

Why Old Jackal Slinks His Tail

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South African

Intermediate
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The little girl was full of excitement. Driving home with her mother from the “dorp,” she had seen Ou’ Jackalse himself—Mynheer Jackal—slinking across the veldt, and all the tales Old Hendrik had told her about him crowded her mind as she watched him. She could hardly contain herself now, as she stood before the old Hottentot pouring forth the story. There was only one regret in it—“He must have been in some trouble, Ou’ Ta’,” said she; “’cause all the time I watched him his tail was right down. I watched and I watched to see if it wouldn’t stick up, ’cause then I’d know he was thinking of a plan; but it never did.”

Old Hendrik smiled. “So his tail was a-hangin’ an’ a-slinkin’ ahter him, was it? An’ didn’t he look back at you over his shoulder as he went?”

“Yes, he did,” answered Annie, still more eager at finding how well Old Hendrik knew the ways and doings of Ou’ Jackalse. “I kept hoping he was thinking of fetching Ou’ Wolf to work for us, then I could tell Ou’ Wolf not to trust him any more, no matter what he said.”

Old Hendrik’s delight bubbled into a jeering shake of the head and a half laugh of derision over the subject as he repeated the name—“Ou’ Jackalse, hey! Ou’ Jackalse!”

“But you needn’t to be feared he’s a-gun’ to get Ou’ Wolf into much more trouble nowadays, Ainkye,” went on the old Hottentot. “He ain’t a-gun’ to get de best o’ so many more folks, not since he went to get even wid Young Tink Tinky, de littlest bird on de veldt. Little Missis Tinky got Ou’ Mammy Reyer, de Crane, to he’p her, an’ dat made all de difference. You seen how he slunk his tail along behind him?—well, dat’s why. He’s a-tinkin’ o’ what happened den, an’ he looked at you over his shoulder, wonderin’ all de time weder you’d heerd de tale or not. It happened dis while or two back, an’ since den he ain’t bin near so sa’cy as he used to was.”

“Oh, poor Old Jackalse!” cried the little girl, “what did happen? Do tell me, Ou’ Ta’.”

“Well,” began Old Hendrik, “if ever you sees Ou’ Jackalse tryin’ to fool Ou’ Wolf into trouble agen, you don’t ha’ to say on’y jüst one ting. You’s on’y got to ask him how he likes eggs, an’ den see if he don’t turn round an fair slink off wid his tail draggin’. Dat’s where de trouble come in, he would go ahter eggs.

“You ’members me tellin’ you how Young Tink Tinky bested Ou’ Jackalse when de birds wantto choose a King for demselves? Well, Ou’ Jackalse he never forgot dat, an’ he was al’ays a-studyin’ how he’s a-gun’ to get even, but he couldn’t find de way nohow till at last he sees Missis Tinky a-sittin’ on de nest, an’ he knows by dat dere’s eggs dere. ‘Dat’s me,’ ses Ou’ Jackalse. ‘Eggs is de ting I does like—an’ here’s some. Watch me teach dat Young Tinky dis time.’

“Now dere was a t’orn-tree like dis,”—here Old Hendrik indicated the mimosa under which he sat,—“an’ dis t’orn-tree was a-growin close beside de river, an’ a willow-tree dat was bigger yet was a-hangin’ over de t’orn. In dat t’orn-tree Young Tinky build his nest, an ahter de eggs is all laid, an’ his missis is well an’ comfy settled into sittin’ on ’em, Young Tink he offs to look for scoff for hisse’f an’ de missis. Den’s de time when Ou’ Jackalse is a-watchin’ him, an’ as soon as he’s gone, here comes Jackalse to de bottom o’ de t’orn-tree an’ begins to scratch on de bark—scratch! scratch! scratch!

“Little Missis Tinky she look down out o de nest. ‘Who’s dere?’ ses she.

“‘Me,’ ses Ou’ Jackalse.

“‘What you want?’ ses Missis Tinky, all in a tremble.

“‘Want dem eggs you got,’ ses Ou’ Jackalse, wid his hair up. ‘You better be sharp about it too.’

“Well, you ain’t a-gun’ to get ’em,’ flutter Missis Tinky; but she’s yust dat frighten’ she cahnt har’ly speak.

