
48. Bewitching Master and Mistress in South Carolina

Telling a pointed story is the mildest form of resistance available to the oppressed, especially if it is told in the third person, with a passable remoteness from specific persons. Storytelling could be very effective, however, as an outlet for bruised feelings, as the following "pointed" tales suggest. In each instance the master or the mistress, and in two instances both of them, become the victims of cunning and witchcraft.

The first three of these stories from slave days were told by Maria Middleton, who was born on Edisto Island in South Carolina several years before the Civil War. The fourth tale was written down by Louise Green, of St. Helena Island, who was much younger than Maria Middleton. They were taken down by Elsie Clews Parsons, as she heard them, for the American Folk-Lore Society. On the basis of much study of Caribbean folk tales, Parsons judged the "hag" stories to have been of African origin. There is no reason to doubt the spirit or authenticity of these stories as having originated as a mild protest of slavery.

[I]

Wen' to a witch-man. When his master 'mence to whip him, eve'y cut he give de man, his [master's] wife way off at home feel de cut. Sen' wor' please stop cut lick de man. When he [master] got home, his wife was wash down wid blood.

man got up in de mornin', de white man was jus' as happy as happy as happy can be; but de more de sun goes down, he commence ter sleep. At de same time he call to his Negro, "Tomorrow you go an' do such an' such a tas'." Givin' out his orders kyan hardly hol' up his head. As soon as de sun was down, he down too, he down yet. De witch done dat. He [witch] come, but he stay in his home an' done dat.

[II]

His master beat him so sebare, so de man went to a witch. De witch said, "Never min'! you go home. Tomorrow you will see me." When de

[III]

A white man had a wife. Eve'y night his wife go, but he don' know where

Source: Elsie Clews Parsons, *Folk-Lore of the Sea Islands, South Carolina* (Cambridge, Mass., and New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1923), p. 61-63.

his wife go to. He had a servant to wait on dem. So de servant whispered to his master, "Master, don' you know mistress kill all my chil'run?" Say, "Mistress is a hag."—"You think you can prove it? You think you can ketch her?"—"Yes, suh! you let me sleep here one night. I kyan ketch her." So de servant an' his master make de agreement how to ketch 'em. He said to his servan', "Don' you go home to-night. You sleep hyere. I'm goin' away soon in de mornin'." Dey bof (de man an' de wife) dey went to baid, de servan' on de watch. Late in de night de mistress woke up. De servan' watch her. Somet'in' she put on her flesh an' take off her skins. After take off her skins, she roll it up an' put it in her dirty clo'es in de back o' de baid. An' she gone out. After she gone out, de servan' call to her master, said, "Master, mistress is gone. To proof to you dat mistress is a hag, I come now an' show you what she done." She went back ob de baid an' get de clo'es what de skin in, an' bring it to her master, an' say, "Here is mistress skin." An' he said to his servan', "What shall we do wid de skin to ketch her?" She said, "Put black pepper an' salt in de skin on de inside." So de master did dat. So later on de mistress came an' get her skin. An' she 'mence to put it on; an' eve'y time de skin bu'n her so much, she said to de skin, "Skin, skin, you don' know me? 'Tis me." Still she couldn' get it on. So she went to her

baid an' wrapped up. Master was out now. She lay down till late. Her husband 'mence to p'ovoke her to get up. Still she won't get up. Jus' keep po'-vokin'. All at oncet he snatched off de cover off her, an' dere she was raw like a beef. So he called witnesses to prove. So dey make a kil' of lime an' put her in it, an' bu'n her down. But as much as de fire a-bu'nin', she never holler 'til dey t'row de skin in. De skin 'mence to scream. So dat was de en' of his wife.

[IV]

Once upon a time there was a old man in slavery. He told his master that he was cripple and couldn't work. So the man let him stay home to take care of his children. One day the master went away. When he came home, he find the man play on his banjo,—

"I was fooling my master seventy-
two years,
And I am fooling him now."

He was singing this song away on his bango. His master caught him, and start to kill him by whipping him. So the old man went to the doctor Negro. The next day he was to be kill'. When his master started to whip him, every time the man start to whip him, none of the licks touch. And he had freedom.

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