

Ανοιχτό Εικονογραφημένο Βιβλίο
από τη Ζάννα Μελά-Φλώρου



Open Illustrated Book
by Zanna Mela-Florou

Series:
Flying Pages
No 12
©

Ecological Texts

by Zanna
Mela-Florou



Mela
FLOROU
ΖΑΝΝΑ

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Series: © Flying Pages, No 12

Ecological Texts by Zanna Mela-Florou

*Hidden treasure in the snow, in the sand
and in the forest*

Prologue

On the flying pages we'll travel first to the farthest north, to join the boy who lives there on the ice with his friends the polar bears and seals. Next we'll venture into verdant forests and gorges where eagles and foxes make their homes. Later we'll find ourselves, along with a toucan, in a strange 'oasis' where acrobats are found. We'll look with wondering eyes on eggs lying buried in the burning sand and we'll see what mysteries they can be hiding. Deep down in the sea, we'll swim amongst strange little fish.

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*Hidden treasure in the snow, in the sand
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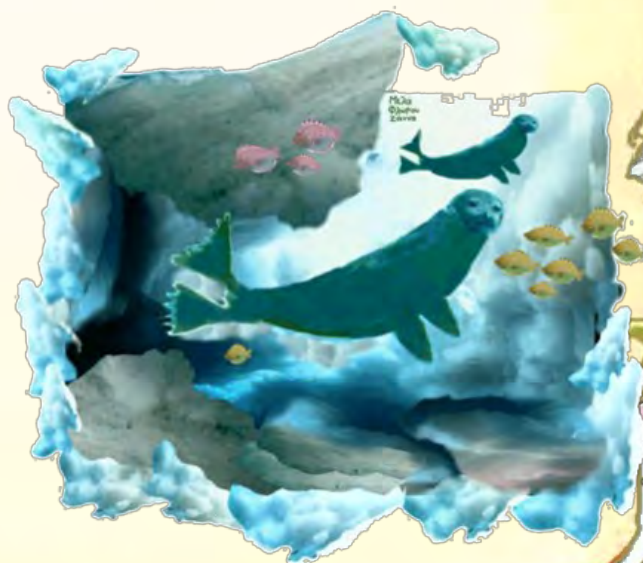
Text 1 - A SECRET MISSION

by Zanna Mela-Florou



'If I were a...!', but the boy from the icy north was reluctant to reveal his secret mission in a composition for school homework. He'd write instead: 'If I were... Time, I'd rub out all wars from my diary. If I could work wonders...'

'No... No...!' The silent boy with the slanting eyes recalled then how some days before, while he was in the place where seals make their home, hunters on sledges appeared as if from nowhere. The boy hastily hid inside his shelter of invisibility. When the hunters drew near they stood motionless beside the holes the seals had made in the ice, waiting for a muzzle to emerge.



Immediately one poked its nose up from the frozen surface of the sea to breathe, a fur trader seized the poor creature and dragged it out of the water. But oh! What a surprise awaited them! The seals' precious fur had all been sprayed with paint and was no use to them at all. They angrily released their prey and went off empty-handed.

The pale boy crawled out of his invisible igloo with a smile upon his face. And you could almost believe the icebergs were laughing with him, for a few days earlier they had seen him spraying paint all



over the seals to save their lives and let them go on holding their young in a warm embrace as they sucked their mothers' milk. And all thanks to him, their young protector.

Yes! Those hunters should be unmasked at last! He would write it all down in his essay.

And if he became chief of his tribe he would protect the coming generations of other creatures, too. He'd organize teams of rescuers in the war against the greedy monsters who wound the natural world and all life on our planet. Yes, he'd urge his friends to join as volunteers as well. The time had come!



Text 2 - IF I WERE AN EAGLE

by Zanna Mela-Florou

I'd love to be a mighty eagle soaring proudly over the plain, with my home among sheer crags, up there in the high mountains. I'd build my nest deep in the canyons and...But look! That's what I am! I've become a handsome bird, a formidable hunter armed with piercing claws. A nest with two young fledglings I adore is awaiting my return.

With a single beat of my great wings I swoop down on a hare. And its cry melts my heart.

'I'll let you have a lucky wish,' it pleads, 'a wish that will come true for sure. And whatever you desire will be granted in an instant!'

The cunning fellow! His words move me, and all the more when he goes on to say that in a burrow he has babies just like me. And mighty hunter though I am, I instantly release him from my claws.



Next I wrap my talons round a crawling **tortoise**, but to my surprise she greets me, murmuring gently, 'What a splendid bird you are, Oh, eagle! You're the queen of all the birds!' Flattered, I immediately pretend that my reason for snatching the tortoise up hadn't been to eat her. Then, with only a moment's hesitation, I let her go and with one flap of my great long wings fly off in search of other food. The tortoise bids me a fond farewell, blows me some kisses and like the hare, sends me wishes that will come true, she says.

