

A COLLECTION OF
STORIES
FROM
WEST AFRICA

Compiled and Illustrated by
David A. Naff



HOW TURTLE COULD FLY
(How Turtle Got a Blocked Shell)



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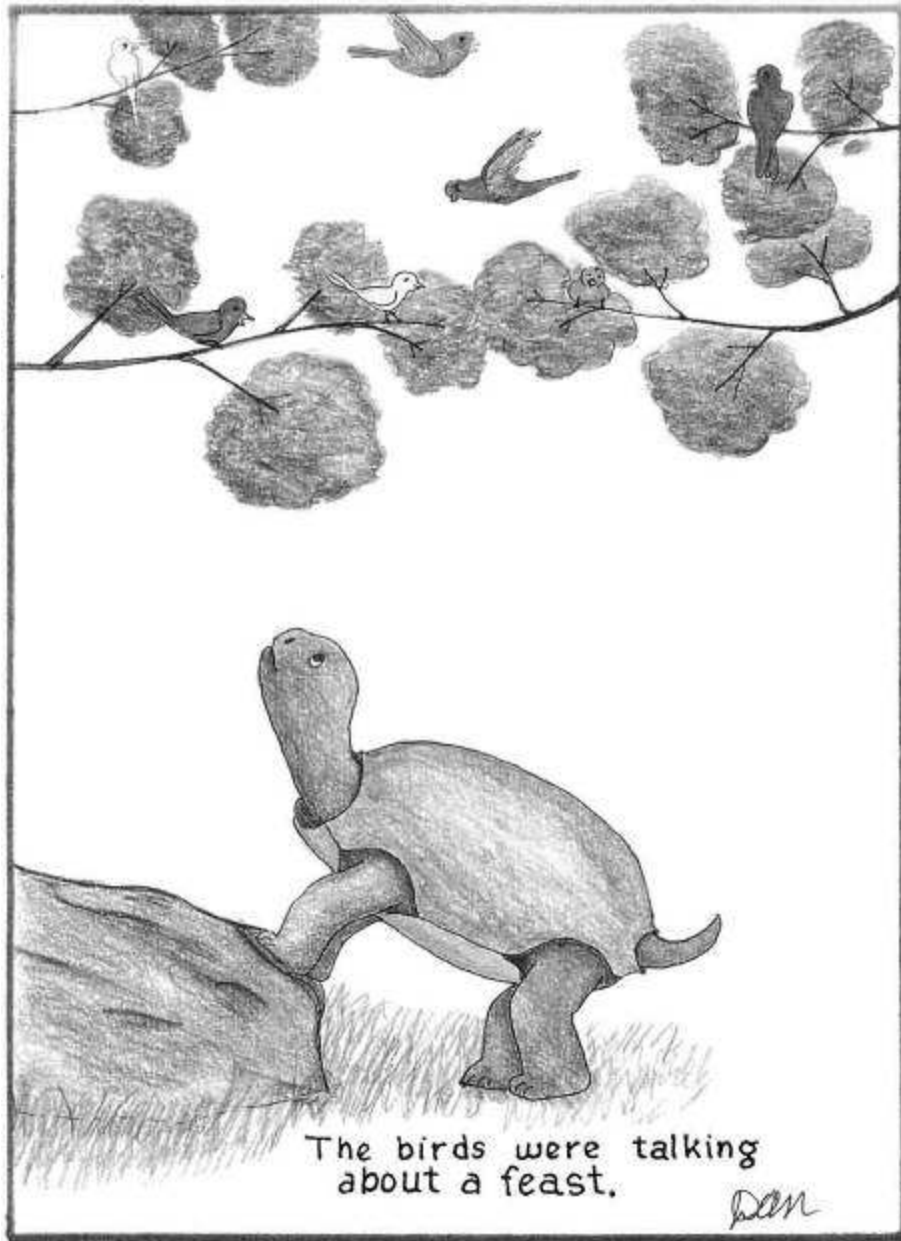
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By Spark Team



HOW TURTLE COULD FLY

(How Turtle Got a Blocked Shell)

Note to the reader: Words and phrases typical of West Africa are retained and indicated by italics.

