

TWO AMERICAN FOLK TALES

Jesse James and the Widow

retold by S. E. Schlosser

One day, as Jesse James and his gang were riding through Missouri, they saw a farmhouse and stopped to ask for something to eat. A widow lived there with three small children. She didn't have much in the house, but shared with them what she had.

It was while they were eating lunch that Jesse James noticed that something was bothering this generous widow. He questioned her about it, and she broke down and told him her story. The mortgage was due on the house that very day, and since her husband had died, she did not have the money to pay it. Her landlord was not a generous man, and was sure to put her children and herself out on the street.

"How much money do you need to pay the mortgage?" Jesse asked the widow.

"Fifteen hundred dollars," the widow sobbed.

Jesse James took out his money bag, counted out \$1500 dollars and presented it to the widow.

"I can't take this," she protested, but Jesse James insisted she use the money to pay off the mortgage.

"Just make sure you get a receipt," he warned her, and she promised that she would.

Then he got a description of the man, and left with his gang.

Jesse James and his gang waited in the woods near the house until the man had collected his money from the widow. Then they rode out onto the road and stole their money back from the landlord.

Source: <http://www.americanfolklore.net/folktales/mo.html>

Why Opossum Has A Bare Tail (Creek/Muscogee Tribe)

retold by S. E. Schlosser

One day, Opossum was walking in the woods around sunset when he spied Raccoon. Now Opossum had always admired Raccoon because he had a beautiful tail with rings all around it.

So Opossum went up to Raccoon and said: "How did you get those pretty rings on your tail?"

Raccoon stroked his fluffy long tail fondly and said: "Well, I wrapped bark around the tail here and here and here," he pointed. "Then I stuck my tail into the fire. The fur between the strips of bark turned black and the places underneath the bark remained white, just as you see!"

Opossum thanked the Raccoon and hurried away to gather some bark. He wrapped the bark around his furry tail, built a big bonfire, and stuck his tail into the flames. Only the bonfire was too hot and too fierce. It instantly burned all of the hair off the Opossum's tail, leaving it entirely bare.

Opossum wailed and moaned when he saw his poor tail, but there was nothing he could do but wait for the fur to grow back. Opossum waited and waited and waited. But the tail was too badly burnt by the fire and the fur did not grow back. Opossum's tail remained bare for the rest of his life.

Opossum tails have been bare ever since.

Source: <http://www.americanfolklore.net/folktales/al3.html>