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Inspirational Stories for English Language Learners

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The Isle of Glass

Part One

The Turkish glassmakers arrived in Venice on a warm day. At first, the people of Venice hardly paid any attention to them. Constantinople had just fallen, and many things were changing across the Mediterranean. My father, a glassmaker named Altan, settled our family near the Grand Canal, the main canal that ran through the center of the city of Venice.

I remember the canal clearly. In the morning, the water was dark and murky. Small boats moved up the canal filled with goods to sell. In the afternoon, people fished and walked along the canal, enjoying the view. Seagulls flew above, calling out to one another and carrying food in their mouths.

My father was an expert glassmaker and it didn't take long for his business to grow. His main rival was a man named Haluk. There were other glassmakers who had come from Turkey, but Haluk was the only one who was a true expert.

'You must not play with Haluk's son,' my father told me one morning.

'Why?' I asked.

'He is our rival, Timur.'

'I don't understand,' I said.

'Every glass bottle he sells is a bottle we should have sold. We were rivals in Constantinople and we are rivals here. Our fathers were rivals and our grandfathers were rivals.'

'OK, Papa,' I said.

Glassmaking was very hot work. The furnaces burned at a temperature of nearly 550 degrees Celsius. The furnaces belched out thick black smoke. While the people of Venice didn't like the furnaces, they did like the glass. They bought glass bottles, small colored statues and decorations for their homes. I worked alongside my father, keeping the fire as hot as possible.

Everything changed one windy day. As usual, my father and I began work after breakfast. We worked and worked late into the afternoon. That's when I saw the fire.

‘Papa!’ I shouted. ‘A Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) fire!’

‘A fire?’ he came out of his workshop. There were black marks all over his face.

‘Oh my!’ Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) he gasped. The fire was spreading from our building across the roofs into Venice. The red flames flickered as the Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) wooden rooftops of the city burned. I heard people screaming, crying out for Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) help. I could feel the heat of the fire, hot against my skin.

‘What do we do?’ I asked. I was incredibly frightened.

‘We need to find your mother and sister,’ he said. ‘Come on, let’s go, Timur!’

We ran through the streets. Fire burned all around us. Pieces of glowing wood fell from the buildings, spitting fire and burning embers.

‘It’s so Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) hot!’ I was crying now; I had never seen anything so terrible. Black smoke filled the air. Everything was on fire, everything was burning.

‘Help!’ someone cried. My father turned to see his rival, Haluk, stuck under a large piece of wood.

‘Haluk!’ He ran over to the man and began to move the burning piece of wood. ‘Hang on!’

‘Help!’ Haluk cried. Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader)

‘Run!’ my father screamed to me. ‘Find your mother and your sister. Get them to safety, Timur!’

‘But Papa!’

‘I said run!’ my father lifted the piece of wood off Haluk’s body. At that very moment, a flaming rooftop fell, killing both men instantly. I collapsed to my knees, Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) watching as the fire continued to spread through Venice.

Part Two

The people of Venice were very angry at the Turkish glassmakers. Half the city had burned down; they wanted all of us out. The only thing saving us was the fact that the Venetians still wanted glass.

By the spring of 1291, the city government exiled all the glassmakers to an island about two kilometers away from the city. The island of Murano was actually several small islands next to each other. My mother, sister and I moved to a part of the island known as Sacca Mattia. For the next six months, my uncle helped us build a home next to a canal. I didn't think about glassmaking at all. I tried my best to forget what I had seen. I didn't know what we would do once we ran out of money.

'You must start a business,' my mother said to me one morning. 'The family needs your help, Timur.'

'What should I do?' I asked.

'You must follow in your father's footsteps, you must make glass.'

'But...' I couldn't bear Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) the thought of being near a furnace again. I couldn't stand the thought of the fire, the heat and the smell.

'It is the only way...' she said. 'Maybe you could work with Haluk's son, Angelo.'

'Angelo?' I asked. I remembered that my father told me not to talk to anyone in Haluk's family. Then I recalled my father trying to save Haluk's life, only to die himself. In the end, my father had sacrificed his life for his rival.

'Yes,' my mother said. 'Angelo wants to start a business...'

'Where will his studio be?' I asked.

'In San Donato.'

Two days later, I walked to San Donato, which was a small island close to my home. I found Haluk's son, Angelo, building a glass workshop with another man.

'Angelo,' I said, approaching him.

'Timur...' He smiled kindly at me. 'I'm so glad you came. I've been meaning to come to your home and to...'

‘Yes?’ I asked.

‘To thank your family for what your father did.’ He cleared his throat. ‘I know he died trying to help my father.’

I pictured Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) the flaming rooftop falling on both men. It was a horrible image. ‘I’ve come here to... to...’

‘To what?’ he asked.

‘To see if you’d like to start a glassmaking business together. Our studio wasn’t burned down, so I have plenty of supplies. I also have a furnace, but it will need to be moved from Venice. This shouldn’t be too difficult, though.’

He nodded. ‘Our studio was burned down, but soon I’ll have a new studio,’ he said, looking at the building he was working on.

