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How Tortoise Got His Bumpy Shell

By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE
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How Tortoise Got His Bumpy Shell

By Idenze Ezeme · Folklores · Ozikoro.com

A long time ago, all the birds were invited to a big feast in the sky. They were very happy and got ready for the special day. They painted their feathers in bright colors and made themselves look beautiful.

Tortoise saw the birds preparing and soon understood what was happening. He was very clever and never missed anything. When he heard about the feast, he became very hungry. There was little food at that time, and he had not eaten a big meal for a long time. His body was thin, and his shell felt empty. He decided to find a way to go to the sky.

Tortoise had no wings, so he asked the birds to let him go with them.

“We know you too well,” the birds said. “You are tricky and selfish. If we take you with us, you will cause trouble.”

“I have changed,” said Tortoise. “I have learned that if I hurt others, I also hurt myself.”

Tortoise spoke so sweetly that the birds believed him. Each bird gave him a feather, and he used them to make wings.

On the day of the feast, Tortoise arrived first. When all the birds gathered, they flew to the sky together. Tortoise was very excited and talked a lot. The birds chose him to speak for them because he was a great speaker.

As they flew, Tortoise said, “We must follow an old custom. When guests go to a feast, they take new names. The people in the sky will

expect this.”

The birds had never heard of this rule, but Tortoise seemed wise. So, they all chose new names. Tortoise chose the name All of you.

When they reached the sky, their hosts welcomed them warmly. Tortoise gave a wonderful speech, and everyone admired him. The people in the sky thought he was the leader of the birds.

Soon, the delicious food was ready. There was hot soup full of meat and fish, pounded yam, palm oil stew, and pots of palm wine. The people of the sky tasted the food first, then invited the birds to eat.

But Tortoise stood up and asked, “Who is this food for?”

Tortoise smiled and said to the birds, “Remember, my name is All of you. In this land, the leader eats first, then the others.”

Then, Tortoise ate the best food and drank two pots of wine. The birds were very angry, but the hosts thought it was their custom.

When Tortoise was full, the birds ate what was left. Some were too upset to eat. They took back the feathers they had given him and flew home.

Tortoise was now stuck in the sky with no wings. He asked the birds to send a message to his wife, but they refused. Only Parrot, who was the angriest, agreed.

Tortoise said, “Tell my wife to put all the soft things in the yard, so I can jump down safely.”

Parrot flew to Tortoise’s wife but gave the wrong message. He told her to put all the hard things outside. So, she put out knives, hoes, and even a cannon.

Tortoise looked down and saw his wife preparing, but he could not see

what she was putting down. He thought it was soft, so he jumped.

He fell for a long time. Then— CRASH! —he landed on the hard objects, and his shell broke into pieces.

A great healer came to help. He gathered the broken pieces and put them back together. But the shell was never smooth again.

That is why the tortoise has a bumpy shell.

SOURCES

References

The article's own bibliography, set as it appears in the record.

- 01 Igbo Folklore. (n.d.). How tortoise got his bumpy shell.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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