



VI

OUR Teacher FOLLOWS THE BAZAAR CAT

Where should we begin, MD?" Our Teacher asked. "The conductor said to talk to the Spitting Camel. But where in this city could we find a camel, let alone one that spits."

Our Teacher and his dog left the Cairo train station. Outside they found sidewalks crowded with people, and streets filled with fume-belching buses and honking taxis. MD rarely enjoyed sniffing so much.

Our Teacher studied a city map on a signboard. He learned Cairo had a modern district and an old district.

"The Cairo Bazaar in the old district might be a good place to search for a camel," he said. He checked the map again and pointed up a side street. "This way, old pal. It's not far."

The entrance to the bazaar was under a tall stone arch. Once inside, Our Teacher and MD wandered through a maze of narrow streets lined with small shops. The beagle caught whiffs of spices, perfumes, and incense. The sounds were of tinkling bells, beating drums, and the babble of voices. But no camel was in sight.

As Our Teacher stood outside a souvenir shop, studying a plaster King Tut mummy, a small voice by his feet said, "Need a guide, tourist?"

He looked down to see a scruffy gray cat with bent whiskers and half an ear missing. Long scars on his backside further suggested he had survived a fight or two.

Crouching low, MD bared his teeth and growled.

Here is the Bazaar Cat Our Teacher saw:



Crouching low, MD bared his teeth and growled.

The cat ignored him. "I know the quarter well, tourist. Let me show you around. Without a guide, a young boy and his dog could get lost in the Cairo Bazaar."

"I'm not a tourist really," Our Teacher said. "I'm searching for the Spitting Camel. Do you know where I could find him?"

"Ugh! Indeed, I do," said the cat. "Why would a tourist want to find that vulgar one-humped dromedary?"

MD snarled some more.

"I was told the Spitting Camel could help me find the Thinking Cap. That's why I came to Egypt, to find the that hat and put it on."

The Bazaar Cat's yellow eyes widened. "The Thinking Cap, tourist? You mean the hat that helps you think? I know it well. And I know where to find it. Why bother with the rude spitting camel? I can take you there myself."

Our Teacher looked around at the busy stalls and crowded alleyways. "You can? Sure. Why not. Kind of you to offer."

"Follow me, tourist," said the Bazaar Cat. "But step quickly. I move fast, and the bazaar is big."

The gray cat took off down an alley. Our Teacher and MD followed almost at a trot. After passing a stall selling pyramids of oranges, the cat turned right. It ran past a cafe and turned left. Past a spice shop, it turned right and then left again.

"Hey, slow down," Our Teacher called out. "We can't keep up."

"Hurry! Hurry, tourists!" the Bazaar Cat said. "We don't want anyone else to take the cap that helps you think."

Right, left, right, right, the cat led Our Teacher and his dog. They passed shops selling gold jewelry, copper kettles, and leather goods. With each turn, the alleys grew narrower and darker. They passed a stone fountain and a large wooden door. By now, Our Teacher could hardly see the cat just a few yards ahead of him.

Finally, the Bazaar Cat entered a dimly lit courtyard. There it stopped. Our Teacher, out of breath, nearly stepped on it. Peeling dark walls surrounded them. The air was still and silent.

"Is this the place?" Our Teacher asked. "Is the Thinking Cap here?"

MD whimpered.

The cat circled Our Teacher. He turned around with it, until he grew dizzy.

"Where's the Thinking Cap? Is it here?"

The cat leaped upon an old wooden table. On the tabletop lay a dusty blue baseball cap with a Chicago Cubs logo above the brim.

"Here it is, tourist," it said. "The very hat you were seeking. Put on this Thinking Cap, and you will think great thoughts like the great thinkers of the world."

Our Teacher picked up the baseball cap. He shook off the dust and turned it in his hands.

"Are you sure this is the Thinking Cap? It looks like an ordinary baseball cap."

"Many extraordinary things look ordinary. Like cats in the bazaar. We look plain, but few tourists ever guess what surprising things we can do."

Our Teacher raised the hat. "All right, then. Here goes. I'll put it on and see what happens."

He placed the cap on his head. What now? Would he hear a voice? Would he see a vision? Would words flash before his eyes telling him his calling? He waited, but nothing

happened.

"I hear nothing and see nothing," he said. "My calling is still a mystery."

"Wait a minute or two, tourist," said the cat. "It takes time for thoughts to enter a brain. Especially the brain of a clever boy like you. And while you're waiting, I need to go do some business. Don't go anywhere. I'll be right back."

The cat scurried down a dark alley. Our Teacher left alone, sat on the table top. He pulled down the brim of the cap and thought as hard as he could. That was not easy. The courtyard was spooky. A shadow passed a window. A *drip, drip, drip* sound came from the corner. A mouse ran under his dangling feet.

"I don't like this, MD," Our Teacher said. "Something isn't right. Maybe I made a mistake. Maybe I shouldn't have trusted the Bazaar Cat."

MD whimpered again.

Our Teacher turned his head. Six dark passageways led from the courtyard. He listened, sensing danger. From several alleys came the snarling of dogs and heavy footsteps.

Our Teacher threw off the baseball cap. "The Bazaar Cat led us into a trap, MD," he said. The growling grew louder. "We must get out of here."

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went MD.

Our Teacher leaped off the table. But Which of the six passageways should he take? Which alley brought him into the courtyard? He had turned around so many times he wasn't sure. They all looked the same. He had to act fast for the dogs and footsteps were drawing closer and closer.

Above one passageway hung an unlit iron lamp. Something clicked in Our Teacher's mind's eye. He remembered the lamp.

"That's the alley we came through, MD," he said. "And that's the way we should leave."

MD ran up to the passage, sniffed the ground, and barked.

"Did you pick up our scent, old pal. Do you agree?"

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went MD once more.

"Then let's go."

Our Teacher took off. MD was close on his heels. No sooner had they entered the alley than a large black dog lunged at them. MD yelped as sharp teeth nipped the end of his tail. Never did the boy and beagle run so fast.

Ahead two alleys intersected. Which way now? To the left was a large wooden door.

"On the way here, we turned right at that door, MD," Our Teacher said. "Going in reverse, we should turn left."

From behind, came the tramping of boots. Their pursuers were still after them.

The beagle sniffed the wall and barked.

"OK, old pal? Let's go."

The pair rounded the corner and bolted up the next alley. Shortly, they stopped by a stone fountain.

"We turned before this fountain," Our Teacher said. "So, going the other way we must turn after the fountain."

MD sniffed the fountain. Yes, that was the way.



Our Teacher listened. The footfalls remained, echoing against the stone walls.

"Let's go! Let's go!"

Over and over Our Teacher remembered corners and alleys the Bazaar Cat had taken them. Over and over MD caught the scent they left on the way there. They ran past shops selling leather goods, copper kettles, and gold jewelry. Next came the cafe, the spice shop, the stall selling oranges, and the shop selling King Tut souvenirs. Finally, they ran under the stone arch at the bazaar entrance. The plaza where they stood was crowded with people. Two policemen strolled by.

Our Teacher bent over, breathing hard.

"We made it, old pal," he said. "We're safe here."

MD was panting too hard to bark.

"I was foolish for following the Bazaar Cat," Our Teacher said. "I was so anxious to find the Thinking Cap, I used bad judgment. That almost got us in bad trouble. From now on, I'll think before I act."

MD wagged his tail.