

THE TORTOISE TRICKS THE LEOPARD

A Liberian tale

Adapted by Carole L. Cooney

This story is called a trickster tale. Notice how Tortoise tricks Leopard into becoming his horse.

Setting: Dense tropical forest in West Africa

Characters:

Narrator

Tortoise

Gray Squirrel

Leopard

Narrator: One day, in the middle of a deep forest, Tortoise and his friend, Gray Squirrel, were talking. Suddenly, Gray Squirrel scampered up a tree trunk and zoomed back down.

Tortoise: My! You certainly are fast! However, although I'm slow, I always get places in style.

Squirrel: What do you mean, in style?

Tortoise: (bragging) I mean... Leopard is my horse!

Squirrel: (shrill laughing) Hee, hee! I can't wait to tell Leopard. Hee, hee!

Narrator: Leopard was sleeping in the warm sun. Suddenly, he awoke when he heard Gray Squirrel's shrill laugh above his head.

Squirrel: (shrill laugh) Hee, hee, hee!

Leopard: (yawning) What's that noise?

Squirrel: Yoo! Hoo! Leopard, oh, Leopard, I hear you are Tortoise's *horse*.

Leopard: (Growl) Who said I was a *horse*?

Squirrel: (laughing) Tortoise said you were his horse.

Leopard: I'll eat that lying Tortoise! Let me at him! (growl)

Narrator: Leopard growled all the way to Tortoise's burrow. He let out an enormous growl as he burst into Tortoise's home.

Leopard: (enormously loud) **Growl !!! Who calls me a HORSE? Is it YOU?**

Tortoise: **A horse? Who told you such nonsense? Was it Gray Squirrel?**

Leopard: **Yes. (growl)**

Tortoise: **I knew it! He's just trying to break up our friendship. I think he deserves to be punished by spreading such nasty tales about you, Leopard.**

Leopard: **Let's go get him! (growl)**

Narrator: **As Leopard leaped down the road to Gray Squirrel's home, he suddenly stopped in mid-air. A little voice called to him.**

Tortoise: (screaming) **Stop! Leopard, STOP! I CAN'T MOVE AS FAST AS YOU.**

Narrator: **Leopard bowed his head in shame as he walked back to Tortoise.**

Leopard: (purring) **I'm sorry not to notice. What can I do to help you?**

Tortoise: **Well, if you carried me somehow, we'd get there in no time at all!**

Leopard: **What a good idea! Why didn't I think of that? All right, just hop on my back.**

Narrator: **Leopard and Tortoise were swiftly loping along when Tortoise slipped off Leopard's back and landed on the dry leaves with a CRASH.**

Tortoise: **Ow! (crying) Boo hoo, boo hoo.**

Leopard: **What happened, Tortoise?**

Tortoise: (sobbing) **Leopard, you are *so handsome*. Your fur is *so smooth*, I just slid right off. Do you think I could have a little cushion to sit on?**

Leopard: **What a good idea! Why didn't I think of that? Will that little blanket on the side of the road make a good cushion for you?**

Tortoise: **Oh yes! Oh yes! Thank you, Leopard.**

Narrator: **The cushion worked very well until Leopard turned a corner too sharply. Off slid Tortoise with a loud PLOP!**

Leopard: **I heard that! Now what is the matter?**

Tortoise: I'm so sorry but when you turned so sharply, I had nothing to hold onto. Might I put a piece of rope into your mouth. Then I could hold onto that.

Leopard: (Grumbling) All right but be quick!

Tortoise: Hold still while I grab this rope off that tall tree. Put it in your mouth, please. I'll hold it as I climb up on your back.

Narrator: Off they went but suddenly Tortoise was hollering.

Tortoise: Ow! Ow! Ow! Thousands of little flies are biting me! I need a whip to beat them away. I see a perfect branch to use as a fly swatter. Please stop so I can reach it.

Leopard: (growling softly) All right but be quick!

Narrator: Tortoise picked the branch. He sat proudly on his cushion, holding the reins and cheerily waving the fly swatter in the air. As they came to squirrel's burrow, Gray Squirrel called all his family and relatives to come out to see Leopard and Tortoise.

Squirrel: Look! Look! Leopard is really Tortoise's horse.

Narrator: All of the squirrels laughed and laughed. Tortoise jumped off Leopard's back and began to laugh. With his head hanging low and growling softly, Leopard ran into the forest and stayed there for a very long time.