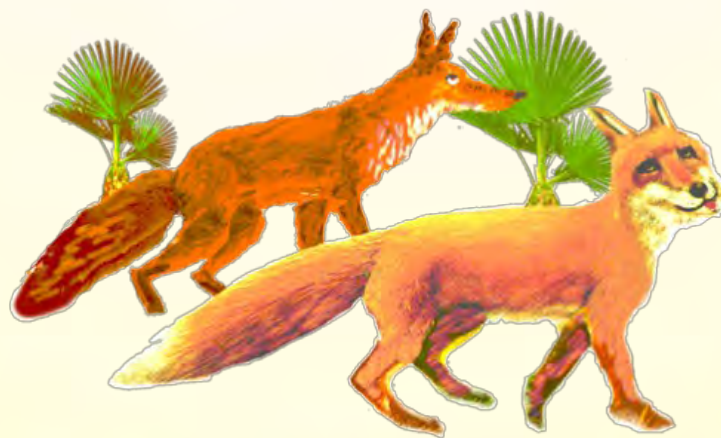
I fly back to my nest with empty claws. There they are, my young ones, flapping their little wings and taking to the air!

They'd found a **snake** but they let it go, for it had such pretty eyes and looked so happy basking in the sun's warm rays. And like the hare and the tortoise, the snake was also saved by its sweet words: 'Little neighbours,' it hissed, 'I wish you good flying up there in the heavens. May you grow into great eagles so I can look up and admire you!'





What other creature could I be? I wouldn't say no to being a **fox**, with ruddy fur and twinkling, crafty eyes. I'd have a great long bushy tail and I wouldn't mind if I lived in the arctic and my coat were **white** all over, so I could hide and disappear from sight, like an ice maiden in the snow.





Then I'd go for a stroll and come back to my lair to enjoy lying down with my newborn cubs again, to suckle them and see them grow as if by magic.

And what if I became a **polar bear**, say? I wouldn't mind that, either. I'd wear a snow-white overcoat and walk as if the world belonged to me. Oh, to live there in the distant frozen north, to curl up snug inside my snowy den and have plump lady seals for neighbours, with their dappled cubs!



Then what if I became a **fish** – but not one like the others. I'd swim upright in the sea with a horse's head and a body like a caterpillar.

Yes, 'sea horse' would be my name. And
down there in the city of the deep
they'd paint my picture, use me as
a trade mark and name shops
after me!





Text 3 - THE BEAR-TRAINER

by Zanna Mela-Florou

It was during carnival time, I remember. I heard the music coming from the big square and then my mother crying, 'Zannoula, quick, come here!' And with my mouth full of apple pie and clutching another piece in my hand I ran to reach the balcony so as not to miss the spectacle, scattering crumbs all over the house. Dressed as a clown, the old man with his dancing bear was quite close by now. Taking off his funny hat with a



sweeping gesture, he gave a bow and began to beat out a lively rhythm on the tambourine he was holding. 'What do the bride and bridegroom do?' he asked. And understanding his question, the bear jumped up on its two hind legs and began to kiss the musician.

The chain that hung from the bear's pierced nose slackened then drew taut again as the trainer asked, 'What does an old man do in bed?' and the bear lay down on its back to show us it was sleeping. The show went on, but had moved a few streets away by now, and I had gone down to follow this strange couple from close up, along with a crowd of other kids from the neighbourhood.

At some point the bear-trainer took off the clown's mask he had been wearing to reveal the face beneath. From its expression we could see he was slowly being forced to admit that wherever he wandered in this country his trade was dying if not already dead. What told him so? Firstly the plate he passed around stayed almost empty and secondly the disapproving way we children all reacted served to convince him. Even the dancing bear beside him seemed to understand what we were saying to her master. She felt it was time to be set free from her chains. Not a gesture or a word we said escaped her. Her eyes seemed glued to our lips, as if guessing our good intentions. Now she was sure her days as a prisoner would be ending here.



She became as gentle as a lamb, but we didn't even dare go near her, much as we wanted to stroke her glossy black fur. 'Tell me, kids,' her master asked us, 'should I give my bear her freedom? But then, it cost me all my savings buying her. Over there in the East, on the other side of the world, where buying a bear is like buying a rabbit or a chicken here, you just have to go to a farm and choose one like this. "Want one for a circus, do you?" they ask, "Or for a zoo?" Anyway, I know when my luck's down: I'll have to change jobs once again.' We looked at one another and the old bear-trainer's eyes were as mournful as his poor chained bear.

We followed him to the edge of town. As soon as he had struck his tent he was ready to be on his way once more. He left the bear with a worker from the city council and set off glumly down the road alone till he had passed beyond the lights of the town's last blocks of flats and disappeared from sight.



What does it matter how many years have passed since that afternoon in Lent? The important thing is that the tame bear was taken in by the Centre for the Protection of Bears that very afternoon. As for the poor dancer's chains, they were

loosed from the ring in her pierced nose and put on display at the Centre's museum as living proof of the suffering she had endured, along with the musical instruments she and her kind had been forced to dance to: a tambourine, a lyre and a clarinet. By them there is a screen, and if you press a button a film begins that shows the life led by a dancing bear:

'Boom, boom, boom!' the film begins. 'I'm ready for my act!' says the bear in the cartoon. 'I'm dressed up as Itsa, a funny little bear with a bright red nose and my lips both painted white.



I'm covered from head to toe in ribbons and bangles. What a silly sight I look! Boom, jangle, boom, jangle, boom! The beating of the tambourine sends me a hidden message that I, a four-footed creature, must stand up on my two back legs. Don't look at the smile that's painted on my face, it's there to fool you. This funny mask I wear just hides the pain I feel.

