

Howdy folks,

By now, y'all surely know the stories of Brer Rabbit: How he tricked Brer Bear into taking his place in a trap by promising a dollar a minute (a still not inconsiderable rate even in today's economy). How he tricked Brer Fox into hurling him directly into the briar patch (where he was born and bred and was exactly where he wanted to be).

Brer Rabbit is a trickster, have no doubt about that. But do you know what his last, greatest, trick was? I bet you don't. Not because you're uneducated, but just because no one told you about it, till now. You couldn't have heard it before now, because I reckon I'm the first to tell you about it. Neither Uncle Remus, nor George Chandler Harris managed to tell anybody about this trick because it happened long after both men went on to their final rewards (or punishment as the case may be).

Brer Rabbit, being a trickster, as well as Brer Fox, (though he ain't quite as tricky as Brer Rabbit), are exponentially longer lived than you, me, and our kin. Brer Bear isn't particularly tricky himself, but last I heard, he's still lopin around too.

Mayhap it's because the power of the story always outlasts the storyteller. Mayhap there was something special about Rabbit, and Fox, and Bear that made them worth jotting down, and that included an agelessness that resisted the ravages of time. Mayhap the lot of them and their ilk are just so busy doing what comes naturally to them that Father Time hasn't managed to catch up to them yet. Mayhap even they're supposed to age like you and me do, but no one thought to tell them that rabbits and foxes and bears aren't supposed to live that long.

I don't know.

All I do know is that Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, and Brer Bear have been keepin' on their same struggle of trick or be tricked for a long time, long after the briar patches got paved over and replaced with parking garages. It's never stopped; not for long. Sometimes their tricks would get into people's ears, but the details of who would get muddled in the retelling after retelling. Instead of Brer Fox chasing Brer Rabbit, it'd be a bluish gray cat chasing a tiny brown mouse with unusually big ears. Other times, instead of Brer Fox trying to get Brer Bear to help him, the story would get twisted around, and while sure enough there'd be a rabbit in the story, his pursuers would be a dim witted hunter and a duck who was just clever enough to know something was wrong, but not clever enough by half to outwit the rabbit. That ol' fox is never half as clever as he thinks he is, and twice as crazy.

Anyway, I told y'all that story to explain to y'all that Brer Rabbit's last (some might say greatest) trick happened a heck of a lot closer to the here and now than the way back when. Come to think of it, that might be why y'all haven't heard it till now. News spreads fast, but is quickly forgotten. History is what sticks around and lingers after news becomes old and stale.

Anyway...

It all started one day when Brer Rabbit was hopping along in the park. There were no more briar patches around, but Brer Rabbit liked the park just fine. Plenty of sunshine, fresh air, and green grass, like a little piece of home that'd stay pretty as you please.

Presently, Brer Rabbit was enjoying the sunshine and the fresh air, and listening to the birds sing their song way up high in the sky, when the most peculiar sight: a picnic blanket laid out pretty as you please, with a nice basket right smack dab in the middle of it.

A picnic. Ready to go, ready to be eaten, and the only other people within shouting distance were barely blurs on the horizon. Now, Brer Rabbit is no thief, and he never took nothing that didn't rightly already belong to him, wasn't free, or else owed to him as comeuppance against someone that wanted to do him wrong. But Brer Rabbit was also a curious sort. So while he wouldn't snatch and steal, having plenty of free time there was nothing stopping him from having an old fashioned sit down right at the edge of yonder picnic blanket.

It was during that sit down that Brer Rabbit noticed a whole heap of things he hadn't taken into account before. Somebody had gone and put stakes in the ground at the blanket's corners, even though there wasn't the slightest breeze on this perfectly mild day. And even though there was barely a whisper in the wind, the stakes still quivered mightily, as if they were holding up a decent considerable weight. The blanket, pulled taught as it was, was short more than a few threads, and so when Brer Rabbit took a good squint at them he noticed that there was more black and brown and not so much green under the sheets.

In short, Brer Rabbit figured out that there was a hole beneath his here picnic blanket, and that this here was no picnic, but a trap. It didn't take Brer Rabbit long to figure out who set this trap, neither. It was a clever trap, sure enough, but hasty and relying on a body's impulse to overpower quick thinking and keen observation.

More to the point, whoever set the trap hadn't accounted for the position of the sun, and how it might cast their shadow far and wide even though they were hiding behind yonder oak tree. "Come on, boy," Brer Fox hissed to himself, rubbing his hands together and just imagining the fine supper he was finally about to catch. "Get the basket. Go for it. You know you want to." Brer Fox always underestimated how much Brer Rabbit's ears listened in, too.

Brer Fox was right about Rabbit's particular impulsiveness, for sure, but what he hadn't accounted on was Rabbit's peculiar impulse for trickery far outweighed his curiosity these days, or his sense to leave well enough alone. How fortunate (or unfortunate as the case may be) that it was right then that Brer Bear came moseying along from the opposite direction, having himself his own fine day at the park. That's when Brer Rabbit got himself an idea.

"Oh Brer Bear!" Brer Rabbit called out. "Brer Bear! Over here! Can I speak to you for just a minute, please?" Brer Bear being an animal of powerful muscle but little else, came up to Brer Rabbit at the edge of the trap.

“Well howdy there, Brer Rabbit!” Brer Bear said. “What can I do for you?”

“I’ve got a most terrible predicament,” Brer Rabbit said. “And I need your help.”

“Howsat?” Brer Bear asked, not at all suspicious despite their shared history together.

Brer Rabbit pointed to the picnic basket. “Y’see Brer Bear, I just went and left my picnic basket over on that there picnic blanket. But I’ve been hopping around and now my feet have gotten themselves terribly dirty.” He hopped all around right quick kicking up a cloud of dust that didn’t quite reach Brer Bear’s tremendous gut. “But it’s my granny’s picnic blanket, y’see, and I don’t want her gettin’ angry at me messing up her favorite blanket. But you? Your feet are so clean that you could walk on that there blanket and not leave a mark.”

Brer Bear scratched his head and did his best to ponder. “Uhh....okay,” he said, nodding his head. “You want me to go and get you your basket then?”

“I’d be much obliged,” Brer Rabbit nodded his head. “Much obliged indeed.”

And so it was with great pleasure, that Brer Rabbit watched Brer Bear step onto the blanket, and with a mighty THUD fall into the trap deep below the earth. So great was his fall, dragging the stretched out picnic blanket after him acted like a slingshot, sending the basket tumbling through the air end over end and right into Brer Rabbit’s arms.

“OH NO!” Brer Rabbit cried out. “I’VE GONE AND FALLEN IN THIS HOLE!” And then he hid inside the basket, listening for what would happen next.

He heard Brer Fox laughing, cackling even. “I GOTCHA NOW, BRER RABBIT! I SURE DO! FINALLY AFTER ALL THESE YEA-!” Brer Fox’s celebration was cut short, likely Brer Rabbit reckoned, by the strong paw of a very very angry Bear caught in a hole not.

“WHOEVER DID THIS!” Brer Bear roared. “I’M GONNA TAKE HIS HEAD CLEEEEEEEAN OFF!”

“BRER BEAR!” Brer Fox yelled. “STOP! I CAN EXPLAIN! THIS IS AN ACCIDENT. ONE OF THEM MISCOMMUNICATIONS!”

“CLEEEEEEEAN OFF!”

From the safety of his wicker hiding place, Brer Rabbit giggled and giggled and giggled until his sides hurt. But just listening to this latest trick of his wasn’t enough to satisfy. He had to see what kind of whoopin’ poor Brer Fox was enduring at the hands of an enraged Brer Bear. Carefully, and quietly he tried to poke his head out, only to realize he couldn’t.

He pushed and pushed and pushed with all his might, but the neither end of the basket would budge an inch for him. No matter how he kicked or pushed up on the lid, the darn thing wouldn't open not a smidge. He hadn't fallen into that hole, but he'd more than gotten himself stuck in this hiding place.

"HEEE-HEEE-HEEEE!" Brer Fox chuckled. "Well how do you like that?" he asked. "It worked. It finally worked!" Brer Rabbit gulped and his blood went cold. Brer Fox sounded a lot happier and a lot closer than he was supposed to be. "That's been my problem this whole time. I knew you was gonna trick Brer Bear, so I made a second trap special. A basket with a latch that doesn't open from the inside. And now I'm finally gonna get to skin me a rabbit!"

"But Brer Bear...?" Brer Rabbit tried to puzzle out what was going on. He felt a jerking motion as the basket was lifted up off the ground, now not-so-safely in Brer Fox's claws.

"Oh that was just me play actin'." Rabbit could hear Brer Fox's smile though nary a bit of sunlight penetrated the wicker basket. "He's still in that hole."

"CLEEEEEEEAN OFF!"

Brer Rabbit knew he had to think fast, faster than his feet, and faster than Brer Fox's teeth. "And I thank you very much Brer Fox," Brer Rabbit said from inside the basket. "It's mighty comfortable in here and you tricking Brer Bear was mighty enjoyable."

"Oh I'm not listening to you no more," Brer Fox said outside the basket. "That's how you get me every time. But now I got you, and I'm gonna skin you, and cook you, and eat you!"

Brer Rabbit had been in closer shaves than this, but not many. "Yeah," Brer Rabbit said. "That's true, I reckon! You got me! But how are you gonna get Brer Bear out of that hole you dug? You're not gonna let him starve are ya?"

"Course I'm not gonna let him starve," Brer Fox said, sounding insulted. "That hole's plenty deep for a rabbit, but a bear could get out of there no problem. That big dummy just hasn't thought to try yet is all."

"YOU HEAR THAT BRER BEAR!" Brer Rabbit shouted out through the wicker basket. "BRER FOX SAYS HE TRICKED YOU INTO FALLING INTO THAT HOLE SO HE COULD CATCH ME AND ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS CLIMB OUT YOU BIG DUMMY!"

The air thundered and the ground rumbled as a very hornery and very angry Brer Bear got himself out of that ol' fox hole and stepped up to a very frightened Brer Fox. "You tryin' to make me look stupid, Brer Fox?" Brer Bear growled.

"Now Brer Bear, I didn't mean nothin' personal by it," Brer Fox stammered. "There was what do you call it...extenuating circumstances."

