CHORUS

I ast my Cap'n what's the time of day,
He got mad and throwed his watch away.

CHORUS

Cap'n got a pistol and he try to play bad,
But I'm going to take it if he make me mad.

CHORUS

Cap'n got a burner[2] I'd like to have,
A 32:20 with a shiny barrel.

CHORUS

De Cap'n can't read, de Cap'n can't write,
How do he know that the time is right?

CHORUS

Me and my buddy and two three more,
Going to ramshack Georgy everywhere we go.

CHORUS

Here come a woman walking 'cross the field,
Her mouth exhausting like an automobile.

2. Gun [Hurston's note].

The Blues

At the beginning of the twentieth century, observers in New Orleans and elsewhere in the South began to notice a new kind of music. This music borrowed harmonic and structural devices and vocal techniques from work songs and spirituals. But unlike these other forms, this music was usually sung not by a chorus but by a single voice accompanied by one or more instruments. Like the earlier forms, blues, as this music came to be known, involved a compellingly rhythmical sound that relied on patterns of call–response between singer and audience, and at times between singer and instrument, too. In spite of all the affinities with church songs, blues music was decidedly secular; it promised no heavenly grace or home but offered instead a stylized complaint about earthly trials and troubles, a complaint countered, if at all, by the hope of better days back in some "sweet home" like Chicago or in another town or by the flickering promise of a "do-right" loving companion. Its dances were not the holy possession dances of church ritual but the courtship dances of Saturday night revelry and after-hours fun that held at bay, albeit temporarily, the melancholia typically described in blues lyrics.

Philosophically, the blues speak of a hard-won, wry optimism in the face of the immutable fact that life on earth involves a steady diet of trouble and pain. Songwriter and bandleader W. C. Handy (1873–1958) is called "the father of the blues" because he took careful note of this form of expression and transcribed its songs. But Handy was more than just a copyist. Having mastered the idiomatic forms, he combined and extended them to produce the first storehouse of blues compositions that were both true to their beginnings and inventive. Like the earlier blues of uncertain authorship—so widely circulated and so often reinvented that they may somewhat justly be termed group creations—Handy's blues were most often twelve-bar forms: three lines of four beats each, the first line repeated twice and followed by a third end-rhymed line:

I hate to see the evening sun go down.
I hate to see that evening sun go down.
'Cause my baby, he done left this town.*

Other blues songs vary from this particular pattern but still are defined as blues because of their use of "blue notes" and other characteristic blues patterns and sounds. All blues songs involve improvisation, sometimes just in terms of timing and emphasis, sometimes more elaborate reinvention of melodies and even meanings. They also involve particular sounds: train bells and whistles, sexual groans, conversational whispers, rhapsodies, shouts, stories, talk to band members and audiences, and—especially in their first rural incarnations—barnyard squawks and squeals as well.

A full discussion of the blues would take into account the early southern farms where black singing flourished; the background in African and European forms; the impact of minstrelsy, medicine shows, and carnivals on the music; the importance of dance to the music; early blues centers such as New Orleans, Memphis, and the Mississippi Delta; the movement of the blues to the Southwest, the Midwest, and up the eastern seaboard; and the persistence of the blues in jazz and other American musics, including, some would argue, hip-hop music. Worth noting here is how this powerful form inspired writers, choreographers, and visual artists throughout the twentieth century. In 1953, as a headnote to his first published fiction, Albert Murray wrote: "We all learn from Mann, Joyce, Hemingway, Eliot, and the rest, but I'm also trying to write in terms of the tradition I grew up in, the Negro tradition of blues, stomps, ragtimes, jumps, and swing. After all, very few writers have done as much with American experience as Jelly Roll Morton, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington." Ralph Ellison said that Richard Wright's *Black Boy* was like the blues in "its refusal to offer solutions"; he also composed the following compelling definition of the form:

> The blues is an impulse to keep the painful detail and episodes of a brutal existence alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.

As Murray's and Ellison's words show, to term a poem, play, or work of fiction a "blues piece" or to note blues influence within it is to associate it with modern black American vernacular expression at its finest.

New scholarship is asking: What is the continuing effect of blues on jazz, including avant-garde jazz, and on forms that defy such classifications? What is the relation of blues music to world musics that share certain blues structures and attitudes? Where are women in the story of the blues? What themes of masculinity, femininity, gender, class, and region emerge in this music? What part do politics and economics play?

*From Handy's "St. Louis Blues."

Good Morning, Blues[1]•

Good mornin', blues,
Blues, how do you do?
Good mornin', blues,
Blues, how do you do?
Good morning, how are you?

I laid down last night,
Turning from side to side;
Yes, I was turning from side to side,
I was not sick,
I was just dissatisfied.

When I got up this mornin',
Blues walking round my bed;
Yes, the blues walkin' round my bed,
I went to eat my breakfast,
The blues was all in my bread.

I sent for you yesterday baby,
Here you come a walking today;
Yes, here you come a walking today,
Got your mouth wide open,
You don't know what to say.

Good mornin', blues,
Blues, how do you do?
Yes, blues, how do you do?
I'm doing all right,
Good morning, how are you?

Hellhound on My Trail[1]•

I've got to keep moving
I've got to keep moving
blues falling down like hail
blues falling down like hail
Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
blues falling down like hail
blues falling down
like hail
And the days keeps on 'minding me
it's a hellhound on my trail
hellhound on my trail
hellhound on my trail
If today was Christmas Eve
If today was Christmas Eve
and tomorrow was Christmas Day
If today was Christmas Eve
and tomorrow was Christmas Day
(aw wouldn't we have a
time baby)
All I would need my little sweet rider just
to pass the time away
uh huh
to pass the
time away
You sprinkled hot foot powder[2]
umm around my door
all around my door
You sprinkled hot foot powder
all around your daddy's door
hmmm hmmm hmmm
It keeps me with a rambling mind, rider,
every old place I go
every old place I go
I can tell the wind is rising
the leaves trembling on the trees
trembling on the trees
I can tell the wind is rising
leaves trembling on the trees
umm hmm hmm hmm
All I need my little sweet woman
and to keep my company
hmmm hmmm hmmm
hmmm
my company

1. By Jimmy Rushing (1903–1972), who recorded it in 1937. As with many works in the vernacular tradition, this classic blues has been sung in many different versions. Compare this one with the version on the StudySpace playlist, by Huddie ("Leadbelly") Ledbetter.

1. Written by Robert Johnson (ca. 1912–1938), who recorded it in 1937. Eric Sackheim arranged this song on the page as a modern poet might have done; his arrangement emphasizes the idea that blues are part of contemporary poetic expression.

C. C. Rider[1]•

C. C. Rider, see what you done done!
Lord, Lord, Lord!
You made me love you, now your gal done come.
You made me love you, now your gal done come.

2. Magic, goopher, or hoodoo powder, presumed to have special powers when prescribed by a conjure doctor.

1. By Ma Rainey (1886–1939), first recorded in 1924 as "See, See Rider." The origins of the often-used alternate title "C. C. Rider" are unclear. Some authorities call it a slightly censored reworking of "Easy Rider"—considered a more unambiguously sexual reference to a callously promiscuous lover, a "rider." Others note a relation to Blind Lemon Jefferson's blues "Corinna Corinna" (shortened to "C. C."). Does the song refer to some sort of a playboy or playgirl circuit traveler (rider)? Or is it an offspring of a children's ring game song—with the words "C. C. Rider, *satisfied*"—perhaps preceding the blues with, as the folk-music scholar Harold Courlander describes it, its "generalized blues statement of discontent"? Although spelling may seem insignificant in an oral form, here it may suggest some of the song's history and its variety of echoing references.

I'm goin' away, baby, I won't be back till fall.
Lord, Lord, Lord!
Goin' away, baby, won't be back till fall.
If I find me a good man, I won't be back at all.

I'm gonna buy me a pistol just as long as I am tall.
Lord, Lord, Lord!
Kill my man and catch the Cannon Ball.[2]
If he won't have me, he won't have no gal at all.

C. C. Rider, where did you stay last night?
Lord, Lord, Lord!
Your shoes ain't buttoned, clothes don't fit you right.
You didn't come home till the sun was shinin' bright.

Backwater Blues[1]•

When it rain five days an' de skies turned dark as night
When it rain five days an' de skies turned dark as night
Then trouble taken place in the lowland that night

I woke up this mornin', can't even get outa mah do'
I woke up this mornin', can't even get outa mah do'
That's enough trouble to make a po' girl wonder where she wanta go

Then they rowed a little boat about five miles 'cross the pond
They rowed a little boat about five miles 'cross the pond
I packed all mah clothes, th'owed 'em in, an' they rowed me along

When it thunder an' a-lightnin', an' the wind begin to blow
When it thunder an' a-lightnin', an' the wind begin to blow
An' thousan' people ain' got no place to go

Then I went an' stood up on some high ol' lonesome hill
I went an' stood up on some high ol' lonesome hill
An' looked down on the house where I used to live

Backwater blues done cause me to pack mah things an' go
Backwater blues done cause me to pack mah things an' go
Cause mah house fell down an' I cain' live there no mo'

O-o-o-oom, I cain' move no mo'
O-o-o-oom, I cain' move no mo'
There ain' no place fo' a po' ol' girl to go

2. A train; either the Wabash Cannonball or the express line from Cincinnati to New Orleans.
1. By Bessie Smith (1895–1937), first recorded in 1927. Used in Sterling A. Brown's poem "Ma Rainy" (1932).

