



# *When Ou' Wolf Built His House*

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South African

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*Intermediate*  
*22 min read*

It was a day or two afterwards before the children caught Old Hendrik in the mood again. But sweet dumplings to dinner, with cinnamon sauce, had mellowed him this day, and they were quick to see it.

“But how did Ou' Wolf an' Ou' Jackalse first fall out, Ou' Ta'?” demanded the eldest boy.

“Dere never was no first fall out,” answered the old Hottentot with a sly grin, shifting his seat under the old mimosa to get the best of its shade before beginning. “Dere didn't need to be no first: it yust come natural. Ou' jackalse yust couldn't he'p hisse'f. Dar was Ou' Wolf; all de time so quiet, an' all de time a-workin' an' a-doin' sometin' for hisse'f. An' den dere was Ou' Jackalse; all de time so slim, an' all de time never a-workin' nor a-doin' anytin' 'cept to get out o' workin' an' doin' sometin' for hisse'f. Ou' Wolf he'd go a-huntin' for what he had to get; an' Ou' Jackalse he'd sit an' bake in de sun an' plan skellum for what he want to get. Natchally dey was al'ays fall out f'm de beginnin': dere wahnt no oder way to it.

“Look now, dat time when Ou' Wolf build his house—look what happen den. Dar was Ou' Wolf all jump-an'-ginger to get Missus Wolf married to him. But he cahnt get married till he build his house to put her in. So dere he was a-workin' away at darie house, yust so set to finis' it 'fore de time's up dat he don't har'ly gi'e hisse'f time to hunt enough to eat. He don't take but mighty little to breakfas', an' ahter breakfas' he yust slap de rest o' de

meat an' de bones into de pot to be cookin', ready agen dinner-time, while he's a-workin' away like crazy.

"Well, he gets to t'atchin' away, an' along comes Ou' Jackalse, an' he smell darie stew in de pot, an' 'fore you can wink he's on to it an' a-holdin' up dat lid. 'Allah man!' ses he, 'dat do smell good.'

"Ou' Wolf up on de roof-poles hears darie lid a-liftn', an' he look round yust in time. You should a-hear him shout, 'Ho, yeh! What for yeh lookin' in darie pot?' ses he, an' he grabs his two hands on de beam, an' sets one foot on it, as if he was yust a-comin' down in one yump, flop on Ou' Jackalse chest.

"'Mawnin'! Oom Wolf,' ses Ou' Jackalse, yust as s'prise' an' cheerful as sun-up. 'Glad it's you. I been a-wantin' some breakfas' yust so bad dat my tummy tink my troat's cut.'

"'Ho! you wants some breakfas', does you?' ses Ou' Wolf, mighty snifty. 'Well, you yust keep on a-wantin'. Dere ain't no breakfas' here for nob'dy. Dere's yust one dinner an' dat's for me. Darie meat in darie pot's it. I hain't no time to go a-huntin' for oder folks eatin': I got sometin' else to do,' ses he.

"Ou' Jackalse he put dat lid back mighty slow an' mighty sorry (like a little boy I knows when his mammy makes him put down de sugar pot at breakfas'), an' all de time he's watchin' Ou' Wolf out o' de corner of his eye to see if he's reg'lar raungin' mad about it or not. But Ou' Wolf reg'lar is.

"Ou' Jackalse he 'gun to tink p'raps he ain't a-gun' to get darie breakfas' so much ahter all. Den he sniff de smell agen, an' it ain't no manner o' use—four men an' a dog couldn't a-druv him away f'm dat smell; he yust ha' to have dat breakfas'.

"'So yeh's got sometin' else to do, has yeh?' ses he den, a sort o' slow an' hurt like. 'You mustto, I should say; an' it must be sometin' mighty busy to make you so snarley like dat when an ole friend like me t'ought you'd like him to take a bite o' breakfas' wid you.'

"Ou' Wolf he feel mighty mean, but den he tink on Missus Wolf, an' it ain't no use; he yust ha' to get dat house finis'. 'I cahnt he'p it,' ses he, stiff an' hairy. 'Dis yere house gotto be finis'. I hain't no time to be a-huntin' my dinner when dinner-time come. 'Sides, I'll be too 'ungry.'