Quietly, Brer Rabbit kicked and kicked and kicked at the bottom of the basket. Brer Fox had gotten the jump on him this time, but sometimes trickiness is no substitute for poor construction and powerful feet. He kicked and kicked and kicked until he was able to make two holes big enough to slip his feet through.

“Extenuating circumstances...?” Brer Bear repeated.

“He means he wanted to extenuate you!” Brer Rabbit called from inside the basket. “You know, like the bug man who comes and poisons the roaches? The extenuator!”

“What?” Brer Fox asked. “No! That’s not what I mean. I don’t wanna extenuate you! I’d never try an’ extenuate you!”

“Then why’d you drop him in a hole?” Brer Rabbit called out. He felt Brer Fox put the basket down on the soft grass, likely so that he could hold up his hands and protect himself.

“I’M GONNA!”

“Brer Bear, please, listen!”

“TAKE YOUR HEAD!”

“No! This ain’t what it looks like!”

“CLEEEEEEEAN OFF!”

Still mostly inside the basket, Brer Rabbit hopped away, his feet carrying him as fast even though his eyes couldn’t see where he was going. Where his eyes failed him, his feet and his ears made up the difference.

“Hey!” Brer Fox called after. “Now you get back here, Brer Rabbit! I ain’t done with you, yet!”

As long as Brer Fox’s voice was getting farther and farther away, Brer Rabbit supposed, that was good enough in the short term. Long term was for later.

Fine grainy sand beneath his feet and the sound of children laughing and shrieking with delight.. He was near a playground. He tried not to think of what else he might be hopping in if he was so near a sandbox.

Hot rocky pavement. Brakes squealing. Horns honking. People cursing. The street! The middle of the street.

Cold concrete. A cat’s meow echoing off of brick. A smell so thick that even his nose could pick

it up through the basket. Some powerful kind of nasty garbage nearby. An alleyway.

Knowing that traveling in a straight line can only get a body so far, Brer Rabbit made a right turn; best if ol' Brer Fox couldn't see him. He'd make a right, a left, another left, a right, and another right, and get so lost himself that there'd be no way Brer Fox would know where he was. Then he'd figure out a way out of this basket trap. What ol' Brer Rabbit didn't know was that the alleyway he was running into hit a dead end and quick, and his first right wouldn't lead him anywhere but head first into the side back door of a strange building.

KA-THUNK!

Brer Rabbit sat in the wicker basket with so many stars circling round his head that he could barely hear the door he'd thunked into squeal open. "Hello?" an unfamiliar voice called out. "Is anyone there?"

Unfamiliar was good, as far as Brer Rabbit was concerned. Unfamiliar was the opposite of Brer Fox and Brer Bear, and this particular voice sounded a sight prettier than either one of them and awful nice besides.

"In here!" Brer Rabbit. Called out. "Open up! I'm stuck!"

The lid came open and Rabbit got himself a look see at a most strange and beautiful creature. "Why hello there," she said, her accent much different than his own particular drawl. "Let me get a look at you."

And get a look at each other they did: She picked Brer Rabbit up out of the basket and looked him up and down, and he looked her up and down.

Her fur was just about the same color as Brer Rabbit's, though his finer and softer. Her muzzle was longer than his, more like Brer Fox, but it still ended in the same dainty nose of Rabbit's. Her ears were about as long as Brer Rabbit's too, but because she was so much bigger than his they didn't look so huge on her. Other than the long non-cotty tail, they both had the same tiny forepaws and big hopping feet, too.

"Well what do we have here?" she asked, her voice full of curiosity and wonder. "Did somebody leave a baby on my doorstep just like the old storybooks?"

Now, Brer Rabbit had never met a proper Kangaroo before, but he reckoned he knew one when he saw one. A lot had changed over the years, and the world had gotten much much bigger and much much smaller all at the same time and in different ways. Seeing this Roo was unexpected, but hardly unbelievable. Just about anybody could pack up a carpet bag these days and go live somewhere more comfortable to their situation should they have the means and inclination (something Brer Rabbit might have to consider when this misadventure was

over, he reckoned).

He was about to disabuse this kindly stranger of her misconception (rabbits were far from baby kangaroos) when the shadow of Brer Fox loomed near the alleyway, his voice calling out ahead of him. "Brer Rabbit! You get out here now! We got business!"

Brer Rabbit knew that Kangaroo's were awfully protective mothers, and right about then that Roo's house and that Roo's pouch seemed awfully inviting, given the circumstances.

"Yes Ma'am, I sure am!" Brer Rabbit said. He then started to hoot and holler just like an itty bitty baby. "Waaah! Waaaah! Goo-goo! Goo-goo!" He started sucking on this thumb for good measure. "I lost my Mommy and ended up in this here basket! Will you be my Mommy?"

The look on the critter's face was one of pure love and joy. "Of course I'll be your Momma, you sweet little thing you!" She hugged Brer Rabbit close and brought him inside her home. Brer Rabbit smiled. This was gonna be easy. Fun too.

Brer Rabbit hadn't known what to expect inside this stranger's house, but what he saw he did not expect. The inside looked to have toys, lots of them: Rattles and blocks, and dollies, and baby walkers were piled up and stacked along the edge of the walls. Toy boxes with all sorts of gadgets like speak and says, and wind up toys, and stacking rings were full up. Play mats and mobiles were pulled out in the middle. It had been a good long while since Brer Rabbit had been inside a proper nursery, but this was definitely one, and a big one at that.

"Um...do you already got kids, um...Momma?" Having a little fun with a stranger was one thing, but Brer Rabbit didn't want to sucker any children.

"Momma Roo," the Kangaroo said. "All my babies call me Momma Roo. And no, silly. I don't have any other babies right now."

"Then why?"

"This is a daycare, silly little Joey." Momma Roo said. "I run it out of my home, but I have no children of my own. Today's Saturday so we're closed. That must be why whoever left you on my step decided to use the backdoor. That and they didn't want to be seen, I'd wager."

"Uh. Yup." Brer Rabbit said. "That's it alright. My old Momma wanted to leave me to a good home, and figured since you take care of youngins you'd be a good mother." He saw Momma Roo looking at him a might suspiciously. "Goo-goo. I mean. Goo-goo ga-ga!"

That seemed to do the trick. "Let's get you sorted out then. First a warm bubble bath, and then a nice nappy and some warm milk."

Brer Rabbit leaned back in her arms and folded. "That does sound nice," and he sucked his thumb.

Momma Roo took him into a bathroom and drew a hot bath. She even added in some fragrant green bubbles, that smelled mighty pleasant. "Eucalyptus," she said. He let her take his pink shirt off and his blue pants, doing his best not to blush. "HmMMM," she stroked her chin. "Your last mother didn't take care of you properly. So dusty!"

"Goo-goo-gah-gah," Brerr Rabbit said. "Maybe that's why she gave me up?" And that was good enough for Momma Roo. He sighed and relaxed as Momma Roo slowly lowered him in and started to gently scrub away the dirt and dust he'd kicked up in the park and the sweat that had soaked himself in running for his life.

"Would baby like a rubber duckie?"

"I sure would, Momma Roo," Brer Rabbit said. "I mean, goo-goo-goo."

So she gave him a yellow rubber duck and he squeaked it and squeezed it while she gently wiped and scrubbed as his fir: Under his arms, on top of his head, behind his ears and in the little creases of his neck, just like his real momma used to do. Then when he was all done she picked him up out of the tub and wrapped him in a nice fluffy towel. "Clean as a whistle," Momma Roo said. "Now let's get you sorted out."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," Brer Rabbit said.

"You're very welcome," Momma Roo replied. Still cradling Brer Rabbit in her arms, she took him out and to another part. His shirt and pants however stayed in a pile on the bathroom floor.

"What about my clothes?"

"I'm not about to put my new baby in dirty clothes right after his tubby," Momma Roo tutted. "Now let's see about your nappy."

Fair enough, Brer Rabbit supposed. Being a rabbit, it's not as if he needed clothes per say, save in the presence of polite company. A nice nap in a cradle sounded plenty good to Brer Rabbit just then, too, the warm water having eased his tense muscles. He liked the way Momma Roo talked and said silly words like 'nappy' instead of nap, besides.

Imagine Brer Rabbit's surprise and consternation, friend, when instead of being tucked into a low rocking cradle with a nice fluffy pillow, Momma Roo set him down on a high sturdy table with a padded mat on it. "Uh, Momma Roo," Brer Rabbit said. "I don't mean to complain...goo-goo-gah-gah...but how am I supposed to fall asleep on this thing?" Small as he was, it was a fairly long way down. "I could rightly fall off."

"I can help with that," Momma Roo said. She reached over the side of the table and pulled a strap tight and firm over Brer Fox's chest. He could wriggle, but he couldn't roll. That solved the problem of his rolling off, but what about the nap?"

"I still don't see how I'm supposed to fall asleep," he said.

"Oh silly, Joey," Momma Roo, "this isn't where babies go to take naps, this is where they go to get changed."

"Changed? Into what?" Brer Rabbit didn't know a whole lot about about where Kangaroos came from, but he never heard of any mother turning their baby into something else. Then again, it had been a loooooong loooooong time since Brer rabbit had been a baby himself, and being the type of trickster he was, he'd never been one for settling down and starting a hutch of little ones on his own, so his knowledge of child rearing was unsurprisingly shallow.

"Silly Joey, I'm not going to change you into anything." Mama Roo reached under the table and took out something that was mostly, white. It was folded, and thick, and rustled ever so slightly when she unfolded it for him. It was something that Brer Rabbit hadn't worn or needed in a long, long, long, time. "I'm going to change your nappy."

Brer Rabbit grasped. A long time ago they'd been made out of cloth and held together with safety pins or just tied in knots at the side, but it was still close enough that the trickster recognized it instantly. "That's not a nappy! That's a diaper!"

"Quite right," Momma Roo said. With her other hand, she shoved a rubber nipple with a plastic mouth guard straight into Brer Rabbit's gasping mouth. "That is what they call it over here, isn't it? Now suck on your dummy and let's get the baby sorted out."

It wasn't a dummy, but a pacifier; at least that's what Brer Rabbit called it. But he sure felt like a dummy just then as Momma Roo lifted up his feet with her free hand and slipped the thick diaper under his bum. There had been a time when youngin's hardly wore anything at all and could just hop around naked outside as soon as they could walk; but those times were long gone. Nowadays, babies wore diapers, and a baby is exactly what Momma Roo thought he was.

