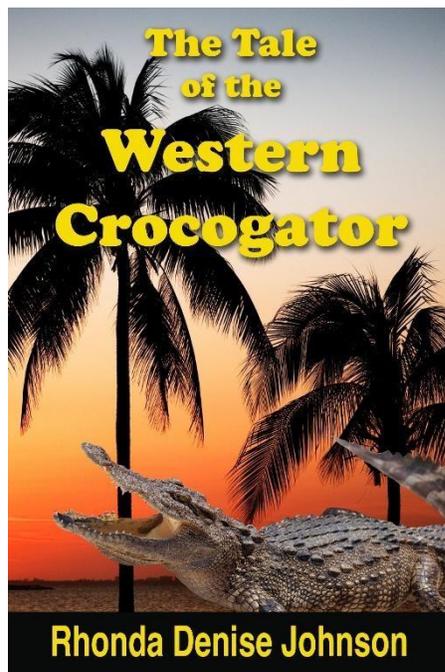


[Return to Reader home page](#)

The Tale of the Western Crocogator cover 1



The Tale of the Western Crocogator

A Short Story

Rhonda Denise Johnson

Copyright 1997 by Rhonda Johnson

All rights reserved

The Tale of the Western Crocogator

The crocogator is an urban legend in the African American tradition. In “The Tale of the Western Crocogator,” I take this legendary figure out of his native home in New York’s Harlem and send him to Los Angeles. In his adventure, he finds out things about himself he had not known and develops a new appreciation for his female companion.

I been fooling with you younguns all day. Now your mama and papa call to say they going to dinner. And gone leave me to fool with you all night? No, sir, it’s time for you younguns to go to bed.

“...”

Say what? You old enough to do what? Gone tell me this California. Like I don’t know. I been many places, and younguns is younguns in any place. Y’all got a place. To bed is your place this time of night. Y’all still just kids. Think you something. Well, I know something will put you under the covers quick. Ain’t nowhere but under the covers will keep away the crocogator.

“...”

Say what? You been where? And you think you too old for fairy tales? Ain’t talking about no fairy tales. Crocogator eat up every fairy he see. Now listen, do you younguns know the tale of the crocogator?

“...”

What? You never heard of one? Why, crocogator’s the baddest dude in Harlem.

“...”

Don't tell me this is the West Coast. I been out here a while, and I ain't never yet seen no dude out here bad as old crocogator. I see y'all got rattlesnakes out here, but we been dealing with snakes since Eden. They ain't nothing new and nothing to be scared of. Just don't take no apples from them, though. Rattlesnake make a nice appetizer for a crocogator meal. Once we had an old cowboy met up with a crocogator on Lenox Avenue. Tried to wrangle him, but cowboy didn't know crocogator got teeth at both ends. So cowboy bend over to tie crocogator's hind legs and got his nose bit off.

“...”

Y'all younguns sure can ask some questions. Leave it to you to ask how he let loose with teeth at both ends. He don't. That's what makes him so mean.

Now hush. I'll tell you about a crocogator name of Stackodaddy. Stackodaddy had a woman and...

“...”

I told y'all younguns to hush. Asking questions like that, young as you is. Don't know how they did it. Got sense enough not to ask. And you reckon he'd tell me? I'm just telling what I seen. I got eyes in the back of my head and can see legends and things what ain't quite true, but I ain't gonna get my nose bit off asking no crocogator about his business with no woman.

Anyway, Stackodaddy had a woman. And she was just as bad as he was. Woman name of Stella. Six feet tall and black as your daddy's shoe polish. He ask her why she so mean. She say cuz if she try to be nice to him, he prolly get tired of her and go find somebody else. She knew him up and down. Knew his mama couldn't breast feed him with all them teeth.

“...”

Yeah, he was born with 'em. He chewed up his bottle and ate it. Ate a barbequed side of beef at two months old. Ate up his warden at twenty years old. By time he was thirty, five men in Harlem had bullets with his PIN number on 'em. He brandished a big Pepsodent smile when he took them all out—and I don't mean to dinner.

Stackodaddy tried to make Stella mind like they say a woman s'pose to do. I reckon when they got that rule, they didn't have Stella in mind. She sure didn't seem to know. Stackodaddy did what he could. He say, "Stella, I don't want you wearing your neckline so low. Ain't no other men's got no business looking at you." Stella took off her shirt right there and went outside in her brassiere and say, "Daddy Stack, it's my business."

"..."

I knew I shouldn'ta mention that word front of you. Just say *brassiere* and y'all have a fit. Silly chillun. Thought you was so grown. Anyway, Stackodaddy say, "Stella, you see all these teeth. Now you come back in here and don't you do that no more."

