

Uncle Remus: Joel Chandler Harris

Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings By Joel Chandler Harris

I. Uncle Remus Initiates the Little Boy

One evening recently, the lady whom Uncle Remus calls "Miss Sally" missed her little seven-year-old. Making search for him through the house and through the yard, she heard the sound of voices in the old man's cabin, and, looking through the window, saw the child sitting by Uncle Remus. His head rested against the old man's arm, and he was gazing with an expression of the most intense interest into the rough, weather-beaten face, that beamed so kindly upon him. This is what "Miss Sally" heard:

"Bimeby, one day, atter Brer Fox bin doin' all dat he could fer ter ketch Brer Rabbit, en Brer Rabbit bein doin' all he could fer ter keep 'im fum it, Brer Fox say to hisse'f dat he'd put up a game on Brer Rabbit, en he ain't mo'n got de wuds out'n his mouf twel Brer Rabbit came a lopin' up de big road, lookin' des ez plump, en ez fat, en ez sassy ez a Moggin hoss in a barley-patch.

"Hol' on dar, Brer Rabbit,' sez Brer Fox, sezee.

"I ain't got time, Brer Fox,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, sorter mendin' his licks.

"I wanter have some confab wid you, Brer Rabbit,' sez Brer Fox, sezee.

"All right, Brer Fox, but you better holler fum whar you stan'. I'm monstus full er fleas dis mawnin',' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

"I seed Brer B'ar yistdiddy, 'sez Brer Fox, sezee, 'en he sorter rake

me over de coals kaze you en me ain't make frens en live naberly, en I tole 'im dat I'd see you.'

"Den Brer Rabbit scratch one year wid his off hinefoot sorter jub' usly, en den he ups en sez, sezee:

"All a settin', Brer Fox. Spose'n you drap roun' ter-morrer en take dinner wid me. We ain't got no great doin's at our house, but I speck de ole 'oman en de chilluns kin sorter scramble roun' en git up sump'n fer ter stay yo' stummick.'

"I'm 'gree'ble, Brer Rabbit,' sez Brer Fox, sezee.

"Den I'll 'pen' on you,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

"Nex' day, Mr. Rabbit an' Miss Rabbit got up soom, 'fo' day, en raided on a gyarden like Miss Sally's out dar, en got some cabbiges, en some roas'n--years, en some sparrer-grass, en dey fix up a smashin' dinner. Bimeby one er de little Rabbits, playin' out in de back-yard, come runnin' in hollerin', 'Oh, ma! oh, ma! I seed Mr. Fox a comin'!' En den Brer Rabbit he tuck de chilluns by der years en make um set down, en den him and Miss Rabbit sorter dally roun' waitin' for Brer Fox. En dey keep on waitin' for Brer Fox. En dey keep on waitin', but no Brer Fox ain't come. Atter 'while Brer Rabbit goes to de do', easy like, en peep out, en dar, stickin' fum behime de cornder, wuz de tip-een' er Brer Fox tail. Den Brer Rabbit shot de do' en sot down, en put his paws behime his years en begin fer ter sing:

"De place wharbouts you spill de grease, Right dar you er boun' ter slide, An' whar you fin' a bunch er ha'r, You'll sholy fine de hide.'

"Nex' day, Brer Fox sont word by Mr. Mink, en skuze hisse'f kaze he wuz too sick fer ter come, en he ax Brer Rabbit fer ter come en

take dinner wid him, en Brer Rabbit say he wuz 'gree'ble.

"Bimeby, w'en de shadders wuz at der shortes', Brer Rabbit he sorter brush up en sa'nter down ter Brer Fox's house, en w'en he got dar, he hear somebody groanin', en he look in de do' an dar he see Brer Fox settin' up in a rockin'-cheer all wrop up wid flannil, en he look mighty weak. Brer Rabbit look all roun', he did, but he ain't see no dinner. De dish-pan wuz settin' on de table, en close by wuz a kyarvin' knife.

"Look like you gwineter have chicken fer dinner, Brer Fox,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

"Yes, Brer Rabbit, dey er nice, en fresh, en tender, 'sez Brer Fox, sezee.

"Den Brer Rabbit sorter pull his mustarsh, en say: 'You ain't got no calamus root, is you, Brer Fox? I done got so now dat I can't eat no chicken 'ceppin she's seasoned up wid calamus root.' En wid dat Brer Rabbit lipt out er de do' and dodge 'mong the bushes, en sot dar watchin' for Brer Fox; en he ain't watch long, nudder, kaze Brer Fox flung off de flannil en crope out er de house en got whar he could cloze in on Brer Rabbit, en bimeby Brer Rabbit holler out: 'Oh, Brer Fox! I'll des put yo' calamus root out yer on dish yer stump. Better come git it while hit's fresh,' and wid dat Brer Rabbit gallop off home. En Brer Fox ain't never kotch 'im yit, en w'at's mo', honey, he ain't gwineter."