Down-Hearted Blues[1]•

Gee, but it's hard to love someone, when that someone don't love you,
I'm so disgusted, heartbroken too,
I've got those down-hearted blues.
Once I was crazy about a man, he mistreated me all the time,
The next man I see, he's got to promise to be mine, all mine.

Trouble, trouble, I've had it all my days,
Trouble, trouble, I've had it all my days,
It seems that trouble's going to follow me to my grave.

If I could only find the man, oh, how happy I would be,
To the Good Lord ev'rynight I pray, please send my man back to me
I've almost worried myself to death wond'ring why he went away,
But just wait and see, he's gonna want me back some sweet day.

World in a jug, the stopper's in my hand,
Got the world in a jug, the stopper's in my hand,[2]
Going to hold it baby till you come under my command.

Say, I ain't never loved but three men in my life,
No, I ain't never loved but three men in my life,
T'was my father, my brother, and the man who wrecked my life.

'Cause he mistreated me and he drove me from his door,
Yes, he mistreated me and he drove me from his door
But the Good Book says you'll reap just what you sow.

Oh, it may be a week and it may be a month or two,
Yes, it may be a week and it may be a month or two,
But the day you quit me honey, it's coming home to you.
Oh, I walked the floor and I wrung my hands and cried,
Yes, I walked the floor and I wrung my hands and cried,
Had the down-hearted blues and couldn't be satisfied.

Prove It on Me Blues[1]•

Went out last night, and a great big fight
Everything seemed to go on wrong
I looked up, to my surprise
The gal I was with was gone

Where she went, I don't know
I mean to follow everywhere she goes
Folks say I'm crooked, I didn't know

1. By Alberta Hunter (1897–1984) and Louie Austin (1897–1972), written in 1922. This was a big hit for Bessie Smith in 1923.
2. A traditional couplet, alluded to by Ralph Ellison in "The World and the Jug" (1964).
1. Written and performed by Ma Rainey (1928). This song is notable for its forthright lesbian references.

where she took it
I want the whole world to know

They said I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me
Went out last night with a crowd of
my friends
They must've been women, 'cause I don't
like no men

It's true I wear collar and a tie
Make the wind blow all the while
'Cause they say I do it, ain't
nobody caught me
They sure got to prove it on me

Wear my clothes just like a fan
Talk to the gals just like any old man
'Cause they say I do it, ain't
nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me

Trouble in Mind[1]•

Trouble in mind, I'm blue,
But I won't be blue always,
For the sun will shine in my backdoor someday.

Trouble in mind, that's true,
I have almost lost my mind;
Life ain't worth livin', feel like I could die,

I'm gonna lay my head on some lonesome railroad line:
Let the two nineteen train ease my troubled mind.

Trouble in mind, I'm blue,
My poor heart is beatin' slow;
Never had no trouble in my life before.

I'm all alone at midnight,
And my lamp is burning low,
Never had so much trouble in my life before.

I'm gonna lay my head
On that lonesome railroad track,
But when I hear the whistle,
Lord, I'm gonna pull it back.

1. By Richard M. Jones (ca. 1889–1945); published in 1926. Gayl Jones refers to this song in her novel Corregidora (1975).

I'm goin' down to the river
Take along my rocking chair,
And if the blues don't leave me,
I'll rock on away from there.

Well, trouble, oh, trouble,
Trouble on my worried mind,
When you see me laughin',
I'm laughin' just to keep from cryin'.[2]

How Long Blues[1]•

How long, how long, has that evenin' train been gone?
How long, how long, baby, how long?
Heard the whistle blowin', couldn't see no train,
'Way down in my heart I had an achin' pain,
How long, how long, baby, how long?

I'm sad and lonely the whole day through,
Why don't you write me and give me the news?
You have left me singin' those how long blues.

If I could holler like a Mountain Jack,
I'd go up on the mountain and call my baby back,
How long, how long, baby, how long?

I went up on the mountain looked as far as I could see,
The man had my woman and the blues had poor me,
How long, how long, how long?

I can see the green grass growing on the hill,
But I ain't seen the green grass on a dollar bill,
For so long, so long, baby, so long.

If you don't believe I'm sinkin' see what a hole I'm in,
If you don't believe I love you, baby, look what a fool I've been,
Well, I'm gone how long, baby, how long?

I'm goin' down to Georgia, been up in Tennessee,
So look me over, baby, the last you'll see of me,
For so long, so long, baby, so long.

The brook runs into the river, the river runs into the sea,
If I don't run into my baby, a train is goin' to run into me,
How long, how long, how long?

2. A traditional line, used by Langston Hughes as the title of his 1952 novel.
1. By Leroy Carr (1905–1935); recorded in 1928. This song is sometimes compared with lines in the Bible about long suffering; it is also discussed in terms of existential philosophy.

Rock Me Mama[1]•

Rock me baby
Rock me all night long
Rock me baby
Rock me all night long

I want you to bend your back, darling
Like your back ain't got no bone

See me comin baby
Go get your rockin chair
See me comin baby
Go get your rockin chair

You know I ain't no stranger
Ole Lightnin' once lived over here

Rock me baby
One time before I go
Rock me baby
One time before I go

I just want you to rock me till I tell you
Ole Lightnin' don't want no more

Roll me, baby
Roll me like a wagon wheel
I want you to roll me, baby
Just like a wagon wheel

Roll me sweetheart
You know how good it make me feel

Rock me baby
Rock me in your big brass bed
Roll me baby
Roll me in your big brass bed

I want you to boogie my woogie
Until my face turns cherry red

Yellow Dog Blues[1]•

Ever since Miss Susan Johnson lost her jockey, Lee,
There has been much excitement, more to be;
You can hear her moaning night and morn.
Wonder where my easy rider's gone?[2]

1. Often listed as "Rock Me Baby." A traditional blues with lyrics from a version recorded by Lightnin' Hopkins ca. 1970.

1. By W. C. Handy (1873–1958); published in 1914.
2. See p. 41, n. 1.

Cablegrams come of sympathy,
Telegrams go of inquiry,
Letters come from down in "Bam"[3]
And ev'rywhere that Uncle Sam
Has even a rural delivery.
All day the phone rings but it's not for me.
At last good tidings fill our hearts with glee;
This message comes from Tennessee:

Dear Sue, your easy rider struck this burg today,
On a southbound rattler, sidedoor Pullman car.
See him here, and he was on the hog.[4]

Easy Rider's gotta stay away
He has to vamp it but the hike ain't far.
He's gone somewhere the Southern 'cross the Yellow Dog.[5]

Dear Sue, your easy rider struck this burg today,
On a southbound rattler, sidedoor Pullman car.
See him here, and he was on the hog.

Easy Rider's gotta stay away
He has to vamp it but the hike ain't far.
He's gone somewhere the Southern 'cross the Yellow Dog.

St. Louis Blues[1]•

I hate to see de evenin' sun go down
I hate to see de evenin' sun go down
Cause mah baby, he done lef' dis town

Feelin' tomorrow lak I feel today
Feelin' tomorrow lak I feel today
I'll pack mah trunk, an' make mah getaway

St. Louis woman wid her diamon' rings
Pulls dat man aroun' by her apron strings
'Twant for powder an' for store-bought hair
De man I love would not gone nowhere

Got de St. Louis blues, jes as blue as I can be
Dat man got a heart lak a rock cast in de sea
Or else he wouldn't have gone so far from me

Been to de gypsy to get mah fortune tol'
To de gypsy, done got mah fortune tol'
Cause I'm most wild 'bout mah jelly roll

3. I.e., Alabama.
4. I.e., living promiscuously.
5. I.e., the Yazoo Delta Railroad.

1. By W. C. Handy (1873–1958); published in 1914.

Gypsy done tol' me, "Don't you wear no black"
Yes, she done tol' me, "Don't you wear no black.
Go to St. Louis, you can win him back"

Help me to Cairo;[2] make St. Louis by mahself
Git to Cairo, find mah ol' frien', Jeff
Gwine to pin mahself close to his side
If I flag his train, I sho can ride

I loves dat man lak a schoolboy loves his pie
Lak a Kentucky Colonel loves his mint an' rye
I'll love mah baby till de day I die

You ought to see dat stovepipe brown o' mine
Lak he owns de Dimon' Joseph line
He'd make a cross-eyed 'oman go stone blind

Blacker than midnight, teeth lak flags of truce
Blackest man in de whole St. Louis
Blacker de berry, sweeter is de juice. . . .

A black headed gal make a freight train jump de track
Said, a black headed gal make a freight train jump de track
But a long tall gal makes a preacher "Ball de Jack"[3]

Lawd, a blond headed woman makes a good man leave the town
I said, blond headed woman makes a good man leave the town
But a red headed woman make a boy slap his papa down. . . .