"'Well,' ses Ou' Jackalse, shakin' his head as if he wouldn' ha' b'lieved it of Ou' Wolf if he ha'n't a-seen it. 'Well, if you feel like dat it must be sometin' pretty bad. What's you in such a Allah Crachty hurry to finis' dis house for anyhow?' ses he. 'Ou' Wolf he don't like to let it out, but he ha' to say sometin' to 'scuse hisse'f.' He outs wid it.

‘Goin’ to get married,’ ses he, sharp an’ spiky. ‘Dat’s what.’

“Oh, dat’s it, is it?” ses Ou’ Jackalse sort o’ brightenin’ up an half a-laughin’ all at once. ‘Well, dat is sometin’ to be a bit hairy about. If dat’s it, why I ain’t got nawtin’ more to say about it, but on’y yust to turn to an’ he’p you straightaway. If you’s goin’ to be married, den we’s yust gotto get dis house finis’,’ ses he, an’ he brace up an’ look as if he’s gettin’ a mighty fine speech off’n his chest.

“But Ou’ Wolf he ’members Ou’ Jackalse, an’ he don’t b’lieve in no sich a fine offer. “Tain’t no good,’ ses he. ‘Dat’s my dinner, an’ it ain’t a-gun’ to be nob’dy’s breakfas’.’

“But you cahnt insult Ou’ Jackalse nohow while he’s a-smellin’ dat smell. ‘It ain’t a-gun’ to be my breakfas’ nohow,’ ses he, mighty brisk and pleasant like. ‘I yust wouldn’ have it—now I knows what’s de matter—not if you wanted me to. You’ll want you’ dinner pretty bad when de time comes—a lot mo’ dan I shall’ (an’ here Ou’ Jackalse sort o’ skip his back leg out an’ wink at it), ‘so I’m yust a-gun’ to lend you a hand to get finis’,’ an’ he offs wid his coat an’ chucks it down. ‘Look out for me,’ ses he. ‘I’s a-comin’ up to dat t’atchin’.’

“Well, Ou’ Wolf he don’t know what to say. He feel dat mean he wish Ou’ Jackalse ’ud slip an’ break his neck comin’ up. But Ou’ Jackalse he ain’t a slippin’ while he ain’t had dat meat yet outen darie pot, an’ he comes up yust as chirpy as a finch in a peach tree. ‘Why, we’ll ha’ dis yob finis’ in no time,’ ses he, an’ he smack Ou’ Wolf on his back atween de shoulders dat hearty he jarred de frown right off’n his face.

“You’s too slow to shift you’ own shadda. See me now. I’ll lay de t’atch on dis lower row an’ you work on up to de top f’m dat,’ ses Ou’ Jackalse, as he slam one bundle o’ reeds at Ou’ Wolf an’ hitch anoder under his own leg on de rafter where he’s a-straddlin’. ‘You’s worse dan Ou’ Miss Kuraan for stan’in’ an’ yaw, yaw, yawin’,’ ses he.

“Well, Ou’ Wolf he cahnt yust feel like he’s a-likin’ it at all; he’s knowed Ou’ Jackalse too long for dat; but yet he cahnt yust see his way outen it needer. De longer dey work, de harder he get to studyin’ yust what Ou’ Jackalse is a-meanin’; an’ he tink so much an’ he tink so deep dat he clean forgot to watch yust what Ou’ Jackalse is a-doin’.

“An’ what was Ou’ Jackalse a-doin’ all de time, ses you? Why now, what would darie ou’ skellum be a-doin’ but doin’ skellum. First string o’ t’atch he lay along de rafters he’s mighty cheerful an’ mighty busy. Second string he lay along an’ you can see all de cheerful drop outen his face an’ see de grin begin to run an’ flicker where de cheerful was before. De t’ird string he lay an’ de fun begun to sheet in his eyes like de dry lightnin’ on a summer

night, an' he yust couldn't hold in no longer. He ketch hold o' de roots of his tail an' he fair whizz it round and round till he almos' make it hum, he feel dat full o' laughin' inside him. An' all dis time Ou' Wolf yust had his back to him, a-studyin' an' a-won'erin' what mischief make Ou' Jackalse want to he'p him. But he don't like to look round to watch somehow.

