

ANANSI AND TURTLE

A Story From West Africa

Illustrated by Wednesday Kirwan

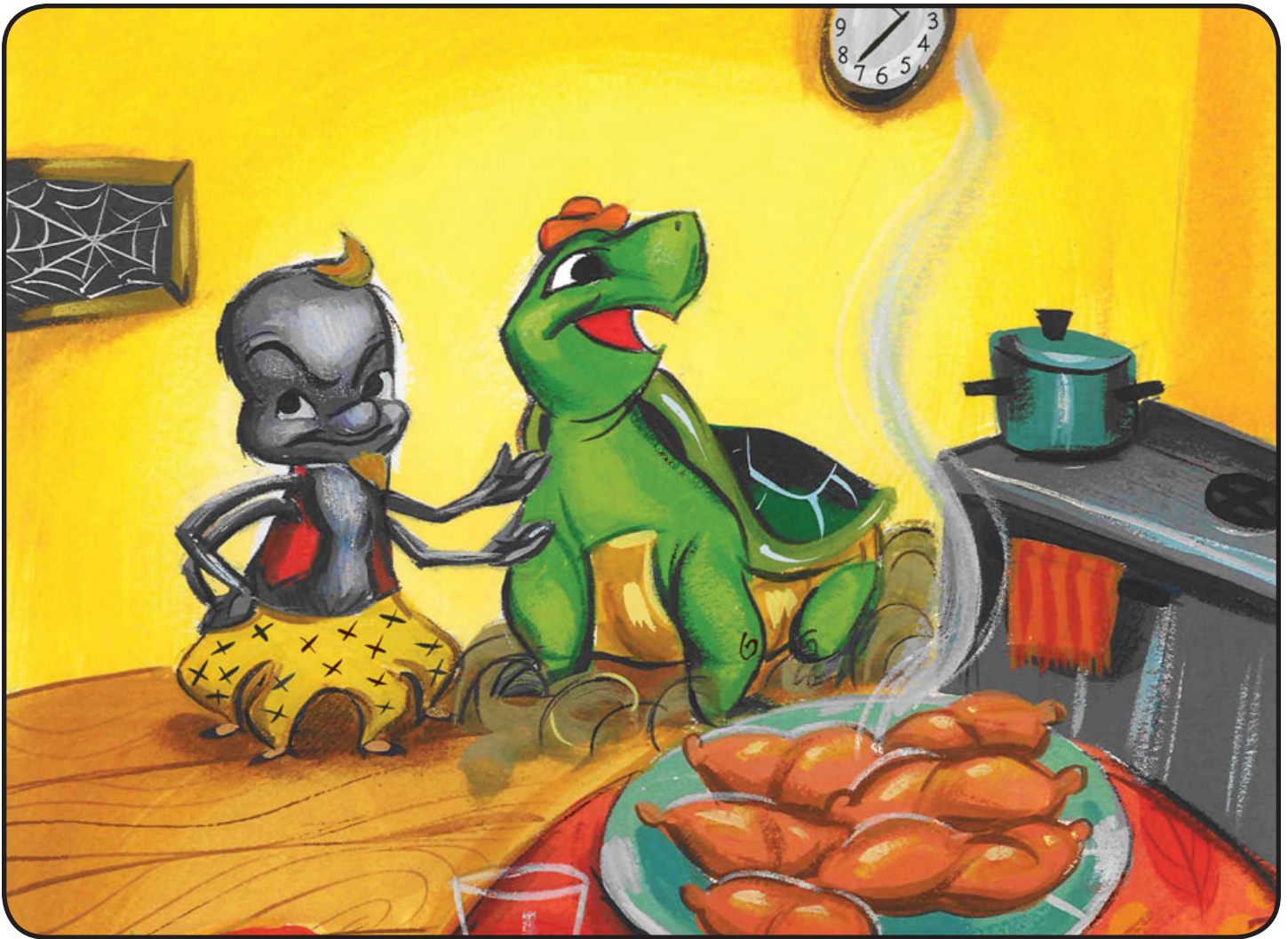


One hot summer day, Anansi the spider picked some juicy yams from his garden. *I will bake these for dinner*, he thought, smiling.