Beale Street Blues[1]•

I've seen the lights of gay Broadway,
Old Market Street, down by the Frisco Bay,
I've strolled the Prado,[2]
I've gambled on the Bourse,[3]
The seven wonders of the world I've seen,
And many are the places I have been.

Take my advice folks
And see Beale Street[4] first.

You'll see pretty browns in beautiful gowns,
You'll see tailor-mades and hand-me-downs,
You'll meet honest men and pick-pockets skilled,
You'll find that business never closes till somebody gets killed.

2. Town in Illinois.
3. Social dance step of the 1920s.
1. By W. C. Handy (1873–1958); published in 1917.
2. Spanish national museum in Madrid.
3. Paris money market, equivalent of the New York Stock Exchange.
4. The main black street of Memphis, Tennessee, lined with commercial buildings, churches, theaters, parks, and houses. The writer Stanley Crouch has suggested a connection between this song's lyrics and aspects of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

I'd rather be here than any place I know,
I'd rather be here than any place I know.
It's goin' to take the Sergeant
For to make me go.

Goin' to the river
Maybe, by and by,
Goin' to the river,
And there's a reason why:
Because the river's wet,
and Beale Street's gone dry.

You'll see Hog Nose rest'rants and Chitlin'[5] Cafes,
You'll see jugs that tell of by-gone days,
And places, once places, now just a sham,
You'll see Golden Balls enough to pave the New Jerusalem.[6]

Goin' to the river
Maybe, by and by,
Goin' to the river,
And there's a reason why:
Because the river's wet,
and Beale Street's gone dry.

I'd rather be here than any place I know,
I'd rather be here than any place I know.
It's goin' to take the Sergeant
For to make me go

Goin' to the river
Maybe, by and by,
Goin' to the river,
And there's a reason why:
Because the river's wet,
and Beale Street's gone dry.

If Beale Street could talk,[7] if Beale Street could talk
Married men would have to take their beds and walk,
Except one or two, who never drink booze,
And the blind man on the corner who sings the Beale Street Blues.

I'd rather be here than any place I know,
I'd rather be here than any place I know.
It's goin' to take the Sergeant
For to make me go

5. Dish made with the small intestines of hogs.
6. Heaven. "Golden Balls": signs of pawnshops.
7. James Baldwin's novel *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) derives its title from this line.

The Hesitating Blues[1]•

Hello Central,[2] what's the matter with this line?
I want to talk to that High Brown[3] of mine,
Tell me how long
Will I have to wait?

Please give me 2-9-8,
Why do you hesitate?
What you say, can't talk to my Brown!
A storm last night blowed the wires all down;
Tell me how long
Will I have to wait?
Oh, won't you tell me now,
Why do you hesitate?

"Procrastination is the thief of time,"
So all the wise owls say,
"One stitch in time may save nine,"
Tomorrow's not today
And if you put it off,
Somebody's bound to lose,

I'd be his,
He'd be mine,
And I'd be feeling gay,
Left alone to grieve and pine,
My best friend's gone away,
He's gone and left me
The Hesitating Blues

Sunday night, my beau proposed to me;
Said he'd be happy if his wifie I'd be,
Said he, "How long
Will I have to wait?
Come be my wife my Kate,
What do you hesitate?"

I declined him
Just for a stall,
He left that night on the Cannon Ball;[4]
Honey, how long
Will I have to wait?
Will he come back now,
Or will he hesitate?

1. Written by W. C. Handy; performed by Louis Armstrong (1954).
2. Phone operator.
3. Person with a light brown complexion.
4. Nickname for a train; p. 42, n. 2.

Goin' to Chicago Blues[1]•

Going to Chicago, sorry that I can't take you,
Going to Chicago, sorry that I can't take you.
There's nothing in Chicago that a monkey woman[2] can do.

When you see me coming, baby, raise your window high,
When you see me coming, baby, raise your window high,
When you see me passing, baby, hang your head and cry.

Hurry down sunshine, see what tomorrow brings,
Hurry down sunshine, see what tomorrow brings.
And the sun went down, tomorrow brought us rain.

You so mean and evil, you do things you ought not do,
You so mean and evil, you do things you ought not do.
You got my brand new money, guess I'll have to put up with you.

Anybody ask you who was it sang this song,
Anybody ask you who was it sang this song,
Tell 'em Little Jimmy Rushing,[3] he's been here and gone.

Fine and Mellow[1]•

My man don't love me
Treats me oh so mean
My man he don't love me
Treats me awful mean
He's the lowest man
That I've ever seen

He wears high draped pants
Stripes are really yellow
He wears high draped pants
Stripes are really yellow
But when he starts in to love me
He is so fine and mellow

Love will make you drink and gamble
Make you stay out all night long
Love will make you drink and gamble
Make you stay out all night long
Love will make you do things
That you know is wrong

1. The composer is unknown, first recorded, by Jimmy Rushing, in 1939. This song celebrates an expected move to the urban north; Chicago was considered a city of promise.
2. Derogatory (and then sometimes flattering) term for an African American woman.
3. Blues and ballad singer; for many years the principal vocalist with the Count Basie Orchestra.
1. Billie Holiday (1915–1959) is credited as the composer and lyricist (1939). This is one of the few twelve-bar blues songs associated with Holiday, though the song uses traditional blues progressions and lyrics; e.g., see Ethel Waters's "Ethel Sings 'Em" (1925).

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Treats me awful mean
He's the lowest man
That I've ever seen

He wears high draped pants
Stripes are really yellow
He wears high draped pants
Stripes are really yellow
But when he starts in to love me
He is so fine and mellow

Love will make you drink and gamble
Make you stay out all night long
Love will make you drink and gamble
Make you stay out all night long
Love will make you do things
That you know is wrong

1. The composer is unknown, first recorded, by Jimmy Rushing, in 1939. This song celebrates an expected move to the urban north; Chicago was considered a city of promise.
2. Derogatory (and then sometimes flattering) term for an African American woman.
3. Blues and ballad singer; for many years the principal vocalist with the Count Basie Orchestra.
1. Billie Holiday (1915–1959) is credited as the composer and lyricist (1939). This is one of the few twelve-bar blues songs associated with Holiday, though the song uses traditional blues progressions and lyrics; e.g., see Ethel Waters's "Ethel Sings 'Em" (1925).

But if you treat me right baby
I'll stay home everyday
Just treat me right baby
I'll stay home night and day
But you're so mean to me baby
I know you're gonna drive me away

Love is just like a faucet
It turns off and on
Love is just like a faucet
It turns off and on
Sometimes when you think it's on baby
It has turned off and gone

Hoochie Coochie[1]•

The gypsy woman told my mother
Before I was born
I got a boy child's coming
Gonna be a son of a gun
He gonna make pretty womens
Jump and shout
Then the world wanna know
What this all about

'Cause you know I'm here
Everybody knows I'm here
Yeah, you know I'm a hoochie coochie man
Everybody knows I'm here

I got a black cat bone
I got a mojo[2] too
I got the John the Conqueroo[3]
I'm gonna mess with you
I'm gonna make you girls
Lead me by the hand
Then the world'll know
The hoochie coochie man

But you know I'm here
Everybody knows I'm here
Yeah, you know I'm a hoochie coochie man
Everybody knows I'm here

On a seven hours
On the seventh day
On the seventh month
The seven doctors said

1. This song is associated with Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield; 1915–1983), who first recorded it in 1954.

2. Conjurer's potion.
3. A root prepared by a conjurer to grant extraordinary powers.

He was born for good luck
And that you'll see
I got seven hundred dollars
Don't you mess with me

But you know I'm here
Everybody knows I'm here
Well you know I'm a hoochie coochie man
Everybody knows I'm here

Sunnyland[1]•

Seems like I heard
That lonesome Sunnyland blow.
Seems like I heard
That lonesome Sunnyland blow.
She blows just like
She won't be back no more.

I feel bad this morning,
Feel just like I wanna cry
Feel bad this morning,
Feel just like I wanna cry.
My baby caught the train this morning,
And she didn't even say goodbye.

I had a letter from my baby,
She said she was coming home.
Had a letter from my baby,
And she said she was coming home.
Well, I'm just sitting here waiting,
And I hope it won't be long.

My Handy Man[1]•

Now, whoever said a good man
Was hard to find,
Positively, absolutely sure was blind.
'Cause I just found the best man that ever was,
And here's just a *few* of the things
That he does:

He shakes my ashes, greases my griddle,
Churns my butter,
And he strokes my fiddle.
My man is such a handy man.

1. By Elmore James (1918–1963); recorded in 1961. "Sunnyland": train. Lyrics about train travel are nearly as prevalent in blues music as the sounds of the train: its whistles and bells, its wheels on tracks, its brakes, and the whoosh of the cars rushing by.
1. Lyrics and music by Andy Razaf and Eubie Blake with infinite variations on the lyrics.

Now, he threads my needle,
And he creams my wheat,
Heats my heater,
And he chops my meat.
(He's a mess!)
My man is such a handy man.

Now, I don't care
If you believe it or not:
He's a mighty nice man to have around.
'Cause when my furnace gets too hot (Umph!)
He's right there to turn my damper down.

For everything, that man of mine's got a scheme;
And honey, it's amazing
The way he handles my machine.
My man is such a handy man
(Oh, that man is a mess. Ow!)

