

## **Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby**

### **A Georgia Folktale**

**retold by**

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Well now, that rascal Brer Fox hated Brer Rabbit on account of he was always cutting capers and bossing everyone around. So Brer Fox decided to capture and kill Brer Rabbit if it was the last thing he ever did! He thought and he thought until he came up with a plan. He would make a tar baby! Brer Fox went and got some tar and he mixed it with some turpentine and he sculpted it into the figure of a cute little baby. Then he stuck a hat on the Tar Baby and sat her in the middle of the road.

Brer Fox hid himself in the bushes near the road and he waited and waited for Brer Rabbit to come along. At long last, he heard someone whistling and chuckling to himself, and he knew that Brer Rabbit was coming up over the hill. As he reached the top, Brer Rabbit spotted the cute little Tar Baby. Brer Rabbit was surprised. He stopped and stared at this strange creature. He had never seen anything like it before!

"Good Morning," said Brer Rabbit, doffing his hat. "Nice weather we're having."

The Tar Baby said nothing. Brer Fox laid low and grinned an evil grin.

Brer Rabbit tried again. "And how are you feeling this fine day?"

The Tar Baby, she said nothing. Brer Fox grinned an evil grin and lay low in the bushes.

Brer Rabbit frowned. This strange creature was not very polite. It was beginning to make him mad.

"Ahem!" said Brer Rabbit loudly, wondering if the Tar Baby were deaf. "I said 'HOW ARE YOU THIS MORNING?'"

The Tar Baby said nothing. Brer Fox curled up into a ball to hide his laughter. His plan was working perfectly!

"Are you deaf or just rude?" demanded Brer Rabbit, losing his temper. "I can't stand folks that are stuck up! You take off that hat and say 'Howdy-do' or I'm going to give you such a lickin'!"

The Tar Baby just sat in the middle of the road looking as cute as a button and saying nothing at all. Brer Fox rolled over and over under the bushes, fit to bust because he didn't dare laugh out loud.

"I'll learn ya!" Brer Rabbit yelled. He took a swing at the cute little Tar Baby and his paw got stuck in the tar.

"Lemme go or I'll hit you again," shouted Brer Rabbit. The Tar Baby, she said nothing.

"Fine! Be that way," said Brer Rabbit, swinging at the Tar Baby with his free paw. Now both his paws were stuck in the tar, and Brer Fox danced with glee behind the bushes.

"I'm gonna kick the stuffin' out of you," Brer Rabbit said and pounced on the Tar Baby with both feet. They sank deep into the Tar Baby. Brer Rabbit was so furious he head-butted the cute little creature until he was completely covered with tar and unable to move.

Brer Fox leapt out of the bushes and strolled over to Brer Rabbit. "Well, well, what have we here?" he asked, grinning an evil grin.

Brer Rabbit gulped. He was stuck fast. He did some fast thinking while Brer Fox rolled about on the road, laughing himself sick over Brer Rabbit's dilemma.

"I've got you this time, Brer Rabbit," said Brer Fox, jumping up and shaking off the dust. "You've sassed me for the very last time. Now I wonder what I should do with you?"

Brer Rabbit's eyes got very large. "Oh please Brer Fox, whatever you do, please don't throw me into the briar patch."

"Maybe I should roast you over a fire and eat you," mused Brer Fox. "No, that's too much trouble. Maybe I'll hang you instead."

"Roast me! Hang me! Do whatever you please," said Brer Rabbit. "Only please, Brer Fox, please don't throw me into the briar patch."

"If I'm going to hang you, I'll need some string," said Brer Fox. "And I don't have any string handy. But the stream's not far away, so maybe I'll drown you instead."

"Drown me! Roast me! Hang me! Do whatever you please," said Brer Rabbit. "Only please, Brer Fox, please don't throw me into the briar patch."

"The briar patch, eh?" said Brer Fox. "What a wonderful idea! You'll be torn into little pieces!"

Grabbing up the tar-covered rabbit, Brer Fox swung him around and around and then flung him head over heels into the briar patch. Brer Rabbit let out such a scream as he fell that all of Brer Fox's fur stood straight up. Brer Rabbit fell into the briar bushes with a crash and a mighty thump. Then there was silence.

Brer Fox cocked one ear toward the briar patch, listening for whimpers of pain. But he heard nothing. Brer Fox cocked the other ear toward the briar patch, listening for Brer Rabbit's death rattle. He heard nothing.

Then Brer Fox heard someone calling his name. He turned around and looked up the hill. Brer Rabbit was sitting on a log combing the tar out of his fur with a wood chip and looking smug.

"I was bred and born in the briar patch, Brer Fox," he called. "Born and bred in the briar patch."

And Brer Rabbit skipped away as merry as a cricket while Brer Fox ground his teeth in rage and went home.