He sniffled as she took a bottle of baby powder and dusted it on his rear and front side. He moaned behind his pacifier while she spread his legs apart and pulled the thick padding up between his legs and fastened the velcro tabs loosely around him. He felt humiliated as she guided his little cotton tail through the the back hole and wiggled it a bit for him.

He had to get out of this. Had to think of a tricky scheme and get out right quick. Maybe his real Mama could be calling and he could hop on home to her, but who in their right or wrong mind would believe a baby? Why couldn't he have said he was a school kid or something? A kindergartener? A preschooler! An age that would at least be allowed to use the toilet!

Momma Roo didn't take no mind of Brer Rabbit's distress. From underneath the changing table she pulled out a pink shirt the same color as his old shirt and yanked it over his head. Brer wasn't ready to lay down again so soon, but he found he didn't have a choice in the matter. With one hand Momma Roo forced him back down to the padded changing table, and then brought the ends of the shirt together, snapping in place with special buttons.

"A nice comfy onesie," Momma Roo told him. "To keep my new baby nice and warm but make it easy to check and change your nappy." It even had a hole for the tale.

"That's mighty nice of ya, Momma," Brer Rabbit said, spitting out his pacifier, "but-

Lie, trick, or truth, Brer Rabbit didn't get to finish that sentence. He was in Momma Roo's arms and having a bottle of milk popped right in his mouth. "Drink up, baby." She gave the bottle a squeeze, sending milk squirting into the back of poor Brer Rabbit's throat. It was either drink or choke.

Golly! If Brer Fox or Brer Bear had been half this forceful, Brer Rabbit would have been skinned, cooked, and eaten long ago. "Drink it all up so you can be big and strong," Momma Roo said. Cradled in Momma Roo's arms and having milk squirted down his throat everytime he did more than suckle, Brer Rabbit did as he was told.

Now friends, Momma Roo might have told him that drinking all that milk would make him big and strong and mayhap it would have in the long term. In the short term though, all a belly full of milk did was make him feel all kinda of full and bloated and tired.

He was so tired that when Momma Roo picked him up over her shoulder and started patting him on the back, he didn't say boo. But he did say "BUUUUUUUURP!"

"Good Joey," Momma Roo said, sounding like a proud new Momma, (and as far as she was concerned, Brer Rabbit supposed, she was).

The changing table hopped away as Momma Roo took Brer Rabbit to another room. This room was dark, and quiet, and felt safe. Soft music played gently from a music box in the far corner. A lullabye.

Slowly, Momma Roo lowered him down, but instead of a low rocking cradle, it was a crib with high bars. "You mentioned a nap," Momma Roo said. "Good idea." She gave him a peck on the head and left. "Night night, baby."

As soon as she was out of the room, Brer Rabbit tried getting out of the crib. But with his belly fully, a fresh diaper spreading his gait apart, and a soft mattress beneath his feet Brer couldn't leap or scurry or climb over the high crib bars. He was trapped.

Brer rabbit settled for getting undressed, but that was no use either. He tugged and tugged and tugged at the ends of the onesie, but it wouldn't come off. As it turns out, rabbit paws might as well be baby kangaroo hands as far as metal snap buttons were concerned.

Full, tired from a chase, surrounded in cushioned comfort, and with soft music gently lulling him, Brer finally laid down and closed his eyes. Turns out he wasn't fibbing or feigning. It really was time to take a nap. Maybe after a little shut eye, he'd figure a way out of this predicament.

(To Be Continued)

It was quiet in the nursery room where Momma Roo had left Brer Rabbit. The lullaby music box had wound down and even the blue birds outside were quietly pecking out bugs, instead of singing "Zippity Do Dah". The morning had passed by into the afternoon and the time for singing was done. It was long past time for most folks to be busy at work.

Brer Rabbit woke up fidgeting in the big ol' crib Momma Roo had laid him down in. He'd just had a whole heaping helping handful of pleasant dreams, mostly about pulling the wool over old Brer Fox's eyes till it was too late and the old Fox ended up with thorns in his backside, a hammer to his teeth, feathers tarred to his arms and legs, a yellow stripe painted down his back and polecat spray on his tongue. That's just what mischief makers like Brer Rabbit dream about.

His pleasant dreams got interrupted by Nature's call however when that bottle of milk Momma Roo had given him finally worked its magic. There's a reason why it's called "Nature's call". It's coming, one way or another, but it's at least polite enough (or loud enough) to give a body plenty of notice. Enough notice, in fact, that most people can stop what they're doing, open a door, and Nature will pass harmlessly through, not hurting anybody.

And as for those who can't; people who can't hear the call or can't open a front way or back door in time so that Nature comes crashing in like a bull in a china shop? Well, that's what diapers are for, ain't it?

Presently, Brer Rabbit was neither too young, too old, or in any way prevented from hearing Nature's call. He woke right up, same as he always did. He just didn't wake up quick enough to remember the predicament he'd fallen asleep in. In his long, long life, he'd never encountered an obstacle that allowed the luxury of sleep.

So I hope y'all will forgive him when I tell you that when Brer Rabbit heard Nature's call, he woke right up, started to rub the sleep out of his eyes, and then slammed face first into the big ol' wooden crib bars penning him in like a hog. A body has a hard time forgetting certain things, and for the longest time, Brer Rabbit would've woken up from his nap, answered Nature's call,

and then either get on with his day if something caught his interest, or go back to his nap if something didn't. Can hardly blame him for making the honest mistake.

The sudden jolting pain to his little pink nose woke Brer Rabbit the rest of the way up and shook him out of his own personal dreamland of perpetual table turning on a certain fluffy tailed trickster. What Brer Rabbit DIDN'T do, is answer Nature's call. Opening that front door right now would just leave him stuck with more Nature than a grown rabbit oughta have on their person. The presence of the disposable diaper wrapped around his bum and the onesie holding it snugly up to him didn't make him feel any better about it, (quite the opposite in fact).

"Oh," Brer Rabbit looked at himself and frowned down at the big old bulge underneath his brand new baby clothes. "Reckon I forgot about that." He reached down and poked the diaper taped up around his hips, and was taken aback and fully amazed at how much push he felt underneath his furry little finger.. He didn't know how much cotton, pulp, and padding he was gonna have to pee into, but he knew how much Momma Roo was gonna use on him.

He'd been wrongfully accused and confused for many things over the years, but being a bouncing baby bunny had never been one of them. Now he had a whole new and unexpected bum wrap put on him (in more ways than one). Things only got complicated when he factored in his current captor.

Brer Fox and Brer Bear were greedy, selfish, short sighted, spiteful, and mainly wanted to wallop, bamboozle, or otherwise harm Brer Rabbit; and Rabbit had become incredibly adept at using those qualities against them. His latest warden, however, genuinely thought she was caring for him. How did he trick someone into not caring for him?

Just as discombobulating, he'd tricked the maternal Kangaroo into hiding him and guarding him from Brer Fox's predations under false pretenses. He hadn't meant anything by it, and had just been following his own natural tendencies. Now she was following hers, and hers seemed a lot stronger than his at this time.

He'd tricked her. How did he untrick her? More importantly, he'd wronged her. How did he unwrong her? More more importantly, she'd babied him. How did he get her to unbaby him?

"What do I do?" Brer Rabbit asked himself. He started pacing in the crib like a lion in its cage or a convict in his cell. "What do I do?" The trickster didn't know, couldn't know. Nature had stopped calling like a proper visit and had started shouting and howling up a whole new kind of ruckus. It might've been whisper quiet inside the darkened room of Momma Roo's daycare, but Nature wasn't calling no more. It was hootin' and hollerin' so loud that Brer Rabbit could barely hear himself think.

Quiet as it was inside the room, it was even quieter in the rest of Momma Roo's place on account of it being Saturday. And Kangaroo's might not have as keen a set of ears as a rabbit's, with no other youngins to attend to, an experienced caregiver like Momma Roo could

easily hear the rattling of crib balls, the rustling of water proof sheets, the crinkling of diapers, and the mumbling muttering of a child newly awake from his nap.

“Well hello there, baby,” Momma Roo said, hopping into the quiet nap room and turning the lights on. “Did you enjoy your nap?”

“I surely did,” Brer Rabbit started, “but there’s somethin’ I gotta tell-...” He froze. Brer Rabbit had learned a lot of things in his life. Some of them were taught directly to him. Others were common sense. Still more was a matter of intuition (a word which here means “uncommon sense”). A handful of precious skills were knowledge acquired by learning from his own mistakes. But nobody and nothing had ever taught Brer Rabbit what to do when somebody picked him up and snuck a couple of fingers in his pants.

So he froze.

“Still bone dry,” Momma Roo remarked after checking his diaper. “A cute little baby like you; I thought you’d be soaking wet after a nice snooze.”

“About that,” Brer Rabbit piped in. “Momma Roo could you do me a favor?”

The lady kangaroo looked down at Brer Rabbit, her eyes filled with love and a kind of special adoration. “Of course I can. You’re my baby. I’d do anything for you.”

Brer Rabbit opened his mouth to tell her the truth. But then a bit of devilry crept into his noggin. It’s not that Brer Rabbit was an immoral sort, or a mean sort; not like Brer Fox. But he was, in his heart of hearts, a trickster. Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, skeeters gotta bite till you itch like the dickens, and tricksters gotta trick. And tricksters never tell the truth when a tall tale, fish or a tiny white fib would get the job done instead.

“Momma Roo?” Brer Rabbit pretended to ask. “Since I’m dry and all, does that mean I’m a big boy now? Uh, goo-goo?” Maybe he could convince the well meaning Momma that he was growing up and be moved out and back out into the world by nightfall. Kids always did seem to grow up fast, he reasoned. Why not him?

Old Momma Roo clucked her tongue and let out a chuckle. “One dry nappy doesn’t mean you’re a big boy yet, but we’re not going to the changing table just yet.”

A bit of inspiration lit up behind Brer Rabbit’s eyes. “Yes Momma. But uh...can you take me to the uh....uh....”

“The what, little joey?” she asked.

Brer Rabbit’s own contrariness was getting the better of him, and Nature screaming at him to get out was making it that much harder. He was so used to asking for the opposite of what he

wanted, that coming right seemed like a round peg in a square hole. “Do you think you could take me to sit on that special chair I saw?”

Momma Roo stopped hopping. “Special chair?” Momma Roo pouted her lip out in thought. “Which special chair?”