He flaps my flapjacks,
Cleans off the table,
Feeds the horses in my stable.
My man is such a handy man.

And do you know:
Sometimes he's up way before dawn,
Busy cleaning the rough edges off my lawn.
My man is such a handy man.

Now he never has a single word to say
While he's workin' hard.
(Poor old soul!)
And I'd give anything if you could see the way
He handles my front yard. (Ow!)

Now, my ice never gets a chance to melt away
'Cause he sees that I get a nice fresh piece every day.
My man is such a handy man.

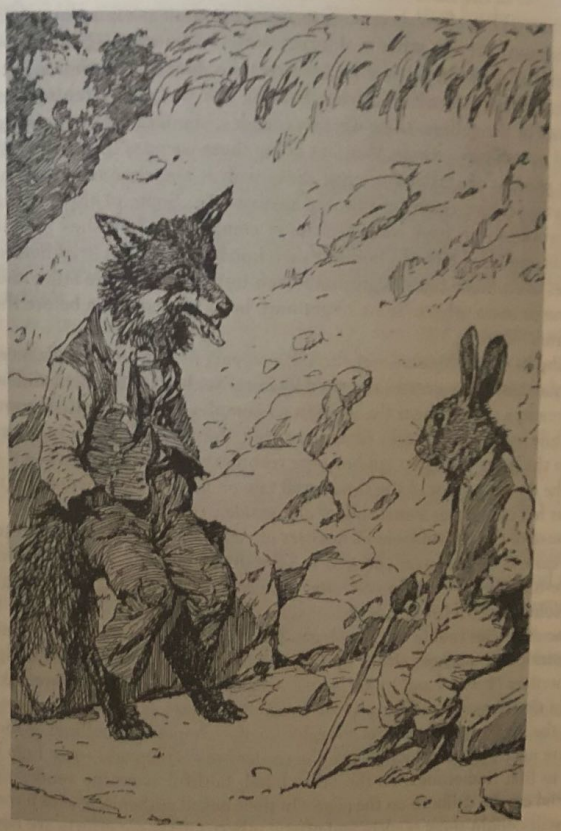
Folktales

In his novel *Train-Whistle Guitar* (1974), Albert Murray introduces a character named Scooter who delights in the rare chances he gets to sit at the front room fireside within earshot of family and neighborhood elders when the mood and moonlight are right for the telling of tales. The novel's setting is black semirural Alabama of the 1920s, but the ritual moment of telling and retelling lifts it into an almost timeless zone. The group's jewels of wisdom (along with some highfalutin play-talk and sheer nonsense) will be handed around with an attitude that combines high solemnity and playfulness. Elders entertain elders with traditional tales (with topical twists and variations), but no one is unaware of the presence of the eleven-year-old youngster who needs to hear these stories—their styles of telling and their substantive values along with their mysteries, silences, and incongruities.

Since their arrival in the New World from Africa (and elsewhere), the tales have been a key part of the African American's equipment for survival and sustenance.

Many new black arrivals, whether coming in the seventeenth century, the eighteenth, or the nineteenth century, could immediately communicate together using a common creole language that had facilitated commerce back home in Africa. What is clearer than ever now is that the Africans also brought with them a vast storehouse of stories—along with other such expressive forms as songs, dances, styles of worship, games, patterns of adornment, and the like that helped them maintain on the new continent at least the broad outlines of their original worldview. (These forms were what the blacks had instead of freedom. They had *rites* and not *rights*, as Ralph Ellison once put it; rhythmic freedom if not political freedom, said Cornel West.) Despite the ravages of the Middle Passage and the violence of slavery as an institution, one finds among African Americans story types, characters, motifs, and styles of telling that bear the distinctive traits of south Saharan Africa's ways of making stories. One finds, for example, many kinds of trickster tales (forerunners of the Brer Rabbit cycle) along with tales of metamorphoses and wonder which have distinctive counterparts in the New World.

Before long, African Americans had taken hold of American Indian and European tales and passed them around the fireside. But whatever the sources—Old or New World; black, white, red—African Americans hammered these myriad



Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. Illustration from an 1893 printing of *Uncle Remus and His Friends* by Joel Chandler Harris.

tales into unmistakably black American shapes and themes. The voices of the storiers (sometimes one story could involve several voices—of Bear, perhaps, or Sis Cat, or Brer Fox—operating in different octaves and vocal timbres) marked them as African American. So did the particular turns of the plot as well as the particular heroes, dupes, and villains, and their values.

This section contains several kinds of tales: animal trickster tales, tales of slave tricksters, tales explaining how things came to be as they are, tales with other lessons about life in the tough briar patch of the United States, and tales where there's simply one darned thing happening after another. All of them invite us along for the narrative ride.

One warning: do not accept any simplistic explanation for the stories' meanings. Watch for the easy interpretation of trickster tales as Weak-but-Cunning Black versus Strong-but-Duller White. This formula often will hold. But then again it will not. Frequently, the "weak" rabbits of these tales are (like tricksters the world over) greedy monsters of selfish pride, dangerously out of sync with their surroundings and fellow creatures. Or the rabbits can be just plain pretentious. In a sense, that is what gets Brer Rabbit into trouble in the famous Tar-Baby Tale: he arrogantly insists on being addressed with genteel etiquette, and to say the least, the effort fails (temporarily!). Often the rabbits' *foes* are infinitely more community minded and responsible than the rabbits themselves. At times, as in tales of Rabbit and Fox, both antagonists are tricksters; in such cases, both may embody characteristics closer to those of the slave holder, as usually imagined, than to those of the slave. Both Rabbit and Fox often serve more as warnings than as exemplars of how to live.

Be aware too that like other oral forms these tales were originally invented not for the printed page but for spoken performance. Something vital is lost when we are not at the fireside with Scooter, hearing the sounds, watching the physical movements of the tellers: their whispery asides, silences, dramatic songs, clicks, calls, and other story sounds. Without being there we miss the sense of the tale as part of a process of verbal exchange that involves audience responses and sometimes a competitive round of tale set against tale. Some of these actual performances would surely have consisted not of complete and finished products but of fragments and loose bits of a familiar yarn handed around in brief before the next talk takes over. Some tales might have been introduced by one teller and finished off by one or more others. Some might have been hooted down before they got off the ground.

Keeping in mind this sense of the tales as part of a lived performance process, note in particular the entries reported by Zora Neale Hurston, who did her best to let her readers see and hear the work in its complex social and ritual contexts. But even while reading Hurston, remember that she was a literary intellectual who came to the party with pen (and/or tape recorder) in hand; even her best efforts to catch the dancing spirit of the thrice-told tale on paper betray her own sense of life and alas her identity as something of an outsider.

Because of the unavoidable difficulties of translation from oral to written forms, purity cannot be a central concern in choosing selections. Joel Chandler Harris, the late-nineteenth-century collector, is here with all his bags and baggages as a white southerner of his era. Harris invents his own frame to encase the tales—in his case as stories told by a somewhat stereotyped Uncle Remus to a curious white youngster in his charge. Other literary renderings of the tales, including ones by black writers Hurston and Julius Lester, also are here along with more unvarnished (and in this sense scientific) reports by such scholars as Roger Abrahams. Sometimes the literary renderings of the tales involve phonetical spellings, which at first obscure meaning but which—once the reader breaks the code—can help bring the work to life. Sometimes, on the other hand, faithful scientific renderings of the material can lie stillborn on the page. (In their naked authenticity, such transcribed tales will delight some readers and offend others.) All these efforts are now part of a tradition in which modern readers, like Murray's Scooter, can pull up as close as we can to the flesh and blood and spirit of the tales and their tellers.

All God's Chillen Had Wings[1]

Once all Africans could fly like birds; but owing to their many transgressions, their wings were taken away. There remained, here and there, in the sea islands and out-of-the-way places in the low country, some who had been overlooked, and had retained the power of flight, though they looked like other men.

There was a cruel master on one of the sea islands who worked his people till they died. When they died he bought others to take their places. These also he killed with overwork in the burning summer sun, through the middle hours of the day, although this was against the law.

One day, when all the worn-out Negroes were dead of overwork, he bought, of a broker in the town, a company of native Africans just brought into the country, and put them at once to work in the cottonfield.

He drove them hard. They went to work at sunrise and did not stop until dark. They were driven with unsparing harshness all day long, men, women and children. There was no pause for rest during the unendurable heat of the midsummer noon, though trees were plenty and near. But through the hardest hours, when fair plantations gave their Negroes rest, this man's driver pushed the work along without a moment's stop for breath, until all grew weak with heat and thirst.

There was among them one young woman who had lately borne a child. It was her first; she had not fully recovered from bearing, and should not have been sent to the field until her strength had come back. She had her child with her, as the other women had, astraddle on her hip, or piggyback.

The baby cried. She spoke to quiet it. The driver could not understand her words. She took her breast with her hand and threw it over her shoulder that the child might suck and be content. Then she went back to chopping knot-grass; but being very weak, and sick with the great heat, she stumbled, slipped and fell.

The driver struck her with his lash until she rose and staggered on.

