

# *How Jakhals Fed Oom Leeuw*

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African

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*Easy*

*16 min read*

“One day in the early morning, before any people were awake, Jakhals was prowling round and prowling round, looking for something to eat. Jakhals is not fond of hunting for himself. Oh, no! he likes to wait till the hunt is over, so that he can share in the feast without having had any of the work. He had just dragged himself quietly to the top of a kopje—so, my baasjes, so—with his stomach close to the ground, and his ears moving backwards and forwards”—Outa’s little hands, on either side of the kopdoek, suited the action to the word—“to hear the least sound. Then he looked here, he looked there, he looked all around, and yes, truly! whom do you think he saw in the kloof below? No other than Oom Leeuw himself, clawing a nice big hamel he had just killed—a Boer hamel, baasjes, with a beautiful fat tail. Oh yes, Oom Leeuw had picked out a good one.

“Arré!’ thought Jakhals, ‘this is luck,’ and he sat still for a minute, wondering how he could get some of the nice meat for himself. He soon made a plan. A white thing fluttered in a little bush near him. It was a piece of paper. He picked it up and folded it—so—and so—and so—” the crooked fingers were very busy—“till it looked like a letter. Then he ran down the kopje in a great hurry and called out, ‘Good morning, Oom.’

“Morning, Neef.’

“I see Oom has killed a Boer hamel.’

“Yes, Neef, a big fat one.’

“Well, here is a letter from Tante,’ said Jakhals, giving the piece of paper to Leeuw. ‘As I was passing she asked

me to give it to Oom.'

"Leeuw took it and turned it this way, that way. He held it far from him, he held it close to his eyes, but he couldn't make it out at all. See, baasjes, Leeuw was one of the old-fashioned sort. He grew up before there were so many schools and good teachers"—here Outa's bright eyes winked and blinked flatteringly on Cousin Minnie and her pupils—"he was not clever; he could not read. But he didn't want anyone to know it, so he said:

"Jakhals, Oom has forgotten his spectacles; you had better read it out."

"Hm, hm, hm,' said Jakhals, pretending to read. "Tante says Oom must kill a nice fat Boer hamel and send it home at once by me. She and the children are hungry.'

"Well, that's all right. Here is the very thing. Tante is not very well. The Jew smouse's donkey she ate the other day disagreed with her, so we must coax her a little. I don't want to *say* anything, but you know *avrouwmens* is a dangerous thing when she is in a temper. So you had better take this hamel to her at once, and then you can have the offal for your trouble."

"Thank you, noble Oom, King of Beasts,' said Jakhals in a fawning voice, promising himself at the same time that he would have something more than the offal. 'How fortunate am I, poor humble creature, to have the King for my uncle,' and off he trotted with the sheep.

"Leeuw prowled further up the kloof, waving his tail from side to side." Had Outa had a tail he would have wagged it, but, as he had not, his right arm was slowly flourished to and fro to give point to his description.

"Here comes a little Steenbokje on its way to a veld dam for water. Ach! but it is pretty! It looks here, it looks there, with its large soft eyes. One little front foot is in the air; now it is down; the other goes up; down again. On it comes, slowly, slowly"—Outa's hands, bunched up to resemble the buck's feet, illustrated each step, the children following his movements with breathless interest. "Now it stops to listen." Outa was rigid as he bent forward to catch the least sound. Suddenly he started violently, and the children involuntarily did the same.

"Hark! what was that? What is coming? Ach! how Steenbokje skriks and shivers! A terrible form blocks the way! Great eyes—cruel eyes burn him with their fire. Now he knows. It is Leeuw!—Leeuw who stands in the path! He growls and glares at Steenbokje. Steenbokje cannot turn away. They stare at each other—so—just so—" Outa glares at each fascinated child in turn. "Steenbokje cannot look away, cannot move. He is stiff with fright.

His blood is cold. His eyes are starting out of his head. And then—voops!”—the listeners jump as Outa’s long arms suddenly swoop towards them—“one spring and Leeuw is on him. Steenbokje blares—meh, meh, meh—but it is no good. Leeuw tears him and claws him. Tip, tip, tip, the red blood drips down; s-s-s-s-s, it runs out like a stream, and Leeuw licks it up. There lies pretty little Steenbokje, dead, dead.” Outa’s voice trails away faintly.

The children heave big sighs. Little Jan’s grey eyes are full of tears. The old native’s graphic description has made them feel as though they had been watching round a death-bed.

“Yes, baasjes, Leeuw killed Steenbokje there in the kloof. He tore the skin off—skr-r-r-r—and bit through the bones—skrnch, skrnch, skrnch—and ate little Steenbokje for his breakfast. Then he went to the krantzies to sleep, for the day was coming and the light began to hurt his eyes.

“When he awoke it was evening, and he felt refreshed and rather hungry. My baasjes know a steenbokje is nothing for a meal for Oom Leeuw. But before hunting again he thought he would go home and see how Tante and the children were getting on, and whether they had feasted well on the nice fat hamel.

