

The Cat Came Back: A Comic Negro Absurdity

(original 1893 Harry S. Miller version)

Words & Music:
Harry S. Miller

Per Wikipedia, this was also known as "The Cat Came Back: A Nigger Absurdity"; which makes sense when one looks at the date and reads more about Miller. Miller was a Tin Pan Alley composer from New York & Chicago and specialized in tunes that used a Georgian Black dialect. I assume that these songs were picked up both by vaudeville performers (remember, Al Jolson's big hit was "Mammy" - sung in blackface well into the 20th century) and minstrel shows (which also disparaged blacks with tired stereotypes). That said, here are the original published words to "The Cat Came Back".

Dar was ole Mister Johnson, he had troubles ob his own --
He had an ole yaller cat that couldn't leave its home.
He tried eb'ry thing he knew to keep de cat away --
Eben sent it to de preacher, an' he tole it for to stay.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

De cat did hab some company one night out in de yard,
Some one frowed a boot-jack, an' dey frowed it mighty hard,
Caught de cat behind de ear, she thought it rather slight
When along dar comes a brick-bat an' in knocked it out of sight.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

Away across de ocean dey did send de cat at last,
Vessel only out a day and making water fast;
People all begin to pray, de boat begin to toss,
When a nodder vessel came along and took de people off.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

On a telegraph wire sparrows sitting in a bunch;
Cat a feeling hungry, thought she'd like 'em for a lunch.
Climbing softly up de pole, an' when she reached de top
Put her foot upon de 'lectric wire, which tied her in a knot.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

One time did gib de cat away to a man in a balloon
An' tole him for to gib it to de man in de moon;
But de b'loon it busted, sho, an' eb'rybody sed
It wer seben miles away or more dey picked de man up dead.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

De cat was a possessor ob a fam'ly ob its own
Wid seben little kittens til dar comes a cyclone.
Blowed de houses all apart an tossed de cat around;
While de air was full ob kittens not a one was eber found.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

De cat it were a terror and dey say it wer be best
To gib it to a nigger who was going out West.
De train going 'round de curve struck a broken rail,
Not a blessed soul aboard de train wer left to tell de tale.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

A man down on de corner swore to kill de cat at sight,
Loaded up a musket full ob nails and dynamite,
Waited in de garden for de cat to come around;
Half-a-dozen little pieces ob de man was all dey found.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

Little boy took de cat away, he got a dollar note.
Took it down to de ribber in a little open boat.
Tied a brick around its neck an' stone about a pound;
Now dey're grappling in de ribber for a little boy that's drowned.

But de cat came back, he couldn't stay no long-er,
Yes de cat came back de very next day,
De cat came back -- thought she were a goner,
But de cat came back for it wouldn't stay away.

While de cat lay a-sleeping an' a-resting one day,
'Round came an organ grinder an' he began to play;
De cat look'd around awhile an' kinder raised her head
When he played Ta-rah-dah-boom-da-rah, an' de cat dropped dead.

But its ghost came back to tell you about it --
Yes, its ghost came back, between you and I.
Its ghost came back (maybe you will doubt it),
But its ghost came back just to bid 'em all goodbye.