

SHORT STORY AMERICA

BR'ER RABBIT AND THE TAR BABY

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

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, after Brer Fox bin doin’ all dat he could fer ter ketch Brer Rabbit, en Brer Rabbit bin 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 come 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 yistiddy,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘en he sorter raked me over de coals kaze you en me ain’t make frens en live naberly, en I told him dat I’d see you.’

“Den Brer Rabbit scratch one year wid his off hine-foot sorter jub’usly, en den he ups en sez, sezee:

“All a-settin’, Brer Fox. S’posen 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 sort o’ scramble roun’ en git up sump’n fer ter stay yo’ stummuck.’

“I’m ’gree’ble, Brer Rabbit,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee.

“Den I’ll ’pen on you,’ says Brer Rabbit, sezee.

“Nex’ day, Mr. Rabbit an’ Miss Rabbit got up soon, ’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 backyard, 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, and den him en Miss Rabbit sorter dally roun’ 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’ out fum behime de cornder, wuz de tip-eeen’ er Brer Fox’s 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 youer boun’ ter slide,
An’ whar you fine 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 santer down ter Brer Fox’s house, en w’en he got dar he yer somebody groanin’, en he look in de do’, en 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, deyer 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 de bushes, en sot dar watchin’ fer 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 close in on Brer Rabbit, en bimeby Brer Rabbit holler out, ‘Oh, Brer Fox! I’ll des put yo’ calamus-root out yer on dis 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.”

“‘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 bawn—Brer Fox did. One day arter Brer Rabbit fool ’im wid dat calamus-root, Brer Fox went ter wuk en got ’im some tar, en mix it wid some turken-time, en fix up a contrapshun what 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 ter see wat de news wuz gwineter be. En he didn’t hatter wait long, nudder, kaze bimeby here come Brer Rabbit pacin’ down de road—lippity-

clippity, clippity-lippity—des 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 was '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 lay still, en Brer Fox he lay low.

“‘Youer stuck up, dat’s w’at you is,’ says Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘en I’m gwineter kyore you, dat’s w’at I’m a-gwineter do,’ sezee.

“Brer Fox he sorter chuckle in his stummuck, he did, but Tar-Baby ain’t sayin’ nuthin’.

“‘I’m gwineter larn you howter talk ter ’specttubble fokes ef hit’s de las ’ack,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. ‘Ef you don’t take off dat hat en tell me howdy, I’m gwineter 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’ nuthin’, 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 him. But Tar-Baby she stay still, en Brer Fox he lay low.

“Ef you don’t lemme loose, I’ll knock you ag’in,” sez Brer Rabbit, sezee; en wid dat he fotch ’er a wipe wid te udder han’, en dat stuck. Tar-Baby she ain’t sayin’ nuthin’, en Brer Fox he lay low.

“Tu’n me loose, of I kick de natal stuffin’ outen you,” sez Brer Rabbit, sezee; but de Tar-Baby she ain’t sayin’ nuthin’. She des hilt on, en den 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 crank-sided. En den he butted, en his head got stuck. Den Brer Fox he santered fort’, lookin’ des ez innercent ez winner 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, en den ag’in he moutent. Some say Jedge B’ar come ’long en loosed ’im; some say he didn’t. I hear Miss Sally callin’. You better run ’long.”...

“Uncle Remus,” said the little boy one evening, when he had found the old man with little or nothing to do, “did the fox kill and eat the rabbit when he caught him with the Tar-Baby?”

“Law, honey, ain’t I tell you ’bout dat?” replied the old darky, chuckling slyly. “I ’clar ter grashus I ought er tole you dat; but ole man Nod wuz ridin’ on my eyelids twel a leetle mo’n I’d ’a’ dis’member’d my own name, en den on to dat here come yo’ mammy hollerin’ atter you.

“W’at I tell you w’en I fus’ begin? I tole you Brer Rabbit wuz a monstus soon beas’; leas’ways dat’s w’at I laid out fer ter tell you. Well, den, honey, don’t you

go en make no udder kalkalashuns, kaze in dem days Brer Rabbit en his family wuz at de head er de gang w'en enny racket wuz on han', en dar dey stayed. 'Fo' you begins fer ter wipe yo' eyes 'bout Brer Rabbit, you wait en see whar'bouts Brer Rabbit gwineter fetch up at. But dat's needer yer ner dar.

“W'en Brer Fox fine Brer Rabbit mixt up wid de Tar-Baby, he feel mighty good, en he roll on de groun' en laff. Bimeby he up 'n' say, sezee:

“Well, I speck I got you dis time, Brer Rabbit,’ sezee; ‘maybe I ain’t but I speck I is. You been runnin’ roun’ here sassin’ atter me a mighty long time, but I speck you done come ter de een’ er de row. You bin cuttin’ up yo’ capers en bouncin’ roun’ in dis naberhood ontwel you come ter b’leeve yo’s’e’f de boss er de whole gang. En den youer allers some’rs whar you got no bizness,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee. ‘Who ax you fer ter come en strike up a ’quaintence wid dish yer Tar-Baby? En who stuck you up dar whar you iz? Nobody in de roun’ worril. You des tuck en jam yo’s’e’f on dat Tar-Baby widout waitin’ fer enny invite,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee— ‘en dar you is, en dar you’ll stay twel I fixes up a bresh-pile and fires her up, kaze I’m gwineter bobbycue you dis day, sho’,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee.

“Den Brer Rabbit talk mighty ’umble.

“I don’t keer w’at you do wid me, Brer Fox,’ sezee, ‘so you don’t fling me in dat brier-patch. Roas’ me, Brer Fox,’ sezee, ‘but don’t fling me in dat brier-patch,’ sezee.

“Hit’s so much trouble fer ter kindle a fier,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘dat I speck I’ll hatter hang you,’ sezee.

“Hang me des ez high ez you please, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘but do fer de Lord’s sake don’t fling me in dat brier-patch,’ sezee.

“I ain’t got no string,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘en now I speck I’ll hatter drown you,’ sezee.

“Drown me ez deep ez you please, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘but don’t fling me in dat brier-patch,’ sezee.

“Dey ain’t no water nigh,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘en now I speck I’ll hatter skin you,’ sezee.

“Skin me, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘snatch out my eyeballs, t’ar out my years by de roots, en cut off my legs,’ sezee, ‘but do please, Brer Fox, don’t fling me in dat brier-patch,’ sezee.

“Co’s e Brer Fox wanter hurt Brer Rabbit bad ez he kin, so he cotch him by de behime legs en slung ’im right in de middle er de brier-patch. Dar wuz a considerbul flutter whar Brer Rabbit struck de bushes, en Brer Fox sorter hung roun’ fer ter see what wuz gwineter happen. Bimeby he hear somebody call ’im, en way up de hill he see Brer Rabbit settin’ cross-legged on a chinkapin log koamin’ de pitch outen his har wid a chip. Den Brer Fox know dat he bin swop off mighty bad. Brer Rabbit wuz bleedzed fer ter fling back some er his sass, en he holler out:

“Bred en bawn in a brier-patch, Brer Fox; bred en bawn in a brier-patch!’ en wid dat he skip out des ez lively ez a cricket in de embers.”