When the yams were baked, Anansi couldn't wait to sit down to eat because they smelled so delicious. Just as he was about to take a bite, someone knocked on his door.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

“Oh, brother! Who can that be?” he muttered.



When he opened the door, there stood his friend Turtle, looking dusty and tired.

“*Mmm*. Anansi, something smells absolutely delicious!” Turtle said. “I’ve walked a long distance today and I’m tired and hungry. May I have some of your wonderful meal?”

Anansi sighed. It was the custom in his country to share a meal with visitors at mealtime. So, he let Turtle in.

“Come, Turtle, I’ll fix a plate for you,” Anansi grumbled.

Turtle saw the yummy yams on the table and licked his lips excitedly. Just as he was about to sit down, Anansi yelled, “Turtle, you can’t eat with such dirty, filthy hands! That is bad manners. You must go and wash them immediately!” Turtle’s hands were extremely dirty from walking on them all day.

“I’m terribly sorry, Anansi. You’re absolutely right. I’ll go wash my hands and be right back.”

Turtle slowly crawled down to the river, quickly washed his hands, and slowly crawled back to Anansi’s house. Meanwhile, as soon as Turtle had left, Anansi started gobbling up the yams. By the time Turtle returned, half of the yams were gone.

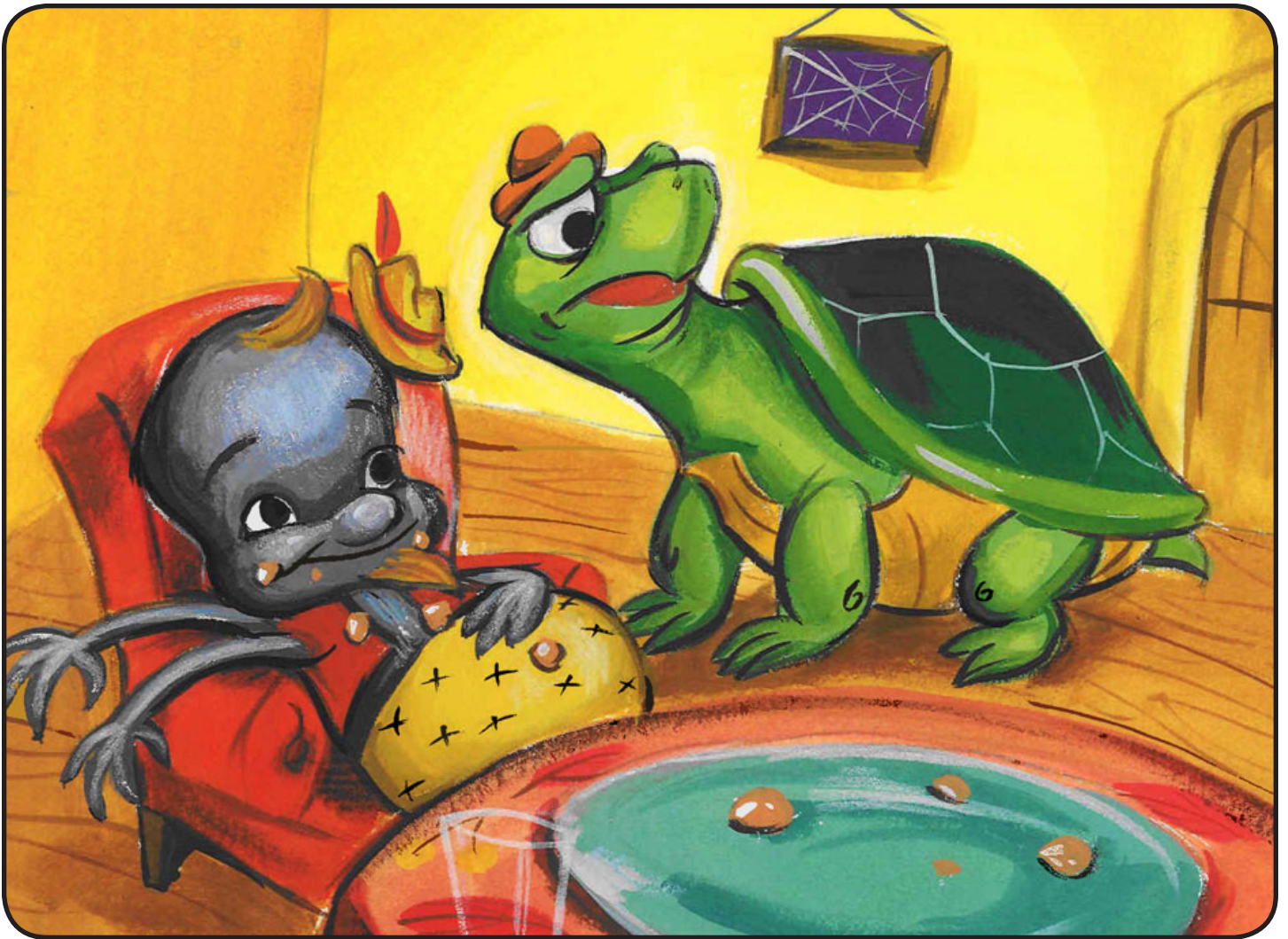
“What took you so long, Turtle?” asked Anansi. “I didn’t want the yams to get cold, so I started eating. Come, help yourself to some. They are so delicious.”