“Den de fourt' string Ou' Jackalse lay he work as quiet an' as slim as if he's a-stealin' it; an' de ting dat it's in his mind to do, dat's de time he's doin' it? Ou' Wolf he's still a-studyin' an' he keep on still a-studyin', till in about one jiff he hear darie pot lid a-liftin' agen, an de smell comes up dat good an' t'ick he can taste it.

“He swip his head round, an' dere was Ou' Jackalse wid de lid up an' his nose a-workin' an' a-sniffin' in de steam Didn' Ou' Wolf shout den. ‘Ho, yeh! How com' yeh at darie dinner again?’

“Ou' Jackalse he cock one year up to hear, an' he cock one eye up to see. ‘Oh, dat's all right,’ ses he, quite comfy. ‘Dis ain't dat pot at all. Dis ain't no dinner; dis is yust a breakfas'. You ain't got no shout in dis at all.’

“Ou' Wolf he don't say not a word, but he yust make one flyin' yump to land right fair on Ou' Jackalse neck.

“But he don't land. 'Stead o' dat he tink he's yumped right troo hisse'f an turned hisse'f inside out. Anyway, he knows he finds hisse'f hangin' down, head first, between de rafters, a-scratchin' an' a-fratchin' in de air. When Ou' Jackalse t'atch dat fourt' string he t'atch Ou' Wolf's tail fast in wid it, an' dere's Ou' Wolf now a-hangin' by dat tail, head down an' fightin', an' he cahnt get back nohow.

“An' don't he shout! ‘Le' me down out o' dis,’ ses he. ‘You hear me now! Le' me down or I'll bang de stuffin' out o' you!’

“Ou' Jackalse he smile quite s'prise' like. ‘What you want down out o' dat for anyhow?’ ses he, spearin' out a piece o' meat f'm de pot—an' ho! but you ought to seen him lick his lips. ‘Dis cahnt be nawtin' to do wi' you nohow. Yours is a dinner, ses you, an' dis is a breakfas', you can see dat you'se'f, 'cause I's a-eatin' it an' it's breakfas' time.’ An' he gullups down de meat off'n half a dozen bones.

“‘Le' me down now!’ yells Ou' Wolf, gettin' black in de face. ‘I'll yust show you weder dat's a breakfas' or a dinner. I'll teach you weder it's mine or not!’

“‘Now you look-a'-me, Oom Wolf,’ ses Ou' Jackalse, his eyes a-twinklin' fresh as he swipe down de last meat off'n de first rib. ‘I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll divide wid yeh—dat's fair enough. So here you is for your share,’ an'

he lams de clean bone at Ou' Wolf an' catches him a hummer on de jaw.

“Ou' Wolf he fair lets out at dat; big words; words what make you' years stand on end. An' all de time Ou' Jackalse keep on a-dippin' an' a-spearin' in de pot, an' a-tellin' Ou' Wolf what a clinkin' fine piece o' meat he's pullin' out, an' how nice it taste, an' how he hope Ou' Wolf 'll fin' his dinner yust as nice when de time come—“Cause you said yust now you has your dinner in a pot som'eres round here, didn' yeh?” ses he, an' he lams him wid anoder bone, biff!

“Den de last meat was eat an' de last bone t'rown, an' Ou' Jackalse he come wid a long reed an' he gun' to tickle Ou' Wolf on de end of his nose where he's a-hangin'. But Ou' Wolf he's in dat rage he yust snap an' yap at darie reed till all de frame o' de house begin to shake, an' Ou' Jackalse he tink it's about time to get f'm under. An' dere ain't no more to stop for anyhow—he might as well keep on a-movin'. So he did.

“Well, Ou' Wolf he's yust dat mad he won't shout Ou' Jackalse back to let him down an' dey'll say no more about it. Not him; he'll yust hang an' rattle an' see him blowed first. But young Missus Wolf—well, you 'members dey wahnt married yet till de house 'ud be finis', an' I s'pose somehow she couldn't he'p herse'f, but she yust hatto sa'nter past in de trees, an' sort o' peep an' see how de house is a-gettin' on. An' dere she seen Ou' Wolf a-hangin', head down, an' black in de face.

