



# *The Bargain for the Little*

## *Silver Fishes*

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South African

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*Intermediate*

*20 min read*

The youngest of the three children had brought in a tortoise from the spruit behind the house, and was half-indignant and half-amused at the stolid refusal of Mr Tortoise to put out his head in response to any stroking of his shell, or to any shaking or bumping on the ground. “He’s just that cunning, Ou’ Ta’, I never did see anything like him,” cried the little boy to Old Hendrik.

“Well, he is tink hisse’f mighty cunnin’ sometimes,” answered the old Hottentot genially. “But dere was once now, when Klein Hahsie want him to ketch him de little silver fis’es.”

“Oh, but that Klein Hahsie—that Little Hare—he is just such a skellum!” broke in Annie.

“Well,” hesitated Old Hendrik, “Little Hahsie he is a bit smart, but den he don’t get nob’dy’s bones broke anyhow. An’ besides, Ou’ Sculpat dere—de Tortoise—he was yust too lazy for ornament, let alone use.

“It was a’ dis way. Little Hahsie he was a-hoppin’ an’ a-floppin’ along down de spruit one day, an’ he come to where de water was a-runnin’ clear an’ fine, an’ what should he see in de big water-hole but all de little silver fis’es yust a-glintin’ an’ a-twinklin’. Allah Crachty! he fair squot right down an’ watch ’em, dey look dat good an’ fine.

“But Little Hahsie ain’t yust like a otter in de water, dough dere ain’t no otter of ’em all could beat him at wantin’ dem fis’es. So he squot, an’ he study, an’ he tink till at last he see Ou’ Sculpat a-danderin’ down, an’ makin’ no mo’ to do but fair flop right in to de water, an’ sort o’ hang in dere wid his nose yust out, like a bird might be a-hangin’ in de air wid his beak catchin’ on to a cloud.

“Little Hahsie fair cock his one year at dat to see Ou’ Sculpat do it so easy, an’ so twenty-shillin’s-in-de-pound comfy like. ‘By jimminy, Sculpat, you looks at home all right,’ ses he.

“I is,’ ses Sculpat, an’ he don’t take so much trouble as to turn his head when he speak to Little Hahsie behind him, much less to turn his body. He sort o’ shift one eye half-way round, an’ dat’s quite enough too, tink he.

“An’ what does you do when you is at home?” ax Hahsie.

“Dis,’ ses Sculpat, an’ he don’t take de trouble to keep dat one eye half-way round, but let it swing back like a swivel.

“Little Hahsie he flick his years like he tink someb’dy ought to yust kick de stuffin’ out o’ Sculpat. ‘But,’ ses he, ‘you has to eat What you do den?’

“Eat,’ ses Sculpat—yust de one word.

“Oh,’ ses Hahsie, like he’d like to do dat kickin’ hisse’f. ‘Den you does ha’ to shift yourse’f a bit sometimes.’

“But I don’t,’ ses Sculpat. ‘I’s in my dinner now—dese water-weeds!’

“Oh, you is, is you?” ses Little Hahsie, an’ he’s yust dat hairy over it dat he biffs de ground wid his back leg an’ he yump over his own shadda. ‘You’s fair dat lazy you’d rader eat weeds, when all de time dem pretty little silver fis’es is a-twinklin’ an’ a-slantin’ roun’ you! Allah Crachty!’

“What’s I want wid twinkly little fis’es?” ses Sculpat. ‘Weeds is nice now, but fis’es—’

“You can keep all de weeds if you gi’es me de fis’es!” ses Hahsie, like he never did hear no such a fathead notion.

“An’ how if I keeps all de weeds anyhow, an’ lets you do de same wid de twinkly little fis’es, hey?” ses Sculpat, an’ his face kind o’ shine like he’d be a-grinnin’ if it wahnt too much trouble.

“Little Hahsie squot down agen at dat What Ou’ Sculpat ses is yust so right flat an’ square dat Hahsie he feel right flat too. But he see de little silver fis’es a-flashin’ agen an’ he fair cahnt give up yet. ‘Dat’s a’ right,’ ses he; ‘but I’s got my good clo’es on, an’ dey won’t do to get wet. What say you now if you was to ketch me out a little string of ’em, hey?’