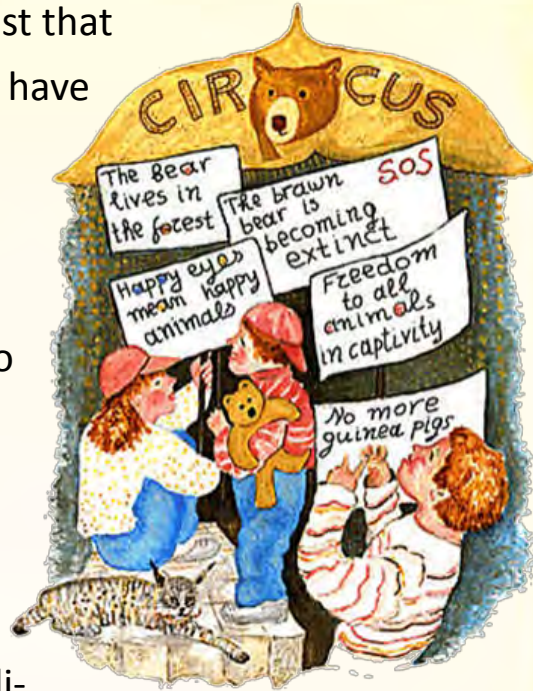
They train me by putting me on a hot iron plate with shoes on my back paws only. This forces me to stand upright to stop my poor front paws from getting burnt.

That boom, boom, boom is the secret message that tells me I must dance. I long to get away from here but under this circus costume that I'm wearing there is a magic chain, well hidden, that turns me from a wild unruly bear into a tamed creature obedient as a lamb.'



But as in the story we've just read, Itsa's young friends make such a protest that before the day is out they have won the bear's freedom.

As for me, I go on dreaming of better days to come for us and for the animals: robot bears to entertain us, eco-friendly coats that look like furs to keep us warm and medicines made from plants to take when we are sick. I dream of a world without bear trainers, without cockfights without lion tamers and with no more cruel bullfights.





Text 4 - A TOUCAN AT THE CIRCUS

by Zanna Mela-Florou

A toucan is flying over a big city. His wings are trembling and he keeps on veering off course, from one side to the other, as if he is worn out. Then he comes down and perches on the edge of a big coloured tent.



'Where can I be, I wonder?' says the toucan. 'I'm afraid I've lost my way. But never mind, there's trees here and coloured balloons and flags. There's animals and a lovely lake, so there must be

food as well! It's a real oasis!'



The words are hardly out of the brightly-coloured bird's big funny beak when a sea-lion emerges from a corner of the lake and growls, 'So you've been fooled, too, eh?'



This is just the show they put on for our circus, the scenery of our theatre. You've flown into a lie! Everything here's a fake. The trees are made of cardboard, the 'lake' is just a dirty swimming pool and even the birdsong is recorded! And the loud laughter you hear every afternoon at exactly the same time is nothing but a rehearsal, a never-ending laugh rehearsal for the evening show. It may be fake, but it fools you all the same!

Then the toucan saw a rope stretched tight and flying up he landed on it.



'Hop, hop!' he croaked, bouncing along the rope, 'I want to be an acrobat, too!' But the poor bird soon grew tired and fluttered down.

'Finished so soon?' he heard the sea-lion's voice behind him. 'Let's have a look at you. You seem sick to me.'

'It's true, my wings are trembling and I've got a cough. That's why I stopped here -to take a rest. My legs are heavy as lead. I was taken in by some whitish wormy things that were floating on the water by the shore and ate a few. Now they tell me they were fag ends -cigarette butts filled with tar, ugh! But let me work in the circus with you. For a little food I could even turn somersaults! You seem to eat well enough here, sea-lion; you've got a nice fat belly.'

'I'm ready to give birth, you funny bird! That's why I must get away from here, so my child can be born free. But off with you now! It's for your own good that I'm telling you. The sooner you get out of here the better.'

Do you hear that bell? The show is starting and it's the signal for me to go into the ring. They've left me hungry and only give me a little fish or two when I do my act and jump into the air to catch balls on my nose! Do you see now why you have to leave at once? Oh, there's the bell again!' the sea-lion muttered and disappeared behind the scarlet curtains that led into the circus ring.

Filled with curiosity, the toucan approached to see what was going on in this strange place.



All the circus people were wearing funny masks and nobody could see their faces. And they all had such strange nicknames! There was Stilty, a funny clown who walked around on tall wooden legs and next to him a dwarf called Gobbo who rode a little motorcycle round and round inside the Wall of Death.

Above them the acrobats were flying like birds from one rope to another, while the audience applauded, holding their breath and with suspense-filled eyes. Then there was The Witch, sitting in a mysterious half-darkness, dressed in a gaudy robe with a few

playing cards laid out before her and playing her role well in this, her first performance, as she peered into her crystal ball to tell the fortunes of naïve members of the audience.



Now, hidden behind the curtain, the brightly-coloured bird with its great curved beak saw a fat apeman brandishing a whip to frighten a strange couple who were refusing to perform. The odd pair, a tiger and a panda bear, were finally forced to stand up and hug each other, then dance around the ring together before the astonished eyes of the audience.



Wild with rage, the toucan seized some animal food and hurled it at their cruel trainer. Soon the ring was full of rotting tomatoes! The toucan hastily gobbled whatever he could find worth eating and hopped into a dimly-lit tent to take a nap.