“Please yourse’f,’ ses Ou’ Jackalse; ‘but if you don’t drop me down a egg dis minute, den I’s a-comin’ up, an’ if I once does come up dere, den I’s a-gun’ to eat you first as well as de eggs. Make a hurry now—drop one!’

“Little missis she get sich a scrik when Ou’ Jackalse ses he’s a-comin’ up dat she yust go all a-flitty flutty, an’ dere ain’t no two ways about it, she hatto drop him one egg to save de rest. So out she pull it an down she drop it, right into Ou’ Jackalse mouf, where he stand on his back legs wid his front feets agen de tree. An’ as soon as he feel it in his mouf he yust gullup it down, an’ off he go for dat day. ‘I’ll make dis ting last a bit,’ ses he to hisse’f.

“Well, little Missis Tinky she’s in dat terr’ble way she cahnt har’ly sit still till Young Tinky comes home, an’ as soon’s ever she sees him she burst out a-cryin’ an’ a-tellin’ him what happened.

“What! An’ you b’lieve sich a fool tale as dat about him climbin’ de tree,’ ses Young Tinky, fair fightin’ mad at de way he lose dat egg. ‘He cahnt climb dis tree, not if he break his neck a-tryin’.’

“But Young Tinky he sees it ain’t no use; it ain’t a-gun’ to he’p his missis for him to shout an’ talk about it. ‘Never you mind dis time, little missis,’ ses he. ‘To-morrow you can go an’ look for de scoff, an’ I stay at home an’ wait for Ou’ Jackalse. I’ll show him what’s what dis time, too,’ ses he. An’ his missis she stop cryin’, dough she cahnt stop lookin’ where dat one egg ought to be.

“Well, de nex’ day Young Tinky he stop at home an’ sit on de nest while his missis went for scoff, an’ it ain’t but a while or two ’fore along comes Ou’ Jackalse to de foot o’ de tree-scratch! scratch! scratch!

“Young Tinky he ain’t a-lettin’ Ou’ Jackalse see who’s at home to-day; he yust on’y slant half o’ one eye down at him. ‘Who’s dere?’ ses he.

“‘Me,’ ses Ou’ Jackalse.

“‘An’ what you want scratchin’ dere?’ ses Tinky.

“‘Anoder egg, an’ you best be sharp about it,’ ses Ou’ Jackalse.

“Well, you’s yust about got all de eggs you’s a-gun’ to get here,’ ses Tinky, stickin’ all his head an’ shoulders out for Jackalse to have a good look at him.

“Oh, it’s you, is it?” ses Ou’ Jackalse, showin’ his teef. ‘Well, if you won’t drop darie egg down in one minute, den I’s a-comin’ up an’ eat you all up—bones, beak an’ feders!’

“Come up den,’ ses Young Tinky, hoppin’ out onto a branch. ‘Yust you come up here if you darse, you hairy skellum you,’ squeak Tinky, hoppin’ up an’ down an’ flickin’ his wings like he’s fair a-gun’ to peck de eyes out o’ de hull fam’ly o’ de Jackalses. ‘You try it on, Mister Ou’ Jackalse, an’ see what I’s do to you!’ an’ Tinky swells hisse’f into a reg’lar ole rage as he tink o’ dat egg yestiday an’ his little missis frighten’ to deaf nearly.

“Dat make Ou’ Jackalse in sich a wax dat he spurt out de word he didn’t mean to. ‘I on’y wish I could yust come up dis tree to you. I’d scoff you down in yust one gullup an’ your eggse ahter you,’ ses he, a-rampin’ an’ a-tearin’.

“You ses dat,’ squeak young Tinky, ‘but I knows better. It’s not you cahnt—it’s you dahnt. But I’ll teach you to frighten poor little mammickies into givin’ you deir eggse, you skellum! skellum! skellum!’

“Ou’ Jackalse he get dat mad, a-snappin’ an’ a-snarlin’ while he listen, dat he fair turn away an’ slant out o’ dat, an’ Young Tinky is yust dat conceited of hisse’f he cahnt har’ly wait till his missis comes home ’fore he begin a-tellin’ her dat’s de way she ought to done yestiday. An’ Missis Tink she listen an’ she tink she’ll do de same herse’f now, if ever Ou’ Jackalse trouble her agen.

