

Turtle World – Emma Storris



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Mr Taddeus Suchandsuch, Esquire, leaned back in his armchair and went to sip some of his Burgundy wine. He looked down his nose and saw the red fluid ripple in the delicate crystal glass.

'Dottie?! Dottie?!' he exclaimed.

'Yes, dear?' his wife absent-mindedly replied from the balcony.

'Have you gained weight?' her ponderous husband asked from his chair, which he hadn't yet left that day.

'Hm, what? Oh, weight... no, most certainly not. Why are you asking?'

'Because the house seems to be shaking again. Thought it must be you stomping around on the balcony.'

'Funny you should mention it,' Dottie answered, 'because I was just discussing the tremors with Mildred this morning. According to her there is a very logical explanation to it all.'

'You say, Mildred, a logical explanation? And what might that be?' her husband said in a derogatory tone.

'She spoke to the young man who lives with his parents in the Halfway House.'

'The one with the cheeky face, what is his name again, Dudley?'

'No, his brother, Rufus. Anyway, Mildred said Rufus said that the wobbles are caused by the giant turtle that our houses have apparently been built on.'

'Nonsense!' Mr Suchandsuch shouted. 'I have never heard such poppycock before in my life.'

'Everyone knows that giant turtles do not exist. Our houses are built on a round planet which is covered by land and water. In fact, not just our houses. Trees, mountains, everything stands on the crust that is on the outside of that big ball. All the scientists agree on it.'

Dottie adjusted her hat with a huffy noise that most resembled a held back sneeze. Her husband raised his eyebrows.

'Well, who made you so knowledgeable all of a sudden? Had a bite of the Tree of Wisdom's fruit, had you?'

'Well, if you must know. It is because of the fruit trees that I know for a fact that the trees are not attached to any crust. They are floating.'

'Floating?' Her husband almost exploded with laughter. 'I knew you were a bit of an airhead, but floating trees?'

Dottie walked icily calm towards the window.

'Look,' she said, 'how do you explain that this tree is moving past our window?'

And right enough, there was a big apple tree making its way past the back of the house. Hannah, next door's housekeeper, who had just been trying to pick an apple on her way back from airing the sheets, was dangling from the lower branches. Her eyes were wide with fear.

Dottie opened the window and dragged the poor woman inside with one big pull of her mighty arms. She closed the window, crossed her arms and looked at her husband sternly.

Mr Suchandsuch looked gobsmacked.

'But, but...' he stammered. 'How is that possible? Trees are attached to the land, which is attached to the planet. Everybody knows that.'

He wrinkled his forehead trying to wrap his mind around what he just saw.

'Look, I don't know about the trees. Apparently, there is something weird going on there which the scientists haven't spotted yet. But the idea of all of this village being built on top of a giant turtle is too ridiculous for consideration.'

'Mr Suchandsuch, if I may,' shrilled the high-pitched voice of Hannah, 'I wouldn't be surprised if there was truth in it.'

She tugged on her bonnet, which was dangling below her chin due to her unscheduled ride on the apple tree.

'You see, I saw that the trees are actually blown up and released from the water by fish. They start out as little green and brown thingummies, which are slowly inflated until they are full size and appear above the water. The fruit seems to be growing from the inside and pushing through to the outside when they are getting too ripe and heavy. That is why they all dangle from the lower branches; they are too heavy to be anywhere but at the bottom by the time they push outward.'

'That still doesn't prove the turtle story.' Mr Suchandsuch correctly remarked.

'No, but it does prove that we don't know everything and stranger things happen.'

Dottie replied, putting her arm around Hannah in support.

'Science is knowledge,' her husband retorted, 'Lucky was the day that scientists rescued us from the clutches of those vile superstitions that ruled us before.'

He stood up and strode towards the door.

'I will call a meeting so we can get this nonsense out of the way.'

Later that evening every villager had gathered in the community hall. Originally the plan had been to gather in the Mayor's office, but for some mysterious reason that room disappeared under water every now and then. Today was apparently somewhere between now or then, since the room was half filled with water. The top of the balcony fence was just visible under the waterline.

So, the community hall it would be. By eight PM everyone had come in, except for Mamie Miller. She was on the balcony over the entrance, as she had been for the past sixty years. Rumour had it that she was waiting there for her lover who had promised her he would come and get her one fateful evening way back.

Unfortunately, he had turned out to be a no show and Mamie Miller had never spoken of it since. In fact, she hadn't spoken at all after that day. For sixty years she had been silently standing on the balcony every evening. This evening was no different. No one paid attention. After sixty years everyone was used to her standing there. There were villagers who were too young to remember the community hall balcony in the evening without Mamie Miller on it.