“Uh...goo-goo-gah-gah. The special chair that I can...sit in? The one with a hole?” How else would a youngin old enough to be sucking milk from a bottle describe a toilet?

She started hopping again. “Oh that! I was taking you there anyway.”

“You was?!” The promise of relief and being able to open the front door for Nature to get out of his body and out in the open was almost as good as the actual relief itself. (Almost, but not quite.)

“Of course I was.” Momma Roo promised. “You didn’t think I was just going to give you that bottle and not feed you anything else?” She held him out by the armpits, like she was fixing to let him down somewhere; a nice clean latrine mayhap.

“I most surely did not,” Brer Rabbit promised, turning on his charmer’s smile. “I most surely did not. Goo-goo gah-gah. I knew you wouldn’t do that to me and forget to...” Brer Rabbit looked back over his shoulder. “Feed me?” It was right about then that it had occurred to Brer Rabbit that he’d made yet another error.

The room Momma Roo had taken Brer Rabbit into had a tile floor, clean smooth counters, and even a sink in it, but it wasn’t any bathroom. It was a kitchen. And that wasn’t a toilet that Brer Rabbit was being lowered onto.

The highchair that Momma Roo lowered him down into didn’t have a proper hole in the bottom so that he might have certain needs meant. But the rim around it connecting the tray to the chair, and the bar that kept him from sliding out the bottom were kinds of holes sure enough.

Much like his pair of pants long since discarded or the diaper he had on presently, the highchair had four holes in it. One for his rear, one for his tail, and one for each leg. And much like the changing table that he’d hoped to avoid, this had buckles and straps that Momma Roo was quick as lightning to use to keep him from getting out of them. Proper babies couldn’t be trusted to stand up or else they might go and hurt themselves.

“Now you just wait right there, and I’ll get you sum num nums,” Momma Roo said hopping over to a nearby cabinet.

“Nnnng...nnng...” Brer Rabbit said. It was getting harder and harder to talk, and Brer Rabbit was fussing trying his best. He wasn’t driven by fear or cleverness, just a simple need to open the front door and answer Nature’s call.

You see, friend. All people are basically three boxes stacked up on top of each other with little tubes like arms and legs sticking out. On top is the Think Box, where reason, cleverness, and guile come from. In the middle is the Tick Box, where your ticker is and from it comes love, anger, fear, and all of your emotions. On the bottom is what we shall call for this purposes the Nature Box (though certain more vulgar storytellers might call this region the "P&S Box").

The Nature Box is responsible for a body's instinct and necessities. It's not for thought as much as it is instinct. It's not for love as much as lust. It's not for things you want to do or feel you should do as much as things that you have to do no matter what. And Brer Rabbit's Nature Box was so full that he couldn't think about or feel much of anything else.

Nature was clawing so hard to get out his door, that Brer Rabbit couldn't do much else besides try and old himself shut. But like a certain wolf from another story, Nature huffed and puffed and blew and howled until Brer Rabbit lost all strength and a whole lotta Nature came crashing and splashing out of Brer Rabbit, not much caring one way or another that it had a big old layer of padding between it and outside proper. Nature just wanted out of Brer Rabbit and that's what it got!

Brer Rabbit let out a gasp of surprise and relief as his diaper absorbed the flood he was putting into it, acutely aware of the warmth and wetness spreading out his front door and then working it's way towards the back. It wasn't entirely unpleasant, as far as his Nature Box was concerned. Getting Nature out was getting Nature out and didn't much concern itself beyond that, one of its primary functions hereby satisfied.

His Think Box and Tick Box-his brain and heart disagreed. His brain was disturbed at his failure, and his heart was just plain overwhelmed. It was enough to make a grown rabbit wanna cry.

"Everything alright, baby?" Momma Roo said hopping back to the highchair.

"Yes ma'am. Just hungry is all." Brer Rabbit lied, sucking in his tears. Babies cried, his brain thought. His heart was too desponded to admit defeat as much as wallow in it.

"Then you'll just love this," Momma Roos said, dipping her spoon into a jar filled up with orange mush. Brer Rabbit very much doubted that. That was the hardest part to Rabbit's thinking. He couldn't just be obstinate or contrary. He knew enough about babies to know they fussed and rebelled all the time. He couldn't just go along with this, either. Plenty of children were mild tempered and perfectly obedient and only the passage of time and them outgrowing their clothes marked them as old enough to make their own decision. (This was especially problematic since Brer Rabbit was good and done as far as growth, and the passage of time didn't tend to affect him as much as it did other folks).

Reverse psychology wouldn't work either. His wants could be outright ignored if his savior turned captured deemed it so. In short, a baby's wants was often secondary to what their

caregiver decided their needs were, and as long as Momma Roo didn't want to punish him, Brer Rabbit's repertoire of tricks was decidedly short.

His brain getting back in gear, even as his pants were sopping and sloshing in his seat, Brer Rabbit got himself an idea. If he was punished, he might be able to turn things around. Avoiding a spanking or a time out couldn't be that much different from avoiding being skinned or tarred and feathered. There might not be any more briar patches these days, but an angry enough Momma Roo might likely be provoked into tossing a horny child out into the cold cruel world.

"Yes, Momma Roo," Brer Rabbit said. "I'd sure loooove whatever it is you got in your spoon right there." He opened his mouth, ready to spit whatever Momma Roo spooned in like a cannon right into her face.

"Here you go," Momma Roo said. Giving him more than just a nibble.

He opened his mouth. Closed it over the spoon...and swallowed. Brer Rabbit swallowed. The texture was different, and much less crunchy than he was used to, but the flavor was delicious and much more than passingly familiar. "Mmmm-mmmm-mmmm!" Brer Rabbit said. "Carrots! I just loooove carrots!"

Momma Roo smiled and gave him another spoonful of mashed up carrots. "I'm so glad to hear that. It's nice to have a baby who likes his vegetables."

The words came tumbling out of Brer Rabbit like fresh spring water. "Oh, I love my vegetables Momma Roo. Goo-goo gah-gah! Can't get enough of them! Gonna grow up big and strong!"

"You sure are!" Momma Roo agreed and then gave him another spoonful.

"Maybe", Brer Rabbit thought to himself, "I can get a little more out of this trick than just some temporary protection." He didn't even care that he was sitting a diaper wet with his own Nature. "Maybe I can get a full stomach, too."

If Momma Roo could hear Brer Rabbit's contemplation, her smile did not give her away.

All told, Brer Rabbit ate three jars of strained carrots, two jars of mashed sweet potatoes, and a jar of juicy peaches for dessert. Momma Roo might have thought him an itty bitty baby, but he had a man's appetite. "You really are a growing boy," Momma Roo said as she was rinsing the jars in the sink. "You might be on the verge of a growth spurt."

"Yes ma'am," Brer Rabbit agreed. He gave his belly a firm pat. Solid or not, it had been ages since he'd eaten that good. "I'm a growing boy!"

Momma Roo hopped over to the door and grabbed a blue bag off the hook. "You sure are," she

said back to him.” She started filling her bag with baby stuff; clothes and toys and wipes and such. “Pretty soon you might be big enough for the next size of nappy.”

Brer Rabbit swallowed, a nasty aftertaste invading his mouth despite the hardy meal he’d just been spoon fed. “Next size? You mean there are…” he paused, “bigger diapers? Goo-goo gah?”

“Of course,” Momma Roo said. “You’re hardly the biggest baby I’ve ever taken care of.” She hopped on back over to the changing table. “Oh almost forgot.” She added a few fresh diapers to the bag for good measure.

While this was happening, an unfamiliar feeling of guilt started to worm it’s way into Brer Rabbit’s Think Box. This nice lady might’ve taken care of bigger babies than Rabbit, but surely not older ones. What was he to do? What was he to do?

The old trickster forgot about what he was gonna do and remembered what he’d done when Momma Roo lifted him out of the highchair. “Let’s see. Do you need a change?”

He felt a flush of good old fashioned embarrassment. “NO...?!”

Momma Roo didn’t need to stick her fingers past the leg cuffs of his diaper and feel around to know that was a lie. She did anyway though. “Oh my,” she told Brer Rabbit. “You are VERY wet. But I don’t mind waiting to change you if you’re comfortable in it.” She grinned and added, “And for a second when I found you dry in your crib, I thought you might be an early bloomer ready for potty training.”

And that was how Brer Rabbit ruined his chances for getting out of diapers with any kind of grace or dignity, even though our story doesn’t end there.

His ego bruised and his now sagging diaper held up by the snaps of his onesie, Brer was lowered down and into the waiting pouch of Momma Roo. Brer didn’t know much about marsupials, but a bit of common sense and intuition told him what the pouch was for.

“Why are you carrying me, Momma?” Brer Rabbit asked before remembering to throw in a couple of “goos” and “gahs” to keep up the charade. “I can uh...toddle around the playroom by myself.”

“It’s easier than a pram, little joey.” Momma Roo told him and gave him a pat between the ears.

Another word Brer Rabbit didn’t recognize. This could not end well. “Pram?”

Mama Roo shouldered the bag and put the tip of her finger to her chin. “I keep forgetting. What’s the American word for it. Buggy? Stroller?”

“BUGGY?! STROLLER?!” Brer Rabbit knew what these words were. He just didn’t like what they meant, not one bit. “But that means we’re going ou-ou-ou-out!”

He was given another pat on his head and a pinch on the side of his face for good measure. “That’s right! I can’t keep my new baby locked inside on such a beautiful day as today. Growing children are like flowers. They need fresh air and sunshine.”

Brer Rabbit did not like the idea of going out. Not like this. Not without a sharp knife or a sturdy pair of scissors to cut himself out of his clothes.. Not in Momma Roo’s pouch, dressed up as he was. Better to be outside as naked as the day he was born than dressed as the day after.

Unfortunately for good ol’ Brer Rabbit, he didn’t have much choice.

The front door came up fast in huge leaps. Held as he was in the lady’s pouch, Brer Rabbit didn’t have a chance as much. All he could do was grip the top of the pouch and go along for the ride.

And what a ride it was, what a ride it was!

Brer Rabbit was mighty quick, there’s no doubt about it. He could hop faster than most any critter in his neck of the woods and when his mind failed him his feet were quicker than Jack. Brer Rabbit was fast. Momma Roo was faster. Much faster.

