



SERIALIZED

VIII

OUR TEACHER SETS SAIL

In no time, the Spitting Camel arrived at the banks of the Nile River. The wide brown river flowed slowly by. The camel took Our Teacher to a dock where a long wooden boat was moored. On its bow was painted a large blue eye. Ten oars on each side of the craft stood straight up from their locks, and in the middle, a tall mast held a single rectangular sail.

"The Egyptians built boats like this thousands of years ago," Our Teacher said. "But if this is the Fast Ferry, it doesn't look very fast"

The camel spat into the water. "Don't let looks fool you, young gentleman. This boat will take you to Greece in a blink of an eye."

"But where are the rowers?" Our Teacher asked. "How does the boat move?"

"Rowers aren't needed. Just tell the ferry where you wish to go, and it will take you there."

Our Teacher and MD climbed aboard the boat. The beagle began sniffing the rowerless oars.

"Hello ferry," Our Teacher said. "We need to go to Greece. Will you take us there?"

Please take us to Athens, Greece."

The blue eye on the bow of the boat blinked. Although there was not the slightest breeze, the boat's single sail billowed, and the twenty oars lowered into the water. Slowly, the boat drifted away from the dock.

"Farewell, Spitting Camel," Our Teacher called. "I'll look for you in selfies on the Internet."

"Good luck finding the round couple, young gentleman. Stamina and persistence. That's what you have. You're like a camel. With stamina and persistence, you won't fail."

Once on the open water, the single-masted boat swept rapidly down the Nile River. Like windshield wipers on high, the rowerless oars whipped backward through the water and forward through the air. Back and forward. back and forward. The full sail threatened to burst.

In no time, the Fast Ferry shot past Alexandria, Egypt and out upon the Mediterranean Sea.

MD stood in the bow of the boat barking.

Our Teacher sat midship, clinging to the mast. "I hope this boat knows where it's going, MD," he said. "We're alone out here."

As he spoke, a familiar sound—*squawk, squawk, squawk*—came from the stern of the boat. MD barked at six seagulls gliding along behind them.

"Hello, gulls," Our Teacher called. "Nice to have your company."

One seagull with gray wings and a ring around its bill flew forward.

Here is the Ring-Billed Gull Our Teacher saw:



"Greetings, mate," the gull said. "We heard you're headed for Greece."

"Yes, we are," Our Teacher said. "We need to go to Athens."

"Bad choice," said the gull. "Take my advice and go to France instead. *Ooo-la-laaa*. The beaches of France are a party. Great fun! Avoid more mishaps and mistakes."

Squawk. squawk went the other gulls.

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went MD.

"Mishaps and mistakes?" said Our Teacher. "But MD and I are doing fine."

"Fine, mate?" said the Ring-Billed Gull. "We heard you failed to find the Thinking Cap in Finland. You failed again in Egypt. And what mishaps and mistakes you made in the Cairo Bazaar."

"How does a seagull know so much about me?"

"Word of your quest has spread fast among the creatures of land, sea, and air, mate. We've all heard about your mishaps and mistakes. Take my advice and forget about putting on the Thinking Cap."

Squawk. squawk, squawk, squawk went the other gulls.

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went MD.

"No, I'm going to Greece," said Our Teacher. "I'm determined to find that hat."

"Then one more word of advice, mate," said the gull. "Look ahead. Here comes your next mishap. Don't make another mistake. Don't say I didn't warn you."

As the six seagulls flew off, a blast of warm air swept across the boat. The ferry rocked and water sloshed over its side. Looking forward, Our Teacher saw dark clouds gathering dead ahead.

"We're headed straight into a big storm, MD," he said. "It's too late to turn around. Brace yourself."

Seconds later, the storm hit with a wallop. The sky went dark and heavy rain pounded the wooden deck. One after the other tall white-caps rolled under the boat. A fierce wind whipped the sail and whistled through the twenty oars."

"Hold on, MD," Our Teacher said. "The worst is yet to come."

Drenched to the skin, Our Teacher grabbed a bucket and began bailing water from the boat's belly. But the ceaseless rain and sloshing waves added water faster than he could remove it.

All would have been lost if Our Teacher hadn't thought quickly. He looked to starboard and saw a patch of blue sky. "I bet we can steer out of the storm, MD." he said. "I think we can sail around it."

Our Teacher cupped his hands around his mouth. Over the howling wind, he shouted, "Fast Ferry, sail eastward! Quickly! Take us out of this nasty weather!"

The blue eye on the bow blinked. The oars on the right side raise from the water, while the ones on the left kept rowing. The boat turned and shot forward again. Within a minute, the wind ceased and the rain stopped. The clouds parted and a bright sun shone again.

"We made it, MD!" Our Teacher said. "We nearly swamped, but we're safe again."

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went the beagle, wagging his tail.

When the storm clouds were safely behind the boat, Our Teacher said, "Fast Ferry, sail for Greece again!"

No sooner had the boat resumed its former course, than the six seagulls returned in its wake.

Squawk. Squawk.

"Close one, mate," the Ring-Billed Gull said. "What mishaps you have. That mistake could have been the end of you."

"No more harm than a little water in the boat," Our Teacher said.

"Take my advice, mate. When you get to Greece find a fast way home. Don't risk putting on the Thinking Cap. It won't tell you what you want to hear. Why risk more mishaps and mistakes."

Our Teacher tilted his head back to enjoy the sun's warmth on his face. "Sorry, gull, but I'm not giving up. Now if you don't have anything helpful to say, please fly away. I've had enough of your gloomy words and advice."

"As you wish, mate," said the gull. "But think about going to France. Now there's a place where you can party. *Ooo-la-laaaa!*"

The six gulls flew off squawking.

Our Teacher smiled as he watched them go. "My only advice is don't take advice from a bird who only gives advice."

"Ruff! Ruff!" went MD.

Soon a green coastline appeared on the horizon.

"Greece, old pal!" Our Teacher said. "The land of Homer, Socrates. and Achilles. The home of Mount Olympus and the Olympian gods. The place where the Thinking Cap now lies."