She spoke to an old man near her, the oldest man of them all, tall and strong, with a forked beard. He replied; but the driver could not understand what they said; their talk was strange to him.

She returned to work; but in a little while she fell again. Again the driver lashed her until she got to her feet. Again she spoke to the old man. But he said: "Not yet, daughter; not yet." So she went on working, though she was very ill.

Soon she stumbled and fell again. But when the driver came running with his lash to drive her on with her work, she turned to the old man and asked: "Is it time yet, daddy?" He answered: "Yes, daughter; the time has come. Go; and peace be with you!" . . . and stretched out his arms toward her . . . so.

With that she leaped straight up into the air and was gone like a bird, flying over field and wood.

The driver and overseer ran after her as far as the edge of the field; but she was gone, high over their heads, over the fence, and over the top of the woods, gone, with her baby astraddle of her hip, sucking at her breast.

1. As told by Caesar Grant, of John's Island, carter and laborer. Published in John Bennett's *Doctor to the Dead* (1943, 1946) and in Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps's *Book of Negro Folklore* (1958). Tales of black flight inspired Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and several other works by African American writers.

Then the driver hurried the rest to make up for her loss; and the sun was very hot indeed. So hot that soon a man fell down. The overseer himself lashed him to his feet. As he got up from where he had fallen the old man called to him in an unknown tongue. My grandfather told me the words that he said; but it was a long time ago, and I have forgotten them. But when he had spoken, the man turned and laughed at the overseer, and leaped up into the air, and was gone, like a gull, flying over field and wood.

Soon another man fell. The driver lashed him. He turned to the old man. The old man cried out to him, and stretched out his arms as he had done for the other two; and he, like them, leaped up, and was gone through the air, flying like a bird over field and wood.

Then the overseer cried to the driver, and the master cried to them both: "Beat the old devil! He is the doer!"

The overseer and the driver ran at the old man with lashes ready; and the master ran too, with a picket pulled from the fence, to beat the life out of the old man who had made those Negroes fly.

But the old man laughed in their faces, and said something loudly to all the Negroes in the field, the new Negroes and the old Negroes.

And as he spoke to them they all remembered what they had forgotten, and recalled the power which once had been theirs. Then all the Negroes, old and new, stood up together; the old man raised his hands; and they all leaped up into the air with a great shout; and in a moment were gone, flying like a flock of crows, over the field, over the fence, and over the top of the wood; and behind them flew the old man.

The men went clapping their hands; and the women went singing; and those who had children gave them their breasts; and the children laughed and sucked as their mothers flew, and were not afraid.

The master, the overseer, and the driver looked after them as they flew, beyond the wood, beyond the river, miles on miles, until they passed beyond the last rim of the world and disappeared in the sky like a handful of leaves. They were never seen again.

Where they went I do not know; I never was told. Nor what it was that the old man said . . . that I have forgotten. But as he went over the last fence he made a sign in the master's face, and cried "Kuli-ba! Kuli-ba!" I don't know what that means.

But if I could only find the old wood sawyer, he could tell you more; for he was there at the time, and saw the Africans fly away with their women and children. He is an old, old man, over ninety years of age, and remembers a great many strange things.

Big Talk[1]

During slavery time two ole niggers wuz talkin' an' one said tuh de other one, "Ole Massa made me so mad yistiddy till Ah give 'im uh good cussin' out. Man, Ah called 'im everything wid uh handle on it."

De other one says, "You didn't cuss *Ole Massa*, didja? Good God! Whut did he do tuh you?"

1. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935).

"He didn't do *nothin'*, an' man, Ah laid one cussin' on 'im! Ah'm uh man lak dis, Ah won't stan' no hunchin'. Ah betcha he won't bother *me* no mo'."

"Well, if you cussed 'im an' he didn't do nothin' tuh you, de nex' time he make me mad Ah'm goin' tuh lay uh hearin' on him."

Nex' day de nigger did somethin'. Ole Massa got in behind 'im and he turnt 'round an' give Ole Massa one good cussin' an Ole Massa had 'im took down and whipped nearly tuh death. Nex' time he saw dat other nigger he says tuh 'im. "Thought you tole me, you cussed Ole Massa out and he never opened his mouf."

"Ah did."

"Well, how come he never did nothin' tuh yuh? Ah did it an' he come nigh uh killin' *me*."

"Man, you didn't go cuss 'im tuh his face, didja?"

"Sho Ah did. Ain't dat whut you tole me you done?"

"Naw, Ah didn't say Ah cussed 'im tuh his face. You sho is crazy. Ah thought you had mo' sense than dat. When Ah cussed Ole Massa he wuz settin' on de front porch an' Ah wuz down at de big gate."

De other nigger wuz mad but he didn't let on. Way after while he 'proached de nigger dat got 'im de beatin' an' tole 'im, "Know whut Ah done tuhday?"

"Naw, whut you done? Give Ole Massa 'nother cussin'?"

"Naw, Ah ain't never goin' do dat no mo'. Ah peeped up under Ole Miss's drawers."

"Man, hush yo' mouf! You knows you ain't looked up under Ole Miss's clothes!"

"Yes, Ah did too. Ah looked right up her very drawers."

"You better hush dat talk! Somebody goin' hear you and Ole Massa'll have you kilt."

"Well, Ah sho done it an' she never done nothin' neither."

"Well, whut did she say?"

"Not uh mumblin' word, an' Ah stopped and looked jus' as long as Ah wanted tuh an' went on 'bout mah business."

"Well, de nex' time Ah see her settin' out on de porch Ah'm goin' tuh look too."

"Help yo'self."

Dat very day Ole Miss wuz settin' out on de porch in de cool uh de evenin' all dressed up in her starchy white clothes. She had her legs all crossed up and de nigger walked up tuh de edge uh de porch and peeped up under Ole Miss's clothes. She took and hollored an' Ole Massa come out an' had dat nigger almost kilt alive.

When he wuz able tuh be 'bout again he said tuh de other nigger; "Thought you tole me you peeped up under Ole Miss's drawers?"

"Ah sho did."

"Well, how come she never done nothin' tuh *you*? She got me nearly kilt."

"Man, when Ah looked under Ole Miss's drawers they wuz hangin' out on de clothes line. You didn't go look up in 'em while she had 'em on, didja? You sho is uh fool! Ah thought you had mo' sense than dat, Ah claire Ah did. It's uh wonder he didn't kill yuh dead. Umph, umph, umph. You sho ain't got no sense atall."

Deer Hunting Story[1]

You know Ole Massa took a nigger deer huntin' and posted him in his place and told him, says: "Now you wait right here and keep yo' gun reformed and ready. Ah'm goin' 'round de hill and skeer up de deer and head him dis way. When he come past, you shoot."

De nigger says: "Yessuh, Ah sho' will, Massa."

He set there and waited wid de gun all cocked and after a while de deer come tearin' past him. He didn't make a move to shoot de deer so he went on 'bout his business. After while de white man come on 'round de hill and ast de nigger: "Did you kill de deer?"

De nigger says: "Ah ain't seen no deer pass here yet."

Massa says: "Yes, you did. You couldn't help but see him. He come right dis way."

Nigger says: "Well Ah sho' ain't seen none. All Ah seen was a white man come along here wid a pack of chairs on his head and Ah tipped my hat to him and waited for de deer."

How to Write a Letter[1]

Ah know another man wid a daughter.

The man sent his daughter off to school for seben years, den she come home all finished up. So he said to her, "Daughter, git yo' things and write me a letter to my brother!" So she did.

He says, "Head it up," and she done so.

"Now tell 'im, 'Dear Brother, our chile is done come home from school and all finished up and we is very proud of her.'"

Then he ast de girl "Is you got dat?"

She tole 'im "yeah."

"Now tell him some mo'. 'Our mule is dead but Ah got another mule and when Ah say (clucking sound of tongue and teeth) he moved from de word.'"

"Is you got dat?" he ast de girl.

"Naw suh," she tole 'im.

He waited a while and he ast her again, "You got dat down yet?"

"Naw suh, Ah ain't got it yet."

"How come you ain't got it yet?"

"Cause Ah can't spell (clucking sound)."

"You mean to tell me you been off to school seben years and can't spell (clucking sound)? Why Ah could spell dat myself and Ah ain't been to school a day in mah life. Well jes' say (clucking sound) he'll know what yo' mean and go on wid de letter."

1. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935). Note the deliberate spoofing of the white "Massa" by the ostensibly respectful "nigger."

1. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935). This tale illustrates, among other things, the unwritable dimension of oral materials.

"'Member Youse a Nigger"[1]

Ole John was a slave, you know. Ole Massa and Ole Missy and de two li' children—a girl and a boy.

Well, John was workin' in de field and he seen de children out on de lake in a boat, just a hollerin'. They had done lost they oars and was 'bout to turn over. So then he went and tole Ole Massa and Ole Missy.

Well, Ole Missy, she hollered and said: "It's so sad to lose these 'cause Ah ain't never goin' to have no more children." Ole Massa made her hush and they went down to de water and follered de shore on 'round till they found 'em. John pulled off his shoes and hopped in and swum out and got in de boat wid de children and brought 'em to shore.