He was just falling asleep when he heard The Witch coming in, practising the role she had to play for her new act. "How ready am I to change shape?" she hissed in a mysterious voice. "But yes, it may be necessary! Necessary to change my appearance into something strange, different from all of you around me; and then I'll find myself facing the beast!

People unite when they are pressed. Two eyes become four, six, eight, ten, with more legs than you can count and just as many hands. All together they make up the beast. And what great power it has! It can even work miracles. The beast with the countless eyes and hands and legs has ears to listen with, it has its own opinions and what is it? It is all of you who are watching how I have transformed myself! I tremble when you fix your eyes on me. They stick to me like leeches! Have you still not grown accustomed to me?" But I'm not giving a performance yet; it's only a rehearsal!" she told herself with relief.



Then Gobbo the dwarf appeared, saying kindly, 'Let me show you round the circus, little witch'. And squeezing her hand gently he began, 'This round wire cage is called The Wall of Death. I go racing round it on my motorbike, defying gravity. It frightens the children, but then they love watching strange, dangerous acts, even if they hardly dare unscrew their eyes!'

They laughed, then Gobbo slipped one hand softly round her waist and pointing with the other said, 'And there are the twin baby elephants.'

'I wonder what trick their trainer uses to make them roll around on the floor,' said The Witch. Now they were coming to the swimming pool. 'I'm curious to know what



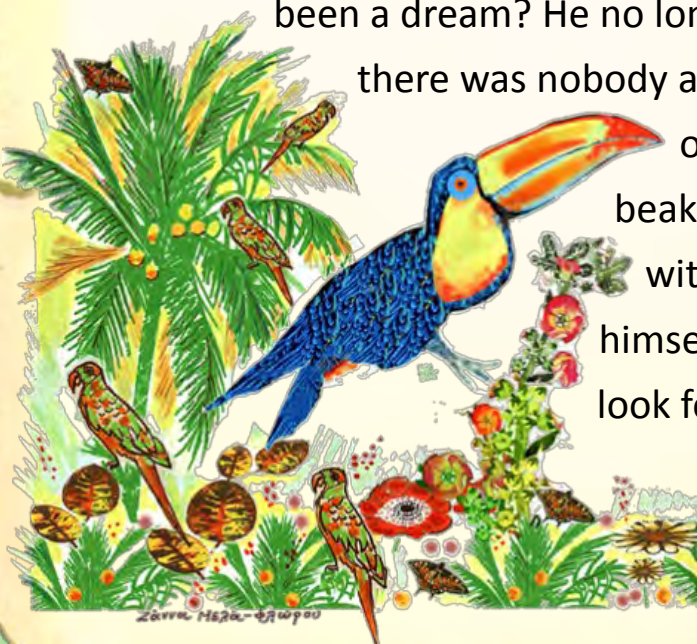
goes on behind the scenes before the show begins,' she said. 'How do they persuade that lazy seal to spin round in the ring as if she is enjoying it? If I find out that the animals are suffering, I'll make such a fuss! I'll throw rotten eggs and tomatoes and I'll get the whole audience to join me!' she muttered angrily. 'But then, if they mistreated the animals wouldn't you hear them crying? Wouldn't they protest?'

'Little witch,' said Gobbo reassuringly, 'that ape-man you saw with his whip will show you his good side tomorrow: he'll be working as an acrobat!'

And I've just hired an unsuccessful thief called Leno and found a circus act for him. He's now the robber-clown who threatens people with his water-pistol. We're training him and helping him to put his life to rights. So far his act is going very well, and he's doing other jobs around the circus, too. He's already quite enthusiastic and he's making plans for the future.

We'll travel from city to city round the world with the circus. We'll all take a share in the profits, for believe me, circuses are still very much alive. As long as audiences pay to come and see us we'll be here to entertain them. It's the public who'll decide if there are circuses!

The toucan woke up, shook his head and opened one eye. Yes, he was still in the witch's tent but outside it was broad daylight. Had he fallen asleep, and had it all been a dream? He no longer cared. And since there was nobody around he stretched out his great yellow beak, opened his wings and with a flap! Flap! Thrust himself high into the air to look for the way back to his home deep in a hollow tree.



Text 5 – THE STRANGEST OF HORSES

by Zanna Mela-Florou



The little artist opened her drawing block. In it she had painted impressive but strange horse-like creatures. She asked the first one her eyes chanced on: '**Rearhorse** –or **praying Mantis**–, which is the strangest of the horses I have painted, can you guess?'

'Little artist, dear, I'm sure that I must be the strangest,' replied the praying Mantis. 'A big green insect with tall legs and huge eyes! What do you say?' And Rearhorse puffed herself up and held her great forelegs out as if in prayer.



'Don't waste your time asking, little girl!' came another voice from among her paintings. 'It's I, the weird fish, you'll give first place to!' And on the page, holding its little body proudly upright, she saw a male **seahorse**. 'I'm famous because I have a horse's head but the body of a caterpillar - and for another reason, too: because I become a pregnant father! But how can that be, you ask? For me it's simple: My lady wife lays her eggs in a tube and they slide down into a bag inside my belly!

"It's your turn now," she says, "so work your wonders on my eggs, my miracle maker! Warm them, guard them, and do everything that they will need." And both of us will be delighted to invite you down into the depths, to see our young seahorses being born.'





'I'm a little horse, too,'
came a tiny neigh from
amongst the pages of
the drawing block, 'a
pony from the island of
Skyros.

