

Dark er de Moon

By Virginia Frazer Boyle

Abijah was a hoodoo; moreover, he had the reputation, over a wide stretch of territory, of having the evil on Judas eye, as it was called among the negroes, which gave him a power oven them all the year round, which was only claimed by the first exhorter during "Big Meetin'."

No journey was even undertaken, no new work begun, in fact, nothing of importance was even planned by the negroes without first consulting Uncle 'Jah, who spoke as an oracle.

His fame extended even to the poor whites of the section who had never owned a slave, and many were the potions for healing and philters for unrequited love, that passed from Uncle 'Jah's hands for a small consideration.

Uncle 'Jah also told the stars, and blended the inherited African rites most unreservedly with the Indian traditions and his idea of the white man's religious ceremonials.

Of course there were other hoodoos on the place, for what plantation had them not? but they were all lesser lights whose radiance paled before the effulgence of the leading spirit.

Uncle 'Jah added to his dignities and honors the fact of having been born free. The stony ran, that his mother was a princess in her own country, having been stolen by traders at an early age, and in the home of her adoption her faithfulness and tender cane won the sympathy of her invalid mistress, who was pleased to give her freedom as a reward.

She had never left the plantation, for a humble romance followed, and the free woman became the wife of a slave.

By "Ole Miss's" will in the olden time her children wore to be free from their birth, and Abijah, the seventh son of the seventh son, though living, as his father had done, on the plantation, was free to come and go, and received wages for his labor when he chose to work.

But Abijah was gathered to his fathers long ago, and many were the lamentations when he passed away. As the passing of a dusky Mohammed, marvels were expected, and groat were the wonders and happenings on his burial night, for, like his aforesaid predecessor, ho planned his own funeral, and he decreed that the burial should occur at night.

It was said that everything had come to him in the dank of the moon; it was dank when he was born, and dark when he died; so they buried him in the midst of the tall bracken, whose swaying plumes cast weird and grotesque shadows by the bight of the flickering pine torches.

The exhontors wore holding their services at the meeting-ground, and would not officiate, as they doomed the burial unholy; but the mass of negroes, who know the work of Abijah, were afraid that his ghost would walk, and attended for the laying of his spirit; and all but the torch-bearers prostrated themselves bow upon the ground, while the hoodoos waved their arms, as the coffin was lowered, and forbade the spirit's return to earthly habitatons then bitter herbs and Abijah's drinking-cup were thrown in before the grave was filled.

As has been said, the passing of Abijah happened many years ago, and now in the third and fourth generations his fame had grown even to that of a dusky god.

So there were not wanting those who, through the mists of time and forgetfulness, attributed to him supernatural powers, a fearless handling of the forces of good and evil, even a personal exorcism of the devil—that old-fashioned devil who donned such familiar forms upon occasion.

Of course such a devil is entirely out of date, but in that long ago there was a certain little maid to whom these devil stories, forbidden fruit though they were, gave the most unalloyed delight.

They were told at night when the trundlebed was rolled out and the little toes were toasting by the fire, and sometimes even, it is to be feared, the “Now I lay me” was rather hastily said, that the stony might be resumed; later, perhaps, an anxious mother wondered why the little one tossed so restlessly, but every genuine child has been duly “scared to death once upon a time,” and so had the little maid.

Through the tangles of the past a picture rises, though the Scheherazade of the nursery has passed away, the voice comes no more to the childish ears, for the little maid too is gone; perhaps the stories are half forgotten, but a word, a thought, stirs the pulse of memory.

“Tell a devil tale, Ellen.”

“Naw, I hain’t gwieo tell you ’n’ Charlie no mo’ devil tales.”

“Please, Ellen, we’ll go to sleep in two minutes if you will.”

“Toll about Uncle ’Jah, the devil, and the dark of the moon.”

“I hain’t gwino tell hit—Miss ’Tishy say you git skeemed an’ don’ go ter sleep, an’ I hain’t gwine tell ‘em ter yo’ no mo’.”

“Oh, Ellen, yes, we will; they don’t scare us. We’ll get right in bed and listen, and by the time you are through we’ll be asleep. Mamma won’t care.”

“But she do keer; she say you mustn’t heah ’em no mo’. Dey gibb her do horrors.”

“Go on, Ellen. She was just afraid that we’d be scared in the night, but we are too big for that now. Go on about the devil and Uncle ’Jah.”

