

WHY BROTHER BEAR HAS NO TAIL

by Joel Chandler Harris



"I 'clar' ter gracious, honey," Uncle Remus exclaimed one night, as the little boy ran in, "you sholy ain't chaw'd yo' vittles. Hit ain't bin no time, skacely, sence de supper-bell rung, en ef you go on dis a-way, you'll des nat'ally pe'sh yo'se'f out."

"Oh, I wasn't hungry," said the little boy. "I had something before supper, and I wasn't hungry anyway."

The old man looked keenly at the child, and presently he said:

"De ins en de outs er dat kinder talk all come ter de same p'int in my min'. Youer bin a-cuttin' up at de table, en Mars John, he tuck'n sont you 'way fum dar, en w'iles he think youer off some'er a-sniffin' en a-feelin' bad, yer you is a-high-primin' 'roun' des lak you done had mo' supper dan de King er Philanders."

Before the little boy could inquire about the King of Philanders he heard his father calling him. He started to go out, but Uncle Remus motioned him back.

"Des set right whar you is, honey—des set right still."

Then Uncle Remus went to the door and answered for the child; and a very queer answer it was—one that could be heard half over the plantation:

"Mars John, I wish you en Miss Sally be so good ez ter let dat chile 'lone. He down yer

cryin' he eyes out, en he ain't boddern' 'long er nobody in de roun' worl'."

Uncle Remus stood in the door a moment to see what the reply would be, but he heard none. Thereupon he continued, in the same loud tone:

"I ain't bin use ter no sich gwines on in Ole Miss time, en I ain't gwine git use ter it now. Dat I ain't."

Presently 'Tildy, the house-girl, brought the little boy his supper, and the girl was no sooner out of hearing than the child swapped it with Uncle Remus for a roasted yam, and the enjoyment of both seemed to be complete.

"Uncle Remus," said the little boy, after a while, "you know I wasn't crying just now."

"Dat's so, honey," the old man replied, "but 't wouldn't er bin long 'fo' you would er bin, kaze Mars John bawl out lak a man wa't got a strop in he han', so wa't de diff'unce?"

When they had finished eating, Uncle Remus busied himself in cutting and trimming some sole-leather for future use. His knife was so keen, and the leather fell away from it so smoothly and easily, that the little boy wanted to trim some himself. But to this Uncle Remus would not listen.

"'Tain't on'y chilluns w'at got de consate er doin' eve'ything dey see yuther folks do. Hit's grown folks w'at oughter know better,"

said the old man. "Dat's des de way Brer B'ar git his tail broke off smick-smack-smooove, en down ter dis day he be funnies'-lookin' creetur w'at wobble on top er dry groun'."

Instantly the little boy forgot all about Uncle Remus's sharp knife.

"Hit seem lak dat in dem days Brer Rabbit en Brer Tarrypin done gone in cohoots fer ter outdo de t'er creeturs. One time Brer Rabbit tuck'n make a call on Brer Tarrypin, but w'en he git ter Brer Tarrypin house, he year talk fum Miss Tarrypin dat her ole man done gone fer ter spen' de day wid Mr. Mud-Turkle, w'ich dey wuz blood kin. Brer Rabbit he put out atter Brer Tarrypin, en w'en he got ter Mr. Mud-Turkle house, dey all sot up, dey did, en tole tales, en den w'en twelf er' clock come dey had crawfish fer dinner, en dey 'joy deyse'f right erlong. Atter dinner dey went down ter Mr. Mud-Turkle mill-pon,' en w'en dey git dar Mr. Mud-Turkle en Brer Tarrypin dey 'muse deyse'f, dey did, wid slidin' fum de top uv a big slantin' rock down inter de water.



"I'speck you moughter seen rocks in de water 'fo' now, whar dey git green en slipp'y," said Uncle Remus.

The little boy had not only seen them, but had found them to be very dangerous to walk upon, and the old man continued:

"Well, den, dish yer rock wuz mighty slick en mighty slantin'. Mr. Mud-Turkle, he'd crawl ter de top, en tu'n loose, en go a-sailin' down inter de water—kersplash! Ole Brer Tarrypin, he'd foller atter, en slide down inter de water—kersplash! Ole Brer Rabbit, he sot off, he did, en praise um up.

"W'iles dey wuz a-gwine on dis a-way, a-havin' der fun, en 'joyin' deyse'f, yer come ole Brer B'ar.

He year um laffin' en holl'in', en he hail um.

"Heyo, folks! W'at all dis? Ef my eye ain't 'ceive me, dish yer's Brer Rabbit, en Brer Tarrypin, en ole Unk' Tommy Mud-Turkle,' sez Brer B'ar, sezee.

"De same,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, 'en yer we is 'joyin' de day dat passes des lak dey wa'n't no hard times.'

“Well, well, well!’ sez ole Brer B’ar, sezee, ‘a-slippin’ en a-slidin’ en makin’ free! En w’at de matter wid Brer Rabbit dat he ain’t j’inin’ in?’ sezee.

“Ole Brer Rabbit he wink at Brer Tarrypin, en Brer Tarrypin he hunch Mr. Mud-Turkle, en den Brer Rabbit he up’n ‘low, he did:

“My goodness, Brer B’ar! you can’t ‘speck a man fer ter slip en slide de whole blessid day, kin you? I done had my fun, en now I’m a-settin’ out yer lettin’ my cloze dry. Hit’s tu’n en tu’n about wid me en deze gents w’en dey’s any fun gwine on,’ sezee.

“Maybe Brer B’ar might jine in wid us,’ sez Brer Tarrypin, sezee.

“Brer Rabbit he des holler en laff.”

“Shoo!’ sezee, ‘Brer B’ar foot too big en he tail too long fer ter slide down dat rock,’ sezee.

“Dis kinder put Brer B’ar on he mettle, en he up’n ‘spon’, he did:

“Maybe dey is, en maybe dey ain’t, yit I ain’t a-feared ter try.’

“Wid dat de yuthers tuck’n made way fer ‘im, en ole Brer B’ar he git up on de rock he did, en squot down on he hunkers, en quile he tail und’ ‘im, en start down. Fus’ he go sorter slow, en he grin lak he feel good; den he go sorter peart, en he grin lak he feel bad; den he go mo’ pearter, en he grin lak he skeerd; den he strack de slick part, en, gentermens! He swaller de grin en fetch a howl dat moughter

bin yeard a mile, en he hit de water lak a chim-bly a-fallin’.

“You kin gimme denial,” Uncle Remus continued after a little pause, “but des ez sho’ ez you er settin’ dar, w’en Brer B’ar slick’d up en flew down dat rock, he break off he tail right smick-smack-smooove, en mo’n dat, w’en he make his disappear’nce up de big road, Brer Rabbit holler out:

“Brer B’ar!—O Brer B’ar! I year tell dat flaxseed poultices is mighty good fer so’ places!’

“Yit Brer B’ar ain’t look back.”