Well, Massa and John take 'em to de house. So they was all so glad 'cause de children got saved. So Massa told 'im to make a good crop dat year and fill up de barn, and den when he lay by de crops nex' year, he was going to set him free.

So John raised so much crop dat year he filled de barn and had to put some of it in de house.

So Friday come, and Massa said, "Well, de day done come that I said I'd set you free. I hate to do it, but I don't like to make myself out a lie. I hate to git rid of a good nigger lak you."

So he went in de house and give John one of his old suits of clothes to put on. So John put it on and come in to shake hands and tell 'em goodbye. De children they cry, and Ole Missy she cry. Didn't want to see John go. So John took his bundle and put it on his stick and hung it crost his shoulder.

Well, Ole John started on down de road. Well, Ole Massa said, "John, de children love yuh."

"Yassuh."

"John, I love yuh."

"Yassuh."

"And Missy *like* yuh!"

"Yassuh."

"But 'member, John, youse a nigger."

"Yassuh."

Fur as John could hear 'im down de road he wuz hollerin', "John, Oh John! De children loves you. And I love you. De Missy *like* you."

John would holler back, "Yassuh."

"But 'member youse a nigger, tho!"

Ole Massa kept callin' 'im and his voice was pitiful. But John kept right on steppin' to Canada. He answered Old Massa every time he called 'im, but he consumed on wid his bag.

"Ah'll Beatcher Makin' Money"[1]

De rooster chew t'backer, de hen dip snuff.
De biddy can't do it, but he struts his stuff.

1. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935).

1. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935).

Ole John, he was workin' for Massa and Massa had two hawses and he lakted John, so he give John one of his hawses.

When John git to workin' 'em he'd haul off and bet Massa's hawse, but he never would hit his'n. So then some white folks tole ole Massa 'bout John beatin' his hawse and never beatin' his own. So Massa tole John if he ever heard tell of him layin' a whip on his hawse again he was gointer take and kill John's hawse dead as a nit.

John tole 'im, "Massa, if you kill my hawse, Ah'll beatcher makin' money."

One day John hit ole Massa's hawse agin. Dey went and tole Massa' bout it. He come down dere where John was haulin' trash, wid a great big ole knife and cut John's hawse's th'oat and he fell dead.

John jumped down off de wagon and skint his hawse, and tied de hide up on a stick and throwed it cross his shoulder, and went on down town.

Ole John was a fortune teller hisself but nobody 'round dere didn't know it. He met a man and de man ast John, "Whut's dat you got over yo' shoulder dere, John?"

"It's a fortune teller, boss."

"Make it talk some, John, and I'll give you a sack of money and a hawse and saddle, and five head of cattle."

John put de hide on de ground and pulled out de stick and hit 'cross de hawse hide and hold his head down dere to lissen.

"Dere's a man in yo' bed-room behind de bed talkin' to yo' wife."

De man went inside his house to see. When he come back out he said, "Yeah, John, you sho tellin' de truth. Make him talk some mo'."

John went to puttin' de stick back in de hide. "Naw, Massa, he's tired now."

De white man says, "Ah'll give you six head of sheeps and fo' hawses and fo' sacks of money."

John pulled out de stick and hit down on de hide and hold down his head to lissen.

"It's a man in yo' kitchen openin' yo' stove." De man went back into his house and come out again and tole John, "Yo, fortune-teller sho is right. Here's de things Ah promised you."

John rode on past Ole Massa's house wid all his sacks of money and drivin' his sheeps and cattle, whoopin' and crackin' his whip. "Yee, whoo-pee, yee!" Crack!

Massa said, "John, where did you git all dat?"

John said, "Ah tole you if you kilt mah hawse Ah'd beatcher makin' money."

Massa said to 'im, "Reckon if Ah kilt mah hawse Ah'd make dat much money?"

"Yeah, Massa, Ah reckon so."

So ole Massa went out and kilt his hawse and went to town hollerin', "Hawse hide for sale! Hawse hide for sale!"

One man said, "Hold on dere. Ah'll give you two-bits for it to bottom some chears."[2]

Ole Massa tole 'im, "Youse crazy!" and went on hollerin' "Hawse hide for sale!"

"Ah'll gi' you twenty cents for it to cover some chears," another man said.

2. I.e., to use to repair the seats of some chairs.

"You must be stone crazy! Why, dis hide is worth five thousand dollars."

De people all laughed at 'im so he took his hawse hide and throwed it away and went and bought hisself another hawse.

Ole John, he already rich, he didn't have to work but he jus' love to fool 'round hawses so he went to drivin' hawse and buggy for Massa. And when nobody wasn't wid him, John would let his grandma ride in Massa's buggy. Dey tole ole Massa 'bout it and he said, "John, Ah hear you been had yo' grandma ridin' in mah buggy. De first time Ah ketch her in it, Ah'm gointer kill 'er."

John tole 'im, "If you kill my grandma, Ah'll beatcher makin' money."

Pretty soon some white folks tole Massa dat John was takin' his gran'ma to town in his buggy and was hittin' his hawse and showin' off. So ole Massa come out dere and cut John's gran'ma's th'oat.

So John buried his gran'ma in secret and went and got his same ole hawse hide and keered it up town agin and went 'round talkin' 'bout, "Fortune-teller, fortune-teller!"

One man tole 'im, "Why, John, make it talk some for me. Ah'll give you six head of goats, six sheeps, and a hawse and a saddle to ride 'im wid."

So John made it talk and de man was pleased so he give John more'n he promised 'im, and John went on back past Massa's house wid his stuff so ole Massa could see 'im.

Ole Massa run out and ast, "Oh, John, where did you git all dat?"

John said, "Ah tole you if you kill mah gran'ma Ah'd beatcher makin' money."

Massa said, "You reckon if Ah kill mine, Ah'll make all dat?"

"Yeah, Ah reckon so."

So Massa runned and cut his gran'ma's th'oat and went up town hollerin' "gran'ma for sale! gran'ma for sale!"

Wouldn't nobody break a breath wid him. Dey thought he was crazy. He went on back home and grabbed John and tole 'im, "You made me kill my gran'ma and my good hawse and Ah'm gointer throw you in de river."

John tole 'im, "If you throw me in de river, Ah'll beatcher makin' money."

"Naw you won't neither," Massa tole 'im. "You done made yo' last money and done yo' las' do."

He got ole John in de sack and keered 'im down to de river, but he done forgot his weights, so he went back home to git some.

While he was gone after de weights a toad frog come by dere and John seen 'im. So he hollered and said, "Mr. Hoptoad, if you open dis sack and let me out Ah'll give you a dollar."

Toad frog let 'im out, so he got a soft-shell turtle and put it in de sack wid two big ole bricks. Then ole Massa got his weights and come tied 'em on de sack and throwed it in de river.

Whilst Massa was down to de water foolin' wid dat sack, John had done got out his hawse hide and went on up town agin hollerin', "Fortune-teller! fortune-teller!"

One rich man said "Make it talk for me, John."

John pulled out de stick and hit on de hide, and put his ear down. "Uh man is in yo' smoke-house stealin' meat and another one is in yo' money-safe."

De man went inside to see and when he come back he said, "You sho kin tell de truth."

So John went by Massa's house on a new hawse, wid a sack of money tied on each side of de saddle. Ole Massa seen 'im and ast, "Oh, John, where'd you git all dat?"

"Ah tole you if you throw me in de river Ah'd beatcher makin' money."

Massa ast, "Reckon if Ah let you throw me in de river, Ah'd make all dat?"

"Yeah, Massa, Ah *know* so."

John got ole Massa in de sack and keered 'im down to de river. John didn't forgit *his* weights. He put de weights on ole Massa and jus' befo' he throwed 'im out he said, "Goodbye, Massa, Ah hope you find all you lookin' for."

And dat wuz de las' of ole Massa.

Why the Sister in Black Works Hardest[1]

Know how it happened? After God got thru makin' de world and de varmints and de folks, he made up a great big bundle and let it down in de middle of de road. It laid dere for thousands of years, then Ole Missus said to Ole Massa: "Go pick up dat box, Ah want to see whut's in it." Ole Massa look at de box and it look so heavy dat he says to de nigger, "Go fetch me dat big ole box out dere in de road." De nigger been stumblin' over de box a long time so he tell his wife:

"'Oman, go git dat box." So de nigger 'oman she runned to git de box. She says:

"Ah always lak to open up a big box 'cause there's nearly always something good in great big boxes." So she run and grabbed a-hold of de box and opened it up and it was full of hard work.

Dat's de reason de sister in black works harder than anybody else in de world. De white man tells de nigger to work and he takes and tells his wife.

"De Reason Niggers Is Working So Hard"[1]

Dis is de way *dat* was.

God let down two bundles 'bout five miles down de road. So de white man and de nigger raced to see who would git there first. Well, de nigger out-run de white man and grabbed de biggest bundle. He was so skeered de white man would git it away from him he fell on top of de bundle and hollered back: "Oh, Ah got here first and dis biggest bundle is mine." De white man says: "All right, Ah'll take yo' leavings," and picked up de li'l tee-ninchy bundle layin' in de road. When de nigger opened up his bundle he found a pick and shovel and a hoe and a plow and chop-axe and then de white man opened up his bundle and found a writin'-pen and ink. So ever since then de nigger been out in de hot sun, usin' his tools and de white man been sittin' up figgerin', ought's a ought, figger's a figger; all for de white man, none for de nigger.

1. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935).

1. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*

The Ventriloquist[1]

TAD Is you hear de tale 'bout de white man an' de nigger an' de mule?

VOICE I hear a heap er tales 'bout white folks an' niggers an' mules. Wuh you have in mind?

TAD One time dere was a white man an' he runned a big farm, an' he notice one er he mule was gitten mighty poor, so he got to watchin'. He s'picion dat de nigger wuh was workin' de mule was stealin' he feed. Dis white man was one er dem people wha' kin pitch dey voice any wey dey wants. He could throw he voice into a cow or dog or any kind er animal an' have 'em talkin'—make 'em carry on reg'lar compersation.

VOICE I has heared dem kind er people.

TAD Well, he git to de crack er de stable an' he seed de nigger wid a bag reach in de mule' trough an' take out some corn an' put it in de bag. When de nigger do dat, de white man pitched he voice right into de mule' mout' an' make de mule say:

"Nigger, don't take my little bit er feed."

When he say dat, de nigger walk off an' look at de mule for awhile an' de mule ain' say nothin' more. Den he walk back an' dip in de trough again an' start takin' de mule' corn, an' de white folks make de mule say again:

"Nigger, please don't take my feed."

An' again de nigger walk off an' look at de mule.

VOICE Ain' no mule ever would er spoke but one time to me.

TAD Dis here nigger ain' have good sense, an' he went back de third time an' dive into dat corn. An' dis time de mule turn he head an' look at him, an' de white folks th'owed he voice into de mule' mout' one more time an' make de mule say:

"Nigger, ain' I axe you please for God' sake quit takin' my feed. You mighty nigh done perish me to de't'."

When he say dat, de nigger drap he bag an' bu's' out er dat stable, an' de next mornin' he went to the boss an' say:

"Boss, I guh quit."

An' he boss say:

"John, I ain' want you to quit me. I satisfy wid you."

An' de nigger say:

"Well, Boss, I ain' zackly satisfy. You mought as well gee me my time, kaze I done quit."

SCIP Dere ain' no nigger ever would er been zackly satisfy after he heared a mule talkin'.

VOICE It was quittin' time.

TAD Dat ain' all. De white folks paid de nigger he wages an' de nigger walk off a piece down de road an' turn 'round an' walk back to de white folks an' say:

"Boss, I done quit. Dere ain' no nuse for nobody to say nothin' to me. I done quit an' I is guine, but 'fore I goes I got one thing to say to you."

An' de white folks look at him jes as kind an' say:

"Wha' it is, John?"

An' de nigger say:

1. Collected by E. C. L. Adams and published in 1928.

"Boss, I done quit sho' 'nough, but 'fore I goes I wants to tell you one thing. Anything dat mule say to you is a damn lie."

An' den he leff.

SCIP I knowed in de first place dat de white folks done loss a nigger.

You Talk Too Much, Anyhow[1]

Once, during the time of slavery, the pond was somewhat low. A negro happened to walk down there and found this turtle down there about the size of the bottom of a big tin tub, lying on the bank. So the negro said to the turtle, "Good morning, Mr. Turtle." The turtle at first didn't say anything, but finally said, "Good morning, Mr. Man." The negro said, "My, Mr. Turtle, I didn't know you could talk." Turtle said, "What I say about you niggers is you talk too much." So the negro goes back to his house and tells Old Massa about the turtle. He said, "Massa, don't you know, I was down at the creek this morning, and there was a great big turtle on the bank, and he could talk." Massa said, "Get away from here, you're just lying." The negro said he was telling the truth, but Master told him he lied like a dog. But the negro said, "No sir, he can really talk."

So the master said he would go down to see this turtle, but if he didn't talk he was going to beat the slave half to death. Both of them went back down to the creek and they found the turtle lying on the bank. The negro walked right up to the turtle and said, "Good morning, Mr. Turtle." Turtle didn't say anything, so the negro repeated, "I say, good morning, Mr. Turtle." Turtle still didn't say anything. This time the negro got scared. He said, "Please sir, Mr. Turtle, please say good morning," but Turtle wouldn't talk.

The Master took the negro back to the house and beat him half to death. After he got his beating, he went on back to the creek. He saw the turtle again and said to him, "Why didn't you say good morning? You knew I was going to get a beating if you didn't talk." Turtle said, "Well, that's what I say about you negroes, you talk too much anyhow."

A Flying Fool[1]

This colored man died and went up there to meet his Maker. But when he got to the gates, St. Peter said that God wasn't home or having any visitors—by which he meant no negroes allowed. Well, this old boy, he had been a good man all his life and his preacher had told him that Heaven would be his place, so he didn't exactly know what to do. So he just kind of hung around the gates, until one time St. Peter just had to go and take a pee. So while Pete was gone, this old boy slipped through, stole himself a pair of wings, and he really took off. Sailed around the trees, in and out of those golden houses and all, swooped down and buzzed some of those heavenly singers and all, and had himself a good old time. Meanwhile, of course, St. Pete came back and found out what had happened and called out the heavenly police force to go get him. Well, this guy was just getting the feel of wearing wings, and he really took off, zoomed off. They had some little time bringing him down, him flying all over Heaven fast as he could go. Finally, they got him cornered and he racked up on one of those trees, and I tell you, he looked like a mess with broken wings and all. So they took him and threw him out the gates. Now here comes one of his friends, who asked him, "What happened, man?" He said, "Oh, man, when I got here they wouldn't let me in to the white man's Heaven, but I grabbed me some wings and I had me a fly." He said, "Oh yeah?" Man said, "Yeah, they may not let any colored folks in, but while I was there I was a flying fool."

1. As published in Roger D. Abrahams, ed., *Afro-American Folktales* (1985).

1. This tale, published in Roger D. Abrahams, ed., *Afro-American Folktales* (1985), is often referred to in novels, poems, and short stories. See Richard Wright's *Lawd Today*, Ralph Ellison's "Flying Home," and Sterling Brown's "Slim in Hell."

Brer Rabbit Tricks Brer Fox Again[1]

When all the animals saw how well Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox were getting along, they decided to patch up their quarrels.

One hot day Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Brer Coon, Brer Bear, and a whole lot of the other animals were clearing new ground so they could plant corn and have some roasting ears when autumn came.

Brer Rabbit got tired about three minutes after he started, but he couldn't say anything if he didn't want the other animals calling him lazy. So he kept carrying off the weeds and brambles the others were pulling out of the ground. After a while he screamed real loud and said a briar was stuck in his hand. He wandered off, picking at his hand. As soon as he was out of sight, he started looking for a shady place where he could take a nap.

He saw a well with a bucket in it. That was the very thing he'd been looking for. He climbed, jumped in, and whoops! The bucket went down, down, down until—SPLASH!—it hit the water.

Now, I know you don't know nothing about no well. You probably think that when God made water, He made the faucet too. Well, God don't know nothing about no faucet, and I don't care too much for them myself. When I was coming up, everybody had their own well. Over the well was a pulley with a rope on it. Tied to each end of the rope was a bucket, and when you pulled one bucket up, the other one went down. Brer Rabbit found out about them kind of wells as he looked up at the other bucket.

He didn't know what he was going to do. He couldn't even move around very much or else he'd tip over and land in the water.

Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit might've made up and become friends, but that didn't mean Brer Fox trusted Brer Rabbit. Brer Fox had seen him sneaking off, so he followed. He watched Brer Rabbit get in the bucket and go to the bottom of the well. That was the most astonishing thing he had ever seen. Brer Rabbit had to be up to something.

"I bet you anything that's where Brer Rabbit hides all his money. Or he's probably discovered a gold mine down there!"

Brer Fox peeked down into the well. "Hey, Brer Rabbit! What you doing down there?"

1. From *The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit*, as told by Julius Lester (1987).

"Who? Me? Fishing. I thought I'd surprise everybody and catch a mess of fish for dinner."

"Many of 'em down there?"

"Is there stars in the sky? I'm glad you come, 'cause there's more fish down here than I can haul up. Why don't you come on down and give me a hand?"

"How do I get down there?"

"Jump in the bucket."

Brer Fox did that and started going down. The bucket Brer Rabbit was in started up. As Brer Rabbit passed Brer Fox, he sang out:

Goodbye, Brer Fox, take care of your clothes,
For this is the way the world goes;
Some goes up and some goes down,
You'll get to the bottom all safe and sound.

Just as Brer Fox hit the water—SPLASH!—Brer Rabbit jumped out at the top. He ran and told the other animals that Brer Fox was muddying up the drinking water.

They ran to the well and hauled Brer Fox out, chastising him for muddying up some good water. Wasn't nothing he could say.

Everybody went back to work, and every now and then Brer Rabbit looked at Brer Fox and laughed. Brer Fox had to give a little dry grin himself.

The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story[1]

"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 atter Brer Rabbit fool 'im wid dat calamus[2] root, Brer Fox went ter wuk en got 'im some tar, en mix it wid some turbentime, en fix up a contrapshun wat 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—dez ez sassy ez a jaybird. 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.

