

Mosey Dawdle's Secret

Reg Down
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Mosey Dawdle Tortoise had a secret. At first he didn't know the secret. He was too sleepy. He trundled here, he trundled there, eating leaves and not a care, and all the while he had no idea that he had a secret.

One day he woke up and knew. "Aha!" said Mosey Dawdle, very proud of himself for knowing. "This is most interesting. I shall chew on this secret," which is exactly what he did in his slow, cumbersome way.

Now, Mosey Dawdle's secret was this: every night, when he went to sleep, he left his shell and flew about. He flapped around meeting the strangest characters and hearing the loveliest music, but the main thing he did was look for his true shell. Not the old, bumpy shell he'd left behind, but a new, eternal one that would last until the end of the earth. Every night he flew hither and thither seeking and seeking, seeking his eternal home.

One night Mosey Dawdle was flying along when he came to a thicket. It was made of living thorn trees with interlacing branches. He tried to fly through the trees but the branches quickly locked together and shut him out. He flew over the trees, but they formed a roof and wouldn't let him see what was inside. Mosey Dawdle scratched his ancient head. He felt in his heart what was inside—it was his new home that would last until the ends of the earth—and the ends of the earth, even for the ancient Mosey Dawdle, was a long, long time.

Mosey Dawdle grew unhappy. For years on end he flew every night to the thorn thicket and every night the thicket wouldn't let him in. Finally he couldn't take it anymore. He went to Speedy Weedy Hare and whispered the secret into his long and furry ear.

"Oh-ho-ho!" laughed Speedy Weedy, falling onto his back and kicking his legs in the air. "Oh-ho-ho! You are such a fool, Mosey Dawdle. No tortoise can fly out of his shell!" and off he raced to tell the other animals.

“Ah-ha-ha!” laughed the animals, falling onto their sides and kicking their legs. “Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! Mosey Dawdle thinks he can fly!”

Mosey Dawdle was disappointed, but tried to be philosophical. “Oh, what a fool I am,” he said to himself. “I should never have told anyone my secret, least of all Speedy Weedy.”

For days and weeks on end everyone made fun of Mosey Dawdle when they met him.

“Ha-ha-ha!” laughed Coyote, wagging his tail furiously. “What’s this I hear? Flap your scaly paddles and let me see you fly,” —but Mosey Dawdle couldn’t do anything except hide inside his shell till Coyote went on his way.

“Ha-ha! Hiss-hiss-hissssss!” laughed Snake, tangling herself into a ball at the thought of such a funny creature as Mosey Dawdle flying. “What’s this I hear? Let me see you fly and I will show you the long legs I use for running.”

Mosey Dawdle went and hid in the sandstone hills. Not many lived in those hills because there was so little to eat. He found himself a cave and crawled in. He sat and sat and sat, his head pulled inside his shell as he pondered. By and by he felt someone running up his back and sitting on top. He stretched out his head and looked up. It was Desert Mouse eating a nut.

“Oh, it’s you, Mosey Dawdle,” said Desert Mouse. “It’s so dim in here—I thought you were a rock.”

“Oh no,” said Mosey Dawdle with a sigh. “It’s me. I was having a think.”

Desert Mouse went on eating his nut, sending small crumbs rolling down the shell. Mosey Dawdle wondered why Desert Mouse was not laughing at him.

“Haven’t you heard my secret?” asked Mosey Dawdle at last. “All the animals are laughing at me.”

“Not I,” said Desert Mouse, running down and jumping off the shell. “I go flying at night too! I was far too shy to tell anyone and never found the courage to speak.”

“Where do you go flying?” asked Mosey Dawdle.

“I seek my new, eternal burrow,” said Desert Mouse. “My forever house and home.”

“Have you found it?” asked Mosey Dawdle.

“No,” said Desert Mouse, “but I keep on looking.”

“Let us meet tonight,” said Mosey Dawdle. “I will show you what I have found.”

That night Mosey Dawdle and Desert Mouse flew out of the cave together. Away they went through the colored air, around the strange and oddsome creatures, through the singing music till they came to the thorn thicket. Desert Mouse was so small that he began

to climb through the branches at once. Instead of shutting the mouse off they opened up and let Mosey Dawdle follow. They went a little ways, full of wonder, for they felt their new, eternal home deep inside the thicket. But suddenly the branches and thorns stopped moving out of the way and their path was blocked. No matter how hard they tried they couldn't go further and had to fly back to the cave.

Night after night Mosey Dawdle and Desert Mouse returned to the thicket, but always and always they couldn't go further. One day they were sitting in the brush outside the cave discussing what to do. Suddenly they heard a dry rattling and Yikes Spikes! the Porcupine appeared. He'd been snoozing in the brush and they'd never noticed him.

"I couldn't help overhearing what you were talking about," he said. "I laughed when Mosey Dawdle told his secret to Speedy Weedy, but now I know the truth. Teach me how to fly at night and I will join you."

Mosey Dawdle taught Yikes Spikes! how to fly and they all met at the thicket.

"I am not afraid of thorns," said Yikes Spikes! and he scurried into the trees. The branches pulled back and Mosey Dawdle and Desert Mouse followed. This time they went much further into the thicket, but again they found their way blocked.

"At least we got further," said Mosey Dawdle. "Perhaps we need more people. Then we might get through."

"Yes, yes," agreed Yikes Spikes! and Desert Mouse. "Let us get more people. We will invite them to go flying at night."

"Ha-ha-ha!" and "Ho-ho-ho!" laughed Silver Fox and Skunk at Desert Mouse and Yikes Spikes! when they were asked if they wanted to fly at night. "You're not following that old fool Mosey Dawdle are you?"

"We are," said Yikes Spikes! "He's telling the truth."

Silver Fox and Skunk rolled over and over in the dirt, howling with mirth. And so it went with many animals: birds fell chuckling off their branches, deer tumbled down the hillsides giggling wildly, and buffalo stuck their horns into the ground and waved their hooves in the air. That's what the animals did when Mosey Dawdle and his friends talked of flying at night—that's how funny they found the idea.

But some didn't laugh. They searched their hearts to see if it could be true. And so, slowly, one by one, nine more animals joined the three friends. There was Beaver, Praying Mantis, Cougar, Squirrel, Dolphin, Ant, Tiny Wren, Honey Bee and Butterfly. They gathered in the sandstone hills and Mosey Dawdle taught them how to fly at night.

When he was done, they waited outside the cave and watched the red sun sink in the west. The stars came out in the darkening sky—first the big stars, then the small, then the whole Milky Way spread across the heavens. One by one they went into the cave and fell asleep. Soon they were winging their way towards the magic thicket. But imagine Mosey Dawdle’s surprise when they found the thorn trees in bloom and the branches opened wide. They gathered around the thicket in a large circle as a great building rose majestically out of the earth and stood upon a hill.

They went inside and saw that the building was made for all of them. It was a place each one could call their true home. The roof was domed and strong like a tortoise shell, the ceiling was painted as beautifully as a butterfly’s wings, the pillars were perfect for squirrels to climb and the honey bee had abundant flowers for nectar and a safe place to make a hive.

But as beautiful as the building was, it also felt unfinished. The twelve kept asking others to join them, and as the years passed more and more came. Every time a new person joined their circle the building changed its shape and form so that the new one would feel at home. And so the eternal house and home that Mosey Dawdle had found kept growing and changing until all the people of the world came to live inside. Then the house was perfect, and even Snake, the last to join, was amazed and hissed no longer.