“What ses I?” ses Sculpat. ‘Rats!’

“Little Hahsie he’s yust dat mad he pick up one foot to go, but he’s yust dat gone on dem fis’es dat he put anoder foot down to stop. ‘Look-a’-here,’ ses he. ‘If you ketch me out some o’ dem fis’, den I’ll fetch you lots o’ de nicest garden stuff from de farm yonder.’

“Garden stuff!” ses Sculpat. ‘Huh!—here’s weeds!’

“An’ what if I eats up dem weeds?—what den?” ses Hahsie.

“Dere’s mo’ weeds in de nex’ water-hole,’ ses Sculpat.

“But I’ll eat dem too,’ ses Little Hahsie.

“Ou’ Sculpat he yust lift his head clear o’ de water, an’ he stick it straight up, and he laugh as quiet an as ghosty as if dat’s de richest ting he’s ever hear. ‘Oh! you yust go on an’ eat ’em,’ ses he. ‘Do go on an’ eat ’em—an’ by dat time your little tummy ’ll be swell’ an’ swell’ till you’s all blowed up like a poisoned pup. Ho, yis! you start in an’ eat ’em, do!’ an Ou’ Sculpat he laugh like he’s never a-gun’ to stop.

“Dat make Little Hahsie dat huffy he fair snift agen. ‘You might laugh some mo’,’ ses he. ‘Why don’t you go on an’ laugh some mo’? You’ moufs big enough, an’ you’s ugly enough.’

“But I ain’t half as ugly as you’d be if you eat all de water-weeds, or dropped in an’ tried to ketch de little twinkly fis’es,’ ses Sculpat; an’ he laugh agen worsen an’ ghostier dan ever.

“Dat stir up Little Hahsie till he’s fair clawin’ mad, but yust when you tink he’s ’gun to begin to ploppin’ out bad

words, right den he seem to wilt down into quiet, an' his face straighten out all de wrinkles like a boy when you gi'es him sixpence for sweets. He tinks dere's anoder way, an' all he ses is—'All right, Sculpat. Good mawnin',' and he offs, an' he don't turn round needer, nor let on at all when he hear Ou' Sculpat laughin' some mo' behind him. He on'y grin an' grin.

"But 'stead o' goin' home he goes off to see Ou' Waxa, de Honey-bird. 'I wants some honey,' ses he.

"So does I,' ses Waxa; 'an' wouldn't I like to get some too!'

"But ain't you got none?" ses Little Hahsie, wid his bofe years cocked straight up wid s'prise. 'Ain't you got yust a leetle teenty bit? Yust a scrape o' honey'll do me.'

"Dere's de place where de honey was,' ses Waxa, showin' him de hole in de tree. 'I 'specs dere's all de scrape you wants—but I don't know about de honey.'

"De drippin's 'll do. What you's dropped 'll do me,' ses Hahsie. 'Ou' Sculpat he ain't never taste honey yet, so he won't know de diffrence of a bit o' dirt or two. De calabas' I'll put it in'll look big all de same, weder dere's lots o' honey inside it or on'y one drop,'—an' wid dat he pulls out a big calabasie wid a long bottle neck, an' 'gins to scrape up de drippin's what Ou' Waxa drop when she pull de bits o' de comb out o de tree.

"Well, it come de nex' day, an' Ou' Sculpat was dere in de water-hole, feelin' de weeds agen his mouf an' not takin' de trouble to make up his mind weder he'll eat or not, when here comes Klein Hahsie, yust a-hoppin' an' a-skippin', wid a calabas' in his one hand, an' a-beatin' it wid his toder like a drum. An' all de time he's a-keepin' time wid singin':—

"Hahsie, Hahsie;

Calabasie;

Dum! Dum! Dam!

