

Folktale Example

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Brer Rabbit meets a Tar Baby

retold by
S. E. Schlosser

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.

Brer Fox Catches Old Man Tarrypin

retold by

S. E. Schlosser

Well now, Brer Rabbit had made friends with Old Man Tarrypin, a big turtle that lived in the pond near his house. Brer Rabbit and Old Man Tarrypin liked to pull tricks on Brer Fox, and that rascally fellow got pretty mad about it.

Since he couldn't catch Brer Rabbit nohow, Brer Fox decided that he'd get even with Old Man Tarrypin instead. He started walking beside the pond every day, hoping to find the turtle out of the water.

One morning, as he was taking his daily stroll, Brer Fox saw Old Man Tarrypin sitting right in the center of the road. The old turtle looked hot and bothered about something. He kept shaking his head back and forth and he was panting like he was out of breath.

"Howdy, Brer Tarrypin," said Brer Fox, stopping beside the old turtle. "What's the matter wid you?"

"I was a-strolling in the field beside my pond when the farmer came along and set it on fire," Old Man Tarrypin gasped. "I had to run and run, but that ol' fire was faster than me, so I curled up in my shell while it passed right over me! My shell is hotter than the noon-day sun, and I think I done singed my tail!"

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"Let me have a look," said Brer Fox. So Old Man Tarrypin uncurled his tail and poked it out of his shell. Immediately, Brer Fox grabbed him by the tail and swung him right off the ground.

"I gotcha now, Brer Tarrypin," cried Brer Fox. "You ain't gonna bother me no more!"

Well, Old Man Tarrypin begged and begged Brer Fox not to drown him. He'd rather go back into the fire in the field on account of he'd kind of gotten used to being burned.

Brer Fox swung the poor old turtle back and forth by his tail, trying to decide what to do. Putting Old Man Tarrypin into the fire was a tempting idea, but then he remembered how the old turtle had curled up into his shell so the fire couldn't touch him. Brer Fox frowned. Fire was no good, then.

Brer Fox decided to drown Old Man Tarrypin instead. He tucked the turtle under his arm and carried him down to the springhouse by the pond.

"Please, oh please don't drown me," Old Man Tarrypin begged.

"I ain't making no promises," Brer Fox retorted. "You've played too many tricks on me, Brer Tarrypin."

Brer Fox thrust him into the water and began bouncing him up and down.

"Oh, I is drowning," shouted Old Man Tarrypin when his head bounced out of the water. "Don't let go of my tail, Brer Fox or I'll be drowned for sure!"

"That's the idea, Brer Tarrypin," Brer Fox yelled back and let go of his tail.

Immediately Old Man Tarrypin splashed down and down into the water and thumped onto the mud on the bottom, kerplicky-splat.

That's when Brer Fox remembered that Old Man Tarrypin lived in the pond, and there was never any fear of him drowning, nohow! He could hear him laughing from the bottom of the pond: "I-dare-ya-ta- come-down-'ere".

Brer Fox jumped up and down in fury. Old Man Tarrypin had escaped him!

From the other side of the pond, Brer Bull Frog called out: "Knee-deep! Knee-deep!"

Brer Fox glared at the pond, and then looked back at Brer Bull Frog. "It's only knee-deep?" he asked suspiciously.

"Knee-deep, knee-deep!" Brer Bull Frog said again.

All the little frogs joined in the chorus then. "Better-believe-it! Better-believe-it!"

Well, thought Brer Fox, if it was only knee deep, then he'd have no trouble catching Old Man Tarrypin.

"Wade-in, wade-in!" croaked Brer Bull Frog.

"Knee-deep, knee-deep!" agreed all the little frogs.

Brer Fox didn't much like water, but he really wanted to catch Old Man Tarrypin. He approached the edge of the pond cautiously. From underneath the water, Old Man Tarrypin laughed at him, and his words bubbled up to Brer Fox: "I-dare-ya-ta- come-down-'ere! I-dare-ya-ta- come-down-'ere."