Food in one mouth cannot taste good. (Food shared tastes better.)
Gbandi proverb

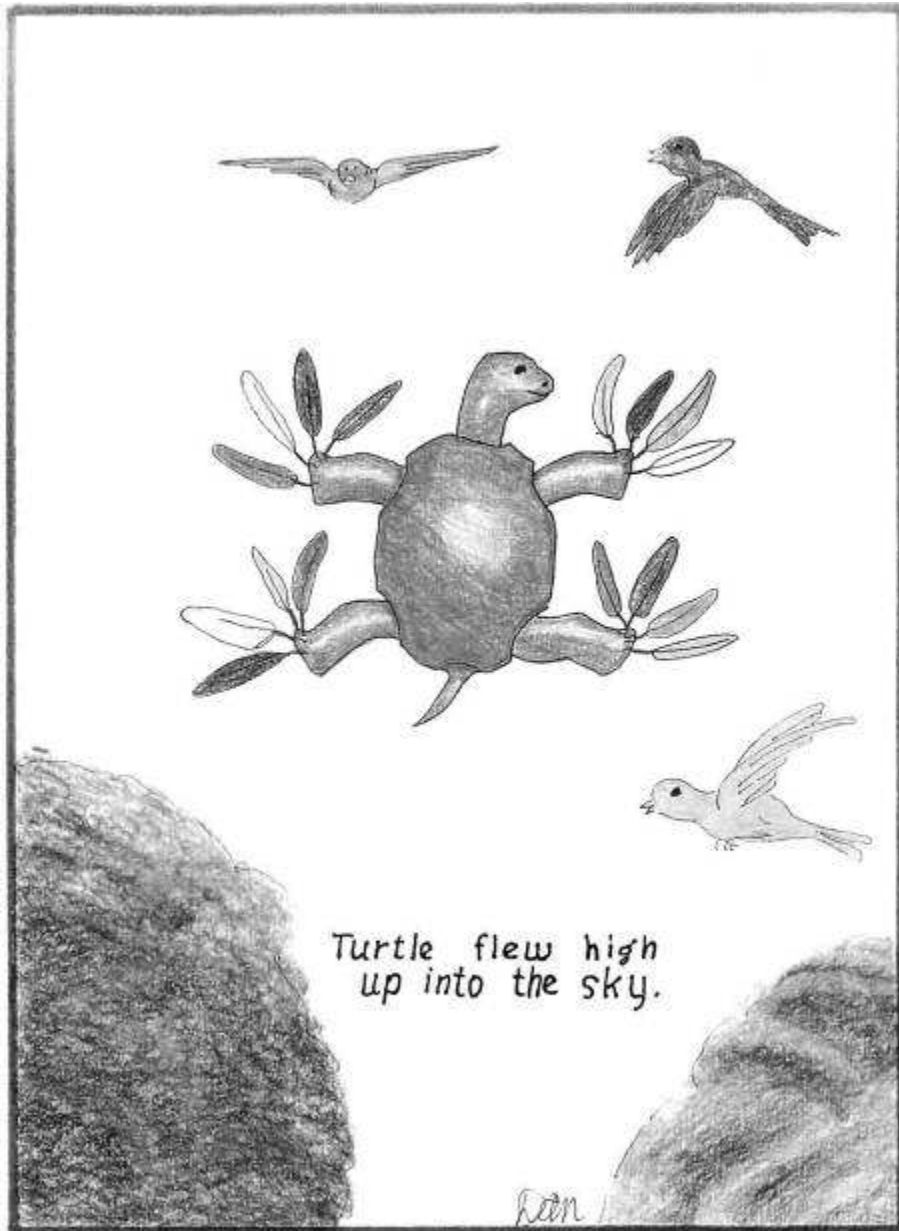
One day, Turtle overheard the birds chattering among themselves.

“Isn’t it wonderful that we can all go to a big feast high in the sky in the Sky King’s house?”

“Yes, all of us have been invited and we are all planning to go.”

“Yes, yes, we all can easily fly up there.”

Turtle liked feasts very much. He interrupted the birds, “harrumph! Excuse me please. May I come to your feast? I would very much like to go to a feast high up in the sky.”