“Sich a scrick she got, an' sich a scream she let out! an' in about two ticks she was inside darie house frame to hold him up. She cahnt reach his head de fust time, but de second time she yump so high she ketch him by de years, an' dere she is, a-hangin' down f'm him—to hold him up! An' Ou' Wolf he's dat much gone on her he don't like to say nawtin' about it—but he feel his tail like comin' out by de roots.

“At last ses he—“You'd better go up on de roof an' make loose my tail. I'll p'r'aps get down quicker dat way,” ses he.

“As soon as she hear him speak—“Oh, he ain't dead yet, he's alive yet,” ses she. An' she's yust dat glad she fair hangs an' swings agen, till Ou' Wolf hatto say sometin'. “But my tail ain't a-gun' to last much more,” ses he.

“Dat sort o' cut into her sense a bit, an' she stop an' look. “Oh, dat's it, is it?” ses she, an' she looks as if dat ain't no great shakes to be de matter wid him. “If you'd yust go up an' make it loose?” ses he.

““Hump!” ses she, but she cahnt say no more yust yet, an' so up she go. But when she get up on de roof an' see how fast his tail is t'atched in wid de rest, it kind o' strike her to won'er how de jimminy his tail come like dat,

an' she hadn't more'n begun to un-t'atch it 'fore she begin to ax him how come it so.

"Ou' Wolf he ain't in no Allah Crachty hurry to tell her all about it, but he ain't no good at tellin' you-know-whats. So what he hatto do he yust up an' did, an' he told her de hull tale plump.

"Now p'r'aps she tinks a lot of Ou' Wolf, an' agen p'r'aps she tinks more about bein' goin' to get married an' have a house o' her own to boss in. But anyhow she tinks a lot de most o' herse'f, an' she gets dat mad wid him for bein' had so silly dat she cahnt stand it nohow. She yust stop unt'atchin', an' she fair slam herse'f half way down troo de rafters to reach him an' biff him a one-two in de ribses. 'Take dat!' ses she, 'an' dat! for bein' sich a fathead!'

"Ouk! Ouk!" Ou' Wolf he yell, an' he make sich a kick an' sich a fluster to get out o' reach, dat fust ting you know de t'atch won't hold no longer an' it come loose an' let him down wollop! fair on his head. But Missus Wolf she's yust dat mad-an'-ginger dat she try to grab him an' hold him up f'm droppin' till she can biff him agen; an' she grab yust too far an' miss her reach, an' down she come as well, head fust too, biff into his tummy, an' knock de wind clean outen him.

"Atween his head an' his tummy Ou' Wolf he tink he's fair about dyin', but in yust two ticks Missus Wolf was up an' a-lammin' into him. Den he knowed yust how dead he ain't, for he yumps up wid a howl an' a howler, an' he fair streak it out o' dat into de vach-a-bikkie bushes till he could lost her. He sit down dere, but he cahnt tink for feelin', an' he cahnt rub his head for tinkin' on his tummy, nor rub his tummy for tinkin' on his head.

"But he lay it all up to Ou' Jackalse. 'Yust wait till I get a fair ole chance,' ses he, 'den see if I don't get so even wid him it'll stick out de oder side. Dat's all.'

"Well, it went on like dis till one day Ou' Wolf was a-raungin' along, an' who should he see alongside de road but Ou' Jackalse, a-sittin' an' a-polishin' off de last piece o' biltong outen a bag; nice, fat, buck-biltong.

"Now I's got him! See me if I don't do sometin' now,' ses Ou' Wolf, an' he sits him down for a minute to see what's de best way to do it.

"But Ou' Jackalse had seen him long ago a'ready, an' he don't hatto sit down an' study how he's goin' to do. He knows it an' he does it. He don't wait to be yumped. He yust gets straight up and skips over to Ou' Wolf, like as if he ain't seen him for he don't know how long, an' he never was so glad. 'Here you is,' ses he 'Yust de very one an' yust in time. Here, taste dat,' ses he an' he offers him de last little piece o' de biltong. 'I owes you a good

breakfas', an' now I's a-gun' to pay you half a dozen for it.'