But I don't have great
wings on my back like the
winged horse **Pegasus** and
nor am I a **Centaur** with a
strange body that is horse
and man together.



Nor do I have a hiding
place for warriors in my belly,
like the big wooden **Trojan**

Horse -Doúreios Íppos-. No, I don't deserve first place,
since I don't even have a tail
like the mythical **Hip-**
palektor which was half
horse and half cockerel!!



'Don't be upset, little
horse from Skyros,' said the
girl who liked to paint.

'I love all the horses in my collection. I've painted each one of you with such eagerness and love that I'll put you on display by turns, so then you'll all enjoy first place -at least one time!' And with a smile, the girl put down her block.



Text 6 – THE DRONE

by Zanna Mela-Florou

Provided I was a praying mantis, it wouldn't bother me to be an insect. And in a flash a mantis I



become! Hip-hopping happily around a field I catch a handsome bee, its colour sweet as honey. I lick my lips in hungry anticipation, but pause astonished at the torrent of words that come pouring from its mouth:

'I am a bee but I don't make honey and I'm not a worker inside the hive. I don't make wax because I am different. I am a male, a **drone**, a bridegroom-to-be for the queen, and the greatest lover of all the hive!'



If her majesty chooses me, I'll become the creator
of a new hive, with babies hidden in the thousands of



eggs our wonderful
queen keeps laying.
But when winter
comes they'll drive
us males out, saying
accusingly: "Drones,
you are lazy crea-
tures!" So please,
praying mantis, take
pity on me. All I
want is to be our
queen's chosen
lover!

Moved by his
tears I let him go. And now I'm hopping off to try my
luck elsewhere.

Text 7 – A PRESENT FROM THE CUCKOO

by Zanna Mela-Florou

'I'll tell you a true story, Cuckoo dear,' said the sparrow to the huge chick that sat there in the little nest looking hungry.

'Once upon a time a sparrow named Chirpy lived all alone in the forest. Another bird, a cuckoo, heard her



complaining how lonely she was feeling and made her a present of a baby bird still wrapped up in its egg. Chirpy happily sat on the egg and warmed it with her feathery body and in a few days a 'crack!' was heard in her little nest!

From the broken shell a pretty little head poked out.
'Coo-coo! I'm hungry!' said the baby cuckoo.

Chirpy looked doubtfully at the not-so-little chick.
Oh, it's not a sparrow. What a pity! she thought, and
lost all interest in the newborn stranger.

'Coo-coo, mummy!' the newcomer chirped playfully
and hid inside the broken eggshell. 'Coo-coo, where am
I?' it cried once again. It half came out then hid once
more, laughing fit to burst.

Charmed by its delightful tricks, the sparrow played
with the chick and fed it with a tasty caterpillar! From
that moment on she adored her adopted child and they
became inseparable, just like us.'

'I know your story, Mrs Sparrow,' said the chick. 'A
great big bird came and told it to me only a few days
ago. "Come with me and spend the winter somewhere
warmer," she said. But as soon as she saw you coming
she took fright and flew off in a hurry. I haven't got
feathers on my wings to fly with yet; but anyway, why
should I leave you, Chirpy? I still haven't learned any-
thing about the place where I was born.'

'But why stay, Cuckoo dear? You're not made for our cold winters. You're a migratory bird, and birds like you spend their winters in the warm south. You'll leave because you cannot stand the cold, while I manage here just fine, come rain or snow. But wait, I've found the answer! I'll knit you some nice warm clothes so you won't shiver, and then I'll



have you for company all year round!'

The sparrow flew off to find some wool, but she had not got far when she found her way barred by a great

big bird who had been waiting for her. 'Chirpy sparrow,' it said, 'that precious gift I gave you once -I want it back.'

'No way, Mrs Cuckoo!' came the answer. 'If you want your baby back it'll be over my dead body!'

A moment later a gunshot suddenly woke the baby cuckoo. 'Where's my mother, where's Chirpy?' he cried out.

'Don't wait for the sparrow, son,' the big bird laughed, 'a hunter's taken her away with him. Look what I've brought you: a big fat worm to make us friends, for I'm a cuckoo, too.'



'I'd die of hunger if it weren't for you, Mrs Cuckoo, poor orphan that I am!'

'You're no orphan. Your mother's alive and I am she. You were adopted, my little cuckoo.'

'But how did I find myself in the sparrow's nest, mother?'

'I'd just returned here to my home country to spend the summer months and while I was resting from my long journey north I heard a hidden voice that said, "It's springtime, so find a way to get me out of here!" It was you, the unborn chick, speaking from the egg inside me. "But I haven't got a nest to bring my young ones up in," was the excuse I gave you.'

'And what did I say to that, mother?'

"You're setting a bad example to all the other birds. You must do your duty!" you told me sternly. And that persuaded me to find a solution, son. That's why I gave you to the sparrow. Do you see the hollow in that tree? A little brother of yours is growing up in there.

There was a nest inside belonging to another bird, with three eggs in it. "Now's my chance to make her hatch my own egg, too!" I told myself. As soon as she left the nest unguarded I went in and laid an egg. Then I hid and waited for her and her mate to return. They counted their eggs, but found everything in order. Ha, ha! They counted again. "One, two, three, they're all there. That broken egg on the ground can't be ours," they said. You see, my son? Trust nothing and no-one, not even your own eyes, or you'll be robbed and never notice!