It felt to Rabbit like he was on a roller coaster, or riding the rails. The wind whipped at his ears and the outside world whirred by him in a blur once he managed to open his eyes. “If only ol’ Brer Fox could see me now!” Rabbit thought; then thought better of it.

Still, it felt mighty familiar. He was bundled up by a big strong lady that said sweet things to him, and was hopping along faster than he could possibly hope to keep up on foot with. It had been a long time since Brer had gotten to experience something like this. A mighty long time. All the same, it felt familiar, indeed. Peculiarly so.

Just as he was starting to really enjoy the ride, Momma Roo lifted him out of her pouch, and set him down on the grass. The place felt vaguely familiar. The ground was mulched, and jutting up from the mulch like a castle into the sky was a good old fashioned jungle gym. “Where are we?” Brer Rabbit asked.

“The Park,” Momma Roo said. “I thought you’d like to play outside for a bit.”

Brer Rabbit found himself feeling terribly confused. “The Park?” That explained the playground well enough, but he didn’t quite recognize the streets. “Where’s your...I mean our house?” Even blindfolded by a wicker basket, Brer Rabbit figured that the home daycare he’d rammed into couldn’t be more than half a block away. Why couldn’t he see it across the street from the playground?

“Our house is over there, little one,” Momma Roo said. She pointed in the opposite direction. “All the way on the other side of the park.” The park was big alright, and Brer Rabbit found that if he squinted his eyes and focused real hard, he could just make out the street he’d crossed running away from Brer Fox as a tiny dot in the distance.

He’d heard the term ‘slack-jawed’ before, but Brer Rabbit had never had it properly to him. Momma Roo fixed this when she put another pacifier in his mouth and tapped the bottom of his jaw.

“Just in case,” she said, clipping the pacifier to his onesie on a ribbon. She then reached into the diaper bag and took out a well worn book: *New Tricks For Older Mothers*

“Pway?” he lisped. Then he realized, “Pway!” This was his chance! All he’d have to do is wait until Momma Roo got good and deep into her book, and then he’d sneak away back home and find a way out of his ridiculous getup.

“Brer Raaaaaaaabbit!” A familiar voice sounded off in the distance. “Where arrrrre you? Heeeere bunny-bunny-bunny-bunny!” Coming up over the hill, looking mean as sin and with big Brer Bear in tow, was Brer Fox. “That was a reeeeeeal funny trick you pulled on us. A reeeeeeal funny trick. We ain’t mad! Come on out and we can all laugh about it together.”

“But Brer Fox,” Brer Bear said. “I thought we were still angry at Brer Rabbit. You said we was gonna knock his head cleeeeeeean off.”

Rabbit’s keen ears could only hear the two rascals talking to each other and see the vaguest shadow of their body language. He couldn’t see Brer Fox roll his eyes at Brer Bear, but sure enough he could hear Fox slap his forehead in exasperation. He could hear him curse under his breath, too.

Right then and there, Brer Rabbit wanted to hop away on down the nearest trail as fast as he could. Better to retreat and let time heal their wounds and dim their memories than to go for another round. But as any precious two-year-old will tell you. Running in a dry diaper is one thing. Running in a wet one is another.

It only took a couple of hops for Rabbit to know that he wasn’t getting away from anybody dressed as he was. He’d be lucky if he made it past the swingset; and the way the wet padding sagged and swayed between his thighs made it impossible for him to do a proper sprint.

That and the kangaroo would catch him anyways, just as like.

It was time to use one problem to solve another. “Momma!” Rabbit yelled, hopping up to the bigger woman. “Momma! Lemme in! Lemme in!” He started trying to burrow back into the safety of her pouch. “Hide me! Hide me! You gotta hide me!”

Momma Roo put down her book. "Hide you?" she asked. "Whatever would I hide you from?"

Brer Rabbit pointed an accusing figure at Brer Fox and Brer Bear still angrily combing the park in the distance. "Them!" he cried. "They're gonna GET me!" He didn't really think either had much of a chance of laying a hand on him under normal circumstances, but these circumstances were far from normal. He reckoned Momma Roo could easily outrun both of his pursuers combined.

"Oh nonsense," Mama Roo said. "It's not like they're a couple of dingos. Why would two big strong strappers like them wanna pick on an itty bitty baby like you?"

"I'm notta-!" Brer Rabbit stopped himself. "Because they're mean, that's why! A couple of bullies!" That much was certainly true.

Mama Roo put the old book back away in her bag, and tucked him into the safety of her pouch. Brer Rabbit felt much warmer and safer than he had the first time. "Alright, little joey," she said, giving him a quick kiss on the top of his head. "Let Mama take care of this."

Unfortunately for Brer Rabbit, how Momma Roo handled things was not as all as the trickster would've recommended.

In the space of three hops and the shake of a bunny tale, Momma Roo crossed the playground, passed the water fountains, and was right in front of Brer Fox and Brer Bear. "Excuse me, gentlemen," she said. "Can I have a word with you?"

Brer Fox and Brer Bear, unaccustomed to being addressed as gentlemen, took a moment before they realized they were being spoken to. "Uhh, why of course madame," said Brer Fox. He bowed and doffed his straw hat. "Brer Fox, at your service. Enchanted to meet you."

Brer Bear did a bow of his own and set down his club. "Uhhh...Brer Bear. I'm embalmed to meet you, too."

Rabbit did his best to dig himself deeper into Momma Roo's pouch but had no such luck to speak of. Momma's hands plunged down and lifted him up, holding up at arm's length. "I run the daycare over yonder and my baby is frightfully scared of you two for some reason. Do you three know each other?"

Brer Fox was still doing his best to mind his manners and kept his hat doffed and his head bowed. "I don't know any baby," Brer Fox said. He looked over at Brer Bear. "Do you know any baby

"Nope," was all Brer Bear had to say.

"No ma'am, we don't trifle with or bother with or even know no babies." Finally, Fox and Bear

stood back up to their full heights, donned their hats, and opened their eyes to get a good look at what was dangling and diapered right out in front of them. "I don't know no babies!" Brer Fox proclaimed. "And that's no baby!"

Both Brer Fox and Brer Bear's eyes went red with anger while their jaws dripped with hunger. Uncoincidentally, Brer Rabbit found himself so shocked and full of terror that another, more severe round of Nature found its way into Brer Rabbit's diaper. Those mashed carrots might not have had time to work through his system, but they definitely got things moving, or so it seemed.

"Uh oh," Momma Roo said. "I know what that means." She then excused herself and turned away from Brer Fox and Brer Bear so she could set Brer Rabbit down...just not on his feet.

"Uh...Momma?" Rabbit squeaked as he was laid down on a blanket from out the blue bag Momma had packed. "What are you doing?"

"Changing your diaper, silly joey." Momma cooed down at him. "What else would I be doing?"

"DIAPER?" Brer Fox cackled.

"CHANGE?" Brer Bear bellowed.

Howls of rage turned into peels of laughter. And all Brer Rabbit could do was lay there as his onesie got unbuttoned and his well used diaper was untapped, right in front of everyone.

"Mommaaaaaa!" Brer Rabbit tried to scream. Only then did he realize that he still had that old pacifier stuck in his mouth, muffling his words. Not that it mattered to Momma Roo one bit. She was too busy wiping him from front to back to listen.

"Awww," Brer Fox laughed. "Look at the little itty baaaaaby!" Brer Rabbit might've preferred getting tarred and feathered, or skinned alive. Right then he would have let Brer Bear take his head clean off. It would've been quicker that way. "Hey don't forget to use that special butt cream so he don't get a rash!"

Momma Roo had just finished balling the old diaper off and slipping a fresh one underneath Rabbit. "That's a good idea!" she called back. "Thank you very much." That only got more laughter from Rabbit's two tormentors.

Rash cream. Then powder. Then the new diaper was put all the way on Rabbit and his onesie was buttoned right back up. Good (or bad) as new. "All fresh and clean," Momma Roo pronounced him.

Meanwhile, Brer Fox and Brer Bear had sauntered up and seen the whole thing for themselves. "Well I do declare," Brer Fox said. "I never thought I'd live to see the day."

“Me neither.” Brer Bear agreed.

“You’ve never seen a baby get a nappy change?” Momma Roo asked. Rabbit was tucked safely back inside her pouch.

“That ain’t no baby,” Brer Fox said. “Thanks for cleaning up though. I’m sure it’ll make him taste better.”

Momma Roo hopped backward. “Taste better?”

Brer Bear shouldered his club. “We’re gonna knock his head cleeeeeean off.”

“And fricassee the rest!” Brer Fox rubbed his hands together. “Now if you’ll kindly just hand him over...”

Momma Roo balled up her hand into one fist, and used the other to pick up the old diaper off the ground. “You’re not laying one hand on my baby!”

“Lady, that ain’t a ba-” Brer Fox started to say before a kangaroo fist punched him right in the nose. Not only could Momma Roo run faster than Brer Rabbit, but she could fight a sight better too.

“Hey!” Brer Bear growled, readying his club. “That’s not-!” But he didn’t get to finish his sentence, neither. It’s awful hard to swing a big ol’ club when you’ve got a diaper filled to the brim with Nature thrown right in your face.

And before Brer Rabbit could get out his first gasp of astonishment, or his first ha-ha, he and Momma Roo were away in a blur and back behind the closed doors of her live-in daycare. “I’ll never let any big old brute hurt my baby.” Momma Roo huffed.

Free room. Free board. Delicious food. Protection from those who would do him the most harm. It was right about then that Brer Rabbit thought that maybe drinking from a bottle and answering Nature’s call in a diaper might not be so bad, all things considered.

Meanwhile, half a park away, Brer Fox was checking to see if his nose was broken, and Brer Bear was rinsing his eyes out in the water fountains. “No fair!” Brer Fox muttered mostly to himself. “That kanga lady she fights dirty.”

“Very dirty.” Brer Bear agreed, his eyes still dripping.

Fox was beside himself with anger. “Every time that Brer Rabbit gets one over on us. Every time! Now this hippity hopper, too! Thinks he’s a baby? Where’d she get that idea?”

“She said she ran a daycare over there.” Brer Bear moped. “An Brer Rabbit’s little.”

“That’s no excuse.” Brer Fox whined. “I’m not exactly towering myself, am I?”

