

Turtle and Onça, the Jaguar

Turtle was slowly crawling her way through the forest when she noticed that Monkey was sitting up in a palm tree eating fruit.

“What are you doing Monkey?”

“I am eating the fruits of the Inaja tree!” answered Monkey.

“Please, Monkey, would you kindly pick and give me some? They look delicious!”

Monkey laughed, “Why Turtle? Come on, climb the tree and pick them yourself!”

“But I can’t climb trees!” whined Turtle.

Monkey came down the tree, picked up Turtle and took her to the top of the palm tree, very close to a bunch of fruit. Turtle started to eat hungrily.

“I see you are busy, Mistress Turtle. I am going to take a walk in the forest and I will be back in a minute.” said Monkey

Turtle ate to her heart’s content and then waited for Monkey. And waited, and waited and waited. But Monkey was nowhere to be seen. Turtle was starting to get anxious. There was no way to climb down from the tree. Turtle just gazed down...too afraid to move...scared of falling from the tree and hurting herself really badly.

Then Onça, the jaguar, approached the tree and noticed that Turtle was up there.

“What is that?” Onça was really surprised, “What are you doing up a tree, Turtle?”

“I am eating the fruits of Inaja!”

“Throw some fruit for me! They look so sweet!”

Turtle picked one fruit and threw it to Onça, who kept asking for more and more, till there was no more fruit around Turtle.

“Turtle, why don’t you come down the tree?”

“I am afraid of dying!” Turtle was really scared.

Onça, who was still very hungry, decided this cute little turtle could make a really nice dessert. Onça called, “Don’t be afraid, my little friend! Just jump. I am strong and I will catch you.”

But Turtle was no fool and knew that Onça was not to be trusted. Then an idea flashed through her brain. Turtle shrank inside her shell and threw herself from the branch just like a torpedo. She aimed at the big cat’s head. And that was exactly where she landed. Onça fell over dead.

Some months went by, and one day Turtle passed by that same palm tree. There were the dry bones of the Onça. One of the long bones looked perfect to carve into a flute. So Turtle carved herself an Onça bone flute and began to play on it. She was so happy that she sang:

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“I’ve got a flute which is made from onça’s bones! Ola-la!”

But another onça happened to be passing by and heard Turtle. It didn’t like that story about a flute made of onça’s bones. The big animal decided to investigate.

“Turtle! What is this song you are singing? Did you say your flute was made from onça’s bones?”

“No way! I just said that I got a flute made from the bone of Anta ole-le.” And Turtle immediately hid herself inside a tree trunk. But she couldn’t resist temptation and started singing:

“I’ve got a flute that is made from onça’s bones!

The second onça was furious and started roaring and yelling, “I am going to eat you now!”

But Turtle, smart as Turtle can be, slid away from a hole to the opposite side of the trunk and worked her way away from danger.

Onça spent a long, long time roaring and making threats until Monkey appeared up a tree, laughing. “Onça, you should be prepared to wait for a long time. Turtle is gone now and it will only return in the rainy season.”

Furious and frustrated, Onça had no choice but to leave. It was going to be a long time before the rainy season would come.

To use a bone from one enemy’s leg and make a flute out of it was an honor to any brave warrior, even among the Romans. Among the Amazon natives, archeologists have found many different types of flutes made with bones both from onças and from men. This explains the happiness and pride felt by Turtle, as it played its flute: this was Turtle’s way to celebrate a rightful victory over a much stronger animal.

A Party in Heaven

There was going to be a party in heaven. All the winged creatures were rejoicing, but the earth creatures were sad. They would not be able to go there. However Turtle, the slowest of all creatures, decided to go anyway. As Turtle announced her plans, the other animals roared in laughter. "Will you fly there? You are so slow you'd better start the trip right now," they joked.

What they did not know was that Turtle had already devised a plan. On the day of the party, she put on her best turtle dress and went to the Vulture's house. The Vulture was busy getting ready to go. He wore a bow tie and had his guitar resting over the bed. Turtle jumped through the window and hid herself inside the guitar. Soon, Vulture started his flight. He was so anxious to get to the party that he didn't notice that the guitar was heavier than usual. When he got there, Turtle waited a bit and left her hiding place, mingling with the other guests. The birds were surprised to see that Turtle had made it there, in Heaven. All night long, Turtle enjoyed herself. She danced and sang till dawn. But she knew she had to leave riding inside the Vulture's guitar. So she hid herself again and waited. When the party was over, the birds started their way back home. But Turtle was so tired that she dropped asleep and bumped her shell on the bottom of the guitar. Vulture heard the thump, looked inside the guitar. Guess who he found there? Turtle, of course.

"I see this is the way you went to the party in heaven! You will see what I shall do!" Vulture was furious. He turned his guitar upside down and shook till Turtle started to fall.

"If I don't fall,

I won't ever go again to a party at all!"

But she kept falling and falling. She screamed:

"Sticks and Stones, get out of my way.

Otherwise, I will destroy you!"

But the trees and the stones did not move at all. She hit the ground with her shell. I must say she did not die because her shell was very hard. It was shattered in a thousand pieces. But the animals of the forest pitied Turtle and helped to find all the pieces and patched her shell till it was whole again. That is why the Turtle's shell looks the way it looks.