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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The travels of Prince Flamingo

No one would have ever known about the wonderful adventures of Prince Flamingo if Mrs. Old Turtle had not been there.

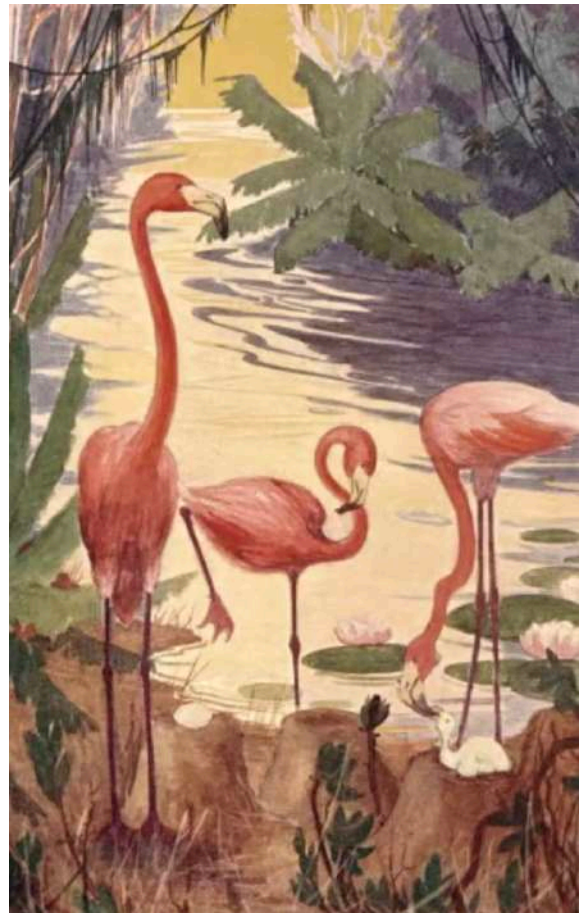
For Mrs. Old Turtle is not only the biggest and oldest turtle that exists, but also the wisest. She is five hundred years old and has had many adventures. She also tells beautiful stories, preferably by moonlight, in a quiet swamp or under a sand dune out of the wind. Cranes, marsh turtles, black swans, and even wise foxes gather around her. Her stories, especially those of Prince Flamingo, are told all over the world, even in the far north where the Heron, who loves to travel, has brought the stories.

The story of Prince Flamingo comes from a distant past when this beautiful white flamingo lived on a beautiful tropical island. On this island is a large lagoon where ships cannot come. There is nowhere safer for flamingos than there. The large pink flamingos build their nests in that secret place and raise their young there.

One beautiful morning, a special white flamingo was born. All the flamingos chirped at once and every mother was busy with her own children. Hundreds of babies were hatched that morning, so the white flamingo did not attract attention. His mother was very happy with him and his stately father looked at him approvingly. They named him White Wing.

The young father bent his graceful neck down and gave the baby the delicious juice of shellfish. His mother, meanwhile, preened her feathers and flew around the sandbanks.

The sun became very hot and there was no shade anywhere. But the flamingos made shade with their wings above the nests. White Wing got so much to eat that he had grown a bit by evening and he could move his wings and feet and sound came from



his throat. The following days, he grew quickly and finally climbed out of the nest, which was made of mud, sand, and twigs, and started to walk.

At first, White Wing was like the other little flamingos and played with them on the sand floor of Flamingo Town. Soon he could make short flights above the town. But just when many of his cousins began to shed their white down and get beautiful pink feathers in its place, his wings became whiter and whiter.

Little White Wing was sad when his playmates laughed at him for this. He also received little love from his parents. His parents were ashamed of him because he had white wings and didn't want him anymore. Even the oldest birds in Flamingo Town had never heard of a flamingo with white wings.

Every night, the little flamingo buried his head in the neck of his beautiful mother and said, "Do you think, dear mother, that I will be pink tomorrow morning?"

She would tell him to be quiet and go to sleep.

But every morning he was still white. This made him very sad. No one wanted to play with him anymore because he was white. He got the worst fish to eat and didn't go home until the others had gone away. He did not want to draw attention to himself. This was a difficult life for him and soon it became even worse. The King of the flamingos said that flamingos with white wings should die.