II. The Wonderful Tar Baby Story

"Didn't the fox never catch the rabbit, Uncle Remus?" asked the little boy the next evening.

"He come mighty nigh it, honey, sho's you born--Brer Fox did. One day atter Brer Rabbit fool 'im wid dat calamus root, Brer Fox went ter wuk en got 'im some tar, en mix it wid some turkentime, en fix up a contrapshun w'at he call a Tar-Baby, en he tuck dish yer Tar-Baby en he sot 'er in de big road, en den he lay off in de bushes fer to see what de news wuz gwine ter be. En he didn't hatter wait long, nudder, kaze bimeby here come Brer Rabbit pacin' down de road--lippity-clippity, clippity-lippity--dez ez sassy ez a jay-bird. Brer Fox, he lay low. Brer Rabbit come prancin' 'long twel he spy de Tar-Baby, en den he fotch up on his behime legs like he wuz 'stonished. De Tar Baby, she sot dar, she did, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

"Mawnin'!" sez Brer Rabbit, sezee--'nice wedder dis mawnin',' sezee.

"Tar-Baby ain't sayin' nuthin', en Brer Fox he lay low.

"How duz yo' sym'tums seem ter segashuate?' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

"Brer Fox, he wink his eye slow, en lay low, en de Tar-Baby, she ain't sayin' nuthin'.

"How you come on, den? Is you deaf?' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. 'Kaze if you is, I kin holler louder,' sezee.

"Tar-Baby stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

"You er stuck up, dat's w'at you is,' says Brer Rabbit, sezee, 'en

I'm gwine ter kyore you, dat's w'at I'm a gwine ter do,' sezee.

"Brer Fox, he sorter chuckle in his stummick, he did, but Tar- Baby ain't sayin' nothin'.

"I'm gwine ter larn you how ter talk ter 'spectubble folks ef hit's de las' ack,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. 'Ef you don't take off dat hat en tell me howdy, I'm gwine ter bus' you wide open,' sezee.

"Tar-Baby stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

"Brer Rabbit keep on axin' 'im, en de Tar-Baby, she keep on sayin' nothin', twel present'y Brer Rabbit draw back wid his fis', he did, en blip he tuck 'er side er de head. Right dar's whar he broke his merlasses jug. His fis' stuck, en he can't pull loose. De tar hilt 'im. But Tar-Baby, she stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

"Ef you don't lemme loose, I'll knock you agin,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, en wid dat he fotch 'er a wipe wid de udder han', en dat stuck. Tar-Baby, she ain't sayin' nuthin', en Brer Fox, he lay low.

"Tu'n me loose, fo' I kick de natchul stuffin' outen you,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, but de Tar-Baby, she ain't sayin' nuthin'. She des hilt on, en de Brer Rabbit lose de use er his feet in de same way. Brer Fox, he lay low. Den Brer Rabbit squall out dat ef de Tar-Baby don't tu'n 'im loose he butt 'er cranksided. En den he butted, en his head got stuck. Den Brer Fox, he sa'ntered fort', lookin' dez ez innercent ez wunner yo' mammy's mockin'- birds.

"Howdy, Brer Rabbit,' sez Brer Fox, sezee. 'You look sorter stuck up dis mawnin',' sezee, en den he rolled on de groun', en laft en laft twel he couldn't laff no mo'. 'I speck you'll take dinner wid me dis time, Brer Rabbit. I done laid in some calamus root, en I ain't gwineter take no skuse,' sez Brer Fox, sezee."

Here Uncle Remus paused, and drew a two-pound yam out of the ashes.

"Did the fox eat the rabbit?" asked the little boy to whom the story had been told.

"Dat's all de fur de tale goes," replied the old man. "He mout, an den agin he moutent. Some say Judge B'ar come 'long en loosed 'im--some say he didn't. I hear Miss Sally callin'. You better run 'long."

Classic Blues

You'll Never Miss Your Jelly Till Your Jelly Roller's Gone (Lil Johnson?)

Transcribed from Lil Johnson, recorded April 23, 1929.
From Lil Johnson, Complete Recorded Works in Chronological
Order, Vol. 1: 23 April 1929 - 22 April 1936; Document Records
DOCD-5307.

I woke up this morning with the blues all 'round my bed,
I woke up this morning with the blues all 'round my bed,
I felt just like somebody in my family was dead.

