



V

OUR Teacher Takes THE POLE-TO-POLE EXPRESS

Our Teacher and MD waited silently on the station platform. Before long, a white bullet-nosed train heading south appeared on the tracks. A sleek white engine and many white train cars passed before the train came to a stop.

The car doors slid open, and the boy and beagle boarded the car in front of them. Being the only passengers this far north, they had a choice of seats.

Here is the Pole-to-Pole Express Our Teacher saw:



Immediately, the train took off at great speed. Out the window, Our Teacher caught a final glimpse of the school, the Riddling Fox's hill, and the herd of reindeer still

playing tag, before they were left far behind. Green tundra, sparkling lakes, and white-birch forests rushed by in a blur.

"Ticket please, laddie," said a voice.

A man wearing a white uniform and a white hat with the word CONDUCTOR on the front stood in the aisle.

"But I have no ticket," Our Teacher said. "I'm going to Egypt to find the Thinking Cap."

The conductor scratched MD behind his ear. "Did the Riddling Fox bring you to the station?"

Our Teacher nodded.

"So you answer the sly fox's riddles correctly."

"Yes, I did. Although the third riddle was tricky."

"Very good, laddie," said the conductor. "Then no ticket is needed for you and your dog. Next stop Stockholm, Sweden in one minute."

"Stockholm already?" Our Teacher said. "This train must be super-fast."

"That it is," said the conductor.

"And does it really go all the way to Antarctica?"

"That it does. North Pole to South Pole. We'll soon be speeding across Europe. Then we'll shoot down the boot of Italy, across to Africa, and up the Nile River. From Lake Victoria, we streak straight to the Cape of Good Hope, and across to the Antarctica continent."

Before Our Teacher could ask another question, the train jolted to a stop.

"Stockholm, Sweden!" the conductor announced. "All off for Stockholm!"

Two people, chatting in Swedish, entered the car and sat opposite Our Teacher. The train took off again and within a minute the conductor returned to say, "Copenhagen, Denmark. All off for Copenhagen!"

This time four Danes entered the car, and the train was off again.

How Our Teacher enjoyed watching the towns, countryside, mountains, and rivers of Europe fly by. Back home, he often moved his finger over his globe, tracing routes he wished to travel. Now, here he was, taking one of those routes through the great cities of

Europe.

“Amsterdam! Brussels! London!” the conductor announced, one after the other.

“Paris, France! All off for Paris!”

Out the window, Our Teacher saw a structure he had often seen in books. “Look, MD, the Eiffel Tower. Built by Gustave Eiffel for the 1889 World’s Fair. At one time, it was the tallest man-made structure in the world.”

At the Paris train station, a man with a goatee boarded the train and sat next to Our Teacher. “Where are you from, young man?” he asked. “And where are you headed?”

“I live in Newport, Oregon, and I’m going to Cairo, Egypt.”

The man nodded, as if impressed. “I reside in Tallinn, myself,” he said. “I’m getting off at Lusaka.”

“Tallinn, capital of Estonia,” Our Teacher said. “Lusaka, capital of Zambia.”

“Splendid, young man. How do you know that?”

“I like memorizing lists,” Our Teacher said. “I can name all the US presidents in order and all the U.S. national parks. I know every world capital.”

The man smiled and stroked his goatee. “OK, I’ll test you. Somalia.”

“Mogadishu.”

“Bratislava.”

“Slovakia.”

“Now here’s a tough one. Dushanbe.”

Our Teacher thought a moment before saying, “Tajikistan. You’re right. Those *stan* countries always trip me up.”

“Splendid. I couldn’t name half the capitals. I doubt many people know them all.”

“Zurich,” called the conductor, walking by. “All off for Zurich.”

“The capital of Switzerland.” Our Teacher said.

The man laughed. “I’m impressed with your knowledge of the world, young man. So, what takes you to Cairo?”

“I’m searching for the Thinking Cap. I want to put it on and learn my calling.”

“Your calling?” said the man. “With your knack for trivia, you should be on a game show.”

"Ruff! Ruff!" went MD.

By now, the train car was full of people speaking different languages and wearing a variety of clothing...business suits, colorful gowns, saris, and black veils. Never had Our Teacher been so thrilled.

"Milan, Italy!" the conductor announced. "Genoa! Florence! Rome!"

As the train approached the Rome train station, it passed the ruins of an ancient stadium.



"The Roman Coliseum!" Our Teacher said. "Two-thousand years ago, gladiators fought and chariots raced in that arena."

The train left Rome and passed through Naples, Italy. A moment later, the view out the window went dark.

Our Teacher called to the conductor. "Is it possible? Are we're going through a tunnel under the Mediterranean Sea?"

"That we are, laddie. The Sub-Med Tunnel. Next stop Cairo, Egypt."

Soon sunlight returned to the train car. Out the window, appeared a wide muddy river.

"The Nile River, MD!" said Our Teacher. "The longest river in the world!"

The train stopped at a large train station.

"Cairo, Egypt!" announced the conductor. "All off for Cairo!"

Tingles of nervousness swept over Our Teacher as he and MD exited the car.

"Good luck, laddie," the conductor called out. "Hope you find the Thinking Cap."

"But where should I look? This city is enormous."

"Ask the Spitting Camel," the conductor said. "You can trust the Spitting Camel."

As MD sniffed the platform, Our Teacher watched the Pole-to-Pole Express whisk from the station.

“If I ever put on the Thinking Cap maybe it will tell me I should be a train conductor,” he said. “Wouldn’t it be fun to meet new people on every trip and have a new view each time I looked out the window?”