



The Flying Lion

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South African

Intermediate
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“Once upon a time,” remarked Outa, thoughtfully, “Oom Leeuw used to fly.”

“O-o-o-oh!” said the children all together, and their eyes widened with terror at the picture called up by Outa’s words.

“Yes, my baasjes, and then nothing could live before him. His wings were not covered with feathers: they were like the wings of Brother Bat, all skin and ribs; but they were very big, and very thick, and very strong, and when he wasn’t flying they were folded flat against his sides. When he was angry he let the points down to the ground—tr-r-r-r—like Oubaas Turkey when he gobble-gobble-gobbles and struts before his wives—tr-r-r-r, and when he wanted to rise from the ground he spread them out and flapped them up and down slowly at first—so, my baasjes; then faster and faster—so, so, so—till he made a big wind with them and sailed away into the air.”

Outa, flapping his crooked arms and puffing out his disproportionate chest, seemed about to follow suit, but suddenly subsided again on to his stool.

“Ach, but it was a terrible sight! Then, when he was high above the earth, he would look down for something to kill. If he saw a herd of springbokke he would fly along till he was just over them, and pick out a nice fat one; then he would stretch out his iron claws, fold his wings and—woops!—down he would fall on the poor bokkie before it had time to jump away. Yes, that was the way Oom Leeuw hunted in the olden times.

“There was only one thing he was afraid of, and that was that the bones of the animals he caught and ate would be broken to pieces. No one knew why, and everyone was too frightened of Oom Leeuw to try and find out. He used to keep them all at his home in the krantzies, and he had crows to look after them, two at a time—not like the ugly black crows that build in the willow-trees near the dam, but White Crows, the kind that come only once in many years. As soon as a white crow baby was found it was taken to Oom Leeuw—that was his order; then he kept it in the krantzies of the mountains and let it grow big; and when the old White Crows died the next eldest became watchmen, and so there were always White Crows to watch the bones when Oom Leeuw went hunting.

“But one day while he was away Brother Big Bullfrog came along, hop-hop-hoppity-hop, hop-hop-hoppity-hop, and said: ‘Why do you sit here all day, you Whitehead Crows?’

“And the White Crows said: ‘We sit here to look after the bones for Oom Leeuw.’

“‘Ach, but you must be tired of sitting!’ said Brother Big Bullfrog, ‘You fly away a little and stretch your wings. I will sit here and look after the bones.’

“The White Crows looked this way and that way, up and down and all round, but no! they couldn’t see Oom Leeuw, and they thought: ‘Now is our chance to get away for a fly.’

“So they said ‘Cr-r-raw, cr-r-raw!’ and stretched out their wings and flew away.

“Brother Big Bullfrog called out after them: ‘Don’t hurry back. Stay as long as you like. I will take care of the bones.’

“But as soon as they were gone he said: ‘Now I shall find out why Oom Leeuw keeps the bones from being broken. Now I shall see why men and animals can live no longer.’ And he went from one end to the other of Oom Leeuw’s house at the bottom of the krantz, breaking all the bones he could find.

“Ach, but he worked quickly! Crack! crack, crack, crack! Wherever he went he broke bones. Then when he had

finished he hopped away, hop-hop-hoppity-hop, hop-hop-hoppity-hop, as fast as he could. When he had nearly reached his dam in the veld, the White Crows overtook him. They had been to the krantz and, foei! they were frightened when they saw all the broken bones.

“Craw, crawl!” they said, “Brother Big Bullfrog, why are you so wicked? Oom Leeuw will be so angry. He will bite off our nice white heads—craw, crawl!—and without a head, who can live?”

“But Brother Big Bullfrog pretended he didn’t hear. He just hopped on as fast as he could, and the White Crows went after him.

“It’s no good hopping away, Brother Bullfrog,” they said. “Oom Leeuw will find you wherever you are, and with one blow of his iron claws he will kill you.”