I began to moan and I began to cry,
I began to moan and I began to cry,
My big man went away, don't know the reason why.

If you don't like my sweet potato, what made you dig so deep?
If you don't like my sweet potato, what made you dig so deep?
In my potato field three, four times a week.

Whooping, I've been whooping, whooping all night long,
Whooping, I've been whooping, whooping all night long,
Whooping, I've been whooping, ever since my man been gone.

Spoken: Oh, swing that thing, Mr. Avery! You play that thing so
good! Ooh, them blues sure sound good this morning. Don't kill
that half-pint!

My dog jumped a rabbit, the rabbit fell down on his knees,
My dog jumped a rabbit, the rabbit fell down on his knees,
He looked up at the dog and said, "Won't you have mercy on me,
please."

Just as sure as you hear me sing this song,
Just as sure as you hear me sing this song,
You'll never miss your jelly till your jellyroll is gone.

Crossroads Blues

Robert Johnson

From the November 27, 1936 recording session in San Antonio, Texas.

I went to the crossroads, fell down on my knees
I went to the crossroads, fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above, have mercy now, save poor Bob if you please

Standin' at the crossroads, tried to flag a ride
Whee-hee, I tried to flag a ride
Didn't nobody seem to know me, everybody pass me by

Standin' at the crossroads, risin' sun goin' down
Standin' at the crossroads baby, the risin' sun goin' down
I believe to my soul now, po' Bob is sinkin' down

You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown
You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown
That I got the crossroad blues this mornin', Lord, baby I'm sinkin' down

I went to the crossroad, mama, I looked east and west
I went to the crossroad, babe, I looked east and west
Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman, ooh well, babe, in my distress

Kind Hearted Woman Blues

Robert Johnson

According to the records, this is the very first recording made by Robert Johnson, on 23 November 1936 in a hotel room in San Antonio, Texas.

I got a kindhearted woman, do anything in this world for me
I got a kindhearted woman, do anything in this world for me
But these evilhearted women, man, they will not let me be

I love my baby, my baby don't love me
I love my baby ooh, my baby don't love me
I really love that woman, can't stand to leave her be

There ain't but one thing, makes Mr. Johnson drink,
I's worried 'bout how you treat me, baby, I begin to think
Oh, babe, my life don't feel the same
You breaks my heart, when you call Mr. So and So's name

She's a kindhearted woman, she studies evil all the time
She's a kindhearted woman, she studies evil all the time
You well's to kill me, as to have it on your mind

Walking Blues

A traditional blues classic, that Robert Johnson recorded during his session on November 27, 1936 in San Antonio.

I woke up this mornin', feelin' round for my shoes
Know by that I got these old walkin' blues, well
Woke this mornin' feelin round for my shoes
But you know by that, I got these old walkin' blues

Lord I feel like blowin my old lonesome horn
Got up this mornin, my little Bernice was gone, Lord
I feel like blowin my lonesome horn
Well I got up this mornin, whoa all I had was gone

Well, leave this mornin' if I have to, ride the blinds
I feel mistreated, and I don't mind dyin'
Leavin this mornin', if I have to ride the blind
Babe, Ive been mistreated, baby and I don't mind dyin'

Well, some people tell me that the worried blues ain't bad
Worst old feelin' I most ever had
Some people tell me that these old worried old blues ain't bad
It's the worst old feelin', I most ever had

Shes got a elgin movement from her head down to her toes
Break in on a dollar most anywhere she goes
Ooh, from her head down to her toes
Lord, she break in on a dollar, most anywhere she goes

(What Did I Do to be so)

Black and Blue

Thomas 'Fats' Waller, Harry Brooks, and Andy Razaf

Cold empty bed...springs hurt my head
Feels like ole Ned...wished I was dead
What did I do...to be so black and blue

Even the mouse...ran from my house
They laugh at you...and all that you do
What did I do...to be so black and blue

I'm white...inside...but, that don't help my case
That's life...can't hide...what is in my face

How would it end...ain't got a friend
My only sin...is in my skin
What did I do...to be so black and blue

(instrumental break)

How would it end...I ain't got a friend
My only sin...is in my skin
What did I do...to be so black and blue

St James Infirmary
Traditional

I went down to the St James Infirmary
Saw my baby there
Stretched out on a long white table
So sweet...so cold...so fair

Let her go...let her go...God bless her
Wherever she may be
She can look this wide world over
But she'll never find a sweet man like me

When I die want you to dress me in straight lace shoes
I wanna a boxback coat and a Stetson hat
Put a twenty dollar gold piece on my watch chain
So the boys'll know that I died standing flat