“So de nex’ day Young Tinky he go ahter de scoff, an’ his missis she sit on de eggs, tinkin’ it’s all right now. But Ou’ Jackalse he’d bin a-watchin’, an’ he know’s who’s a-gone an’ who’s a-stop at home, an’ in about no time he’s at de foot o’ darie t’orn-tree agen, an’ de same ole scratch! scratch! scratch! at it.

“Little Missis Tink she stick her head out an’ she start to tell him to get out o’ dat, in de biggest voice she’s got. But she hadn’t more dan got out de first two words dan she see his teef where he bare ’em all round, white an’ yammerin’, an’ he look dat savage an’ murderin’ dat de rest o’ de words stuck fast in her froat, an’ she fair chattered wid fright.

“Down wi’ darie egg, else I’ll come an’ tear you into smitchies,’ ses Ou’ Jackalse.

“Missis Tinky nearly drop out o’ de nest wid de scrik she got; but she tink o’ what Tink Tinky say, an’ she squeak

it out. 'You cahnt come up dis tree if you try,' ses she.

"'Cahnt I?' ses he, all hair an' spiky. 'Yust see me half try!' an' he gives de biggest yump he ever make in his life, an' it scrape him a couple o' yards up de tree stem.

"'Little missis she fair gi'en one big squawk an' tink she's all gone—eggs, nest, an' all. 'Is you a-gun' to drop me dat egg?'" shouts Ou' Jackalse.

"'Yes, yes. Here it is! Take it, take it!'" squeak de little missis, an' she drop out de one egg to him.

"'Ou' Jackalse he ketch dat egg an' he gulp it down an' off he go agen. 'Nex' time I come you better drop one quicker. I ain't a-gun' to ax twice no more,' ses he.

"'Well, as soon as he go, little Missis Tinky she cry like her heart break, an' she cahnt sit dere on de dest at all. Anyhow she's feared to wait till Young Tinky comes home, 'cause she don't know what he'll say when he finds anoder egg gone, an' she's in dat misery dat she don't know what to do. Den she tink of her Aunt, Ou' Reyer, de Blue Crane, an' she fly off to her where she's a-fis'in' in de reeds, an' she yust up an' tell her de hull tale of it.

"'So darie Ou' Jackalse's up to his tricks agen, is he?'" ses Ou' Reyer. 'Well, he's meddle wid de birds before, an' dis time we'll teach him to don't do it no more. Now you yust go home an' sit on de nest agen, an' I'll come in a minute or two—den well be ready for him.'

"'Little missis she go back, an' in a minute or two Ou' Reyer follows, an' she hide herse'f in de top o' de willow-tree over de nest. 'Now for Ou' Jackalse,' ses she.

"'Well, it ain't but a little while rill here come Ou' Jackalse agen, wid de same ole scratch! scratch! scratch! an' de same ole terr'fyin' words—'Drop me down anoder egg or I'll come up an' eat you,' ses he.

"'Make like you's a-gun' to drop him one,' whispers Ou' Reyer; an' little Missis Tinky she make like she's a-doin' it.

"'Ou' Jackalse he rise up on his hine legs, an' he put his paws agen de tree, an' he open his mouf an' shut his eyes, an' he fair feel de taste o' dat egg a'ready. An' den, yust den, Ou' Reyer she lean out over Missis Tinky an' she open her big long beak, an', swock! she drop a great big bull-frog right into Ou' Jackalse's froat.

"'Wow! but dere was a chokin' an' a squeal-in' den. Ou' Jackalse he yump an' he roll, an' he fling hisse'f along de

ground a-tryin' to cough up darie fat bull-frog, an' darie ou' bull-frog he puff an' he wiggle an' he slip down an' down till dere he is in Ou' Jackalse's tummy, a-hoppin' an' a-floppin' an' a-croakin' an' a-gloakin' till Ou' Jackalse is yust dat scared dat he light out f'm dere plump across de scenery. An' he go dat fast he yust hit de high places as he went an' never touch' de low. I tell you Ou' Jackalse was scared.

“He don't stop nudder till he's yust dat puffed out dat he roll over an' over like a shot hare, an' he's so long a-gettin' over it dat he forget what day it happen in. Ever since den, too, de birds all click deir beakses at him, an' chatter at him, an' ax him how he likes Tinky eggs; an' dat's what make him so shamed he ain't never cocked up his tail no more—he yust cahnt do it.”

“And serve him right,” cried all the children in chorus.

Old Hendrik only shook his head.

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