"Ou' Sculpat open his eyes at dat. He turn his head, an' on dat Little Hahsie gives a extry kick an' a stride. 'Here you is, Sculpat!' ses he. 'Taste dis!' an' he sticks a long feder into de calabas' an' pulls it out wid a flouris' an' holds it up. 'Open your mouf, an' shut you' eyes, an' see what comes dat's spiffin' nice,' ses he.

"Ou' Sculpat he wave hisse'f to de side o' de pool like he dunno weder it's wort while or not; but he comes out an' he stick his head up an' open his mouf an' shut his eyes—an' dat's why he don't see de grin come in Little Hahsie's face, nor' de double extry flouris' he give de feder. Den Hahsie draw de feder troo Ou' Sculpat's mouf

an' out agen.

“As soon as he taste dat honey Ou' Sculpat's eyes flew wide open an' his mouf begun a-workin' all ways at once. 'Allah Crachty! but dat's fair fine-o,' ses he. 'Yust gi'e me a little teenty bit more o' dat, won't you?'

“Ah, now,' ses Hahsie. 'Yestiday when I ax you for some little fis'es you was mighty snifty. To-day I gi'es you some o' my nice stuff an' you ses—“Mo.” An' I ses—“What for?”

“Well, I'll gi'e you a fis' if you gi'es me some more o' dat,' ses Sculpat.

“Hoho!' ses Hahsie. 'Yestiday I offer' to fetch you garden stuff an' you ses you's got weeds. S'pose I says now—“What do I want wid fis'es—I's got honey?”—eh?’

“Ou' Sculpat he try to tink dat over, an' dis time it's Little Hahsie is a-grinnin'. 'Yestiday you laugh' at me,' ses Hahsie. 'What price you laugh at yourse'f to-day? You wouldn't gi'e me what you had, but you want me to gi'e you what I got. What's de difference, Sculpat?’

“Honey,' ses Sculpat; 'an' you's got it. How many silver fis'es you want for dat calabas' o' honey?’

“Ten,' ses Hahsie.

“Right,' ses Sculpat. 'You be here in half an hour an' I'll have de ten ready.’

“Well, Little Hahsie he hop off wid de same ole drummin' on de calabas', an' de same ole song, 'Hahsie, Hahsie, Calabasie! Dum! Dum! Dum!' Ou' Sculpat he sets to work to ketch dem fis'es.”

“But, Ou' Ta',” interrupted the eldest boy, “how does Ou' Sculpat catch fish?”

“Ah!” answered the old Hottentot slyly; “dat's yust what Ou' Sculpat ain't never let anyb'dy see yet. Dat's why he sent Klein Hahsie away till he done it. But anyhow, he ketched dese yere ten, an' laid 'em out on de green o' de grass, all white an' shinin' silver in de sun; dey looked mighty fine an' tasty, I can tell you. An' den along comes Little Hahsie agen wid de calabas'.

“Here's de fis'; where's de honey?’ ses Ou' Sculpat.

“Here's de honey: count de fis',’ ses Hahsie.

“Dey counted out de fis an' dere was de ten a' right, an' one little one beside for bargain. 'Dat's de style,' ses

Hahsie. 'Now open your mouf an' shut your eyes an' see if dis stuff ain't rippin' nice.'

"Ou' Sculpat he shut his eyes an' he open his mouf, an' Little Hahsie he flouris' de feder out o' de calabas' wid a mighty ole twirl, an' den he draw it troo Ou' Sculpat's mouf slow an' slower till it come out across. Den he yabs it half-way down his froat an' draw it back. 'Dere!' ses he. 'Ain't dat nice?'

"Ou' Sculpat he don't say a word. He yust smack his lips an' work his mouf an' den plank it wide open for more.

"Little Hahsie he sort o' consider dat open mouf, an' he grin into it, an' he slant his eye into it like he's lookin' down it to see what Sculpat had for breakfas', an' he pat it under de chin, an' den, while he's a-considerin' it some mo', Ou' Sculpat open his eyes an' ketch ole Hahsie a-squintin' down his gumses. 'Well,' ses he, 'what about de rest of it?'