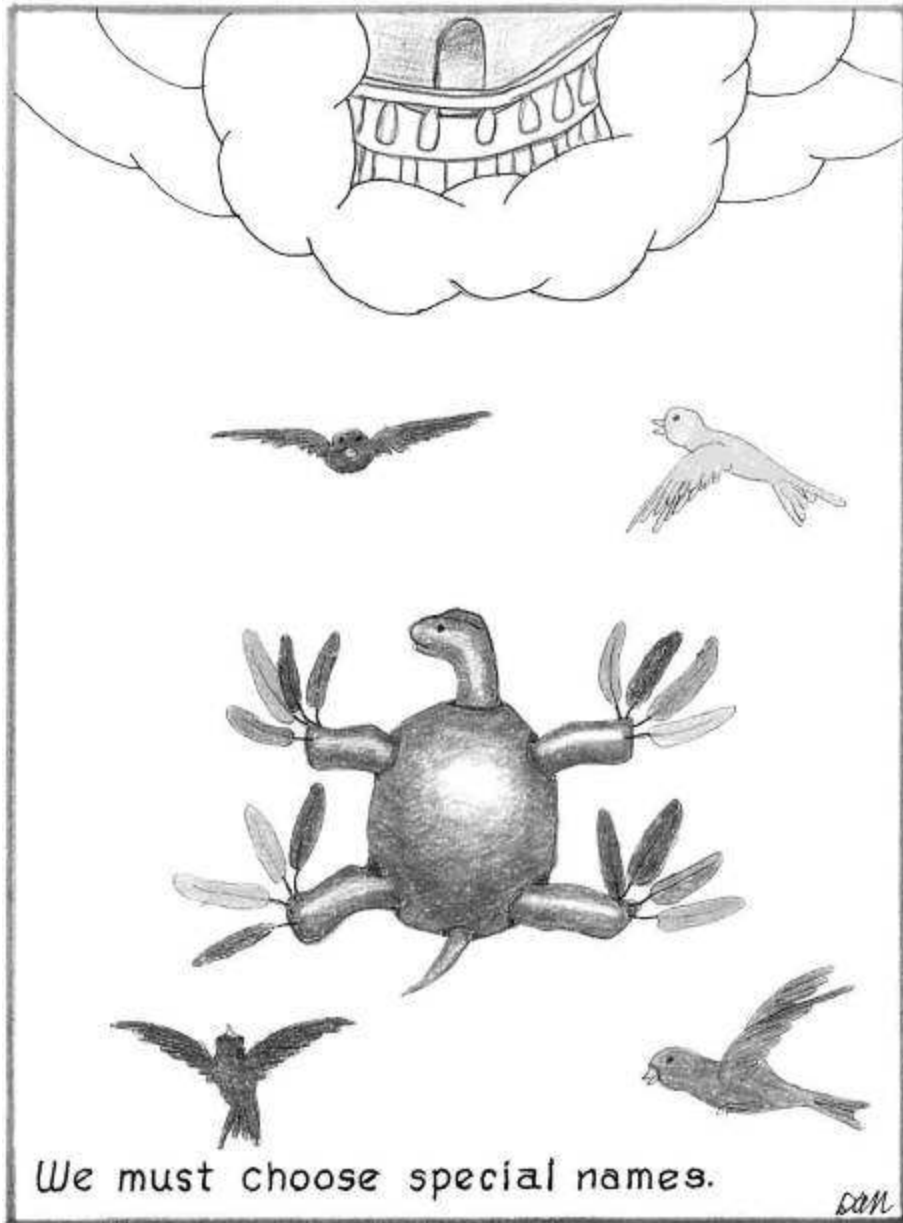
“Oh, but, Turtle, you cannot fly. How would you get there?” the birds inquired.

Turtle thought a minute then replied, “Hmmm. Well, I think that if each one of you would lend me one feather, I could fly up with you to the Sky King’s house. Then we all could enjoy the feast together.”

Now the birds thought that it would be very nice to have such an important person with them at the feast. So each bird gave Turtle one feather.

The Love Birds each gave Turtle a feather – one blue one and one red one. The Pepper Bird gave Turtle one grey feather. Eagle gave Turtle one brown feather; and so on until Turtle had enough feathers for each hand and each foot. Holding the feathers tightly, Turtle jumped up into the air and moved his arms and legs up and down very fast. Turtle rose up into the air.

“Look!” the birds chattered. “Turtle can fly. Turtle can fly!! Let’s go!”



So, away all the birds flew, up into the sky and Turtle with them. As they rose higher up and higher up Turtle began to talk with the birds.

“Did you know that when people of distinction go to an important feast like this one, it is customary to take a special name?”

“What kind of a name?”

“Oh, whatever name you like or perhaps one that sounds like you.”

The Love Birds said that their names would be Love and Friendship.