“Miss ’Tishy be mighty mad!” “But we won’t tell her. Her mammy used to tell her those tales when she was little; she said so.”

“An’ yo’ won’t tell yo’ maw?”

“No, we won’t tell hen.”

“Yo’ sho’ yo’ won’t tell?”

“Cross my heart and body, we won’t, Ellen!”

“Well, one time dey hab er powerful Big Meetin’ on de place whar Unc’ ’Jah lib, an’ dar was en mighty prophesyin’ an’ ’zortin’ ’count er hit.

“Dey was en-prophesyin’ ’bout dis an prophesyin’ ’bout dat, but dar wa’n’t many sinners got up twel er stranger kim up an’ sot inter prophesyin’, an’ den sech er gittin’ enbout yo’ nebben did see; dan wa’n’t ’nough benches fur de mo’ners, an’ dey des laid down in de straw.

“Some uv ’em ’low de stars gwine fall ergin; an some uv ‘em ‘low do stars hain’t gwino fall, but do *pest’lence er* kimmin’; an’ some ‘low do *pest’lence am’* kimmin’, but do y gwine hab er rain er sarpenes; but do stranger he ‘zont an’ prophesy louder an’

longer, an' he 'bow dat arter do Big Meetin', do debil gwino be loose on do place an' gwine take do form uv er sanpent, er tamrypin, or man, an' er fly, an' he gwine pester mightily do chillen or do promus; but do sanpent dey kin shoot, de tarrypin dey kin kill, an' de man dey kin see, but hit gwine ter be mighty hard ter ketch up wid de fly, specuil in fly-time, 'case de debil choose de innercentest house-fly he kin fin'.

"But de stranger say de debil de do mos tore-down things es er fly, 'case he kin go ovor' whar, an' walk on de ceiling top side down des en-seem' things dat's hid, an' he kin git erroun' faster 'n de man, an' las' ergin es de sarpent, an' er hundred times es fas' os de tarrypin. He taken de tanrypin so's ter git de 'scusin' or movin' slow. Well, Unc' 'Jah he don' pay no 'tention ter de prophesyin' an' de churchin', 'case he do he own prophesy-in' an' workin', so he des lay low an' keep still.

"Bout dat time Unc' 'Jah's boy Rube he go co'tin' de putties' nigger gal dat ebber were borned; but she were unner conviction at de Big Meetin', an' don' 'pear ter take no notice er Rube, but she like him powerful, unbeknownst.

"Oh, but she were putty! an' she wore er house-nigger, an' w'ar finer close dan t'others, an' sot an' sew night by her Ole Miss.

"Well, Rube ho savin' uv ho wedges, an' he think he ax Ole Manse mought he buy her, arter dey marries, fur hit 'pear lack dey gwine ter marry arter de Big Meetin', 'case Rube he were mighty lack he Mammy, ar' all de gals was plum sot on him. Well, Unc' 'Jah don' 'pear ter take no notice, 'case he were er-workin' on he Mammy, who were mighty po'ly, des er-draggin' one foot an' totin' t'other, twel sumpen 'pear ter happen ter Rube's gal, an' den Unc' 'Jah he 'pear ter des wake up.

"Hit happin dis way: 'Bout de time de Big Meetin' ober dar kim er stranger in de Quarters dat taken er powerful shine ter de gal, an' he allus kim in de night, an' walk an' talk wid de gal er little erway fum t'others.

"Well, dat gal she show him her putty teef, an' laugh an' jeck her putty head erbout, but she thinkin' 'bout Rube.

"Den he fotch some big gole year-rings an er brooch—powerful fine fur er nigger, 'case dey mos' es fine es her Ole Miss wear ever' day; an' dat nigger w'ar broadclof lack or gemmen; an' Rube he were powerful low in he min', 'case de stranger talk mighty putty, an he 'low dat 'omens lub putty talkin'; but dat stranger ain' say whar he fum, an' he ain't call he name ter any er de niggers, not eben ter de gal.

"An' sing! Lord, how dat stray nigger sing, an' pick de banjo, an' mek de fiddle fa'rly dance! Eben de 'zorters, hearin' uv hit 'way off, couldn' keep dey foots fum shufflin' an' dey han's I fum pattin' when dey hears dat nigger play de fiddle. But es fine es he were, wid he mustache an' de b'ar's grease on he hair, he allus wanter set down; an' Unc' 'Jah, 'case Rube were so po'ly, he pull he eye, lack er lizard, down on him, an' he see dat he got sumpen de matter wid de right foot, an' he try ter hide hit all he kin.