"Dat's exac'ly what I wants to know,' ses Hahsie. 'Dat's why I's a-lookin' down your froat—to see where de rest is went to. Here's me tipped up de calabas', an' den I rub a taste nicely in your mouf, an' den I drop in all de rest, so you'd have a nice ten minutes suckin' on it. It drop in a' right, but, Allah Crachty! where's it go to? Tell me dat, Sculpat, for dere ain't no sign of it where I looked.'

"Ou' Sculpat stretch his eyes wide open at dat. 'It must ha' gone somewhere,' ses Hahsie. 'Hyer's de calabas' quite empty for you to see.'

"Ou' Sculpat cock his eye into de calabas', but he cahnt see nawtin' dere, an' he look at Little Hahsie, an' Little Hahsie look back like dis is de funniest merrikle ever was. Den Sculpat dive into de inside o' his shell to see if p'r'aps de honey might ha' got dere, but it ain't; an' at last he ses—'What's you goin' to do about it?—you's got de fis'es.'

"An' you's got de honey,' ses Little Hahsie.

"Where's it den?' ses Sculpat.

"I put it into dis end o' you,' ses Hahsie. 'You's de one to know what's happen' to it after dat.'

"Ou' Sculpat he consider a bit. 'Well, I did feel sometin' ticklin' half-way down my froat,' ses he, 'but I didn't feel it no funder.'

“P'r'aps dat's de way you's made inside,' ses Hahsie; 'half-way down an' den a drop.'

“Ou' Sculpat he didn't say nawtin' to dat; he stick to business. 'When's I to have some mo'?' ses he.

“When I wants more fis', ' ses Hahsie, his big eyes fair a-shinin' wid wonderin' about dat honey still.

“An' when's dat?' ses Sculpat.

“When I feels like I'd like some,' ses Hahsie, an' he don't grin a bit.

“To-morro'?' axes Sculpat.

“A' right,' ses Hahsie. 'You have de fis'es ready an' I'll see about gettin' some mo' honey. So long, den,'—an' Mr Hahsie he picks up de ten fis'es an' de little one, an' he offs.

“Ou' Sculpat watch him go a minute. 'Dat stuff is taste rippin',' ses he. Den he flop into de water agen, but he don't eat any weeds.

“Well, de nex' day dere's Ou' Sculpat ready wid de ten fis'es but dere ain't no little one extry dis time, an' hyer comes Hahsie wid de same ole drummin' an' singin'—'Hahsie, Hahsie, Calabasio! Dum! Dum! Dum!'

“But dis time when Ou' Sculpat open his mouf an' shut his eyes he don't shut 'em; not quite; he keep one eye half-open. Dat's de way he seen de gay old flouris' Little Hahsie give de feder, an' de little little drop o' honey dere is on it too. Dat's de way also he seen de grin on Little Hahsie's face, when Hahsie's a-lookin' into his mouf, where he's touchin' spots here an' dere wid de feder, an' he get dat s'picious dat his one eye spring wide open—an' dat's de way Little Hahsie seen yust in time dat he's a-lookin'.

“But Little Hahsie he's a gamey ole bird, an' he don't turn a hair nor let on in any sort o' way. He yust holds de feder up like he's waitin', an' he ain't a bit astonish' when Ou' Sculpat lets de oder eye spring open too. 'How's de taste o' dat, Sculpat?' ses he.

“It's a-gun' to taste better when dere's more on top of it,' ses Sculpat. 'Come on wid de rest.'

“Well,' ses Hahsie, 'you ain't no picaninny. You don't want me to stick a bib under your chin an' feed you wid a feder. Here you is—take de calabas' an' eat de lot, an' I'll take de fis.'

“Sculpat he take de calabas', an' Hahsie he pick up de fis'; but he ain't got two skips away before Ou' Sculpat

sings out: 'Hey yeh! Where's-dis honey?'

"Where you's got it, in de calabas'," ses Hahsie.

"Dat's yust where I ain't got it," ses Sculpat. 'Dere's de calabas' an' dere ain't de honey; you look for yourse'f.'