“But, dear land! What did poor Oom Leeuw find? The children crying, Tante spluttering and scratching with rage, everything upside down, and not even the bones of the hamel to be seen.

“Ohé! ohé! ohé!” cried Tante. “The bad, wicked Jakhals! Ach, the low, veld dog!”

“But what is the matter?” asked Leeuw. “Where is Jakhals?”

“Where is he? How should I know? He has run off with the nice fat hamel, and me—yes, *me*, the King’s wife—has he beaten with the entrails! Ohé! ohé!”

“And boxed my ears!” cried one of the cubs. “Wah! wah! wah!”

“And pinched my tail,” roared the other. “Weh! weh! weh!”

“And left us nothing but the offal. Oh, the cunning, smooth-tongued vagabond!”

“And all three fell to weeping and wailing, while Leeuw roared aloud in his anger.

“Wait a bit, I’ll get him,’ he said. ‘Before the world wakes to-morrow he’ll see who’s baas.’

“He waved his tail to and fro and stuck out his strong claws. His eyes glared like fire in a dark kloof when there is no moon, and when he brulled it was very terrible to hear—hoor-r-r-r-r, hoor-r-r-r-r,” and Outa gave vent to several deep, blood-curdling roars.

“Very early the next morning, when only a little grey in the sky shewed that the night was rolling round to the other side of the world, Leeuw took his strongest sjambok and started off to look for Jakhals. He spied him at last on the top of a krantz sitting by a fire with his wife and children.

“Ah! there you are, my fine fellow,’ he thought. ‘Well and happy are you? But wait, I’ll soon show you!’

“He began at once to try and climb the krantz, but it was very steep and high, and so smooth that there was nothing for him to hold to. Every time he got up a little way, his claws just scratched along the hard rock and he came sailing down again. At last he thought, ‘Well, as I can’t climb up, I’ll pretend to be nice and friendly, and then perhaps Jakhals will come down. I’ll ask him to go hunting with me.’”

Here Outa’s beady little eyes danced mischievously. “Baasjes know, the only way to get the better of a schelm is to be schelm, too. When anyone cheats, you must cheat more, or you will never be baas. Ach, yes! that is the only way.”

(Cousin Minnie would not disturb the course of the tale, but she mentally prescribed and stored up for future use an antidote to this pagan and wordly-wise piece of advice to her pupils.)

“So Leeuw stood at the foot of the krantz and called out quite friendly and kind, ‘Good morning, Neef Jakhals.’

“Morning, Oom.’

“I thought you might like to go hunting with me, but I see you are busy.’

“At any other time Jakhals would have skipped with delight, for it was very seldom he had the honour of such an invitation, but now he was blown up with conceit at having cheated Oom and Tante Leeuw so nicely.

“Thank you, Oom, but I am not in want of meat just now. I’m busy grilling some nice fat mutton chops for

breakfast. Won't you come and have some, too?'

"Certainly, with pleasure, but this krantz is so steep—how can I get up?"

"Ach! that's quite easy, Oom. I'll pull you up in an eye-wink. Here, vrouw, give me a nice thick riem. That old rotten one that is nearly rubbed through,' he said in a whisper to his wife.

"So Mrs. Jakhals, who was as *slim* as her husband, brought the bad riem, and they set to work to pull Oom Leeuw up. 'Hoo-ha! hoo-ha!' they sang as they slowly hauled away.

"When he was about ten feet from the ground, Jakhals called out, 'Arré! but Oom is heavy,' and he pulled the riem this way and that way along the sharp edge of the krantz"—Oom vigorously demonstrated—"till it broke right through and—kabloops!—down fell Oom Leeuw to the hard ground below.

"Oh! my goodness! What a terrible fall! I hope Oom is not hurt. How stupid can a vrouwmens be! To give me an old riem when I called for the best! Now, here is a strong one. Oom can try again.'

"So Leeuw tried again, and again, and again, many times over, but each time the rope broke and each time his fall was greater, because Jakhals always pulled him up a little higher, and a little higher. At last he called out:

"It's very kind of you, Jakhals, but I must give it up.'

"Ach! but that's a shame!" said Jakhals, pretending to be sorry. "The carbonaatjes are done to a turn, and the smell—alle wereld! it's fine! Shall I throw Oom down a piece of the meat?"

"Yes please, Jakhals,' said Leeuw eagerly, licking his lips. 'I have a big hole inside me and some carbonaatjes will fill it nicely.'

"Ach! my baasjes, what did cunning Jakhals do? He carefully raked a red-hot stone out of the fire and wrapped a big piece of fat round it. Then he peered over the edge of the krantz and saw Leeuw waiting impatiently.

"Now Oom,' he called, 'open your mouth wide and I'll drop this in. It's such a nice big one, I bet you won't want another.'

"And when he said this, Jakhals chuckled, while Mrs. Jakhals and the little ones doubled up with silent laughter

at the great joke.