"But Unc' 'Jah don' say nuffin; he dos onworkin'. An' de stray nigger he promus de gal fine close an' fine house lack her Ole Miss got; an' de gal she show him her teef ergin, but she still er-thinkin' 'bout Rube.

"Den de stranger he chink de gole money in he pocket an' show hit ter de gal; she 'ain't nebber see er nigger tote gole money erfore, an' she op'n 'er eyes wide, an' ain' think 'bout Rube no more.

"Dat Rube he were er cuissome nigger, an' he git ter be mighty painful, an' he ain' wanton eat 'count er de gal, an' ain' look at t'others des er-rinnin' arter him; an' Unc'

'Jah he ain' say nuffin, but he sot er charm fur de gal dat done promus ter marry de stray nigger an' shakes her big gole hoops in de face er Rube. Dat gal mout er-knowed de stray nigger ain' git 'em hones'.

"Den he gib her er ring wid two hearts on hit dat ud come in two, perzackly lack white folks, an' dat rin Rube putty nigh crazy, 'case he done gib her he gran'maw's gole ring; an de gal gib out dat she gwine marry de stranger, an' er-gwine ter er far country. Unc' 'Jah were mighty pestered, an' he casts erbout; den he ups an' ax de gal fur er lock uv her hair ter 'member her by.

"Hit please de gal powerful, 'case she were mighty uppish—uppish lack white folks—an' she gib hit ter 'im; an' Unc' 'Jah chuckle powerful, 'case he got all he want fur ter mek he charm work.

"An' dat night when de gal was er-walkin' wid de stranger in de moonlight, she see sumpen dat skeer her mos' ter def; but she 'feared ter holler; fur de stranger he taken he hat off fur ter cool he head, des er-talkin' sweet's sugar all de time; an' dat gal, sho's you born, see two little horns des er-growin' in de moonlight, er-sproutin' outer he forud; an' she skeered so she look down, an, my Lord she see de lame foot des nuffin but er hoof! Den dat gal she know she done gib her promus ter marry wid de debil, 'case Unc' 'Jah's charm hit taken de scales fum her eyes; an' she think 'bout Rube ergin, an' she shuck an' shuck, an' tell de debil she cole; but he laugh, an' show he teef, an' 'low, 'You's done mine now; I gwine warm yo' bimeby.' An' she sweat cole, and 'low she gwine gib back de ring an' de gole year-rings, an' de promus; dat she ain' lub nobody but Rube; but hit de debil, an' he ain' let her go, an' he say she gotter marry him; but she say she ain', dat she hate him.

"Unc' 'Jah workin' yit, an' bimeby de stranger ain' kim ter see de gal no mo'; but er tarrypin foller her, an' stay by her when she work, an' listen when she talk, an' hit 'ten' ter be ersleep; but when she ain' look at hit, hit snap at her toes wid hits ugly mouf, an' she cain't dribe hit off. An' bime-by she shivers, den taken hit up in her lap, 'case hit de debil an' he mek her de hit; an' dat tarrypin hit bite de blood outen her arm, case she b'long ter him an' he got her promus; an she were so po'ly dat she gitten right scrawny.

"Den Rube ain' know what ter do, 'case de gal cry, an' he taken he axe an' cut de tarrypin's head off, while de gal hold hit ter keep hit fum drawin' back; but he wa'n't no hoodoo lack he daddy—he des er common nigger—an' he mek er miss an' cut de gal's thumb off wid hit.

"But de cut neck er de head an' de cut neck er de body dey retch an' stretch todes one nuther, an' retch an' stretch twel dey tech, an den dey des jines right erf ore dey eyes, an' dat ole tarrypin he lif' he head an' blink dem ole eyes at bofe uv 'em. Hit go on dat way twel de gal 'mos' cry her eyes out ter git shet er de tarrypin, when Unc' 'Jah he kim erlong swing-in' he axe keerless lack, an' he hear de commotion lack he nebber hear hit erfore, an' taken sumpen lack grease outen er box in he pocket, an' smear hit on de sharp aige, an' blip! down he kim on de tarrypin's neck, an' de head an' de body part, don't jine no mo'.

