

Why the Hair's Nose is Slit

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Easy
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The curtains had not yet been drawn nor the shutters closed, and little Jan looked with wide serious eyes at the full moon sailing serenely in the cold sky. Then he sighed as though thoughts too big for expression stirred within him, and turned absently towards the purring fire.

“And why does the big man make such a sighing?” asked Outa Karel. “It is like the wind in the mealie land at sun-under.”

Little Jan’s eyes slowly withdrew their gaze from some inward vision and became conscious of the old native. “Outa,” he said, “why is the moon so far away, and so beautiful, and so golden?”

“Ach! to hear him now! How can Outa tell? It is maar so. Just like grass is green and fire is hot, so the Moon is far away and beautiful and golden. But she is a cruel lady sometimes, too, and it is through her that the poor Little Hare runs about with a slit in his nose to-day.”

“Tell us, Outa.” Little Jan dropped on to the rug beside the basket of mealie-cobs, and the others edged nearer.

“And why do you call the Moon a lady?” asked Pietie of the inquiring mind.

“But doesn’t baasje know that the Moon is a lady? O yes, and for all her beauty she can be cross and cruel sometimes like other ladies, as you will hear.”

“Long, long ago, when the world was quite young, the Lady Moon wanted someone to take a message to Men. She tried first one creature and then another, but no! they were all too busy, they couldn’t go. At last she called the Crocodile. He is very slow and not much good, but the Lady Moon thought she would pinch his tail and make him go quickly. So she said to him: ‘Go down to Men at once and give them this message: “As I die and, dying, live, so also shall you die, and, dying, live.”’”

“Baasjes know how the Moon is sometimes big and round——so”——and Outa’s diminutive hands described a wide circle and remained suspended in the air——“like she is now in the sky. Then every night she gets smaller and smaller, so——so——so——so——so——till——clap!”——the crooked fingers come together with a bang——“there’s no more Moon: she is dead. Then one night a silver horn hangs in the sky——thin, very thin. It is the new Moon that grows, and grows, and gets beautiful and golden.” By the aid of the small claw-like hands the moon grew to the full before the children’s interested eyes. “And so it goes on, always living, and growing, and dying, and living again.

“So the Lady Moon pinched old Oom Crocodile’s tail, and he gave one jump and off he started with the message. He went quickly while the Moon watched him, but soon he came to a bend in the road. Round he went with a great turn, for a Crocodile’s back is stiff like a plank, he can’t bend it; and then, when he thought he was out of sight, he went slower and slower——drif-draf-drippity-drif-draf, drif-draf-drippity-drif-draf, like a knee-haltered horse. He was toch too lazy.

“All of a sudden there was a noise——sh-h-h-h-h——and there was the Little Hare. ‘Ha! ha! ha!’ he laughed, ‘what is the meaning of this drif-draf-drippity-drif-draf? Where are you going in such a hurry, Oom Crocodile?’

“I can’t stop to speak to you, Neef Haasje,’ said Oom Crocodile, trying to look busy and to hurry up. ‘The Lady Moon has sent me with a message to Men.’

“And what is the message, Oom Crocodile?”

“It’s a very important one: “As I die and, dying, live, so also shall you die and, dying, live.””

“Ach, but that is a stupid message. And you can’t ever run, Oom, you are so slow. You can only go drif-draf-drippity-drif-draf like a knee-haltered horse, but I go sh-h-h-h-h like the wind. Give the message to me and I

will take it.'

"'Very well,' said the lazy Crocodile, 'but you must say it over first and get it right.'

"So Neef Haasje said the message over and over, and then—sh-h-h-h—he was off like the wind. Here he was! there he was! and you could only see the white of his tail and his little behind legs getting small in the distance.

"At last he came to Men, and he called them together and said: 'Listen, Sons of the Baboon, a wise man comes with a message. By the Lady Moon I am sent to tell you: "As I die and, dying, perish, so shall you also die and come wholly to an end."' "

"Then Men looked at each other and shivered. All of a sudden the flesh on their arms was like goose-flesh.

'What shall we do? What is this message that the Lady Moon has sent? "As I die and, dying, perish, so shall you also die and come wholly to an end."' "

"They shivered again, and the goose-flesh crept right up their backs and into their hair, and their hair began to rise up on their heads just like—ach no, but Outa forgets, these baasjes don't know how it is to feel so." And the wide smile which accompanied these words hid the expression of sly teasing which sparkled in Outa's dancing black eyes, for he knew what it was to be taken to task for impugning the courage of his young listeners.

"But Neef Haasje did not care. He danced away on his behind legs, and laughed and laughed to think how he had cheated Men.

"Then he returned again to the Moon, and she asked: 'What have you said to Men?'

"O, Lady Moon, I have given them your message: "Like as I die and, dying, perish, so also shall you die and come wholly to an end," and they are all stiff with fright. Ha! ha! ha!' Haasje laughed at the thought of it.

"'What!' cried the Lady Moon, 'what! did you tell them that? Child of the devil's donkey! you must be punished.'

"Ach, but the Lady Moon was very angry. She took a big stick, a kierie—much bigger than the one Outa used to kill lions with when he was young—and if she could have hit him, then"—Outa shook his head hopelessly—"there would have been no more Little Hare: his head would have been cracked right through. But he is a slim kerel. When he saw the big stick coming near, one, two, three, he ducked and slipped away, and it

caught him only on the nose.

“Foei! but it was sore! Neef Haasje forgot that the Moon was a Lady. He yelled and screamed; he jumped high into the air; he jumped with all his four feet at once; and—scratch, scratch, scratch, he was kicking, and hitting and clawing the Moon’s face till the pieces flew.

“Then he felt better and ran away as hard as he could, holding his broken nose with both hands.

“And that is why to-day he goes about with a split nose, and the golden face of the Lady Moon has long dark scars.

“Yes, baasjes, fighting is a miserable thing. It does not end when the fight is over. Afterwards there is a sore place—ach, for so long!—and even when it is well, the ugly marks remain to show what has happened. The best, my little masters, is not to fight at all.”

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