Well. That did it. Brer Fox ran right up to the edge of the pond. Leaning over, he looked into the water and saw another fox staring at him.

"Dat's-your-brother! Dat's-your-brother," Brer Bull Frog told Brer Fox.

Brer Fox was thrilled. He didn't know he had a brother. Now that there were two foxes, catching Old Man Tarrypin would be a cinch! Brer Fox leaned down to shake hands with his new-found brother, and toppled right down into the deep water of the pond.

All of the frogs laughed and laughed at the trick they had played on Brer Fox and Old Man Tarrypin started swimming up from the bottom of the pond, his red eyes leaped on Brer Fox's tail. Brer Fox knew that the old turtle wanted to pull him down under that water and drown him, so he

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learned to swim mighty quick! With much splashing and squirming and kicking, Brer Fox made it to the edge of the pond, where he jumped out and ran away as fast as he could, while Brer Bull Frog laughed and the little frogs shouted with glee.

The last thing he heard as he rounded the corner was the voice of Old Man Tarrypin calling: "I-dare-ya-ta- come-down-'ere".

Brer Fox never messed with Old Man Tarrypin again.

The Birth of Paul Bunyan

retold by

S. E. Schlosser

Now I hear tell that Paul Bunyan was born in Bangor, Maine. It took five giant storks to deliver Paul to his parents. His first bed was a lumber wagon pulled by a team of horses. His father had to drive the wagon up to the top of Maine and back whenever he wanted to rock the baby to sleep.

As a newborn, Paul Bunyan could holler so loud he scared all the fish out of the rivers and streams. All the local frogs started wearing earmuffs so they wouldn't go deaf when Paul screamed for his breakfast. His parents had to milk two dozen cows morning and night to keep his milk bottle full and his mother had to feed him ten barrels of porridge every two hours to keep his stomach from rumbling and knocking the house down.

Within a week of his birth, Paul Bunyan could fit into his father's clothes. After three weeks, Paul rolled around so much during his nap that he destroyed four square miles of prime timberland. His parents were at their wits' end! They decided to build him a raft and floated it off the coast of Maine. When Paul turned over, it caused a 75 foot tidal wave in the Bay of Fundy. They had to send the British Navy over to Maine to wake him up. The sailors fired every canon they had in the fleet for seven hours straight before Paul Bunyan woke from his nap! When he stepped off the raft, Paul accidentally sank four war ships and he had to scramble around scooping sailors out of the water before they drowned.

After this incident, Paul's parents decided the East was just too plumb small for him, and so the family moved to Minnesota.

Babe the Blue Ox

retold by

S. E. Schlosser

Well now, one winter it was so cold that all the geese flew backward and all the fish moved south and even the snow turned blue. Late at night, it got so frigid that all spoken words froze solid afore they could be heard. People had to wait until sunup to find out what folks were talking about the night before.

Paul Bunyan went out walking in the woods one day during that Winter of the Blue Snow. He was knee-deep in blue snow when he heard a funny sound between a bleat and a snort. Looking down, he saw a teeny-tiny baby blue ox jest a hopping about in the snow and snorting with rage on account of he was too short to see over the drifts.

Paul Bunyan laughed when he saw the spunky little critter and took the little blue ox home with him. He warmed the little ox up by the fire and the little fellow fluffed up



remained as blue as the snow that had stained him in the first place. So Paul named him Babe the Blue Ox.

Well, any creature raised in Paul Bunyan's camp tended to grow to massive proportions, and Babe was no exception. Folks that stared at him for five minutes could see him growing right before their eyes. He grew so big that 42 axe handles plus a plug of tobacco could fit between his eyes and it took a murder of crows a whole day to fly from one horn to the other. The laundryman used his horns to hang up all the camp laundry, which would dry lickety-split because of all the wind blowing around at that height.