"Well, dat gal done git shet er de tarrypin, an' dough she mighty po' an' sickly lookin', lack she hab de swamp-fever, she say she gwine marry Rube soon; but Unc' 'Jah he know what were kimmin', an' she ain' gwine marry Rube yit.

"Dat gal git ter be so po' an' droopy dat her Ole Miss 'low she let her work in de fiel', dat de fresh air gwine de her good.

“So she sot inter choppin’ out cotton, ’case hit de spring er de year, but she sorter skeered dat de tarrypin kim back.

“He ain’ gwine kim back, but one day in de row she feel sumpen tichhin’ uv her bare foot mighty sof’, an’ she look an’ see hit were er long wigglin’ sarpent, an’ hit w’ar de face er de stray nigger she done promus ter marry, an’ hit smile an’ smile at dat gal in de row, an’ hit foller her down de row an’ back ergin, an’ when she ain’ look at hit, hit bite her foots an’ strike wid hits fangs, ’case hit gwine ter be noticed. Ever’ day hit meet her in de row, an’ ever’ day hit bite her, drawin’ de blood, an’ bimeby hit say it cole, an’ she hatter take it up in her arms ter warm hit, ’case hit de debil an’ he done git de promus.

“Well, dar ain’ nobody kin kill dat snake wid er stick, an’ dar ain’ nobody dat kin shoot hit wid er gun, ’case dey done try, an’ all de time dat sarpent des er-thinnin’ dat gal’s blood lack er man-eatin’ bat, when here kim Unc’ ’Jah down in de fiel’, an’ he taken de gun fum he shoulder an’ wipe de sweat offen him, ’case hit were hot. Den he kinder keerless lack ’n’int de bullets wid de sumpen dat he ’n’int de axe wid, an’ load up. Den he say surmpen ter hese’f an’ p’int de gun at dat streaked snake, an’ he were sho’ dead dat time.

“Dat gal she fall down and hug Unc’ ’Jah’s knees; but de debil he wa’n’t fru wid de gal yit; he ain’ wanter let her git erway fum him.

“Hit were summer-time good now, an’ de gnats dey pesterin’ de hosses an’ de cattle, an’ hit were fly-time ‘mongst de people.

“Well, hit were de debil’s chance ergin, fur de gal say she ain’ marry de man, an’ de sarpent an’ de tarrypin bofe dead.

“Well, de debil he gwine mek dat gal see sights, fur he sot an’ think an’ think; den he finds out de innercentest house-fly dat ebber was hatched, an’ put hit in he pocket, an’ day arter day he trainin’ dat fly; den on de dark er de moon he set facin’ er de fly, an’ mek hese’f mighty small an’ git inter de fly, an’ fly up ter whar dat gal was er-settin’, an’ buzz an’ buzz.

“He light on her han’, an’ she bresh him off; he light on her year, an’ she mek dem gole year-rings ring; an’ he tickle her nose, an’ stick he cole clammy foots on her chin lack ’twere gwine ter rain; den he lit on her mouf an’ rin her putty nigh plum crazy.

“When her an’ Rube was co’tin’ ’unbeknownst, he buzz an’ buzz, an’ fly ertwixt ’em an’ listen ter all dey say, an’ he hears ’em say when dey gwine marry, an’ he buzz so hard he mos’ skeer hese’f.

“Den when de gal go ter bed he draw de blood ’mos’ es bad es de sarpent, an’ pester her so she hatter kiver up her head wid er quilt, dough hit were so mighty hot. Bimehy hit ’pear lack dat gal she know hit were de debil, an’ she git ashy an’ ashy, an’ dat fly pester her so dat de folks say she gone crazy erbout er little house-fly; but dat Rube hain’t gib her up, an’ de debil hain’t nuther.

“Well, Unc’ ’Jah ain’t talkin’; he des erwatchin’, an’ hi were de darker de moon ergin, an’ he were plum ready ter meet de debil now.

“So whilst dey was er-prayin’ an’ ’zortin’ ober de gal fur ter mek her min’ kim back, he was er-workin’ wid er ’intment ter kill dat fly, an’ er-’sortin’ ter ’spedients fur ter keep de debil’s sperit fum gittin’ back inter he body when he kim outer de fly.

“‘Mos’ ever’ hoodoo kin de dat. I’s heard ’bout hit many er time; dar whar de debil lam hit. Dar allus two uv ’em, an’ dey set facin’, an’ spits deyse’fs inter anything dey wants ter go inter.