“She probably think just about anybody the right size was a youngin’”

That’s when Brer Fox got his own bit of inspiration. He walked over and pulled on Brer Bear’s ear. “Now hold on just a second there Brer Bear. I got myself an idea, I surely do. We’ll get that Brer Rabbit yet, and no hippity hoppin’ Roo is gonna stop us!”

He had to tell the big oaf a couple of extra times for it to sink in, but eventually it sunk in. “That’s a pretty good plan,” Brer Bear said.

Brer Fox grinned an evil grin. “Yes it is. Yes it surely is.”

The next day, back at Momma Roo’s, Brer Rabbit sat by the little old dollhouse playing with his blocks. He was making a game of it. How high could he stack it before the entire mountain came down. By ones? By two’s? Did it help any if they were off center and counting each other’s weight? What if he had a bigger base? Did that make it less likely to fall down?

It was a perfect game for an old fashioned trickster like Brer Rabbit. At its very core, it was about him seeing just how much he could get away with before things came tumbling down and he had to adapt. And of course, if used up all of the wooden blocks, Brer would consider the game lost. It wasn’t about finishing or building anything. Goodness knows it wasn’t about playing it safe. If he wanted to use all of the blocks, he could just as easily lay them flat on the ground and not stack them on top of each other.

All the while he played this game against gravity, Brer Rabbit hummed and sang quietly to himself.

*“Everybody’s got a laughin’ place,
A laughin’ place, to go ho-ho!
Take a frown, turn it upside-down,
And I found mine, I know ho-ho!”*

With hardly a thought or a struggle, Brer Rabbit let loose his bladder and felt the front of his diaper get a little warmer and a little soggy. It wasn’t the first time he’d let Nature crash right through the door and into the thirsty padding wrapped around him, and likely wouldn’t be the last.

No siree. The trickle bounced off the front of and slid down near the middle where it disappeared into the diaper's core. Oh the wonders of modern technology! Rabbit couldn't remember the last time he needed diapers- rabbit's gotta grow up quick for more reason than one- but he was pretty sure this was a couple of sights better than those old rags and safety pins.

Add a plus one to the rest of his clothing. This onesie was mighty comfortable, like a set of fine pajamas excepting that babies were allowed to wear them all the time. Mighty comfortable indeed.

The way Mama Roo fussed and over him was something else too. Even right now she was away in the kitchen, deciding to bake him a cake.

She'd played with him, fussed over him, cooed at him, checked and changed him, fed him, bathed him, dressed him, put him to bed. And this morning it was happening all over again.

Being a legendary trickster, Brer Rabbit had never been on a proper vacation. The only vacating he tended to do was when brutes and bullies were getting too close. Maybe this is what this was: A kinda vacation.

"When's your birthday?" she'd asked him this morning after a breakfast of some pureed vegetables and a bottle of milk.

"I don't rightly remember," Brer Rabbit replied. For just a second he thought that the jig was up. "I'm just a baby. Goo-goo-gah-gah!"

Momma Roo's face just lit up, instead. "Then we're gonna say your birthday is today." And the matter seemed settled. And after leaving him a bottle of juice and checking to see if he needed changing again, she left him to play in her at-home daycare's nursery.

A cake. A whole cake, just for him. One that he didn't have to bake or swindle himself. And all of these toys to play with. Strange as it may seem for such a legendary trickster, such things were as foreign to Brer Rabbit as Momma Roo's accent.

Having as many brothers and sisters as rabbits tend to do meant that Brer didn't get a whole lotta toys or a whole lotta 'tention growing up. Being so little and living in a world filled with foxes, and wolves, and bears made it so being a

child wasn't exactly an option.

A fella doesn't get to be a legendary trickster by living the same normal- and often more comfortable- life as everybody else. People just don't tell stories about that kind of thing.

This, this nursery, might be his new laughing place, Brer Rabbit reckoned. There were precious few briar patches left in the world, so why not someplace softer, and quieter? A new place to hide between mishaps and misadventures.

He gave the blocks one last topple, got up and started pacing. It'd only been a few hours, but it was getting harder and harder to notice the crinkle when he walked, or how he was less walking and more toddling. Hopping was easier than walking in his current situation. Crawling might be easier than even than that.

"I mean why not?" Brer Rabbit said to himself. "What would I be losing if I kept this up?" He waddled and toddled over to the dollhouse. "The bars and the crib were somethin', but that mattress was comfier than an old feather bed."

He opened the playset up and looked at the people inside. Happy little people living their happy normal lives. "That chair was confining, but the food was pretty good."

"And the diapers and baby clothes?" He looked down at himself and poked the front and felt the little squish. He could still barely tell that he'd wet himself. "I could get used to these." Memories of the look on Brer Fox and Brer Bear's face when a fully loaded diaper went sailing at their fool heads. He let out a little giggle. " `Specially since I don't have to clean up after myself."

Growing up in the boonies and the backwoods most of his life, Brer Rabbit was of the opinion that most indoor plumbing was overrated. Getting water into the tub? That was handy, no arguments there. But whisking away certain unpleasantries of Nature? Why go to the effort when a tree, a bush, or even an outhouse would do? In his current predicament, what Momma Roo had taped on him was doing the job one better since he didn't have to go anywhere to do it.

"It's not that different from a briar patch," Brer Rabbit decided. "Patch has thorns instead of bars. And it's a lot less pretty." He picked up a green rubber

ball and gave it a bounce. "Lot less to do, too." He rolled the ball away.

What would he be giving up to pretend to be Momma Roo's baby for a might longer? A job? A wife? A nice home? No. No. And this was nicer.

After the initial embarrassment at having one of his own tricks backfire on him wear off, and experiencing the rush of someone else giving Brer Fox and Brer Bear whatfor, Brer Rabbit found himself developing a taste for this baby stuff.

Babies got snuggled and cleaned and fed and cared for and defended. The only reason people got embarrassed over playing with toys and being pushed in strollers and having their Mommies and Daddies love on them was because someone came along told them that was the way it ought to be.

Men weren't supposed to wear dresses, either. That hadn't stopped Brer Rabbit from yanking one over his head and posing as a debutant to throw Fox off his trail that one time...

It was all in the trick and babies were the real ones getting tricked. By the time they were old enough to enjoy and appreciate being babied, they weren't allowed to be babies no more.

The more he thought about it, the more Brer Rabbit was convinced that this might be the greatest trick he'd yet played. He risked nothing worth risking, and might just gain so much more.

There would be some difficulties, Brer Rabbit was sure. Keeping other people from blowing his cover was one of them. If a couple of blockheads like Fox and Bear could recognize him, plenty of other people could. When Momma Roo's normal charges at the daycare came back tomorrow, she might have an easier time of sniffing out Brer Rabbit's ruse.

It was always easier to figure out a flim flam when you had the legitimate article right in front of you. That was a problem for tomorrow, however.

"Maybe I'll just get some sleep on it," he yawned. Lazily, he spread out on the floor, flopping out and stretching his legs. "When I'm Brer Rabbit," he said to himself. "Laying down and staring up at the ceiling is me being idle and lazy. But if I'm just a little baby," he yawned, "it just means I'm plum tuckered out."

He closed his eyes and began to doze.

DING-DONG!

Rabbit had just been about to go to sleep. "Ding-dong?" He scurried to his feet. Who could be calling at a time like this? The daycare part of her home wasn't even open on weekends. Momma Roo had told him that much.

"Coming! Coming!" Momma-Roo shouted. She hopped to the front door.

The idea that a baby- a real one- had been left on Momma Roo's doorstep flickered into Brer Rabbit's mind. What was he supposed to do if a real little tot was brought in? Be recognized? Be replaced? Or worse, be forced to try and figure out a way to get rid of an actual helpless little kid?

As tricky as he could be, Brer Rabbit didn't know if he had the moral decrepitude to try something like that...

Nervously, he followed his new caregiver to the door, making good and sure to hide behind her so he couldn't be seen. His curiosity got the best of him though, so he still cheated a peak from behind her kitchen apron.

"Why, hello!" Momma Roo called out across the threshold. "Can I help you?"

Turns out, Brer Rabbit needn't have dabbled in such paranoid eventualities as what to do if and when actual children came through that door. Because right in front of him were no children at all.

Towering above them was Brer Bear, only instead of his usual clothes, he was dolled up and in drag. A green dress that might've used to be curtains hung over his massive frame, and his old red hat had been traded for something somebody's grandma might wear on Sunday. It even had a little flower stuck in the brim and everything, (poor flower).

"Hello Ma'am" Brer Bear rumbled. "I have just moved into the neighborhood, and was looking uh..uh.." His speech was slow and stilted, a poor actor rehearsing lines that he couldn't quite remember. Brer Bear was a lot of things, but brains wasn't one of them. "I was looking for a playmate for my child. Someone his own age because he is so little.."

"Playmate?" Brer Rabbit wondered aloud peeking out from behind Momma Roo's apron.

In most any other situation, Brer Rabbit, might've laughed at what he saw. This time, though, Brer Rabbit felt his blood run cold. Standing next to Brer Bear, was an evilly grinning Brer Fox!

This didn't look like no regular Brer Fox, though. He'd changed things up, too. Instead of his usual all green attire, the Fox was dressed from top to bottom in a sailor suit. And based on how short the shorts were, (not to mention the bulky roundness beneath them), Rabbit didn't reckon that Fox had enlisted in the navy.

"Of course! Of course!" Momma Roo said. "Come in. I was just baking a cake!"

"Cake?" Brer Bear positively drooled before a quick elbo to his thigh from Brer Fox made him remember himself.

"Momma!" Brer Rabbit Yelled. "That's not a baby that's-!"

Momma Roo picked him up and pressed a finger to his mouth. "Hold on, sweetie. Grown-ups are talking."

Brer Fox let out a little snicker as they came in and were led into the playroom. Momma Roo took a seat and Brer Bear did the same. She placed Brer Rabbit on the carpet, and likewise Brer Fox was plopped down too.

"Go play with your new friend," she said to Brer Rabbit, giving him a pat on the rump.

"Uh, you too," Bear copied. "Be nice and play with your little friend."

"Yes, 'Mommy'," Brer Fox grinned a grin full of sharp teeth. "I'm gonna play reeeeeeal nice with my new little friend here. Just you wait and see!" There was a bit of the Devil in that old fox's eyes.

"But don't wander too far off," Momma Roo said. "Stay where we can see you. I know how babies can get into mischief when they're together." She didn't know the half of it.