Mr Suchandsuch stood in front of the congregation and cleared his throat.

'Ahem, ahem. Is everybody seated comfortably?'

After hearing affirmative noises from his audience, he proceeded.

'We have gathered here tonight, because the sheer existence of reason is threatened as the laws of logic have been defied.'

'Ah, pooha!' his wife exclaimed. 'Why much you always be so pompous?'

Mr Suchandsuch pretended he didn't hear her and went on.

'This morning it came to my knowledge, that there are those amongst you who seriously believe that we do not live on a round planet covered in a crust on top of which lie land and water, as the scientists have established. Those individuals are spreading the unlikely rumour that our village has been built atop of a giant turtle.' The men of the village gentlemen's club chuckled. They couldn't believe there were people who would believe such nonsense.

A young man with a wild mop of hair jumped up.

'You old people always believe you know it all!' He pronounced the word old with such a sneer in his voice that some of the attendees gasped with indignation.

The youngster went on.

'But through the centuries the younger generations have proven you wrong again and again. Just think of the Lake Monster, the Man in the Moon, mermaids. All things that you and your scientists were sure did not exist. But we were right. Why do you find it so hard to believe that the universe is full of mysterious and wonderful creatures that help shape our world? Is it that you do not want to believe it?'

'And what proof do you have to back up your story, young man?' Mr Suchandsuch snickered. 'We have books and books full of scientific dissertations about the ways of our planet. What do you have to show for yourself?'

'Eyewitnesses.' Rufus – because that was the young man's name – answered. 'Not that I expect you to take my word on it, but I have friends all over the seas that have seen the turtles underneath the villages. They do not appear often, because they move rarely and, if they do, very slowly. I have heard of only one occasion in which the movement was vehement enough to cause problems. That is why they are seldomly seen. You have to be lucky enough to have your eyes in the right direction and observe them. But seldom isn't never, they have been spotted a couple of times.'

At that moment, a burst of lightning came, followed by a clap of thunder. Rufus chuckled triumphantly.

'Ha ha! Another one of those realities that your scientists had an alternative explanation for. The existence of people in the sky who cause thunderstorms when they are fighting. Nonsense, you all insisted. Until one of them lost their hammer and came down to the village to retrieve it. Then you had to believe it.'

He shook his head and sighed.

'But you will refuse to own up until one of your own cannot do anything else but admit it, because it is right in front of them.'

'I believe you, Rufus.'

Dottie stood up in support of the young man. Hannah followed her example.

'I do too. If fish blow up trees, why wouldn't this be true.'

Mildred stood up as well, but she went to the balcony.

'Poor Mamie Miller is still outside. She'll catch her death if she stays out in that storm.'

She opened the door and walked outside. After a few minutes she returned with the soaked Mamie, who had a wild and bewildered look in her eyes.

'So, what to do about that nonsense of the giant turtle?' Mr Suchandsuch resumed.

'How can we convince you that the scientists are right and there is no such thing as a giant turtle underneath our village?'

Mamie Miller abruptly turned around and started screaming her head off.

'TURTLE, TURTLE, TURTLE! Watch out for the TURTLE!'

Everyone paid attention right away. They couldn't believe Mamie Miller was actually speaking. Mamie stopped screaming and started stammering incoherently. Dottie

and Mildred tried to calm her down and put her in a chair. But she wouldn't hear of it. She had been silent for sixty years and that was more than enough. Finally, over the shock of what she witnessed all those years back, she told everyone in the hall her story.

That fateful evening, while she was waiting for her lover, the sea had been fairly calm. The days before there had been an occasional rumbling, but other than a fallen glass nothing had happened. But that evening the water had been as smooth as a mirror and there hadn't been a sound.

From afar she had seen her beau approaching the village. He was plunging his oars into the water fervently so he could get to her faster. She was waving to him and laughing out loud, seeing his effort to reach her as quickly as possible.

Then it happened. A shock went through the village and Mamie lurched to the side, hitting the balcony fence. As she hung over the fence she looked to the right and saw movement. She wanted to scream but her voice seemed to be stuck in her throat.

Her lover didn't seem aware of what was going on and she couldn't signal to him. She had to hang on to the fence or else she would tumble over.

As her eyes widened in horror she could only look on while the giant turtle underneath the village raised his head above water and one of his legs crashed on top of her beau's boat.

The End....

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