“Course Unc’ ’Jah could de hit hese’f; dey cotch him er-doin’ uv hit; an’ course he ain’t gwine ter let de debil beat him at he best game.

“Well, Unc’ ’Jah he sot erbout fur ter mek er ’intment fur ter cotch dat fly, so he mek er ’intment dat smells powerful sweet, an’ he sot de pot down by de side er de gal, an’ bimeby de fly buzz round an’ smell hit, an’ he fin’ hit sweeter ter him ’n de gal, an’ furgit all ’bout her, an’ eat twel he fitten ter bus’; den he drap offen de aidge an’ buzz his wings twel he die.

“Den Unc’ ’Jah he know de debil’s spent loose fum de fly, an’ he ain’ gwine ter let de debil git back inter he body dis time if he kin hope hit, so he ’gin ter work he charm hard es he kin.

“De debil mek er win’ blow de fly out de do’; but Unc’ ’Jah follers bit. Den de debil blow dus’ in Unc’ ’Jah’s eyes; but he rubs hit out, an’ follers de fly.

“Den de debil blow er strong smoke in Unc’ ’Jah’s eyes fur ter keep him fum follerin’; an’ hit burn an’ hit smart, but Unc’ ’Jah he foller whar de win’ er-totin’ dat fly.

“Den de debil gib Unc’ ’Jah er miz’ry in de knee: he were ole, Unc’ ’Jah were, an’ ’twere mighty easy ter mek him painful: but Unc’ ’Jah des limp on an’ keep de dead fly in de win’ des erfore him, ’case he wanter hope set de gal free, ’count er his son Rube.

“Well, de debil play all kinds er capers wid Unc’ ’Jah ’dout techin’ him, ’case he were de bestes’ hoodoo dat ebber were, dead er libin’, an’ de debil were mighty put ter hit, ’case de power er de debil stops short somers, n he were putty nigh nfl ter de eend uv he rope.

“So dey rin an’ rin an’ rin’, Une’ ’Jah alms keepin’ de fly in de win’ des erhead uv him, dough his tongue was hangin’ out.

“Den de debil he mek de win’ blow harder, an’ de fly in de winj des fa’r flew; but Unc’ ’Jah he hol’ up he charm erfore him an’ split de win’ des ’hine de fly.

“Hit were sho’ cuissome ter see dat dead fly scootin’ on de win’, an’ Unc’ ’Jah des er-ridin’ hard, an’ er-ridin’ on nuffin; but dey say dat he sho’ done hit, an’ hit ’pear lack arter while de debil ’stonished ’case he see sech er powerful hoodoo, an’ he let dat win’ die back an’ dat fly flop down so suddent dat hit ’mos’ take Unc’ ’Jah’s bref erway.

“Den Unc’ ’Jah he see dat de debil spent done gone inter er debil hoss dat was waitin’ fur he marster close by ter whar de fly fall; an’ hit were powe’ful hard ter keep up wid de debil hoss, ’case he mek he time by jumps es well es by flyin’; but Unc’ ’Jah’s charm was es good es de debil hoss, an’ when he fly, Unc’ ’Jah fly, an’ when he jump, Unc’ ’Jah jump, an’ he keep ’im plum in sight.

“Den de debil he w’ar out he hoss, an’ goes inter er grasshopper. Unc’ ’Jah groans at dat, fur he was mighty ole ter go so high an drap so low ever’ time wid de grasshopper, but dey say dat he done hit, an’ sho’ beat de grasshopper er-hoppin’.

“Dar was er squinch-eyed toad er settin’ by er rock, de debilishest-lookin’ toad dat ebber you see, an’ when de grasshopper wore out, de debil flings his ole laigs erway an’ goes inter de toad.

“Unc’ ’Jah he know hit wa’n’t no use ter kill de toad, ’case de debil gwine fin’ sumpen harder ter git ter he body in, so Unc’ ’Jah he hol’ he charm fas’ an’ des hop ’longsider de toad.

“Hit were mighty low-down work fur Unc’ ’Jah, but he were workin’ ter git eben wid de debil, an’ we has ter squat low ter rise high sometimes, an’ dat gal an’ dat Rube was bofe er-pinin’ unner de cuss.

“Well, dat toad wa’n’t any good company ter Unc’ ’Jah, an’ his belly wa’n’t useter stayin’ so clost ter de groun’, so he were powerful glad when dat toad ’low he was mighty tired an’ sleepy too.

