

A LIVING IN THE COUNTRY
SHORT TALE

MR.
MISCHIEF



HARTLEY STEVENS

Mr. Mischief

A Living-In-The-Country Short

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A Living-In-The-Country Short Tale

By

Hartley Stevens

Though young in years, he was an old soul when it came to the sneaky -- sneaky.

I remember this tale so well, because I was on the outside looking in. It was one of the few times my brother did what he always did, but didn't involve me when it came to the consequences.

Rex was a first grader. Wiry, lean and tough as pine bark. He loved school, as I did. But not for any academic reasons, which he abhorred. He was a true, social animal. We didn't get much opportunity for socialization on the farm. We were commanded by the boss, my father, to be each others' best friend.

To Rex, school was all play. Loud talking, friends, sports and teasing. Even as a six-year-old, he was constantly in trouble. He talked in class, he was too rough at recess, he traded favors for lime-green Jello at lunch, he ground pencils in the sharpener until they were dust, he pulled pig-tails, he went in the girls' restroom by mistake, he...

I was always scared for the whippings at home, when trouble from school was announced. Not Rex. He was just too damn tough for his own good. Just too damned tough.

By the second semester of his first-grade year, he had a record—not an arrest record, but a reputation. Ms. Fowler, his teacher, was intense about the learning process. She was strict, but still a great teacher. She was in it for the learning, for the kid’s learning. Rex was a serious impediment to classroom order. The elementary school principal, Dr. Braxton, was an excellent administrator, yet she loved the *bad* boys. I always saw her give them a wink during trying times. She had a serious soft-spot for Rex, but never once winked at me.

And so it came to pass that the four of us, the family, all sat around the dinner table. Rex’s transgressions were the topic of conversation over heavenly, fried chicken.

The dinner table was a long rectangle. Big Danny, Daddy, sat at the head, of course. Rex sat to his left, me at the right-hand of the Father and Mama beside me. We didn’t have a television, but soothing Christian music was allowed at all times.

The Boss spoke. “Mama says that Ms. Fowler took a knife off you at recess today.”

Rex stirred his frizzle-grits. He never liked to eat when we were young. My dad always came to the table and would remove his belt and hang it over the back of Rex’s chair as a warning.

“Yes sir.” He wasn’t stupid, just ornery.

“It was a firecracker last week, if I remember?”

“Yes sir.”

“And you took some little boy’s Jello the week before?”

“Yes sir.”

“Each time, you got the paddle at school?”

“Yes sir.”

“That paddle don’t seem to work on a hard-head like you.”

“No sir.”

I finished my plate, asked for seconds, which my Mama was only too happy to retrieve while I basked in the glory of his pain. No TV drama was this good.

“You want a whuppin’?”

Whuppin’s, whippings and spankings were of a different breed altogether. Spankings were at the low end, a couple of whacks with a belt. Whippings were one notch up, spankings-squared. There was no definite end of a ‘whuppin’, except for my father’s muscle tolerance—or until he gave out of breath. I only remember two of those in my life.

“No sir.”

“You will never get another paddling at school. Your mother is going to go down there and tell them that you’ll never git another paddling. Because if you do—you get another paddling at school this whole term—then a whuppin’ is what you’ll get at home. You understand me boy?”

“Yes sir.”

I loved my brother. Did, do, and beyond to eternity.

But he *did* need a ‘whuppin’ —especially one that didn’t involve me. With a shaded grin, I worked extra-hard to help Mama with the dishes that night.

I’ll give him this, he made it all the way to Thursday of the following week. But on that day, he turned from the urinal and pee’d on the pants of the boy next to him.

Ms. Fowler snatched him up by the scruff and marched him down to the office. He was intimately familiar with the surroundings.

Straggle-haired and at the end of patience, Ms. Fowler fairly barked at Dr. Braxton. “He’s passed my reach. He’s very intelligent, but he is beyond the definition of distraction.”

Dr. Braxton didn’t wink, didn’t smile. She was a smoker, back when that was permitted in the teacher’s lounge and she had the lip wrinkles to prove it.

“Young master Rex. Did you urinate, did you pee, on Paul at the urinals?”

Flagrantly troublesome, he still was never rude. “I reckon I did.”

“And can you tell me why?”

Simple and truthful. “His leg was just kinda... you know... there. He wears fancy pants.”

Dr. Braxton stood with patience. She took the long board from the wall and wrapped the leather strand around her wrist. “It’s five licks today. Assume the position, against the desk.”

Ever present and in the moment, yet always polite, Rex said, “My Daddy said I wasn’t to get any more whippings at school.”

This was a new one. She’d always had the green-light when it came to Rex and corporal punishment. She set the large board on the table and un-tethered her wrist.

“Big Danny said you were no longer to be paddled at school?”

With intense faux-integrity he said, “Yes ma’am. No more paddlings at school. That’s what he said.”

Dr. Braxton nodded, pointed to the phone on her desk. “Ms. Fowler, call the mother.”

The old, rotary dial phone made its sounds. Two rings, then the answer. “Mrs. Stevens, this is Ms. Fowler, Rex’s teacher.”

I wasn’t there, but I can imagine my Mama going into a self-described ‘conniption fit’.

“I’m sorry, what did he do?”

Fowler lurched into the void. “I’ll tell you what his latest sin was. He urinated on a boy in the bathroom. What kind of—”

She was cut off by Dr. Braxton snatching the receiver from her hand. “Mrs. Stevens, this is Principal Braxton.”

Acquaintances on the other end.

“Yes, well, young Mr. Rex tells us... he says, his father said, he was no longer to be paddled at school for his transgressions.”

Mama warbled unintelligible sounds. Then, “No, Dr. Braxton. That’s not what his father said. He said the home whippings would be worse, if he got a paddling at school. Do your job, paddle away.”

Dr. Braxton hung up then, with the patience of Saul, she explained the conversation to my brother. Then she asked Ms. Fowler, “Get another woman from the desk. I want another witness.”

A tight bun shuffled into the room, she left the door open. She’d had too many encounters with the likes of Rex. She sneered at what was to come.

Dr. Braxton tethered her wrist, she rubbed the pine. “Rexy, I know that *you* know what you’re doing here. Assume the position.”

Rex spanked his pants, rubbed his face and got his *mean* on. Six-year-old Rex looked deep into the principal’s eyes. “I understand Doc, I know what you have to do. But, one thing before you go whaling on me...”

Dr. Braxton moved around her desk. “What’s that son?”

He got that look on his face, neither remorse nor defiance, but still hard. “Before you go whipping my ass, Dr. Braxton—sorry for the ‘ass’ thing. Before you do it, I need you to know one thing.”

Pity bloomed on her face. She knew the home punishment to come. “What’s that, Rexy?”

Rex wiped at non-existent tears. “I need you to know Dr. B...”

“What Remy?”

“I need you to know... I love *you*.”

The End

Before You Go...

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