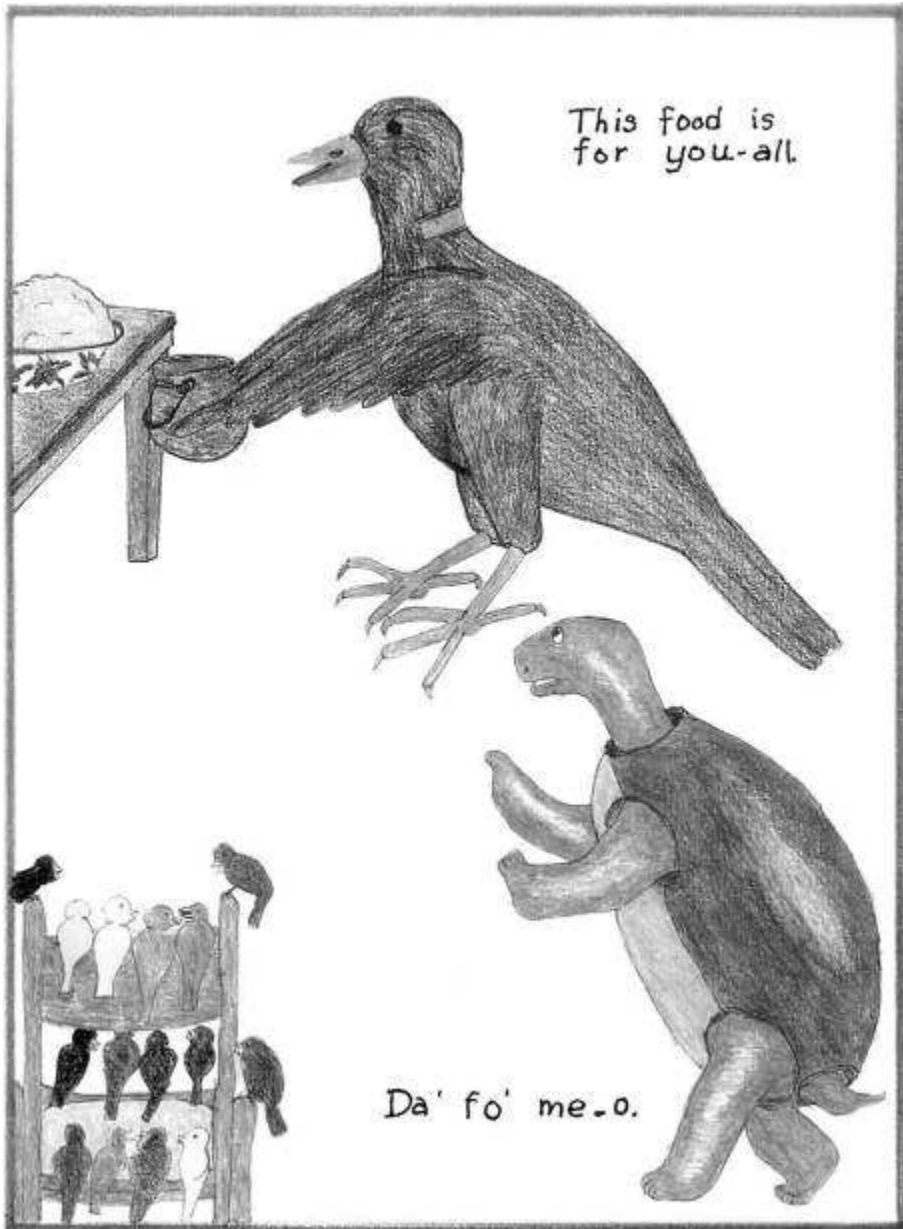
Pepper Bird said, “I will be called Singer.”

Eagle said, “I will be called Sharp Eye.”

Rice Bird said, “I will be called Yellow Bell.”

Red Bird said, “I will be called Hibiscus.”

“Well, Turtle,” the birds asked after they had all chosen names for themselves, “What will you be called?”



“My name,” Turtle answered, “will be You-All.”