"Little Hahsie look dat astonish"—you never seen no sich astonishment. 'Why,' ses he, 'I went to Ou' Waxa, de Honey-bird, myse'f wid dat calabas', so's to be sure an' get it full. An' now I yust turns my back an' you ses dere ain't none in it!'

"An' dere was yestiday, too," ses Sculpat.

"Yes," ses Hahsie, comin' one step back. 'Dere was yestiday; an' I 'specs dat's what's de matter to-day, same as 'yestiday. You's gulluped de lot down in one, an' now you wants to bluff me out dat you ain't had none.'

"Dat sort o' talk won't do," ses Sculpat 'Hyer's de calabas' an' hyer ain't no honey. You can look for yourse'f.'

"Hahsie looks, an' he cahnt see no mo' inside dat calabas' dan' anyb'dy else can see de inside of any other bottle-neck calabas'. But he make like he's fair astonish', all de same. 'By jimminy! it do look like it's empty,' ses he. 'But I'll tell you what, you let me have dat calabas' agen, an' I'll take it back to Ou' Waxa an' ax her how it is dere ain't no honey in it. An' to-morro' when you has de fis'es ready I'll bring two lots o' honey, one for to-day as well as to-morro'. I'll ha' to go quick, dough, if I's gun' to ketch Ou' Waxa 'fore she go. So long, den,' an' he offs wid de calabas' an de fis' 'fore you can say rats!

"Ou' Sculpat ses on'y one ting: 'To-morro' I has de honey fust'. Den he ins to de water-hole an' tinks.

"Well, to-morro' comes, an' de ten fis'es dis time is all laid out in a wheel, wid deir little tails togeder an' deir heads out, so dey look mighty fine in de sun. But dis time here come Little Hahsie widout no calabas' at all. 'Hello!' ses Sculpat, 'where's de honey?'

"Dat's yust what Ou' Waxa said when I took her de calabas'," ses Hahsie. 'An' dis time she ain't a-trustin' me wid de honey. You's got to bring de fis'es an' come wi' me an' get de honey from her yourse'f.'

"Well," ses Sculpat, 'I's gun' to see dis ting troo dis time. I's comin'. Show de way, den,' an' he slings de fis'es two by two on his back an' off dey pop.

"Off dey pops an' dey gets five yards on de road an' Hahsie finds hisse'f a hundred yards ahead, so he squots an'



waits for Sculpat to come up. 'You better to shift yourse'f a bit mo' livelier,' ses he.

"Dey gets twenty yards furder, an' Little Hahsie finds hisse'f hoppin' along on his lonesome near out o' sight ahead. 'Allah Crachty!' ses he, 'I might do a sleep while I's waitin' like dis,' an' as soon as Ou' Sculpat comes up—'Is you goin' to get dere to-day, or is it to-morro?'" ses he.

"But Ou' Sculpat he ain't got time for talkin'. He yust keep on flip-a-flipperin' along de road, an' Hahsie he starts wid him agen.

"Well, dis time Hahsie gets clean out o' sight over de rise, till after a while he comes tearin' back, head fust, an' his front legs havin all dey can do to keep out o' de way o' de hind 'uns. 'Look-a'-hyer, I's been over de rise, an' dere'll be no honey left by de time we get dere at dis rate.'

"Ain't I a-comin'?" ses Sculpat.

"Yes,' snort Hahsie, 'an' so's good times—but when? We's a-gun' to lose dat honey if we don't do sometin'. Here,' ses he, an' he hops alongside Ou' Sculpat. 'Gi'e me de fis'es an' I'll go on an' get de honey till you come,' an' 'fore Ou' Sculpat can consider dat, Little Hahsie snatches de fis'es off his back. 'You keep comin' along till you gets dere,' ses he, an' off he scoot wid his legs goin' yards long.

"I'll come along in time,' ses Sculpat as Hahsie go over de rise. 'I'll keep on. I wants dat honey.'

"Well, he did keep on," concluded Old Hendrik. "He kep' on an' he kep' on, over de rise an' over de veldt. An' he look about an he ax about, but—he ain't never come along to dat honey yet. An' he never will."

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