

And Still the Turtle Watched

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Long ago, when the eagles still build their nests on the cliffs by the river, an old man and his grandson stood beside a large rock. The rock stood all b itself on the bluff at the bend in the river where the bright water flowed to the bitter sea. "Here at our summer lodge," the old man said, "I will carve the turtle. He will be the eyes of Manitou the All-Father to watch the Delaware people and he will be our voice to speak to Manitou. In summer you will bring your children to the rock to greet the turtle and they will bring their children, And Manitou will bless our land with plenty, our people with straight bodies and strong arms, and peace shall reign beside our fires." And so he shaped the stone. And then the turtle watched. He watched the green of summer turn to gold of autumn. He watched the gold of autumn become the white of winter. The summer came again. The turtle was happiest in summer, for then the children came, and then their children, and then their children's children. Years

followed years. The Great Bear chased the Little Bear around and around the northern sky.

As time wore on, fewer and fewer children came to greet the turtle. Have watched badly? he thought. Does Manitou no longer hear me? The rains washed him, the winds blew him, and countless snows chilled him. Now it took a sharp and knowing eye to see the turtle. Then one day strangers came. They did not greet the turtle. They did not speak Manitou. Their axes chopped and killed the forest. Their shouting drowned the lark's bright music. The turtle watched, but did not understand. He watched as stranger followed stranger followed stranger. He watched white water turn to brown. He felt the air grow heavy. He heard strange growling noises still the song of birds. At night new lights glowed near the ground. They dimmed the stars of Manitou.

The little turtle grew very sad. Why do I watch? he thought. Why do I speak to Manitou when Manitou no longer hears me? The air is dark and dirty. The stares are dim. The noises hurt my ears. My children have not come for many

times many moons. In the night the turtle wept. One day some boys came near the rock. They stopped and pointed. The turtle's heart beat faster. "They've come to see me," he murmured to himself. "My children have returned. Thank you, Manitou." He watched them as they capered around him. Black boxes on their shoulders blared loud noise that hurt the turtle's ears. They pointed shiny round things at him. The turtle heard a hiss. He was a shining arc of color leap toward him. He felt cool wetness on his eyes. He could no longer see. He could no longer watch for Manitou. Deep in his darkness he felt the cracking of his heart. No one watched for Manitou as days, months, and years passed, and the turtle stood in darkness. Then one day a man came. He knew that the Delaware people had once summered here. He hoped to find something they had left behind, but searched all day and found nothing. He was tired. He was going home. Suddenly he was the rock standing all by itself on the bluff at the bend in the river where the bright water flows to the bitter sea. Something about the rock called to him as it stood forlorn and covered with graffiti. He was a man who saw

beneath what first appeared. He had a sharp and knowing eye, he had a wise and loving heart, and he knew the ways of Manitou.

The turtle did not know the man was there. The paint had blinded his eyes. The paint had stopped up his ears. Then he felt a finger on his head. It stroked back along his carapace and he shivered deep inside. The man came back with workmen. They pried the rock out of the found and hoisted it up on a truck. The little turtle was very frightened. He did not know what was happening. The truck swayed and bumped along for a long, long time. Then the rock was hoisted off the truck. Hands patted and rubbed the turtle. He felt sharp-smelling wetness pour over his head and his eyes started to clear and his ears to hear as the paint was scrubbed away. No longer is he watching by the river. He is indoors at a botanical garden where the children come to see him. And they will bring their children, and their children's children. And he will speak of them to Manitou.