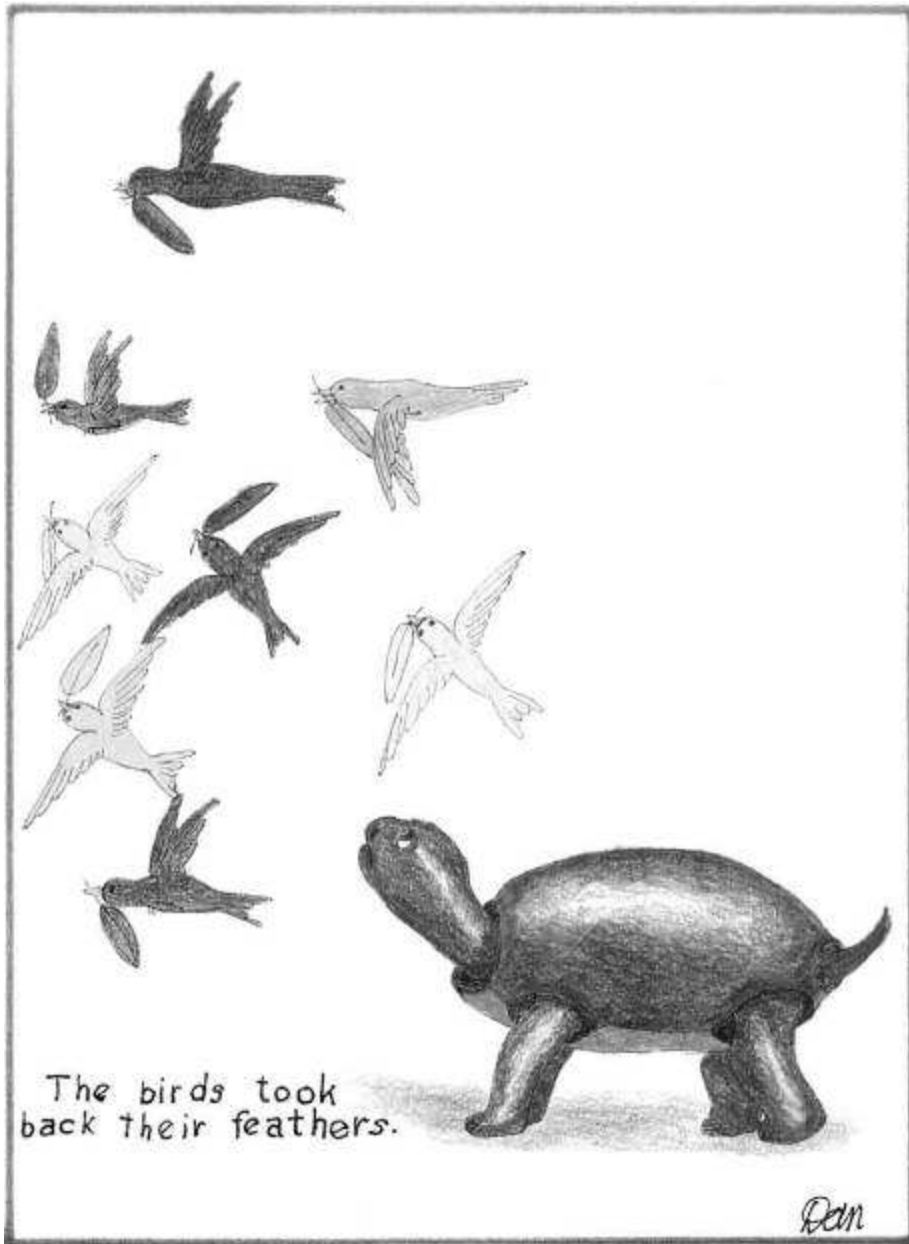
“You-All? That is a strange name.”

“Oh, it is not so strange,” Turtle answered. “Many famous people have been called You-All.”

So away they all flew and into the Sky King’s house. Everyone was made welcome in the Sky King’s house, even Turtle, though the Sky King did say, “You certainly are a strange looking bird.”

Sky King greeted them all warmly saying, “Now the food will be ready shortly and so everyone find a comfortable place to sit or roost. Meanwhile you can enjoy the lovely view from way up here and the sweet smell of the food being cooked.”

Everyone including Sky King sat around laughing and talking together, telling stories, anticipating the fine feast that smelled so good. Presently a servant of the Sky King called him and he went out.



At last the cook, a huge black crow, brought out the big post of sweet smelling food. He set the pots on a big table in the center of all his guests.

“Ahem. Excuse me, please. For whom is all this food?” asked Turtle.

“Caw-w-w Caw. Why, it is for you-all,” answered the cook. “You all-ll-ll. Caw-w-w.”