"Yup," Brer Bear agreed. "Whole lotta mischief. You best behave yourself."

Brer Fox's expression soured a note. "Yes Mommy..." he said. "I sure will."

Rabbit hopped on over to the other side of the playroom; still well in sight should Brer Fox try and snatch him up, but far away enough so that Brer Rabbit might talk more freely. He'd need his words to get out of this mess.

As expected, Brer Fox followed. Brer Rabbit looked back and saw that Fox kept yanking his shorts up every couple of steps, stubbornly trying to make it so that the edge of his diaper stopped poking out the top of his elastic waistband. He walked funny, too; though the funny was mostly in his face. Kind of like someone trying to slowly get in a cold river stream instead of just dunking themselves. Brer Fox wasn't used to wearing a diaper just yet.

Good.

The only thing faster than Brer Rabbit's feet most days was his mouth. He'd already figured out what that scoundrel Brer Fox was likely up to. The old game of cat and mouse turning into a game of disguise and dress up. He was here to pose as Brer Rabbit's playmate and use the proximity so that he could finally have a decent chance at ringing Rabbit's skinny little neck.

The thing about scoundrels though is that they're clever; just not half as clever as they think they are. And as much as Brer Fox rightly scared Brer Rabbit, Brer Rabbit knew that doing the old pleading and whimpering routine wouldn't work this time. Time for a different approach.

"Brer Fox," Brer Rabbit scolded. "What do you think you're doing here, trying to muscle in on my top secret training? I thought of this baby thing, first, and it's no fair for you to try and copy it so quick! Not when I'm so close!"

"Just wait till I get alone with you," Brer Fox snarled. "I'mma get put in one of them baby cages with you, and then there'll be nothing you can..." he paused. "What are you talkin' about, Brer Rabbit?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking 'bout, Brer Fox." Brer Rabbit said. "Don't think you can fool me!"

"No, I promise!" Brer Fox replied. "I'm not tryin' anything tricky. I'm just here to skin you, is all. I'd do it elsewhere, mind you, but you're hiding in here."

Brer Rabbit made a scoffing sound. "Hiding? You think I'm hiding?"

Brer Fox lifted the sailor hat off his head briefly to scratch it. "Um...yeah? Ain't you?"

Rabbit sat down, seeming at ease, and ignoring the wet squelch beneath his bottom. "What? Did you think that I ran away from you and Brer Bear in the park yesterday and accidentally got caught by this crazy Kangaroo lady who thinks I'm her baby and I can't figure a way out so I'm stuck in a onesie havin' to play pretend?"

"Well, when you put it that way..." Brer Fox replied. "Yeah. Kind of."

Brer Rabbit waved it off. "No. I was training."

"Training"

"Fixing to whoop your butt." Brer Rabbit said matter of factly. "Give me a week or two of this and I would have been able to knock your head clean off. I'd be almost as strong as Brer Bear over there."

Brer Fox doubled over laughing. "You?! Knock my head clean off?" But he stopped and sat back up. "How is you wearing baby clothes and playing in a nursery gonna help you beat me?"

"Simple," Brer Rabbit lied. "I'm growin' up again."

The orange scoundrel frowned. "Growin' up again?"

Brer Rabbit crawled over to his most hated enemy and wrapped his arm over his shoulder as if they were good friends. He even saw Momma Roo and 'Momma' Bear point and comment on it.

"Think about it," Brer Rabbit whispered to the fox. "When folks are little, we wear this stuff. Diapers. Onesies. Sailor Suits. They get put in those baby cages and those high chairs and eat mush all day, and they drink outta bottles

and get burped.”

“Yeah, I know what a baby does,” Brer Fox scowled.

“Well what do babies do?” Brer Rabbit continued. “They grow up! And as soon as they get big enough, they stop doing baby stuff! That’s because if you keep wearing him and doing the baby stuff, you keep growing.”

Brer Fox shifted a bit and stroked his chin. “My grandmama always did say that youngin’s grew up too fast.”

The blocks in Brer Rabbit’s mind were stacking higher now. Time for the real fun. “Mine too! That’s why I’m doing this! I wanted to keep growing so I wouldn’t have to be scared of you no more!”

A hint of suspicion flared up in Brer Fox’s eyes. “Hmmm...”

“That’s why I’m here,” Brer Rabbit said. “After a couple weeks of this, I’ll shoot up like a weed and will be as big as you. Gimme two years, and I’ll be at least as big as Momma Roo.” He pointed to the woman who had taken him in and gotten him stuck like this.

“You can’t be as big as a kangaroo.” Brer Fox said. The blocks of this little scheme were starting to tumble.

Fortunately, Brer Rabbit knew a thing or two about stopping schemes from crumbling. “Look at her feet. Look at her ears. Think about that pouch! She was babied for a loooooong time. That’s why she’s so good with little ones and has this daycare.”

Brer Fox’s mouth hung open. “A Kangaroo ain’t nothin’ but a giant rabbit...” he said just above a whisper.

Scheme saved. “Yes, sir! Yes, sir! A rabbit that got some extra tender loving care. That’ll be me some day. I bet within a year, maybe even less, you could get to be as big as Brer Bear. You’d have the brains and the brawn then.”

Brer Rabbit saw the look of greed replace the look of hunger in Brer Fox’s eyes. He had him.

"She's a good momma," Brer Rabbit told him. "The best. Course, now that you're here, you can just skin me alive and eat me, and never learn her tricks." He sighed dramatically. "Neither of us are ever gonna get nearly as big as Brer Bear."

DING!

"Oh! Cake's done!" Momma Roo stood up off the couch and hopped off to the kitchen.

Brer Bear got up too, but he didn't follow Momma Roo into the kitchen. "I'm gonna knock your head cleeeean off!" He pounded one giant fist into the palm of his other giant hand.

Brer Fox leapt up and crinkled in between the two of them. "Hold on just a second, Brer Bear!" He looked nervously between the two of them. "We don't wanna seem suspicious do we?"

"But you said...?" Brer Bear growled.

"I know what I said...I know what I said!" Brer Fox stuttered. "But...but..."

"Who wants lunch?" Momma Roo called from the kitchen. "With cake for dessert?"

Brer Bear whipped his head around and sniffed at the kitchen. "Hmmm...cake?"

"Cake!" Brer Fox stuttered. "Yes! Cake! Can't smack somebody's head off before cake, can we?" Brer Fox toddled off to the kitchen, waving behind him. "Come on, uh...Mommy. Let's go have cake!"

Before Brer Bear could follow, Brer Rabbit was tugging at his dress. "Don't you hate how he bosses you around?" he whispered. "How he tries to bamboozle you with words?"

"Uh...yeah." Brer Bear agreed. "He's always talking like he's smarter or better'n me."

"Just remember," Brer Rabbit told him. "In here, you're his Momma. He has to

do what you tell him to." A funny look came on Brer Bear's face. Brer Rabbit wasn't sure he'd ever seen the look on Brer, but if he didn't know any better, he'd have called it an idea.

"Oh yeeeeeah..." Brer Bear said. "I'm the Momma. He's the baby."

"Mine shushed me, sure enough. You saw that, right?"

Brer Bear nodded. "I did. I did."

And so Brer Rabbit hopped happily into the kitchen, where Momma Roo fastened him into his high chair. "I've got a spare for your little one," she said to Brer Bear.

"Hey!" Brer Fox started to shout as he was lifted and put in the highchair beside him. Brer Rabbit just gave him a quick conspiratorial wink, and Brer Fox quieted down.

Momma Roo went over to the pantry. "Cake for dessert, but first lunch for the babies." She asked Rabbit, "What do you want, baby?"

"Oh, I'll have just about anything." Brer Rabbit said. "Anything except prunes, that is." He stuck out his tongue. "Yuch! Prunes!"

Momma Roo laughed lightly. "That's fine. I don't think you need any help answering Nature's call anyway." She got out a jar of mashed carrots. Rabbit's favorites.

"Yum yum!" Brer Rabbit said. "Sounds good to me!" Then remembering that there were three people he was supposed to be fooling, he made sure to end with, "Goo-goo!"

"That's right. Now eat it up all your food so you'll grow big and strong."

Brer Rabbit didn't have to be told twice. He opened his mouth and let Momma Roo spoon in heaps of the the orange mush. No chewing just meant he got to eat faster. Soon he'd get that cake. From the looks of it and smell of it, it was chocolate; Brer Rabbit's second favorite flavor (behind carrot cake of course).

Brer Bear and Brer Fox. "Excuse me," Brer Bear started, hat in hand. "I seemed

to have forgot my baby's..."

Momma Roo didn't even wait for him to finish. "Help yourself, ma'am. I've got plenty of baby food in the pantry and bottles of milk in the refrigerator."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am. My little boy appreciates it too." Between spoonfuls of baby food, Brer Rabbit wondered just how gullible Momma Roo really was. Brer Bear wasn't even putting on a falsetto. Copying Momma Roo to a tee, Brer Bear moseyed on over to the pantry and reached in. "What kind of baby food should I give to you?" He said to Brer Fox now trapped in his sailor suit.

Likewise, Brer Fox replied. "Anything but prunes."

"Gee Momma," Brer Rabbit spoke up. "It's so good that you let us babies eat whatever we want whenever we want!"

"Not all the time," Momma Roo replied. "Only when you want something that's good for you. It's Mommas who are really in charge." She gave him another spoonful.

Brer Rabbit swallowed and gave Brer Bear a wink. "Oh yeah. I forgot. I'd have to eat prunes if you said so."

The fake Momma Bear caught the wink and grabbed a jaw filled with purple mush. "I think baby's gonna have some prunes. Gotta keep you regular."

Brer Fox sat upright in the highchair. He went so far as to waggle his finger at the bear. "I said-!" His words were cut off when the plastic spoon nearly dived into his gullet.

Brer Bear was more than a might stronger than Momma Roo, and far less experienced at child rearing. Far less gentle, too, as it turned out. A head doctor might even go so far as to say that given his history of being tricked and verbally lashed by both Fox and Rabbit, that Brer Bear was enjoying the sudden imbalance of power. I'm no head doctor, though, just the person telling you this story.

"Nuh-uh-uh. Momma knows best." Brer Bear waggled his finger. "Now swallow."

Slowly, Brer Fox did. His sigh of disgust only gave Brer Bear another opening for a spoon. "But-!" Another spoonful. Brer Rabbit looked over to Rabbit and shrugged.