“So Unc’ ’Jah were on de watch, an’ all uv er sudden dat toad flop down an’ open he mouf fur bref, fur de debil rid him hard, an’ fum de flutterin’ an’ hollerin’, Unc’ ’Jah know de debil done fin’ he nigger, de jay; but de jay cain’t bre’k he word ter Ole Mammy Natur’, an’ cain’t fly at night, an’ he hol’ so fas’ de debil cain’t shake him outen de tree.

“Hit were de same way wid de jay’s cousin, de crow; dar wa’n’t no corn dat de debil mout coax him wid in de night.

“An’ dat whar birds an’ beastes is better’n men; if you offers er man ernough, he’ll ’low ter de anything, hut t’others eain’t go ’gin Natur’; an’ hit ain’t natchel fur er jay er er crow ter go kerhootin’ in de night-time.

“Dar wa’n’t nuffin lef’ fur de debil ter tek fur ter retch his body in but er bat, an’ Unc’ ’Jah hain’t got no wings; but Unc’ ’Jah he spread he arms an’ he ragged coat, an’ riz wid de bat.

“Hit were de dark er de moon, an’ dar wa’n’t many bugs er-flyin’, an’ hit ’pear lack dat bat wa’n’t so powerful anxious ter go; an’ de way he skimmed in de space an’ bumped ergin de trees fur ter spite de debil in him was er caution.

“But ever’ time de bat skim, Unc’ ’Jah skum, an’ ever’ time de bat bumped, Unc’ ’Jah bumped, twel hit ’mos’ knock de bref plum outen him, an’ his ole bald head were es full er goose aigs es er nut is er meat; but Unc’ ’Jah were des er-keepin’ up wid de debil.

“Well, dat body er de debil were er long way off, fur dey flewed an’ dey flewed, an’ rin ergin mo’ quare critters in de air dat ’pear ter be some ’quaintance er de bat, an’ he stop ter say ‘howdy’ ter. Dey rin ergin all kinds er owls, an’ de bat ’pear ter be mighty thick wid ’em, an’ fum de things dey talks ter one nuther in de dark, Unc’ ’Jah think they mout be kin.

“Well, dey flewed an’ dey flewed, an’ es Une’ ’Jah were in mighty close comp’ny wid de bat, de owls dey think Unc’ ’Jah er mighty big un, an’ dey mek dey compliments ter him. Bein’ es how Unc’ ’Jah he w’ar de charm an were er high-toned hoodoo, he know de language, an’ mek ’em back mighty perliglit, des lack de owls, an’ de owls an’ de bat an’ Unc’ ’Jah dey ’pear ter be des lack brudders.

“Unc’ ’Jah he lack mighty well ter be back in he cabin, ’sleep, but hit wa’n’t ever’ hoodoo dat git de chances er gittin’ eben wid de debil ever’ day, so he keep er spreadin’ he coat an’ stretchin’ he arms lack de bat.

“Dey flewed so high dat dey could see down folks’ chimblies; an’ ’pear lack dar wa’n’t no tops on de houses, fur de debil were ’long an he onkiver ’em, lack he de ever’ night, an’ Unc’ ’Jah see de white folks, des what dey doin’, some uv em ’sleep, some uv ’em drinkin’, some uv ’em dancin’, an some uv ’em playing cards, an’ er-doin’ all kinds er devilmey dey think nobody kin see—stranglin’ wid ropes, an kullin’ in de dark, an’ sech lack; but Unc’ ’Jah he ain’t say nuffin, ’case hit wa’n’t none er his business. De debil he were mighty peart, an’ ever’ time dey kim ter rinnin’ water he try ter shoot dat bat er-crost hit, ’case he know er hoodoo cain’t cross er rinnin’ branch; but ever’ time dat bat dive, Unc’ ’Jah he spread he coat-tails wider an’ head ’im off, ’case he know what bre’k

he charm, an' de way dey kep' er-duckin' an' er-divin' when all hones' folks was in dey beds was des fa'rly scand'lous; but Unc' 'Jah were tryin' ter set dat gal free fum de cuss er de debil.