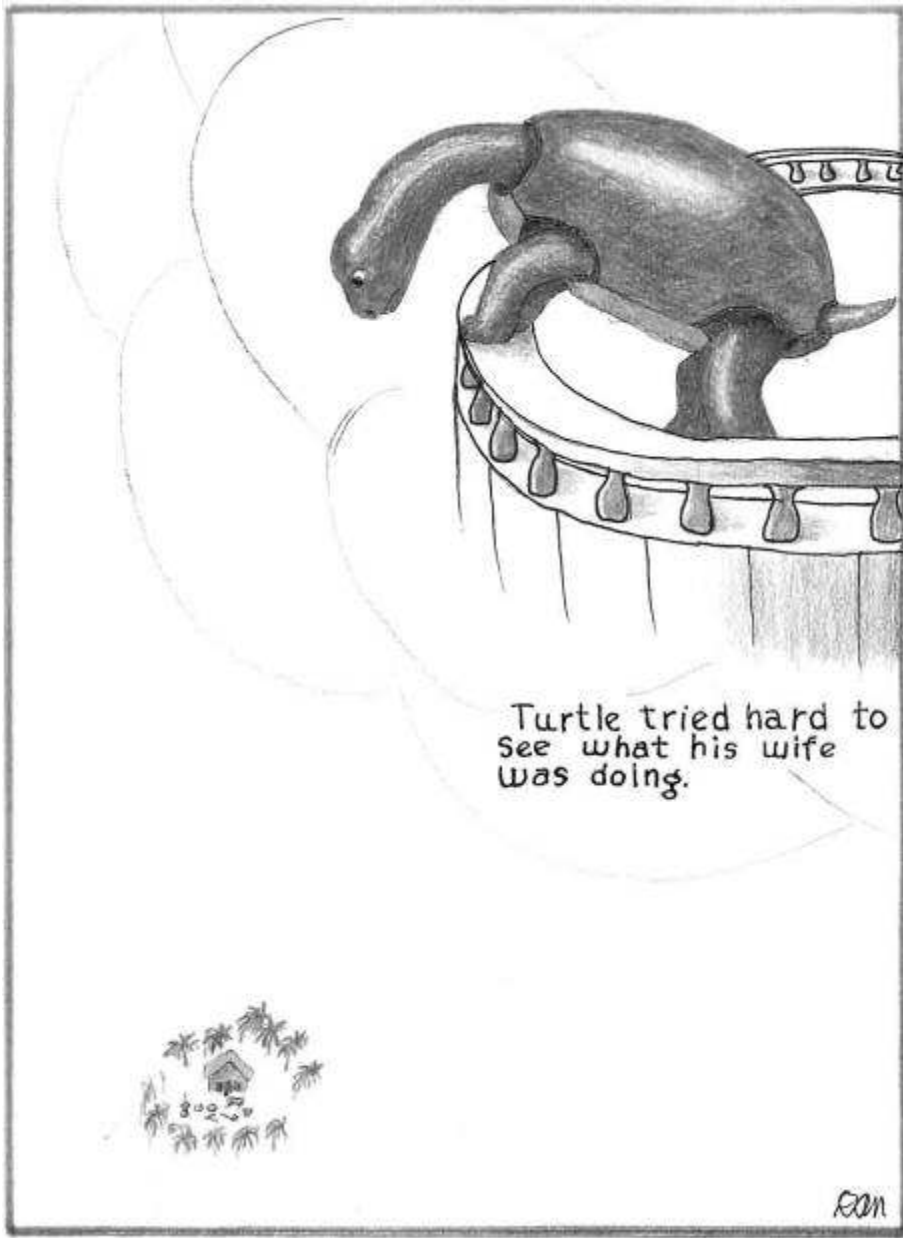
“Thank you very much,” said Turtle.

Turtle looked at the birds. “You see, this food is for me, for my name is You-All. Your part will come soon. Now just bear patience.”

Then Turtle ate and ate and ate until he ate all of the food. None was left for the birds and no more food was brought from the kitchen.

The birds realized that they had been tricked.

