

DRAINING THE SWAMP

Donald the Alligator was the biggest and fattest alligator in the whole swamp and owned the biggest sandbank. He had inherited it from his late father who had left the swamp to make ladies handbags in some big city.

Donald was big and fat because there were lots of fish in the swamp and when he felt hungry, he simply waddled down the steep slope of his sandbank, slithered through the mud and opened his massive mouth when he reached the water. Fish then swam in for shelter because they thought his mouth would be a safe hiding place from the flamingos. All Donald had to do then was close his jaws and swallow. When his belly was full of fish, he would slither back through the mud, waddle up the steep slope of the sandbank to his favourite resting place at the top, which he called his tower.

Life could not have been better for Donald. He even had a harem of young lady alligators who lay beside him in return for being allowed to beach on his sandbank. Donald should have been happy but was not. He was angry, very, very angry. Why? Because the smell from the swamp got up his snout and made him feel sick. The swamp stank. It was, he said, like having built a palace in the middle of a cesspit.

One very hot day, when the swamp was stinking more than usual, Donald had a brainwave - more a ripple than a wave as alligators have very small brains. He sent a message to all the other alligators to come immediately to his sandbank for a rally.

'We must drain the swamp,' he announced, when all the other alligators had arrived. 'We must get rid of the smell and make our swamp great again!'

All the other alligators cheered and chanted, 'Make the Swamp Great Again.'

'All we need to do,' he continued, 'is to dig out all the black mud at the far end of the swamp which is damming it up.'

So, led by Donald, all the alligators waddled and slithered to the far end of the swamp and began to lash at the black mud with their powerful tails. It was the biggest and greatest mud bath the world had ever seen. Soon, they had formed a canal through the black mud and the water from the swamp came rushing out, bringing all the fish with it.

Donald, thoroughly satisfied with his days work, returned to his tower and watched with a smile as the water in the swamp slowly disappeared. At long last, he felt happy. 'This was the greatest idea that any alligator has ever had,' he said to Melanigator, his favourite lady alligator. Then he fell into a deep and contented sleep.

The following morning, he was awakened by the cacophony of noise from a flock of tweeting flamingos.

'I drained the swamp,' he roared at them in contempt, as if trying to drown out their twittering.

Then he felt the pangs of hunger. He had moved a lot of black mud the day before. It's time for breakfast, he thought.

He raised himself on his short legs, waddled down the steep slope of his sandbank and tried to slither through the mud but the mud had dried and was going hard. So he had to waddle over its caked surface, which was very hard work as his stumpy little legs kept breaking through the crust under his great weight. It was like trying to wade through thigh high snow, not that he had ever seen snow.

When he reached where the water had been, it was no longer there and without the water there was no fish. Donald was incandescent with rage. 'This is a fraud!' he roared at all the other alligators who were flapping about in the semi-solid mud. 'The flamingos have stolen our fish!'

The other alligators all agreed. This had been daylight robbery. 'Put back the fish!' they began to chant and vowed to deny the flamingos access to the swamp.

As the days passed and the fish did not return, all the other alligators began to waddle off to find some other swamp where there would mud and water and fish. Even Melanigator moved on but Donald remained resolute. He refused to leave his sandbank and became more and more angry. This was not his fault. 'The flamingos have stolen my fish,' he kept repeating over and over again as the pangs of hunger cut deeper and deeper.

After two weeks all alone on his tower with the swamp now dry as a bone and hard as a rock, he heard a loud rumbling sound and felt vibrations in the sand. He opened his eyes and in the distance saw a cloud of dust rising and beneath it, a great mass of large, grey-skinned animals approaching the swamp in some sort of celebration. It was the hippopotami. They were coming to take over his swamp.

With his remaining strength, Donald flicked his tail and scratched a message in capital letters on the steep slope of his sandbank. It read: I DRAINED THE SWAMP. THE GREATEST DRAINING OF ANY SWAMP IN THE HISTORY OF SWAMPS.

With that, Donald closed his eyes for the last time but he could still hear for a little bit longer. He heard a strange sound. It was the noise of birds but not the tweeting of thieving flamingos. This was the screeching of vultures. That and the heavy plodding footsteps of the hippopotami were the last sounds Donald heard.