

THE DANCING TURTLE
Adaptation from a Cajun folk tale
by Judy Constantinides

Long time ago near Bayou Lafourche lived Brother Rabbit and Brother Bear who were best friends. Now, Brother Rabbit was clever and quick and mostly he did the talking and the thinking for the two. Brother Bear was rather slow and clumsy and mostly he followed along after his friend and did what he was told.

One morning, Brother Rabbit was out taking the air when he heard sweet beautiful music floating across the Bayou. Following the music, he drew closer, peeked through the palmetto leaves and saw Turtle dancing and playing her flute. She played her flute loud and soft, fast and slow, high and low, and as she played, she danced back and forth, forward and backwards, round and round. Turtle was having a grand time and she danced and played so sweetly all the creatures of the Bayou stopped to listen. Except for Brother Rabbit, who was thinking how woouoonderful it would be to have TURTLE STEW for dinner!

Well, by and by, Turtle finished her dance and stopped playing her flute and settled down to sleep, and all the creatures of the Bayou went on about their business. But Brother Rabbit sneaked up on Turtle as she was snoozing in the sun, grabbed her tail, flipped her over onto her back and dragged her all the way back to his house, where he locked her in a cage, flute and all.

“Brother Bear! Brother Bear! Come see what I caught us for dinner!” shouted Brother Rabbit. Brother Bear came lumbering along and peered into the cage.

“What’s this, Brother Rabbit, what’s this?” he asked, scratching his head in perplexity. “Looks like a rock to me.”

“Oh, no, it’s not a rock, Brother Bear, not a rock *at all*--this is a fine turtle and she’s going to make a woouooooonderful turtle stew!”

Turtle heard Brother Rabbit and drew her head and her tail farther into her shell, trembling with fright.

“Brother Bear, you stay and watch Turtle now while I go find us a cooking pot and invite our friends and relations to dinner tonite,” and Brother Rabbit went off to do his errands, rubbing his hands with glee.

Brother Bear sat down on a rock and watched Turtle carefully, but she didn’t move, so finally he started to snooze a little. Turtle stuck her head out of her shell cautiously and looked around. Then she began to think how she was going to get out of her fix, and she came up with a plan. Picking up her flute she began to play. The sweet notes floated out of her cage and tickled the ears of Brother Bear, who rubbed his eyes and started to listen.

“Oh, Turtle,” he said, “play some more--it is soooo beautiful!”

Turtle played loud and soft notes, high and low notes, fast and slow notes, and Brother Bear listened.

“Brother Bear,” Turtle coaxed, “I can dance beautifully too, but this cage is too small to do it well.”

“Well, Turtle,” said Brother Bear, “I will let you out of your cage for just a moment so you can show me your dance.”

Brother Bear unlocked the cage and let Turtle out. “Now play and dance Turtle,” he said, “play and dance!”

Turtle played her flute and she danced her dance, backwards and forwards, side to side, round and round....backwards and backwards, backwards and backwards until she reached the edge of the Bayou and plop! splash! Turtle dove down under the water and swam away as fast as she could and she didn't stop until she was back in her home.

Brother Bear stood on the bank and scratched his head in confusion. “Turtle, come back!” he called, but Turtle did not come back.

“Oh, oh, what's Brother Rabbit going to say? He's going to be mighty angry with me for letting Turtle go.”

Brother Bear thought as fast as he could. He grabbed the rock he had been sitting on and painted it to look like Turtle and put it into the cage. Just in time! Along came Brother Rabbit with a big black pot, skipping through the trees, and behind him came all their friends and relations all ready to eat some wooodoo wonderful turtle stew. Brother Rabbit got the water boiling in the pot, went and got the rock that he thought was Turtle and dropped it in the pot to cook. When some time had passed, he called everyone to the table and proudly poured the stew into a giant bowl. Clunk! the rock fell out of the pot and broke the bowl.

“Brother Bear!” yelled Brother Rabbit. “Where is Turtle? This is just an old rock!”

“Oh 'scuse me Brother Rabbit! 'scuse me!” Brother Bear said. “Turtle played her flute for me and it was so beautiful I let her out of her cage so she could play and dance for me just for a minute. And she played high and low notes, and loud and soft notes and she danced forwards and backwards and backwards and backwards 'til she reached the Bayou and she jumped in and swam away!”

“Oh well,” said Brother Rabbit shaking his head, “I guess since we aren't going to have turtle stew tonite, we'd better do the same as Turtle--let's dance and play music and let the good times roll!” So Brother Rabbit and Brother Bear and all their friends and relations gathered 'round and played music and danced and sang all night long down by the Bayou, but they never did get to eat turtle stew. And Turtle made sure every time after, that when she danced and played it was in the middle of the largest pond in the swamp!

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for reader, flute and string quintet

Cello

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