“You mean turtle. You ate all the food,” they cried. The birds were *vex too much*. Each went and tore his feather off Turtle, saying,



“That was a mean trick after us being so kind to you. Give us back our feathers!”

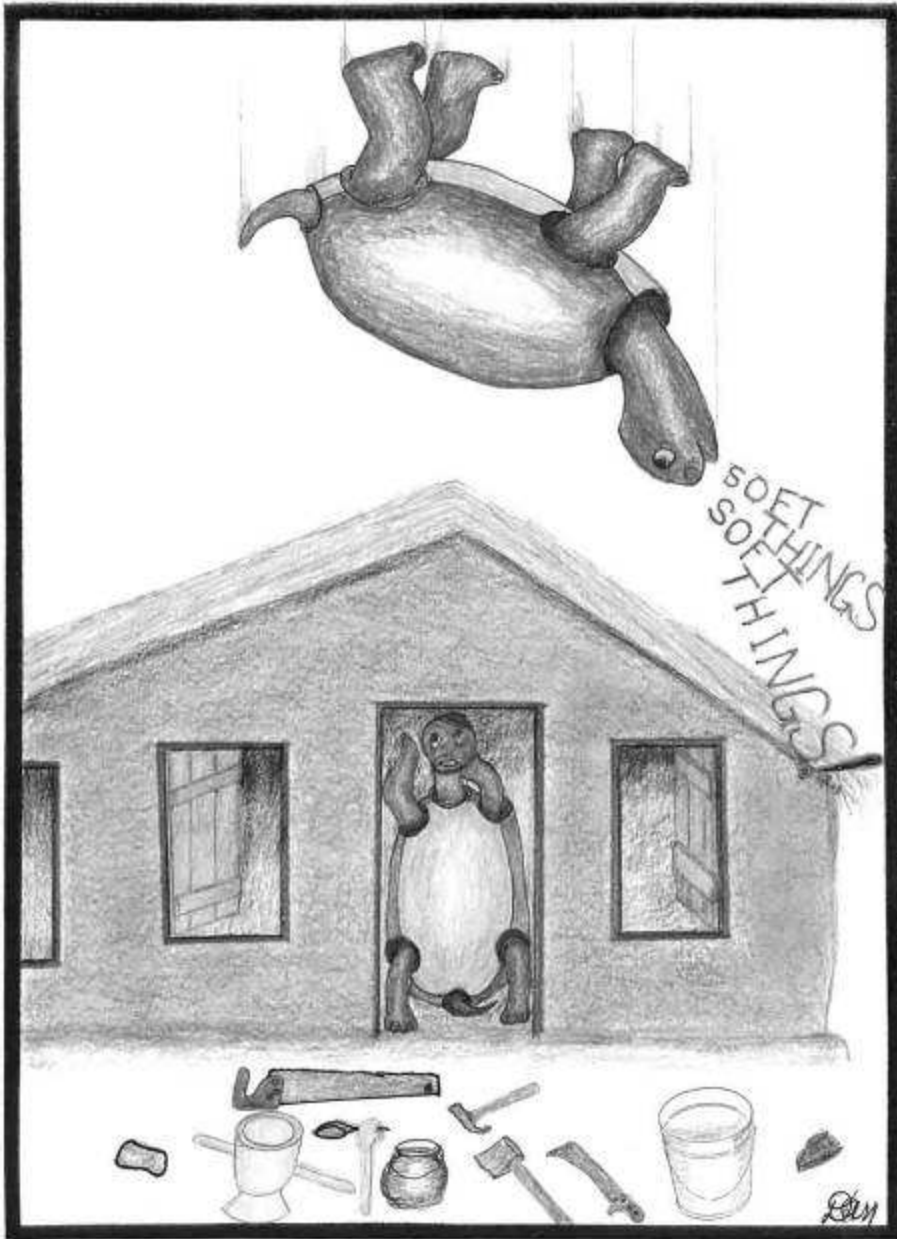
The last bird to come and get his feather was Friendship. Turtle pleaded with Friendship, “Please go tell my wife to put all of the soft things out into the yard in front of my house so I can jump down and not get hurt too much.”