"'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.

1. From Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1880).
2. A tropical plant, also called sweet flag.

"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 '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 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 sa'ntered fort', lookin' des 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, en den agin he mountent. Some say Jedge B'ar come 'long en loosed 'im—some say he didn't. I hear Miss Sally callin'. You better run 'long."

How Mr. Rabbit Was Too Sharp for Mr. Fox[1]

"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 darkey, chuckling slyly. "I 'clar ter grashus I ought er tole you dat, but ole man Nod wuz ridin' on my eyeleds '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 fambly 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.

1. From Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1880).

"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'se'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'se'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 fire,' 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 that 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 des ez deep ez you please, Brer Fox,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, 'but do 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'se Brer Fox wanter hurt Brer Rabbit bad ez he kin, so he cotch 'im by de behime legs en slung 'im right in de middle er de brier-patch. Dar was a considerbul flutter whar Brer Rabbit struck de bushes, en Brer Fox sorter hang 'roun' fer ter see w'at 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."

The Awful Fate of Mr. Wolf[1]

Uncle Remus was half-soling[2] one of his shoes, and his Miss Sally's little boy had been handling his awls, his hammers, and his knives to such an extent that the old man was compelled to assume a threatening attitude;

1. From Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1880). Note the contrast between the outer tale's ostensible peace and the inner tale's extraordinary violence.
2. Performing a shoe repair.

but peace reigned again, and the little boy perched himself on a chair, watching Uncle Remus driving in pegs.

"Folks w'at's allers pesterin' people, en bodderin' 'longer dat w'at ain't dern, don't never come ter no good eend. Dar wuz Brer Wolf; stidder mindin' un his own bizness, he hatter take en go in pardnerships wid Brer Fox, en dey want skacely a minnit in de day dat he want atter Brer Rabbit, en he kep' on en kep' on twel fus' news you knowed he got kotch up wid—en he got kotch up wid monstus bad."

"Goodness, Uncle Remus! I thought the Wolf let the Rabbit alone, after he tried to fool him about the Fox being dead."

"Better lemme tell dish yer my way. Bimeby hit'll be yo' bed time, en Miss Sally'll be a hollerin' atter you, en you'll be a whimplin' roun', en den Mars John'll fetch up de re'r wid dat ar strop w'at I made fer 'im."

The child laughed, and playfully shook his fist in the simple, serious face of the venerable old darkey, but said no more. Uncle Remus waited awhile to be sure there was to be no other demonstration, and then proceeded:

"Brer Rabbit ain't see no peace w'atsumever. He can't leave home 'cep' Brer Wolf 'ud make a raid en tote off some er de fambly. Brer Rabbit b'ilt 'im a straw house, en hit wuz tored down; den he made a house outen pine-tops, en dat went de same way; den he made 'im a bark house, en dat wuz raided on, en eve'y time he los' a house he los' wunner his chilluns. Las' Brer Rabbit got mad, he did, en cust, en den he went off, he did, en got some kyarpinters, en dey b'ilt 'im a plank house wid rock foundashuns. Atter dat he could have some peace en quietness. He could go out en pass de time er day wid his nabers, en come back en set by de fier, en smoke his pipe, en read de newspapers same like enny man w'at got a fambly. He made a hole, he did, in de cellar whar de little Rabbits could hide out w'en dar wuz much uv a racket in de naberhood, en de latch er de front do' kotch on de inside. Brer Wolf, he see how de lan' lay, he did, en he lay low. De little Rabbits wuz mighty skittish, but hit got so dat cole chills ain't run up Brer Rabbit's back no mo' w'en he heerd Brer Wolf go gallopin' by.

"Bimeby, one day w'en Brer Rabbit wuz fixin' fer ter call on Miss Coon, he heerd a monstus fuss en clatter up de big road, en 'mos' 'fo' he could fix his years fer ter lissen, Brer Wolf run in de do'. De little Rabbits dey went inter dere hole in de cellar, dey did, like blowin' out a cannle. Brer Wolf wuz far'ly kivver'd wid mud, en mighty nigh outer win'.

"'Oh, do pray save me, Brer Rabbit!' sez Brer Wolf, sezee. 'Do please, Brer Rabbit! de dogs is atter me, en dey'll t'ar me up. Don't you year um comin'? Oh, do please save me, Brer Rabbit! Hide me some'rs whar de dogs won't git me.'

"No quicker sed dan done.

"'Jump in dat big chist dar, Brer Wolf,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee; 'jump in dar en make yo'se'f at home.'

"In jump Brer Wolf, down come de led, en inter de hasp went de hook, en dar Mr. Wolf wuz. Den Brer Rabbit went ter de lookin' glass, he did, en wink at hisse'f, en den he drawd de rockin'-cheer in front er de fier, he did, en tuck a big chaw terbarker."

"Tobacco, Uncle Remus?" asked the little boy, incredulously.

"Rabbit terbarker, honey. You know dis yer life ev'lastin' w'at Miss Sally puts 'mong de cloze in de trunk; well, dat's rabbit terbarker. Den Brer Rabbit sot dar long time, he did, turnin' his mine over en wukken his thinkin' masheen. Bimeby he got up, en sorter stir 'roun'. Den Brer Wolf open up.

"'Is de dogs all gone, Brer Rabbit?'

"'Seem like I hear one un um smellin' roun' de chimbly-cornder des now.'

"Den Brer Rabbit git de kittle en fill it full er water, en put it on de fier.

"'W'at you doin' now, Brer Rabbit?'

"'I'm fixin' fer ter make you a nice cup er tea, Brer Wolf.'

"Den Brer Rabbit went ter de cubberd en git de gimlet,[3] en commence fer ter bo' little holes in de chist-led.

"'W'at you doin' now, Brer Rabbit?'

"'I'm a bo'in' little holes so you kin get bref, Brer Wolf.'

"Den Brer Rabbit went out en git some mo' wood, en fling it on de fier.

"'W'at you doin' now, Brer Rabbit?'

"'I'm a chunkin' up de fier so you won't git cole, Brer Wolf.'

"Den Brer Rabbit went down inter de cellar en fotch out all his chilluns.

"'W'at you doin' now, Brer Rabbit?'

"'I'm a tellin' my chilluns w'at a nice man you is, Brer Wolf.'

"En de chilluns, dey had ter put der han's on der moufs fer ter keep fum laffin'. Den Brer Rabbit he got de kittle en commenced fer ter po' de hot water on de chist-lid.

"'W'at dat I hear, Brer Rabbit?'

"'You hear de win' a blowin', Brer Wolf.'

"Den de water begin fer ter sif' thoo.

"'W'at dat I feel, Brer Rabbit?'

"'You feels de fleas a bitin', Brer Wolf.'

"'Dey er bitin' mighty hard, Brer Rabbit.'

"'Tu'n over on de udder side, Brer Wolf.'

"'W'at dat I feel now, Brer Rabbit?'

"'Still you feels de fleas, Brer Wolf.'

"'Dey er eatin' me up, Brer Rabbit,' en dem wuz de las' words er Brer Wolf, kase de scaldin' water done de bizness.

"Den Brer Rabbit call in his nabers, he did, en dey hilt a reg'lar juberlee; en ef you go ter Brer Rabbit's house right now, I dunno but w'at you'll fine Brer Wolf's hide hangin' in de back-po'ch, en all bekaze he wuz so bizzy wid udder fo'kses doin's."

What the Rabbit Learned[1]

So they had a convention. De rabbit took de floor and said they was tired of runnin', and dodgin' all de time, and they asted de dogs to please leave rabbits alone and run somethin' else. So de dogs put it to a vote and 'greed to leave off runnin' rabbits.

So after de big meetin' Brer Dog invites de rabbit over to his house to have dinner wid him.

He started on thru de woods wid Brer Dog but every now and then he'd stop and scratch his ear and listen. He stop right in his tracks. Dog say:

"Aw, come on Brer Rabbit, you too suscautious. Come on."

Kept dat up till they come to de branch just 'fore they got to Brer Dog's house. Just as Brer Rabbit started to step out on de foot-log, he heard some dogs barkin' way down de creek. He heard de old hound say, "How o-l-d is

3. A small hand tool for boring holes.
1. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935).

he?" and the young dogs answer him: "Twenty-one or two, twenty-one or two!" So Brer Rabbit say, "Excuse me, but Ah don't reckon Ah better go home wid you today, Brer Dog."

"Aw, come on, Brer Rabbit, you always gitten scared for nothin'. Come on."

"Ah hear dogs barkin', Brer Dog."

"Naw, you don't, Brer Rabbit."

"Yes, Ah do. Ah know, dat's dogs barkin'."

"S'posin' it is, it don't make no difference. Ain't we done held a convention and passed a law dogs run no mo' rabbits? Don't pay no 'tention to every li'l bit of barkin' you hear."

Rabbit scratch his ear and say,

"Yeah, but all de dogs ain't been to no convention, and anyhow some of dese fool dogs ain't got no better sense than to run all over dat law and break it up. De rabbits didn't go to school much and he didn't learn but three letter, and that's trust no mistake. Run every time de bush shake."

So he raced on home without breakin' another breath wid de dog.