See, even the baddest dude in Harlem ain't nothing in the hands of a bad woman. Stella laughed. She waved at the postman.

One day Stackodaddy thought about his life. He thought about having a bunch of little crocogators around the house to pass on his legend. He knew Stella was the onliest woman in the world could handle a brood of crocogators without getting herself ate up. So he asked her to marry him. He bought her a 'gagement ring and went down to the tall woman's store for a bunch of lacy underclothes. He say, "You can't go outside in these."

But Stella say, "No, I'm going to school. Gonna get educated and do something with myself. Ain't nothing you plan to do with me."

Stackodaddy let loose at both ends. He cussed for three days. He thought about tying Stella up and calling the preacher to his house, but he ain't never yet raised his hand at Stella. And I ain't saying he was scared to. Old crocogator ain't scared of nothing. He just ain't never got around to doing it. He saw a friend fall on his knees and beg his woman to marry him. She did, but that's something else a crocogator don't do.

So Stella determined she gone go to school, and Stackodaddy have to handle his own heart. These was strange feelings Stackodaddy hadn't knowed he was capable of. He almost cried crocogator tears. But he caught hisself, hitched up his britches, packed up his grip and headed west, looking for something new.

First thing he noticed about California was the funny-looking trees. They looked like God used them to put on his shaving cream. And all the houses was flat on the ground. You didn't have to climb stairs to get to the bedroom. Made of that stucco. Look like cornmeal. Look like it would crumble away. Not solid like a brick.

Anyway, he found himself a place near some railroad tracks. Didn't mind the trains at night cuz he wasn't hardly home no how. Anyway, one morning he found himself at home sleeping off this new stuff called tequila. Didn't take much tequila to kill anybody but a crocogator. But that's something y'all younguns don't need to know nothing about 'cept to stay away from it.

Anyway, he was half sleep when it felt like a train come by. A powerful, big train. Musta had a hundred cars, cuz it just roll on and on. The lights went out, and something crashed in the kitchen. The dresser fell over and the bed just went thump thump bump bump.

Stackodaddy wonder to himself, *What kinda train is this?* He staggered cross the floor. Staggered worse than tequila. He looked out the window. Didn't see no train, but the whole mother ground was stomping at the Savvoy. Old crocogator ain't scared of nothing, but he

jumped out the window cuz he didn't want to be buried in no cornmeal. He saw somebody flailing around in the dark. He say, "What the hell's going down?"

Somebody say, "Your roof is going down, dummy."

Stackodaddy bared his teeth. All of them. "Oh, so you a little signifying monkey is you. Well I'll kick your..."

Monkey say, "you'll kiss what?"

Stackodaddy did more than kiss him. He ate him up.

After while the ground lay still. Crocogator mighty shook up, but he ain't scared of nothing. He looked around town cuz he missed having a woman with Stella back home getting educated. He saw somebody he might like and asked her for her phone number. She just gave it to him like she been waiting all her life. She say, "When you gone call me?"

He say, "When you gone be home?"

She say, "Whenever you want."

Stackodaddy thought to hisself, *Stella wouldn't never say nothing like that*. Stella make a man say "When will I see you again?" cuz you never know. The baddest dude in Harlem got to be the baddest dude in LA ain't can't do with a cream-puff woman. Woman made of cornmeal. He sashayed away as fast as he could 'fore she got ate up by little crocogators.

Anyway, he looked around town, then one day he opened his door and the baddest woman in Harlem stepped cross his threshold.

She say she found him in the phone book.

He say he thought she was getting educated.

She say she got the 'sociate degree and gone finish in LA cuz Harlem ain't the same without the crocogator. 'Sides all the mens is scared to date the baddest woman in Harlem and educated too. But crocogator ain't scared of nothing.

Stackodaddy say he believe she right.

She agreed to marry him if he ain't gone try to make her mind.

He say he can't no how and he don't want her to go away no more.

She say she'd go if she wanted to but right now she didn't want to.

So they got married and had a bunch of little crocogators. Like y'all younguns, they thought they was bad. The baddest little crocogators in LA gone be like their daddy and not be scared of nothing.

They didn't want to go to bed neither, but Stackodaddy got them teeth at both ends and he got them coming and going. He put them in the bed and made them get under the covers. He say "Anything what ain't under the covers will get bit off."

Why y'all younguns ain't in bed yet? Don't you know crocogator's still in town? He maybe live down the street, and he go round like Sanny Claus to make sure all the younguns is under the covers. Now git! Don't let me have to tell you again. I'll call him. I'll sure call him.

###

The end

I hope you enjoyed The Tale of the Western Crocogator.