Whenever he got an itch, Babe the Blue Ox had to find a cliff to rub against, 'cause whenever he tried to rub against a tree it fell over and begged for mercy. To whet his appetite, Babe would chew up thirty bales of hay, wire and all. It took six men with picaroons to get all the wire out of Babe's teeth after his morning snack. Right after that he'd eat a ton of grain for lunch and then come pestering around the cook - Sourdough Sam - begging for another snack.

Babe the Blue Ox was a great help around Paul Bunyan's logging camp. He could pull anything that had two ends, so Paul often used him to straighten out the pesky, twisted logging roads. By the time Babe had pulled the twists and kinks out of all the roads leading to the lumber camp, there was twenty miles of extra road left flopping about with nowhere to go. So Paul rolled them up and used them to lay a new road into new timberland.

Paul also used Babe the Blue Ox to pull the heavy tank wagon which was used to coat the newly-straightened lumber roads with ice in the winter, until one day the tank sprang a leak that trickled south and became the Mississippi River. After that, Babe stuck to hauling logs. Only he hated working in the summertime, so Paul had to paint the logging roads white after the spring thaw so that Babe would keep working through the summer.

One summer, as Babe the Blue Ox was hauling a load of logs down the white-washed road and dreaming of the days when the winter would feel cold again and the logs would slide easier on the "ice", he glanced over the top of the mountain and caught a glimpse of a pretty yeller calf grazing in a field. Well, he twisted out of his harness lickety-split and stepped over the mountain to introduce himself. It was love at first sight, and Paul had to abandon his load and buy Bessie the Yeller Cow from the farmer before Babe would do any more hauling.

Bessie the Yeller Cow grew to the massive, yet dainty proportions that were suitable for the mate of Babe the Blue Ox. She had long yellow eyelashes that tickled the lumberjacks standing on the other end of camp each time she blinked. She produced all the dairy products for the lumber camp. Each day, Sourdough Sam made enough butter from her cream to grease the giant pancake griddle and sometimes there was enough left over to butter the toast!

The only bone of contention between Bessie and Babe was the weather. Babe loved the ice and snow and Bessie loved warm summer days. One winter, Bessie grew so thin and pale that Paul Bunyan asked his clerk Johnny Inkslinger to make her a pair of green goggles so she would think it was summer. After that, Bessie grew happy and fat again, and produced so much butter that Paul Bunyan used the leftovers to grease the whitewashed lumber roads in summer. With the roads so slick all year round, hauling logs became much easier for Babe the Blue Ox, and so Babe eventually came to like summer almost as much as Bessie.

The Birth of Pecos Bill

retold by

S. E. Schlosser

Well now Pecos Bill was born in the usual way to a real nice cowpoke and his wife who were journeying west with their eighteen children. Bill's Ma knew right from the start that he was something else. He started talkin' before he was a month old, did his teething on his Pa's bowie knife and rode his first horse jest as soon as he learned to sit up on his own. When he started to crawl, Pecos Bill would slither out of the wagon while his Mama was cookin' supper and wrestle with the bear cubs and other wild animals that roamed the prairies.

Yep, the whole family was expecting great things of little Bill; until they lost him in the drink. Seems they took the wagons over the Pecos River while Pecos Bill was taking a nap and he got bounced out of the back and swept downstream afore anyone missed him. If he hadn't taught himself to swim right-quick, he would have been a goner!

Right about the time Pecos Bill was drying out and trying to get a fix on where he was, a Mama Coyote came along and decided to adopt the poor waif and raise him with the rest of her pups. So Pecos Bill spent the first fifteen years of his life running around with the coyote pack, howling to the moon, chasing prey across the prairies, and having the time of his life.