"Go away, my child, go away!" whispered his mother, for she had heard that White Wing was to die. "Go away as far as you can. It will be okay someday. Remember that your mother loves you."

And so ended the youth of White Wing. Before the first light of dawn, the beautiful young bird flew away. He flew for miles until his wings could barely carry him. Then he saw land in the distance and the lonely, hungry bird rested in the shade of a mangrove tree.

Suddenly, he heard a friendly, gentle voice. To his surprise, he saw a huge turtle on the beach below him. "Ah, there you are," said the turtle cheerfully. "I heard about you. They drove you away, didn't they? They didn't want white in their pink family. Well, don't be so sad."

The turtle made her way through the sand and observed, "You birds are funny creatures. Look at the difference between you and us. I don't care what my children look like. I'm going to the sand dune to hatch

nine eggs. I just hope they hatch and the young ones aren't eaten. But as far as I'm concerned, they can come out of their shells in any color they want. We turtles don't worry. We drift quietly through the water. That's our way of life."

She then laughed heartily and sat down to dig a hole in the white sand. "I prefer to be alone when I lay eggs, but I can tell you stories another time, son."

No one had ever called him "son" before, and no one had ever been so kind to him. The good old turtle and her cheerful ways had suddenly made life worthwhile. Suddenly, White Wing realized he was very hungry and eagerly ate the crabs he had previously deemed unworthy. The moon was high, and he almost fell asleep when Mrs. Old Turtle finally finished digging in the sand and laid her eggs. She kept her story short, but her words inspired White Wing to go on a journey.

"You are special," she began. "You are probably a king. But this is not your place. Go where you need to go. It is far away from here. The Emperor has a palace near the smoking mountains, and he wants a white flamingo. Fly with your feet towards the sunrise until you reach the river mouth, and then follow the river to the mountains. That is where you belong. Don't be afraid when you get there. Forget your cousins and be great." The poor White Wing was almost dizzy from all these good things. He didn't know what it meant to go on a journey. But the old turtle told him about the many islands he would see and the dangers along the way. Then she told him to leave quickly and began her own

arduous journey through the sand, back to the deep water of the sea.

The next morning, White Wing was far out to sea, looking for an island where he could find water and food. His goal was to reach the Emperor's realm, who wanted a white flamingo. After traveling for many days and nights, he came to a mountain covered with palms. There was no white shore, but a thick swamp, and he saw the river that would lead him to the Emperor.

A black bird with a large yellow beak greeted him with a cheerful laugh and confirmed that he was indeed on the right path. This bird was a toucan. The bird gave him much good advice but regretted that the flamingo did not want to eat bananas instead of fish. The cheerful toucan offered to accompany White Wing on his journey through the valley. But he only flew a short distance because he saw wild figs that he wanted to eat along the way.

The journey through the river valley was long. Along the way, White Wing saw noisy parrots and millions of insects flashing their lanterns. From the dark forests rose the screams of large cats and strong snakes catching their prey. Eventually, he reached a beautiful plain and the smoking mountains came into view. He was almost at the Emperor's city.

At sunrise, he saw the high walls of the palace and heard beautiful music. He waited on the high cliffs above the river and polished his beautiful white feathers. When the day arrived, the Emperor's court climbed the rock to the palace. They offered the

Emperor "the light of the sun" because the Emperor was holy.

White Wing soared high above them all. His large white figure was beautiful in the rising sunlight. No bird had ever looked so beautiful. He saw the procession of people who stopped in amazement. Then he slowly glided down.

From that moment on, White Wing led a life almost like an emperor himself. A beautiful park was created for him and he was given servants. He was given the tenderest fish and juiciest snails to eat. One of his thin legs was bound with a golden chain and he was given a golden chain with turquoise around his neck.

White Wing was then called Prince Flamingo and worked as an adviser to the Emperor. He was very wise and he stood on one leg next to the throne for hours. For years he lived in splendor and gained more and more wisdom. He also came to love the little princes and princesses.

He loved one princess in particular, but that will be continued by Mrs. Old Turtle next time. She first needs to go abroad to take care of some business. Then you will hear more about Prince Flamingo's journey.