked out the window where the reindeer still played the game on the tundra.

“I never thought of myself as brave or quick-thinking, MD,” he said to his dog.

“Like my dad was. Maybe the Thinking Cap will tell me my calling is to become a police officer like him. Yes, maybe that’s what I was meant to be.”