“Are you ready, Oom?”

“Grr-r-r-r-r!’ gurgled Leeuw. He had his mouth wide open to catch the carbonaatje, and he would not speak for fear of missing it.

“Jakhals leaned over and took aim. Down fell the tit-bit and—sluk! sluk!—Leeuw had swallowed it.

“And then, my baasjes, there arose such a roaring and raving and groaning as had not been heard since the hills were made. The dassies crept along the rocky ledges far above, and peeped timidly down; the circling eagles swooped nearer to find out the cause; the meerkats and ant-bears, the porcupines and spring-hares snuggled further into their holes; while the frightened springboks and elands fled swiftly over the plain to seek safety in some other veld.

“Only wicked Jakhals and his family rejoiced. With their bushy tails waving and their pointed ears standing up, they danced round the fire, holding hands and singing over and over:

“Arré! who is stronger than the King of Beastland?

Arré! who sees further than the King of Birdland?

Who but thick-tailed Jakhals, but the Silver-maned One?

He, the small but sly one; he, the wise Planmaker.

King of Beasts would catch him; catch him, claw him, kill him!

Ha! ha! ha! would catch him! Ha! ha! ha! would kill him!

But he finds a way out; grills the fat-tailed hamel,

Feeds the King of Beastland with the juicy tit-bits;

Eats the fat-tailed hamel while the King lies dying;

Ha! ha! ha! lies dying! Ha! ha! ha! lies dead now!”

Outa crooned the Jakhals’ triumph song in a weird monotone, and on the last words his voice quavered out, leaving a momentary silence among the small folk.

Pietie blinked as though the firelight were too much for his eyes. Little Jan sighed tumultuously. Willem cleared his throat.

“But how did Jakhals *know* that Oom Leeuw was dead?” he asked suddenly.

“He peeped over the krantz every time between the dancing and singing—like this, baasje, just like this.”

Outa’s eyes, head and hands were at work. “The first time he looked, he saw Oom Leeuw rolling over and over; the next time Leeuw was scratching, scratching at the rocky krantz; then he was digging into the ground with his claws; then he was only blowing himself out—so—with long slow breaths; but the last time he was lying quite still, and then Jakhals *knew*.”

“Oh! I *didn’t* want poor Steenbokje to die,” said little Jan. “He was such a pretty little thing. Outa, this is not one of your nicest stories.”

“It’s all about killing,” said Pietie. “First Leeuw killed poor Steenbokje, who never did him any harm, and then Jakhals killed Oom Leeuw, who never did *him* any harm. It was very cruel and wicked.”

“Ach yes, baasjes,” explained Outa, apologetically, “we don’t know why, but it is so. Sometimes the good ones are killed and the bad ones grow fat. In this old world it goes not always so’s it must go; it just go so’s it goes.”

“But,” persisted Pietie, “you oughtn’t to have let Jakhals kill Oom Leeuw. Oom Leeuw was much stronger, so he ought to have killed naughty Jakhals.”

Outa’s eyes gleamed pityingly. These young things! What did they know of the ups and downs of a hard world where the battle is not always to the strong, nor the race to the swift?

“But, my baasje, Outa did not make up the story. He only put in little bits, like the newspaper and the

spectacles and the Jew smouse, that are things of to-day. But the real story was made long, long ago, perhaps when baasje's people went about in skins like the Rooi Kafirs, and Outa's people were still monkeys in the bushveld. It has always been so, and it will always be so—in the story and in the old wicked world. It is the head, my baasjes, the head," he tapped his own, "and not the strong arms and legs and teeth, that makes one animal master over another. Ach yes! if the Bushman's head had been the same as the white man's, arré! what a fight there would have been between them!"

And lost in the astonishing train of thought called up by this idea, he sat gazing out before him with eyes which saw many strange things. Then, rousing himself, with a quick change of voice and manner, "Ach! please, Nooi!" he said in a wheedling tone, "a span of tobacco—just one little span for to-night and to-morrow."

His mistress laughed indulgently, and, unhooking the bunch of keys from her belt, handed them to Cousin Minnie. "The old sinner!" she said. "We all spoil him, and yet who could begin to be strict with him now? Only a small piece, Minnie."

"Thank you, thank you, my Nonnie," said the old man, holding out both hands, and receiving the coveted span as if it were something very precious. "That's *my* young lady! Nonnie can have Outa's skeleton when he is dead. Yes, it will be a fine skeleton for Nonnie to send far across the blue water, where she sent the old long-dead Bushman's bones. Ach foei! all of him went into a little soap boxie—just to think of it! a soap boxie!"

He started as a young coloured girl made her appearance. "O mij lieve! here is Lys already. How the time goes when a person is with the baasjes and the noois! Night, Baas; night, Nooi; night, Nonnie and little masters. Sleep well! Ach! the beautiful family Van der Merwe!"

His thanks, farewells and flatteries grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away in the distance, as his granddaughter led him away.

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