'You mean you pushed one of their eggs out of the nest and replaced it with one of your own?'

'Exactly! And you should see what fate awaits the other little chicks when they hatch next to one of your big fat brothers! In a tiny nest with barely enough food it's the strongest one that wins.'

'So the baby cuckoos fight with the other chicks, eh, mother, and they beat them?'

'Yes.'

'And you let this happen? You must be crazy, mother!'

'Not crazy -lazy!'



'So those are the sort of dirty tricks you play! No wonder the other birds don't trust us. Now I realize why they set a guard on their nests as soon as they notice the sly way we cuckoos laugh behind their backs!'

'Why are you tearing your feathers out, my child?'

'So I won't look like you! And I'll change my name, too. Then they won't call me a cuckoo any longer. Ah, poor Chirpy, how I love you, little sparrow! Oh, oh, oh!'

'You're right, my little one. I'm a dreadful mother. I've loaded all my responsibilities onto other birds, pretending I'm making them a present by letting them 'adopt' my chicks. And now I feel guilty about using such mean tricks. I've left your brothers and sisters to grow up in foreign nests here there and everywhere.'

Yes, I've made up my mind, little cuckoo. I shall hand myself in to the guardians of nature, the hawks, to be punished for my terrible behaviour. I've even found a stepmother to take care of you. Coo-coo, Coo-coo, Coo-coo... Ah, there she is. She heard my call, the hunter's little daughter, and she's on her way. Good-bye, my baby, and good luck!

The wet seashore is bathed in sunlight. Among its greyish-white and coffee-coloured pebbles something is moving. I draw closer and see it is a young cuckoo, still a fledgling, slipping and sliding among the wet sea pebbles as if drunk. It tries to fly but however hard it beats its wings it fails. I take it in my hands. It is trembling with fear but my soft caresses calm it and it knows it has been saved. I speak to it in the language of love and we come to a secret agreement. Just one look exchanged and it is done: I adopt it as my child and it accepts me as its mother. Now free of cares, it falls asleep in my hand as if it were in its nest, no longer frightened by my movements. Waking again, it stretches its little wings. No trembling now and no shivering in the chill of early morning.



I feed it and hear: 'Coo-coo! I've had enough now. Don't stuff more food into me. I'm little still and need time to grow up. Coo-coo, Coo-coo...' it chirps crossly, and lifting its little bottom over the side of its new nest it does its business with a 'plop!' then curls into a feathery ball and falls asleep.

'Coo-coo, Coo-coo! I am awake. Where are you, little girl? Come and feed me. Coo-coo... I'm hungry. Yes, that's it - a little every time but often- that's how I eat. Now you're starting to learn something about babies.' And he flutters his wings rapidly to show that he is happy.

Time goes by and the little cuckoo grows up into a handsome bird. 'Why are you looking so sad, little girl?' he asks me.

'Because you'll soon be going, Cuckoo,' I reply. You'll leave me and fly far away, like all birds that migrate.'

'When I return in spring I'll come to see you, little girl. Then I'll build the finest nest in the forest, find my brothers and sisters left here and there in the nests of other birds, and last of all I'll free my mother from the prison of the guardian hawks. I want us to become useful members of the winged community, to be respected and welcomed in the homes of other birds. But above all, I'll love and protect their chicks as if they were my own.'

'Do you remember Chirpy, the sparrow who was your mother once? My father the hunter shot her, but I tended her wounds and now she is well again. Before you leave you can see her-she's not far from here. Well, goodbye for now then, Cuckoo dear, and have a safe journey, my little one!'

'Goodbye, hunter's daughter! Goodbye, step-mother, dear! I won't forget you, little girl.'

Soon afterwards the sparrow and the cuckoo were holding one another tight, unable to speak, so moved were they at being reunited.



Text 8 – THE LITTLE SPARROW

by Zanna Mela-Florou



Once again the tiny sparrow comes hopping onto the little girl's hand, pecks at the crumbs in her palm and settles there. She watch as he preens himself and wags his little head co-quettishly.

She throws more crumbs to him and laughs. Delighted, he chirps his thanks. Then plucking up courage he hops onto the table and boldly hovers over the bread basket. Without moving, she watches him with a smile.

He looks back at her, then boldly begins pecking at her loaf! 'What a cheeky little bird!' you must be thinking. But this one has been used to feeding out of the girl's hand ever since he was a chick. Do you see where he's made his nest, up there on the roof of the girl's house? 'Chirp, chirp!' he sings in a merry farewell as he circles her head before flying away.



Text 9 – IN THE TURTLE'S NEST

by Zanna Mela-Florou

I'm a little baby turtle in a hurry, no bigger than your thumb-nail. For now I'm hidden in a soft-shelled egg just like a ping-pong ball, covered in warm sand. My mother Mrs Turtle left me in the care of the hot sun, carefully buried like a treasure not these two months back. But how can I get out of this round egg?

Wait for me, dear brothers and sisters, wait! I'm coming, too!

Then a voice says, 'If you are ready to come out there's only one way, baby, and you'll find it!'

And find it I do! With kicks, the leathery shell of my egg starts to give way; and then I find that on my chin I've got a bone like a razor that can cut it open! I split the egg and half crawl out.