“Great! I’m starving!” Turtle exclaimed.

Then, as Turtle sat down and reached for the yams, Anansi shrieked, “My goodness, Turtle, your hands are still filthy! I insist that you go wash them again!”

Turtle’s hands were indeed dirty because, after all, he had used them to crawl to and from the river. Slowly, Turtle got up from the table and left to wash his hands yet again. This time, on his way back to Anansi’s house, he crawled on the grass so that his hands would stay clean.

When Turtle returned, he could not believe his eyes. The yams were all gone! Greedy Anansi had finished eating all of them!



Turtle stared at Anansi in disbelief and remarked, “Thank you so much for inviting me to dinner. If you’re ever in my neighborhood, please come by my house and let me return the favor.”

With that, Turtle crawled home, very disappointed.



Weeks passed, and Anansi did not see Turtle. One day, Anansi remembered Turtle's dinner invitation and grew excited at the thought of a free meal.

This is a good day to visit Turtle, thought Anansi. So he set off for Turtle's house.

Turtle was stretched out, relaxing and sunning on a big, flat rock when Anansi arrived.

“Hello, Anansi!” said Turtle. “What a lovely surprise! Have you come to have dinner with me?”

Anansi said, “Why, yes, Turtle, I have.” The long walk to Turtle’s house had made Anansi even hungrier than before.

“Well,” said Turtle, “I’ll go prepare something special for you.”

Turtle dove underwater to his house to get everything ready for dinner. Anansi made himself comfortable lying on the rock and waited for Turtle to return.

Soon Turtle reappeared. “All set!” he said. “Anansi, dinner is ready. Come, join me.”

Turtle dove down again. Anansi jumped into the water to follow Turtle, but he couldn’t get down to Turtle’s house.

He tried to swim down, then to dive down, but he was too light to get to the bottom of the river.



Instead, Anansi kept floating back up to the surface again and again. What could he possibly do to get underwater for dinner? Suddenly, he had an idea.

There were lots of stones scattered along the river bank. Anansi gathered up some of the biggest ones. One by one, he put them in the pockets of his overcoat. Then, he jumped back into the water. The weight of the stones made him so heavy that he finally sank down to Turtle's house.

Turtle was already slowly eating his meal. “Anansi,” Turtle exclaimed, “you finally made it! Come, eat!”

Anansi saw Turtle’s table full of delicious food. Anansi was so hungry he drooled at the sight. He sat down and hungrily reached for some food. Turtle stopped him instantly.

“Anansi, aren’t you forgetting something?” Turtle snapped.

“What?” answered Anansi, looking puzzled.

“Surely you’re not going to eat dinner with your coat on?” Turtle answered. “That’s just not proper!”

“Oh, of course. You’re right, Turtle! Where are my manners?” Anansi responded, taking his coat off.



ZOOM! Right back up to the surface he went! Without the rocks in his coat pockets to hold him down, Anansi floated up, up, up — and popped back out of the water! Now Anansi could only dunk his head into the water and stare at Turtle below, eating up every bit of the tasty meal. All the while, Turtle had a sly smile on his face.

Anansi grumbled all the way home, hungry and wet.