



The Tortoise and the Birds

(A story from Nigeria)

Once upon a time, creatures lived both on the earth and in the sky. The sky people were having a big party to celebrate a very important day and they invited a tortoise to come along. They also told him to invite his friends too.

The tortoise knew there would be lots to eat and drink, and lots of presents, but being very greedy creature he did not want to invite others.

He really, really wanted to go to the party and schemed and planned but couldn't figure how to get there since he had no wings and none of the birds were willing to lend him any feathers without knowing why he needed them.

The day of the party finally arrived and he still had not managed to find a way to get there so he surrendered and went to the birds and told them about the party and about all the food, drinks and presents that would be there.


The birds were very excited and made a deal with the tortoise to lend him a feather each so he could make wings and fly with them to the party.


When they got there, the sky creatures were very welcoming and gracious. They wanted to get to know everyone and asked all their names.

Each of the birds told the sky people their names, but when it got to the tortoise, he told them his name was "All of you".

When the food came out, the server said, this food is for "all of you...and so are all the drinks and the presents." The sneaky tortoise had tricked the birds and told them that this food was for him and they should be patient, theirs was coming.

The end of the party arrived and the birds were still waiting while the tortoise was full and drunk from all the food and drinks he had consumed.





The birds angrily went to the sky people and asked why they were ill-treated. They answered that they were sorry, but the tortoise had eaten all the food by himself. There was none left for anyone else.

The birds confronted the tortoise but he laughed and called them stupid so they all flew away home. The sky creatures were very disappointed that the tortoise had spoiled their party and told him to leave as they didn't want him in their house anymore.

The greedy tortoise gathered up the feathers he had been given by the birds and tried to fly home. But because he had eaten so much food and had drunk so many drinks he had doubled in weight and was too heavy for the feathers to cope with. So the tortoise fell all the way from the sky to the earth and landed on his back cracking his shell into many different pieces.

And this explains why a tortoise's shell is not smooth.