In the dark, I bump against a hundred other eggs that all hide baby turtles. It's a mad-house down here, so many of us on top of one another!

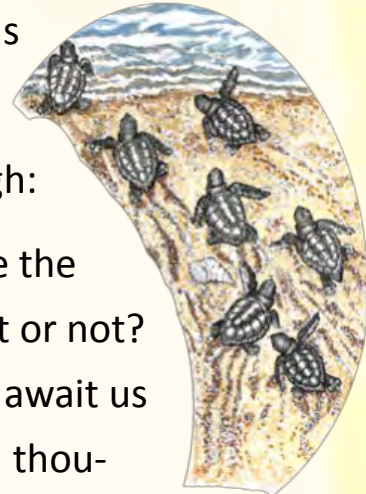




-I struggle to find some way out of this dark pit, until a reassuring voice from somewhere in the crowd says: 'If you want to get out of this deep nest our mother dug for us, then use the empty eggshells as a ladder, little brother. Can you hear? The sea waves are calling out a tender welcome. There must be around a hundred of us by now. Come along too!'

I hesitate and ask myself with a sigh:

'Will I and my kind die out, just like the dinosaurs? Is it worth leaving the nest or not? I've dreamed that a host of problems await us once we do. Only one baby turtle in a thousand will have the good fortune to grow up and



mate, then come back to this shore and dig a nest in the warm sand like mama did; to lay the eggs that will hatch into the children of the coming generation.'

So I decide to stay right where I am, inside the nest, asleep and hoping in my dreams to find a sea park where I will be safe. Good night!



But what's this 'plaf, ploof!' noise I hear that's stopping me from sleeping?

It's the waves that are shaking me awake and inviting me to their embrace, to feed me tasty morsels from the sea, to lull me into a sleep filled with sweet dreams and introduce me to the strange world of the deep. And for this miracle that has occurred it is the hot sun I must thank!

'Good morning, waves!' I cry, 'I'm off to fish. And after that I can hardly wait to go for a good long swim and play with my hundred little brothers and sisters. There they are!

Wait for me, I won't be long! And as I go off fishing, I gaily sing:

'I'm a tiny turtle, a babe in a hurry,
Small as your thumbnail, legs in a flurry.
While I still have a weak, soft shell
I shall hide in the kind sea's swell,

To happily play in its arms and laugh
As month by month I grow bigger by half
Until I become both handsome and strong,
Making friends in the sea where I belong:
Other turtles, of course, by the score,
Whales, seahorses and many more.
Then there are things I'll have to learn,
Like eating plastic my stomach will turn!



And next, of course, I'll have to find
Just where I belong in the turtle kind:
Loggerhead? Flatback? Maybe a Green?
For many kinds of us can be seen!

And not to forget that reptiles like me
Such as lizards and snakes live out of the sea.
They give me a friendly wave from the beach
But the place where I live they cannot reach.
Now my course in life is set fair;
Well-armoured, I dive then come up for air.
With my hopes and my dreams I swim along,
And wishing you well I end my song.

Back there on the broad white sands was the nest
where I was born. The society for the protection of
caretta caretta, the loggerhead turtle (me, that is!) had
put a wire basket over it for protection with a post stuck
in the sand nearby saying in faded letters:



'Be careful! Turtle Eggs!' They'd put it there fifty-five days before, when we were first buried in our nest.

In summer the volunteers stand guard, protecting the nests and the mother turtles who come ashore at night to lay their eggs. And then they wait expectantly to see the tiny army of baby turtles forming up on the sand then scuttling down as fast as their little legs will carry them to find their watery home - the sea.

Once there, they'll quickly scatter for a while to hide amongst the seaweed and the rocks, then surface to take in a hasty gulp of air before diving down once more like tiny submarines in search of food and neighbours to make friends with.

Look at me in wonder -me and my hundred little brothers and sisters who have suddenly come popping from the sand! It's as if you've seen a miracle, a dream that can't be true.

Yet true it is, this fairytale, true as true can be. For there are secrets hidden for long ages that explain how we survive. I love you all, but above all my parents and the kind sun that warmed me into being. And the volunteers as well, who care so much about us. I love you all! Fond kisses from a lucky little turtle who has just been born!'

So let's all shout together, 'Long live life! Long live the miracle of nature! Long live volunteers! Long live the baby turtles!'

We invite them to present themselves at our fairy-tale castle on the floating island! And if they are late? Then you'll certainly find pictures of them, and not only pictures, among the magnificent collection in the castle shop. We have cardboard turtles, pottery turtles, glass ones, turtles made of cloth, turtles painted on bags and caps or hidden in painting books. And you'll even meet model turtles made of wax! Have a good tour!





Series: © Flying Pages, No 12

Ecological Texts

by Zanna Mela-Florou



Zanna Mela-Florou writes and paints

Electronic Edition

<https://www.openillustratedbook-mela-florou.net>

<https://openillustratedbook-mela-florou.blogspot.com>

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ISBN: 9786185172183

Zanna writes and paints

So let's go back to when I was a little girl, to tell you how I came to paint. To my good fortune, my grandmother, who had a country house in the foothills of a mountain, had a neighbour who was a painter -and a professional one at that. She had so many brushes, paints, palettes and canvases....piles of them! I examined them all very carefully and watched her as she painted, lost in her own private world. And then I took a piece of paper and a pencil and drew my cousin, a girl a few years younger than me. I quickly got her pigtails and all her little body down on paper. And it seems that hasty sketch impressed our good neighbour the artist, for she said, 'Our little Zanna has got talent!' Granny showed no surprise at this, just adding, 'Yes, I see her drawing all the time. Soon she'll have filled the house with pictures!' As for me, I only listened -listened to the grown-ups saying something good about me.