Friendship did not answer. He just turned away. When they all got home he went to Turtle’s wife and said, “Mrs. Turtle, your husband says that you must put all the hard things out into the yard in front of your house.”

“Why does Mr. Turtle want all of the hard things out in front of our house?”

“I do not know,” Friendship lied. “Just go ahead and put all of the hard things out into the yard. Turtle has his reasons.”

Then Friendship flew away.

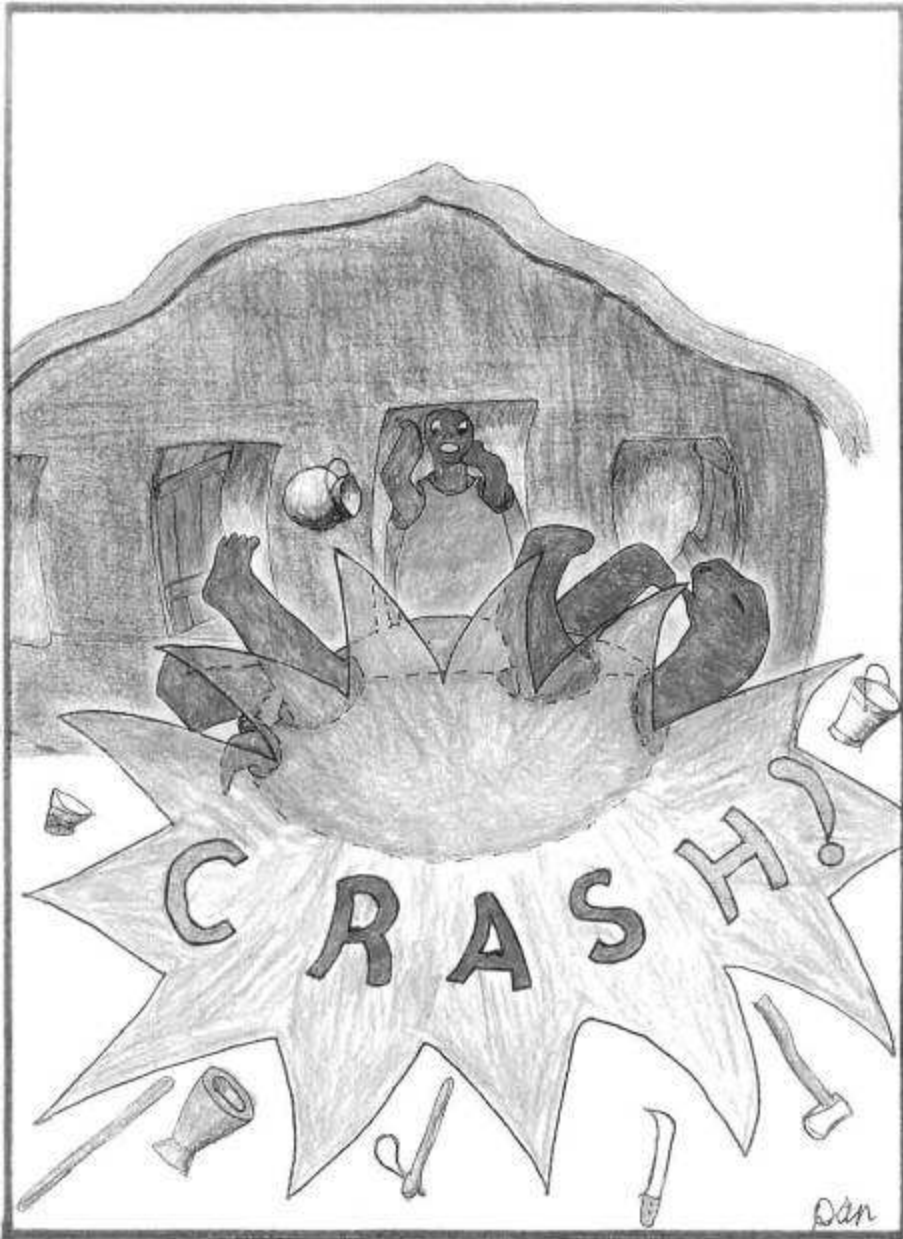


So Turtle's wife put the cutlasses, the ax, the iron pot, the hoe, bucket, the sharpening stone and all of the hard things she could find out into the yard in front of the house.

Turtle looked down from the Sky King's house. He was so high up that he could only see that she was moving about. He could not see what she was doing.

Then he saw that she had finished. Turtle jumped. Turtle was very heavy because he had eaten so much food. Faster and faster he fell. Too late he saw that all the hard things were there instead of all the soft things.

Turtle began to yell, "Soft things! Soft things!" but there was no time for Mrs. Turtle to bring out the soft things. There was no way that he could stop or slow up.



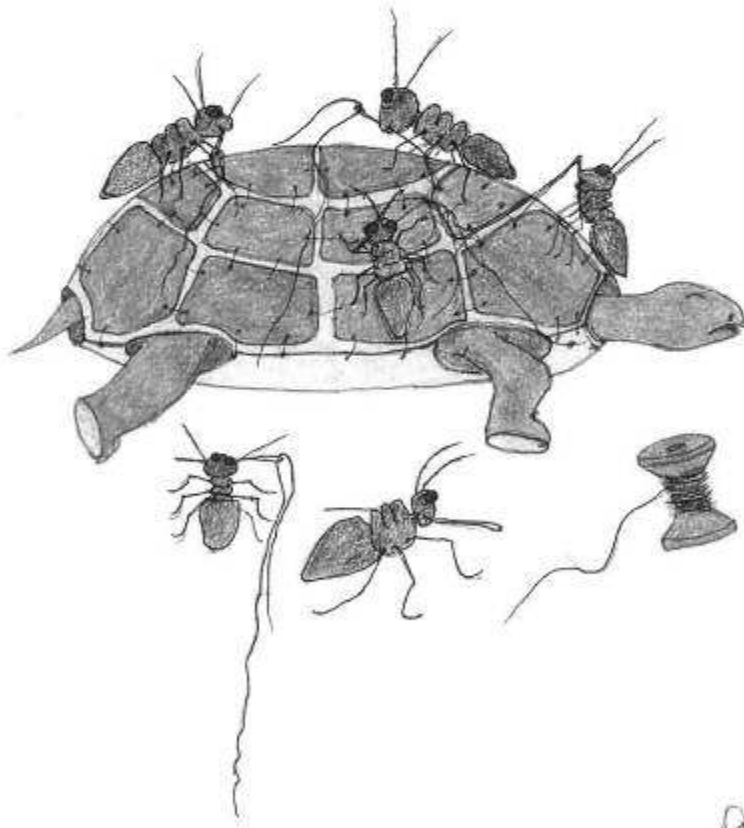
C-R-A-S-H!! Turtle hit the hard things. The ground shook! Everything shook when Turtle hit. His shell was cracked all over.

Turtle's wife and the neighbors carried him to the tailor ants. The tailor ants took their sharp needles and some thread. They sewed Turtle's shell all together again, but the cracks were still there. Turtle was very sick for many days. And to this day Turtle's shell is all blocked.

The Bible tells us that “they have all turned to their own way, each one wanting to get things for himself that are not his.” (Isaiah 56:11c).

It also says, “He who gets things by doing wrong, brings trouble to his family.” (Proverbs 15:27).

The tailor ants sewed Turtle's broken shell together again.



That happened to Turtle didn't it? Turtle took the name You-All because he was selfish and greedy, thinking only of himself. He brought plenty trouble on himself and his family. He lost some good friends too. Don't be like Turtle.

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