‘I can bring my equipment and we can use your studio. We can split the profits fifty-fifty,’ I said. ‘What do you think?’

We shook Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) hands. ‘It’s a deal. Let’s call our business Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) the Father’s Glass Company.’

‘I like it,’ I said.

Part Three

Angelo and I worked very well together. We spoke of our families back in Constantinople, of the sacrifices many Turkish people had made to come to Venice. The days passed Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) quickly when we were together.

‘Remember the boats?’ he asked. ‘I always think about being out on the water and watching the waves go by. It is so strange to be on a boat in one part of the world, then a few days later, you are somewhere completely new!’

‘The boats were very dirty,’ I said, recalling the smell of the ocean. ‘Our boat was filled with rats!’

‘Ours too,’ he said. ‘Some of the rats weren’t too Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) bad. My father

actually liked the rats. He said, “Just like us, they are trying to survive”.’

‘I never thought of rats like that...’

While our friendship was fine, our business was struggling. All the Turkish glassmakers Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) were on the island of Murano. This meant that competition was fierce. The prices were lower than they were in the city and we didn’t make much money that first year. Finally, after one cold winter, Angelo said, ‘We need to do something differently, something other glassmakers haven’t done before.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Did your father ever show you how to make transparent glass?’

‘No... how?’

Angelo’s eyes lit up. ‘I can’t believe I didn’t think of this before... OK! The first thing we will need is some seaweed.’

We hurried down to the shoreline. I scooped seaweed into my arms, bringing it to Angelo, who collected it in a basket. Once we had a large basketful of seaweed, we returned to the glass studio.

‘This is how you make transparent glass,’ Angelo said. He added the seaweed to molten glass and mixed it together.

‘You just add the seaweed?’ I asked, amazed.

‘Yes, something in the seaweed makes the glass clear, almost as clear as a crystal.’

The glass cooled and sure enough, it resembled a clear crystal.

‘This... this is perfect!’ I said. ‘No one Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) on the island can make this.’

‘It’s our secret then...’

‘What shall we call it?’ I asked.

‘My father called it *cristallo*,’ Angelo said.

Part Four

For the next two years, Angelo and I made our *cristallo* glass, which was completely clear. The Father's Glass Company became very successful, making us very Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) rich men. The other glassmakers couldn't figure out how we were making our glass clear. One glassmaker even tried breaking into our studio – all he found was normal glassmaking supplies and a box full of seaweed.

Ultimately, the competitor next door finally understood that the clear glass had something to do with the seaweed. He had wondered for years why he always saw us collecting seaweed. Once the secret was Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) out, other glassmakers began making clear glass.

'What do we do now, Timur?' Angelo asked. It was a sunny summer day and he was in the studio with me.

'We need to think of something new,' I said, 'something else no one has done before.'

'That's not exactly easy!' Angelo said.

'It's fine, I think I have an idea...'

I'd had a dream the previous night. In the dream, I was in my father's glass studio, watching him work. My father looked at me and said, 'Remember, glass has many properties, even reflective properties.'

After saying this, he showed me a piece of tin.

'Tin?'

'Tin and glass...' my father had said in the dream.

That night, I didn't go home as I normally did. I stayed at Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) the glassmaking studio instead, working on a new idea. I started by spreading molten glass Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) on a piece of tin. This didn't seem to do anything.

'Something's not right...' I picked up another piece Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) of tin and examined it. It was reflective, but not reflective enough. 'I need to add something to the tin to make it more reflective.'

I thought back to a visit I had made to the blacksmith. I remembered the blacksmith adding

liquid mercury to armor to make it shinier. Otherwise, the armor would be dull.

‘What if I add mercury to the tin and then pour clear glass on top of the mercury-coated tin?’

The next Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) night, I poured liquid mercury over a piece of tin. I kept my experiment a secret. I didn’t want Angelo to know if it had failed or not. Once the mercury had cooled, and it was indeed reflective, I added clear glass to the top of it. I let the mixture cool and then looked into my creation. In Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) the reflection, I Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) could see a candle burning in the studio. I could also see my own face.

‘I did it!’

I ran to Angelo’s house and started beating on the door.

‘What is it, Timur?’ Angelo’s wife asked. ‘What are Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) you so excited about?’

‘I did it!’

‘Is that Timur?’ Angelo asked from inside the Inspirational Stories and Love Stories: A collection of books for English Language Learners (A Hippo Graded Reader) house. He came to the door.

‘Angelo... look!’

I showed Angelo and his wife the reflective glass. His wife screamed and turned away. ‘It’s... it’s impossible!’

‘You made this?’ Angelo asked. ‘But how?’

‘I had a dream...’ I explained. ‘In the dream my father showed me how to make reflective glass.’

‘I’ve never seen anything like this before,’ Angelo finally said. ‘It isn’t glass at all... it is something else entirely. It is...’

‘What?’ I asked nervously.

‘Well, we need to think of a name for it.’ Angelo smiled at me. ‘Timur, you’ve created something the world has never seen before.’
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