"Ou' Wolf he don't know. He's mighty s'picious of Ou' Jackalse any time you like, an' worse when he's a-offerin' good turns. He draws back a bit. But dat biltong it look so red an' sweet in de middle, where it's cut across, an' Ou' Jackalse is a-lickin' his lips wid such a smacks, dat Ou' Wolf he take dat little piece an' he wolf it down.

"Dat piece taste yust so good he cahnt he'p it—he's gotto ha' some more. 'Where's dere more o' dat?' ses he. 'Tell me quick till I gets at it.'

"Ou' Jackalse smile. 'Well,' ses he, 'I've a-eat dat much dat I cahnt run fast enough myse'f. If I hadn't a-done I'd a-gone wid you. But it don't matter anyhow—it's yust too easy for troublin' about.'

"'Ne'er min' dat. Where's it?' ses Ou' Wolf, short an' sharp.

"'On de road dere,' ses Ou' Jackalse. 'On dat road you sees de spoor of a waggon dat's went along not so long since. All you has to do is to run a bit wide an' get ahead o' dat waggon. Den you lie down in de road an' make like you's dead—too dead for skinnin' in a hurry. De waggon'll come along an' de baas he'll see you, an' he'll say—"Hello! here's a dead wolf. His skin'll make a fine mat for my wife. I'll take him home an' skin him."

"Den he'll pick you up an' chuck you on de waggon, an' dere's where all de biltong is—sacks an' sacks of it. All you has to do is to wait a bit till de man ain't a-lookin', an' den, flip!—you drops a sack o' de nicest biltong out an' slips off ahter it you'se'f. I on'y wish I had room for mo', ses he, an' he rubs his tummy like he's fair a-longin'.

"Ou' Wolf he look at Ou' Jackalse an' he tink what he was intendin' o' doin'. But de taste o' dat biltong yust make his mouf run, an' he cahnt wait. 'Is dat de way you got yours?' ses he, sharp an' hairy.

"Dat's de hull way,' ses Ou' Jackalse; 'an' I's a laughin' yet to tink on it—it's so easy.'

"Ou' Wolf he don't want to seem like he's too soft a-b'lievin', but de biltong make him fair yammer for more. 'Well,' ses he, 'we'll see,' an' off he sets to come round darie waggon.

"By'n'by he gets ahead, an' den he cuts into de road an' lies down, an' makes yust de same as if he's dead.

"De waggon comes along, an' de man he see Ou' Wolf a-lyin' like dead in de road. 'Hello!' ses he, fair a-bristlin', 'here's anoder on 'em, is dere? On'y toder one was a yackalse. An' dis 'un's goin' to get chucked into de waggon

too, is he, an' steal anoder sack o' biltong as well? But we'll yust see about dat, we will. Here's you!' ses he, an' he fair yump right square on Ou' Wolf's ribs—wallop!

“Wou-uk!’ yells Ou' Wolf, an' he try to up an' run for it.

“So, you're anoder, is you?’ shouts de man, an' wallop he yumps on him agen.

“I didn't. Le' me go,’ yells Ou' Wolf at dat.

“Steal anoder sack, will you!’ shouts de man, an'—wop!—he yumps on him some more.

“But Ou' Wolf's yust about had enough. If he don't get out o' dat immeejitly, if not sooner, den he's goin' to be deader dan he shammed a minute since. 'Fore you can say knife! he yust scratched up an' away an' light out for de oder side o' de sky line, wid de man a-peltin' him wid a stone for every stride. 'P'r'aps you'll come agen,’ ses de man.

“When Ou' Wolf manage to crawl to de ridge he look back, an' he sees de man a-whackin' de whip into his team an' shoutin' like he feels right good an' sa'cy. 'Allah Crachty! look-a'-dat now,’ ses Ou' Wolf to hisse'f, but he don't rub no spot 'cause he cahnt make up his mind which is de sorest.

“Den he look along de ridge an' dere he see Ou' Jackalse, yust a-hoppin' an' a-rollin' wid laughin'. Ou' Wolf he look an' Ou' Wolf he tink. But Ou' Wolf he's still a-feelin' too, an' he fair flop down an' say nothin'. Dere wahnt anytin' else to say. But he shake his head: I tell you he shake his head,” ended Old Hendrik, shaking his own head with the word.

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