Pecos Bill plumb forgot all about his real family, until the day he turned sixteen and his older brother came along. He was punchin' a herd of long-horn cattle and had brought them down to drink from the Pecos River. The ol' cowpoke took one look at Pecos Bill and knew he'd found his long-lost brother, on account of he looked jest like their Ma, who'd died of a broken heart after they lost little Bill in the river.

"See here, ain't you Pecos Bill, my little brother?" demanded the cowpoke of Pecos Bill when he came jumping over a giant log to run about in the field and howl at the full moon.

"Don't think so," said Pecos Bill. "I'm a coyote! Listen to me howl!" Pecos Bill let out a horrendous shout and scampered about the field on all fours. He scared the herd so bad that the long horns almost stampeded.

"You stop that!" Bill's brother shouted after he got the cattle calmed down. "And tell me this; how come you ain't got a long bushy tail if you're a coyote."

That was a tricky question. Pecos Bill thought about it for a long time.

"I got fleas," he volunteered. "And I howl at the moon!"

"Everybody in Texas has fleas and howls at the moon. That ain't no excuse," said his big brother.

"Any how, you can walk upright like a normal person and you can talk too. That ain't what a coyote does."

"I guess you're right," said Pecos Bill.

"Course I'm right. I'm your big brother and I outta know," snapped the cowpoke. "It's about time you stopped foolin' around on the prairie and became a cowboy like all the rest of us."

That made good sense to Pecos Bill. So he bid farewell to the coyote pack and went out west with his brother to learn to be a cowboy. Soon as he learned the ropes some, Pecos Bill began to realize that the cowboys needed some new tricks to help them cope with them stubborn longhorns. The cowboys kept getting the cows mixed up, which made the owners mad, so Pecos Bill invented the branding iron so they could put a mark on each cow telling everybody who owned it. Then he noticed that the other cowboys were having trouble making the wilder cows behave. Now whenever Pecos Bill saw a cow misbehavin', he'd jump on its back and ride it until it had bucked and kicked itself into behaving better. But the other cowboys weren't so skilled as Bill, so he invented the lasso to help them tame the wild cows.

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Pecos Bill's brother was right proud of him. "Not bad for a kid raised by coyotes," he told his baby brother. "In another couple of years, you'll be the toughest cowboy in the world." And he was right!

Pecos Bill finds a Hard Outfit

retold by

S. E. Schlosser

Well now, Texas jest became too tame for Pecos Bill once he killed off all the bad men, so he struck out for New Mexico, looking for a hard outfit. He asked an old trapper he met on the way where he could find a hard outfit, and the trapper directed Bill to a place where the fellers bit nails in half for fun. It sounded like a promisin' place to Bill, so he set off. But his durned fool hoss got its neck broke on the way, and Bill found himself afoot.

Bill went a walkin' with his saddle on his back. Suddenly, he come face to face with a rattlesnake 'round about fifteen feet long and lookin' fer trouble. Now Bill wanted to be fair to the rattler, so he let it get in a few jabs before he beat the stuffin' out of it. Being a kind man, when the snake was beat, he picked it up, wrapped it around his neck and carried it along with him.

They was a headin' through a narrow canyon when a cougar thought he'd have a bit of fun and jumped them. Bill never turned a hair. He jest put down his saddle and then whipped the tarnation out of the cougar. Hair flew everywhere, blocking the light sose the jackrabbits thought it was night and went to bed. Finally that cat were so beat he cried like a lost kitten and jest licked Bill's hand.

So Bill saddles him up and they tear off across them hills like forked lightning. Whenever Bill wanted to calm that cougar down, he'd just give him a tap with the rattlesnake. They set such a pace that they soon rolled into the hard outfit the trapper'd told Bill about. Quick as a wink, Bill jumps off the cougar, helps himself to some beans and coffee, wipes his mouth with a prickly pear and turns to look at the toughs sittin' around the fire.

"Who's the boss around here, anyhow?" he asks.

"I was," said a big mountain of a feller about seven foot tall and wide, "but you are now, stranger!"