“But old Brother Big Bullfrog didn’t take any notice. He just hopped on, and when he came to his dam he sat back at the edge of the water and blinked the beautiful eyes in his ugly old head, and said: ‘When Oom Leeuw comes tell him I am the man who broke the bones. Tell him I live in this dam, and if he wants to see me he must come here.’

“The White Crows were very cross. They flew down quickly to peck Brother Big Bullfrog, but they only dug their beaks into the soft mud, because Brother Big Bullfrog wasn’t sitting there any longer. Kabloops! he had dived into the dam, and the White Crows could only see the rings round the place where he had made a hole in the water.

“Oom Leeuw was far away in the veld, waiting for food, waiting for food. At last he saw a herd of zebras—the little striped horses that he is very fond of—and he tried to fly up so that he could fall on one of them, but he couldn’t. He tried again, but no, he couldn’t. He spread out his wings and flapped them, but they were quite weak, like baasjes’ umbrella when the ribs are broken.

“Then Oom Leeuw knew there must be something wrong at his house, and he was toch too angry. He struck his iron claws into the ground and roared and roared. Softly he began, like thunder far away rolling through the kloofs, then louder and louder, till—hoor-rr-rr-rr, hoor-rr-rr-rr—the earth beneath him seemed to shake. It was a terrible noise.

“But all his roaring did not help him, he couldn’t fly, and at last he had to get up and walk home. He found the poor White Crows nearly dead with fright, but they soon found out that he could no longer fly, so they were not

afraid of him.

“Hoor-rr-rr-rr, hoor-rr-rr-rr!” he roared. “What have you done to make my wings so weak?”

“And they said: ‘While Oom was away someone came and broke all the bones.’

“And Oom Leeuw said: ‘You were put here to watch them. It is your fault that they are broken, and to punish you I am going to bite your stupid white heads off. Hoor-rr-rr-rr!’

“He sprang towards them, but now that they knew he couldn’t fly they were not afraid of him. They flew away and sailed round in the air over his head, just too high for him to reach, and they called out: ‘Ha! ha! ha! Oom cannot catch us! The bones are broken, and his wings are useless. Now men and animals can live again. We will fly away and tell them the good news.’

“Oom Leeuw sprang into the air, first to one side and then to the other, striking at them, but he couldn’t reach them, and when he found all his efforts were in vain, he rolled on the ground and roared louder than ever.

“The White Crows flew round him in rings, and called out: ‘Ha! ha! ha! he can no longer fly! He only rolls and roars! The man who broke the bones said: “If Oom Leeuw wants me he can come and look for me at the dam.”’
Craw, crawl,’ and away they flew.

“Then Oom Leeuw thought: ‘Wait, I’ll get hold of the one who broke the bones. I’ll get him.’ So he went to the dam, and there was old Brother Bullfrog sitting in the sun at the water’s edge. Oom Leeuw crept up slowly, quietly, like a skelm, behind Brother Bullfrog.

“‘Ha! now I’ve got him,’ he thought, and made a spring, but Brother Bullfrog said, ‘Ho!’ and dived in—kabloops!—and came up at the other side of the dam, and sat there blinking in the sun.

“Oom Leeuw ran round as hard as he could, and was just going to spring, when—kabloops!—Brother Bullfrog dived in again and came up at the other side of the dam.

“And so it went on. Each time, just when Oom Leeuw had nearly caught him, Brother Bullfrog dived in—kabloops!—and called out ‘Ho!’ from the other side of the dam.

“Then at last Oom Leeuw saw it was no use trying to catch Brother Bullfrog, so he went home to see if he could mend the broken bones. But he could not, and from that day he could no longer fly, only walk upon his iron

claws. Also, from that day he learned to creep quietly like a skelm after his game, and though he still catches them and eats them, he is not as dangerous as he was when he could fly.

“And the White Crows can no longer speak. They can only say, ‘Craw, crawl.’”

“But old Brother Big Bullfrog still goes hop-hop-hoppity-hop round about the dam, and whenever he sees Oom Leeuw he just says ‘Ho!’ and dives into the water—kabloops!—as fast as he can, and sits there laughing when he hears Oom Leeuw roar with anger.”

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