That's how I came to take my first art lessons from that dear painter. We painted together, with her giving me exercises progressively more difficult and showing me with magic brush-strokes what to add, what to avoid and what to take away.

She taught me, her student, the hidden mysteries of her craft, the fruit of long years of experience.

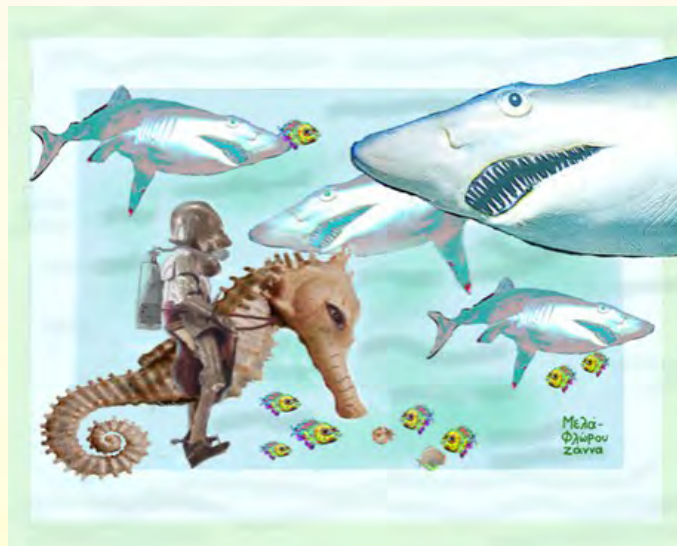
Flying pages filled with heroic characters

Over time, I realized that something strange was happening to me. Whenever my eyes were growing heavy with sweet drowsiness in the deep armchair I was dozing in, they would come from far away with a 'bz, bz', those little creatures with their joyful voices, approaching all around me on flying pages filled with the heroes of my childhood years. In soft voices they would say what they had seen, what they had dreamed and what they had imagined. And then, insisting, they would pull me up and take me with them on their journeys, to meet with new adventures and together make the world our own.

Then I would transform myself into a witch and work mad magic tricks. An instant later I'd become a pirate girl on a great ship with a crew obedient to my orders, and a moment afterwards I'd take a fairy's shape and fly into dense forests with my little heroes, next to birds that looked like glowing books. And as we journeyed on we'd begin to turn their pages, in search of 'gems'. The mysteries they concealed enthralled us.

Under their magic spell we found ourselves far away in other worlds, worlds of sky and sea, with flying pages and hot air balloons, with sleighs and even submarines. And now the diary of our journeys began to fill with all that we had seen, all we had met with and all that had impressed us. Now here we are at the bottom of the sea, thousands of metres from the surface, with gigantic monsters all around us, glowing in the dark. And the fish are oddly-shaped down here as well; even the sharks are differently built. Everything is completely strange to us!

We're very happy down here, but as we're extremely busy taking photographs and making notes on everything we've seen, we'll bid you a hasty farewell for the moment -but we promise you, friends, we'll be in touch again quite soon.



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Ecological Texts

by Zanna Mela-Florou

*Hidden treasure in the snow, in the sand
and in the forest*

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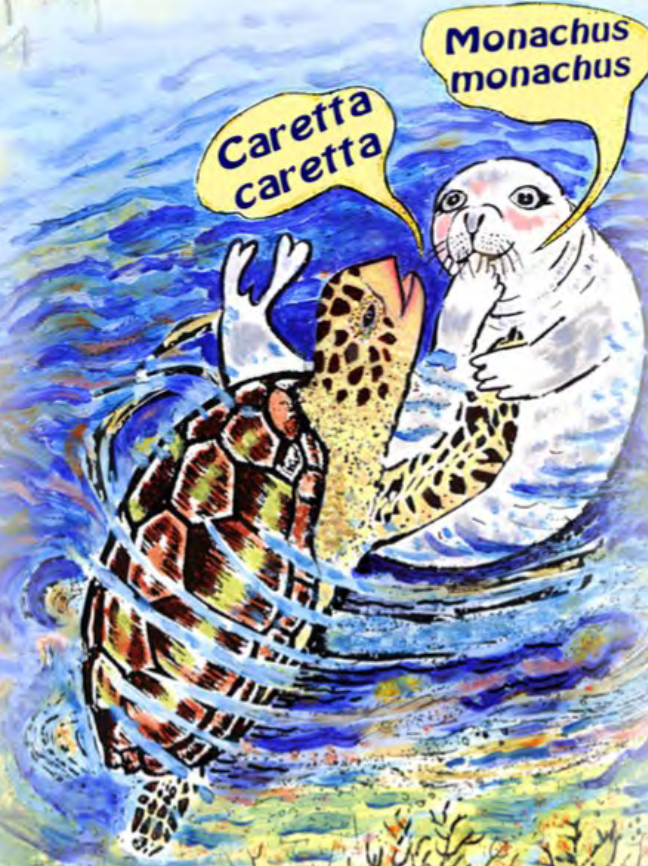


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