“Well, Unc' 'Jah he de so lack de bat dat he most furgit whedder he er bat er no, 'case he de dey ways an' know dey talk 'dout steddin' uv hit; but bimeby de debil he git tired er dodgin' Une' 'Jah, 'case he done lef' dat body so long already dat he know hit dry up an crack, lack clay in de sun, an' he know he gwine hab er power er trouble ter git back inter hit; an' he see de dodgin' ain't de no good, an' 'pear lack he lef' dat body 'cross de branch, so he mek de kin' er breeze blow up dat allus mek Unc' 'Jah powerful sleepy. Unc' 'Jah fit hit mighty hard, an' he op'n he eyes wide an' cl'ar he throat fur ter wake him up when he feels 'em shet, but Unc' 'Jah des couldn' mek er stan' 'gin dat breeze, an' es he fly erlong he op'n he mouf an' 'gin ter snore. Dat were enough fur de debil, an' de way he mek dat bat duck an' dive an' git 'cross dat branch whilst Unc' 'Jah were nappin' would er mek yo' head fa'r swim. Well, when Unc' 'Jah wake up an' fin' hese'f on de groun', an' de bat lyin' dead an' de debil 'cross de branch, he sho' were plum mad, an' he rub an' rub he charm fur ter mek hit work.

“Dar sot Unc' 'Jah on one side de branch, an' dar sot de debil on t'other, an' Unc' 'Jah couldn' cross hit, 'case he er hoodoo, an' dar hain't no hoodoo kin cross rrinin' water 'dout bre'kin' de spell. De debil he drag de body fum unner de trees, but hit were des es dry es clay, an' de debil tryin' es hard es he could ter git back inter hit, an' Unc' 'Jah des er tryin' fur ter keep him fum hit.

“But de charm ain' workin' good, 'counter de rrinin' water, dough de debil hab er mighty hard time.

“De debil sot de body up 'gin er tree, an' he sot down er faein' uv hit, an' he try ter spit hese'f back inter de body; an' he spit an' spit twel he mouf plum dry, but dat body ain' move, 'case de debil done been gone too long, an' hit done git too dry.

“De debil hatter borry er body, 'case he cain't mek one, an' hit b'long ter some low-down man dat wand'rin' roun' outen he skin; an' de debil he hatter gib hit back, an' he kinder in er herry too, 'case dat man gotter go ter work in de mornin'.

“Well, de debil he spit an' he spit, an' 'cross de branch Unc' 'Jah he work an' he work— he tryin' fur ter dry up de water so's his charm kin work on de debil.

“Hit 'pear lack de debil gwine win, 'case he done spit hese'f 'mos' half inter de body; an' de body lif' he arm an' chuckle an' laugh—course hit were de debil chucklin' an' laughin' in him; but dat branch were er dryin' up too, mighty fas', an' dey bofe uv 'em herry, fur bit done 'most day.

“De body lif' t'other arm; but de branch done plum dry now; an' Unc' 'Jah he riz wid he charm an' jump 'cross an' lay he han's on de body; an' de debil he pull, an' Unc' 'Jah he pull; but de debil cain't work 'gin' Unc' 'Jah's charm; an' he howls lack er dog fur ter skeer Unc' 'Jah off, but Unc' 'Jah ain't skeered; an' he bark lack er wolf, but Unc' 'Jah know him; an' he roar lack er lion an holler lack er mad bull, but Unc' 'Jah keep he han' wid de charm in hit on de body.

“Den de debil shine he eyes at Unc' 'Jah lack er tiger-cat, an' r'ar an' t'ar an' chaw de ole coat plum offen Unc' 'Jah, but Unc' 'Jah got holt er de body yit. Den de debil he gin hit up, 'case he cain't work 'gin seeh er powerful hoodoo, an' draw de res' uv he spent outen de body, an' gib one has' awful howl, 'case de day was bre'kin' now, an' go des

er-limpin' an' er-yellin' inter de wood in de shape uv er lame yaller dorg dat was er-sniffin' close by.

"Den unc' 'Jah go up ter de house an' git some salt, fur salt hit mek de debil plum miserbul, an' he fill up dat ole body wid hit lack er sack, an' tie hit up, an' fling hit inter de bayou.

"De debil he go erbout er-seekin' fresh parsturs an' er-feedin' on new grass, fur he ain' nebber kim on dat place no mo'; an' he ain' pester de gal no mo' arter Rube done marry her; fur dat de way Unc' 'Jah git shet uv him, an' dat de way ter git even wid him when he pesters yo', if yo' does hit lack Unc' 'Jah do, in de dark er de moon.