"Gotta eat your prunes so you can get big and strong." Bear said. "And regular.

"Don't worry," Momma Roo said to Brer Bear. "It's just a phase that they all go through. It doesn't mean anything."

Brer Bear seemed to agree.

They sat in relative silence. The "grown-ups" fed the "babies" and themselves. Bits of nuts and fruit were nibbled on daintily between spoonfuls of mush.

Having acclimated to the texture and method already Brer Rabbit found it a most pleasing affair. Having not acclimated to such things, himself, (and hating the taste of prunes besides), Brer Fox found it far less enjoyable.

Next came the bottles.

Brer Rabbit accepted his without complaint. "Such a good eater!" Momma Roo cooed. Even with his life hanging in the balance, Brer Rabbit couldn't help but feel good about that.

She gently patted his back, until a series of gentle burps rumbled out.

Brer Fox gurgled and glugged behind the bottle, trying not to choke as Brer Bear cradled him and shoved the nipple in his face. "Too mch!" He tried to say. "Too mch!" His own burps came out and mumbled and muffled with yelps as thunderous paws rained down on him.

Momma Roo slipped two fingers into Brer Rabbit's onesie. "Hmmm...wet." She said. "But I think you can make it a little longer without a change. You're still too little to potty train, anyways."

Brer Bear tried to check Fox's diaper but Fox slapped his hand away. "I'm dry! I'm dry! I don't need a change!"

"Babies don't know the difference between wet and dry or messy and clean."

Momma Roo said to Brer Bear. "That's why I check mine and tell him."

Brer Rabbit had to hold in his laughter just then. Brer Bear flipped Brer Fox over and pulled back the waist band. "All clean." Next he cupped the inside of Brer Fox's shorts. "Dry, too. Good baby!" Even through his orange fur, Brer Fox looked like he was on the verge of going beet red.

"Miss Bear?" Momma Roo said. "Would you mind looking after the little ones while I do some dishes and finish with the cake? It's just about cooled and needs to be decorated."

Brer Bear scooped up Rabbit and Fox. "Of course, Ma'am! I'd be happy too."

The pair were picked up and carried out to the playroom. As soon as they were out of sight and out of Momma Roo's earshot. Brer Fox found a bit of his pride. "What was that about?!" Brer Fox demanded. "I told you I wasn't wet! I told you I didn't want prunes either, an' I couldn't get a word in with that bottle in my mouth!"

Brer Bear crossed his arms. "Babies aren't in charge."

"I'm not really a baby!" Brer Fox said. "I just got in this getup so I can get big and strong!"

Bear was confused. "I thought you said we were doing this so we could knock Brer Rabbit's head clean off...?" He patted Brer Rabbit on the head. "No offense, Brer Rabbit."

"None taken, Brer Bear."

"Well yes," Brer Fox stuttered. "At first, but then I found out that...that..." A rumbling in his stomach and a funny feeling in his bladder caught his attention. Nature was knocking on Brer Fox's door all of a sudden. Prunes and a big bottle of milk will do that to a lot of folks.

"Sounds silly, doesn't he?" Brer Rabbit said. "Almost like a...?"

Feeling like a sage ol' Momma Bear, Brer Bear nodded down at Brer Rabbit, knowingly.

Brer Fox started doing a little dance in place, hoping to stall Nature's call. " `Scuse me a second, fellas. Where's the bathroom?"

"You don't need a bath," Brer Rabbit said. "Your Momma fed you real good. Didn't get a drop on ya!"

Brer Bear sat up a little straighter, seeming proud. "I just gotta go...go..." Brer Fox was shifting in place, holding himself. "Go! You know?!" Nature was pounding at the door, about to bust it down.

"I thought you were wearing that outfit cuz you wanted to grow like a baby," Brer Rabbit mocked. "Babies don't go nowhere special to do their business. They're always open for it."

"That's right," Brer Bear said. He gave Fox's cheek a pinch with one meaty paw. "You just go on and play. I'll change you later."

"But...but...but...but...! I'm grown! I know better!"

"You're the baby and I'm the Momma, and I say no!" There was more than a hint of finality in Brer Bear's voice. "You stay right here and play. I'll change you when I'm good and ready; just before napttime."

Tears welled up in the old scoundrel's eyes as the finality of Brer Bear's statement weighed in on him. Cleverness brought him this far. Greed got him in too deep. And pride was about to be shattered. "But I...I...I..." he whimpered. "I'm not really a baby. I'mma...I'mma big...big..." He stopped and swallowed. He shuddered. That's when anybody with a brain knew that Nature had just emptied itself right into the front of Brer Fox's diaper.

Funny thing about baby food, especially prunes and certain kinds of formula: It's easy to digest. Too easy. Runs right through you.

Brer Fox's bottom lip quivered. A hint of a tear formed. He covered his mouth with a gasp and slammed his eyes shut, gripping his guts. Nature wasn't done with him just yet.

Brer Rabbit watched with terrible fascination as Brer Fox was forced to open the door and fill his pants up like he thought he was gonna win something. The way he adjusted his stance gave even more of a clue, a kind of sickly bow legged

sight, like someone trapped in their own skin. The second meanest thing anyone could have done just then to Brer Fox was to ask him to sit down.

Brer Rabbit wasn't much better. But because he'd already learned to go with Nature and trick his pride, he was acres and acres better. Like most things, turns out potty training was more of a firm suggestion than an unbreakable law.

Having recently been in Brer Fox's shoes, Brer Rabbit almost felt sorry for Brer Fox. Almost. Not quite, but almost. He hopped over to Brer Fox, squishing with each hop. "Hey Brer Fox, there was one other thing about my secret growing up strong plan."

Disgusted Brer Fox leaned in. "What's that?"

"I lied. I did get myself stuck here hiding from you! You just ate a whole mess of prunes and got burped for nothin' except to make a state right in your pants!"

"Why you little!" Brer Fox yanked Brer Rabbit up the ears. "I'm gonna skin you alive, tar and feather you, and then everybody will be calling you Brer Chicken!"

Brer Rabbit looked past Brer Fox and up to the couch. "WAAAAAAAH!"

Brer Fox was snatched up so fast that that Brer Rabbit could have sworn that the angels themselves swooped down from the heavens to deliver divine retribution.

It was no angel though; just "Momma" Bear a little too into the role and enjoying his newfound power over "Baby" Fox.

"I'm gonna knock your butt cleeeeeeean off!" Brer Bear said. He yanked Fox's shorts down to his ankles and took him over his knee. The second worst thing that could have happened to Brer Fox was to have to sit down in a thoroughly used diaper. The first worst was what was happening.

"GOOD! BABIES! PLAY! NICE! BAD! BABIES! GET! SPANKED!"

Brer Fox tried to explain, but Brer Bear wasn't hearing it. He just kept spanking and spanking until Brer Fox was screaming his throat raw (which considering Bear's strength wasn't particularly long). "I'm sorry!"

"You're sorry?"

"Yes!"

"You're sorry, who?"

"I'm sorry...MOMMY!"

Brer Rabbit just pointed and laughed. What fun! What sport! He had so much fun he almost didn't notice as he finished soaking the already wet diaper around his bum. He definitely needed to be changed now.

That's when Brer Rabbit knew he'd found his laughing place.

Momma Roo hopped in from the kitchen. "What's all the commotion."

"I'm powerful sorry, Momma Roo," Brer Bear said. Brer Fox was tucked under one arm, his bottom sore and his pants still around his ankles. "My baby plum forgot his manners and I think I need to take him home to teach him some."

"Oh," Momma Roo said sounding disappointed. "Would you like a piece of cake to take home with you, then?"

Brer Bear shook his head. "No thank you. Mine hasn't earned any cake today, and I gotta watch my figure. I'm a Momma after all." Clearly, Brer Bear was digging up old memories of the things his mother used to say. Strange thing was, he was quickly gaining a talent for it. A real natural.

"Well how about I save him a slice for if he's good tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"You're so good with little ones," Momma Roo said, "I was thinking I might hire you to come on by and help me. Play with the kids. Make sure they behave. Make sure you bring your little one, too."

"What?" Brer Fox called out. "Come by and help you? But he's no-!" Brer Fox was cut off by a big paw slamming his muzzle shut. Brer Rabbit pretended to help and offered Brer Fox a pacifier.

"How much?" Brer Bear asked.

"A quarter a minute."

"A QUARTER A MINUTE?!" Brer Bear took the pacifier and stuck it between Fox's lips just so that he had a free hand. He reached out and shook Momma Roo's. "YES MA'AM! THANK YOU MA'AM! ME AND MY BABY WILL BE RIGHT HERE EARLY TOMORROW MORNING!"

Brer Rabbit laughed as the duo tromped away. If Bear was as stubborn as he usually was- maybe doubly so if he was getting paid for it- then Brer Fox was gonna be stuck in strollers and such for a loooooong time. This really was a great trick.

Except...

Brer Rabbit tugged at Momma Roo's apron. "Excuse me, ma'am."

Momma Roo looked down at Brer Rabbit, eyes full of love. This all started because he took advantage of her kindness and gullibility. People who meant him harm was one thing. Nice folks like Momma Roo were another. "Yes, dear?"

"I think you should know. I'm not really a baby. Not in the uh...traditional sense that is."

"I know."

Brer Rabbit was dumbfounded. "You do? Since when?"

"About three seconds after we met."

"But why?"

"Just because you're growing older doesn't mean you've grown up," Momma Roo told him. She winked and picked him up. "Besides, I like a good trick, too."

Brer Rabbit leaned into Momma Roo and for the first time in a long time he hoped for something for himself besides pulling one over on somebody. "Does that mean I can stay?"

"As long as you'd like." Momma Roo told him. She checked his diaper. "Let's get you changed."

And that's the story of the last great trick of Brer Rabbit. A trick so good, he convinced himself to stay. Some say he's still there at Momma Roo's Daycare. Getting the second childhood that he never have. Some say that Brer Bear and Brer Fox still come by too, though Brer Fox is much less happy about it. I can't say why he's complaining. He gets three squares and a crib. Though he never got used to the attire.

Serves him right though, if you ask me.

If you ever come across them, be sure to give them my regards. Just don't mention anything to them about you being a baby unless you really want it. Cuz Momma Roo will be listening and will likely hold you to it. And Brer Rabbit will talk circles around you until you end up there in the playpen with him.