

Robert Masterson

## “Cool Real Life Turtles”

### Turtle One

When my cousin Gary was a little boy, somebody brought a turtle over to his house and showed it to him. Gary didn't know it was a turtle and he said “Cookie!” really loud and he snatched the turtle up and he put it in his mouth. Nobody got hurt. The turtle was okay and Gary was okay. Still, it was an important day for everybody that was there. We all heard about it later. It's the kind of story that families tell over and over again. I don't know what happened to the turtle.

### Turtle Two

There was a turtle named Mascara because she had such beautiful eyes and Mascara is a kind of eye make-up that people wear sometimes. Anyway, she lived here and there around the Rio Grande in New Mexico until one day a kid snatched her up and put her in a box and then drove her up the bosque into Albuquerque. For a while, Mascara lived in the pet store where the boy sold her. Then the pet store sold her to me. It was pretty good when Mascara came to stay with us. We had a bunch of pets then and she fit right in and became part of the family.

One night a terrible storm blew into Albuquerque and, while the lightening flashed blue and the thunder rolled heavy, a strong blast of wind opened up the screen door. In her fright, Mascara slipped out that open door! We looked and looked for Mascara that night. We got some flashlights and we looked under the bushes and, even though it was a silly thing to do, we called out, “Mascara! Oh, Mascara! Where are you?” We were really sad when we didn't find her. We stayed up extra late that night and got up extra early the next morning, but we couldn't find Mascara. One whole year went by. We managed to get by, somehow, but we often thought of Mascara and how her beautiful eyes would sparkle when she saw a tasty strawberry.

Here comes the good part. After all that time (remember, we waited one whole year) a friend of ours called up on the telephone. “You guys like turtles, right?” he asked us. We said, “You bet.” And then we asked him, “Why do you ask?” He said, “I found this really good-looking turtle in the middle of a very busy street so I

stopped and I picked her up but I don't want to keep her so I thought I would call you and see if you would see that she gets a good home." "You bet," we said. "You bring that good-looking turtle right over." (Have you guessed it yet?) When our friend came over with the turtle we took one look and we knew right away that it was Mascara. Who else would look at us with such beautiful eyes?

### Turtle Three

When I was a really little boy, long before I could read a book by myself, I had a little turtle with red cheeks that lived in a bowl with a plastic palm tree on a plastic island in the middle. I named that turtle "Rockla" and it was the same kind of turtle with red cheeks that my cousin Gary thought was a cookie when he was a little boy.

### Turtle Four

Just the other day I read in the newspaper about a man who called the emergency line in his home town, that 911 number, and said, "I hab a turdel ond by dose" and all the emergency operators thought he was joking until the paramedic guys showed up and had to take it, a real life turtle, off his, a real life guy's, nose with some pliers.

### Turtle Five

When I was a kid I had some friends who were boys and some who were brothers and they had a big turtle but I can't remember what that turtle's name was. Anyway, one hot summer day when little boys like us, my friends and me, start getting sleepy and turtles like theirs just start getting energized, that turtle decided to go swimming and that's the last we ever saw of that turtle and we all remember how the grown-ups that summer kept making fun of us because we let a turtle run away. They'd act like they were acting like us and talk in funny, slow-motion voices and pretend to run in slow-motion calling, "Cooommmme baaaaaack, tuuuuurtle" in slow-motion voices. We looked everywhere for that turtle but we could never find him.

### Turtle Six

Teachers told us that some people think the whole world rests on the back of one big big turtle and I remember thinking that if anybody could hold up the world, a turtle probably could. It might make a little, soft noise and it might make a little, soft tear, but you can bet that turtle would never let the world drop. No way, turtle!

### Turtles Seven

One time when it was spring, we went to visit our friends Peter and Anne who live in the mountains of Taos. When we got up in the morning and they were making

up the breakfast that we were going to eat, there was this big scratching sound from a big box they had. We knew right away what we had heard. It was the turtles waking up. They had been sleeping all winter in that cardboard box and then, that morning, they decided to wake up and look around. We all went outside to eat our breakfasts and we watched the turtles blink at the sunshine they hadn't seen in so long and then start taking big bites out of the daffodils which they hadn't eaten since last year and we all kept taking big bites of pancakes and saying, "Good morning, turtles! Good morning, sleepyheads!"

### Turtle Eight

One time a turtle saved my life. I was going to college for my second semester and I was walking at dusk down a very flat road in Sarasota, Florida, where my college was, when I saw a sparkle in the bushes. I was much younger then than I am now and so I decided to go over and see what was sparkling there by the side of the road. It was a turtle in the weeds by the side of the road and the reason that turtle's eyes were sparkling was because there was this crazy driver coming up behind me and he would have hit me except that his headlights had hit that turtle's eyes and led me off the flat road to safety.

### Turtle Nine

Our latest turtle is very cool. We named her Cookie after the turtle my cousin Gary almost ate that time. This new Cookie got real sick one time and we had to take her to the veterinarian. The doctor told us all sorts of things we didn't know about turtles. She told us they need Vitamin A, for their eyes. She told us a vitamin shot every once in a while sure wouldn't hurt them. She told us how old Cookie was by looking at one of her scales under a microscope. It turns out that Cookie is six years old. Right now, Cookie is asleep in the garage in a box of blankets and newspapers. That's how she'll spend the winter. When springtime comes, she'll wake up and we'll all be so glad to see her. "Good morning, Cookie!" we will say. "Good morning, sleepyhead."