

Why the Tortoise Has No Hair On

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South African

Intermediate
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“But,” demanded Annie of the old Hottentot, a couple of days later, “after that horrid Little Hare cheated Old Tortoise over the little twinkly fishes, what did Old Tortoise say next time he met him?”

“What did Ou’ Sculpat say to Little Hahsie?” repeated Old Hendrik, with a sudden wide open laugh. “Well, Ainkye, he said a lot; you may bet he said a lot. He yust hatto say a lot ’cause what he ha’ to say wahnt true; an’ when you hain’t got de trufe to tell, den you has to use a mighty lot o’ words to make it stick.”

“But surely Old Tortoise didn’t believe that Little Hare after what he’d done!” protested Annie.

“Oh, but you hain’t never hear dat Little Hahsie talk when he’s a mind to butter some’dy down,” rejoined Old Hendrik. “Ou’ Sculpat’s one o’ dese people what wants to know ’fore dey b’lieves anytin’, an’ he was raungin’ round for blood an’ t’under lookin’ for Little Hahsie. Well, an’ he meet him, an’ de nex’ ting you knows dey’s yust ole chummies a-plantin’ peach-trees togeder. Dat’s fine, ain’t it? But den, de finis’ of it!—an’ de finis’ of it is, Ou’ Sculpat hain’t got no hair on him any mo’.”

“Why! did tortoises ever have hair on?” demanded little Annie in blank astonishment.

“O’ course dey had hair on,” retorted Old Hendrik, protesting at such astonishment in his hearer. “Ain’t his big broder, de otter, got hair on him yet? But Sculpat would get mix’ up wid Little Hahsie, an’ dere you is; he hain’t got no hair on him no more.”

“Oh, how was that? Do tell us,” begged Annie.

“Why, it was dis a-way,” went on Hendrik. “When dey did meet, an’ when Ou’ Sculpat finis’ talkin’ big, an’ Little Hahsie finis’ talkin’ butter, den Hahsie feel dat good an’ harum-scarum inside him dat he hop, an’ he skip, an’ he monkey off across de veldt till he come to a farm, an’ dere was de peach garden right in his way, wid de farm house a bit way off f’ m it.

“Well, Little Hahsie he squot an’ he sniff, an’ he tink about de dogs an’ de little boys dat frow stones; but he tink o’ de peaches too, an’ he feel yust dat cussed dat he’s a-gun’ to have a try at dem peaches if he lose his tail for it. He can see de fence is all aloes an’ prickly-pear, growin’ dat close dere ain’t room even for Ou’ Ringhals, de snake, to get troo, let alone a Hahsie; but dat ain’t a-gun’ to send him off widout peaches.

“So he looks about, an’ dere’s a round stony koppie yust back o’ de house an’ garden, an’ he hop round an’ up de back side o’ dat koppie, an’ peep over to have a reglar look at tings. An’ under a tree at de foot o’ de koppie he sees two fat dogs a-sleepin’, an’ comin’ f’ m de garden dere’s a little boy wid his daddy’s ole hat full o’ peaches; dese big, fine, girl’s-cheek peaches. An’ de boy goes an’ sets down under de tree.

“Little Hahsie he look at de boy, an’ he look at de dogs. Den he look at de big stones, an’ de little bushes all down de side o’ de koppie, an his big eyes ’gin a-shinin’. ‘I knows how I’ll get dem peaches,’ ses he.

“Well, he creep down de koppie troo de bushes an’ de stones till he’s right at de bottom an’ on’y about forty yards away from de little boy, an’ den he pop out right in front o’ him. He gi’es one hop an’ he gi’es two hop, an’ den all of a sudden he squot flat, like he’s yust seen de little boy an’ tinks de boy ain’t seen him. But dere’s one fair ole yell an’ one mighty ole yump f’ m darie boy, an’ den he’s yust a-sikkin’ de dogs on to ketch dis hare.

“Dat’s all Little Hahsie want. While de boy’s a-yellin’ an’ a-yumpin’, an’ while de dogs is a-wakin’ an’ a-lookin’ out to see what’s it all about all dat time Klein Hahsie’s yust a-makin’ a brown streak round dat koppie.

“But he ain’t. He on’y make ten yards of it an’ den he’s out o’ sight round de corner. Dat’s far enough, an’ he yust gi’es one fair ole yump to one side, up de koppie, an’ squots down flat behind a stone till de dogs is rush past wid de little boy runnin’ all he know ahter ’em. Den Hahsie yust hop back to darie ole hatful o’ peaches under de tree, an’ pick it up an’ skip out o’ dat eatin peaches all de way.”

“And what did the little boy do when he got back and found his peaches gone?” broke in Annie’s younger brother.

“Well,” answered Hendrik, “I on’y heard about what Klein Hahsie done. Dey don’t say nawtin’ about what de boy done. But I ’specs he yust went back an’ got some mo’ peaches.

“But about Klein Hahsie,” resumed he. “Dese yere peaches taste yust dat good dat all de while he’s a-eatin’ ’em he’s tinkin’ how nice it ’ud be if he had his own tree to pick at widout no dogs to chase him. An’ de mo’ he eat de mo’ he study, till at last it strike him what to do. Den he saves de last two o’ de peaches, an’ he biff dat ole hat into shape wid a one-two, an’ swack it down on one ear an’ de back of his head, an’ off he set down de spruit to de water-hole where he’ll find Ou’ Sculpat.

“Ou’ Sculpat was dere, wid his chin on top de water, lookin’ yust as leary as ever, an’ he don’t so much as wink his eye till Little Hahsie shout him out. ‘Hello! Sculpat!’ ses he. ‘I’s struck luck since I lef you. I’s got peaches; an’ I reckoned now we’s frens I’d better gi’e you one an’ me de oder. Here you is den, choose which one you’ll have.’

“Well, Ou’ Sculpat he tinks he’ll tink it over, but he look at dem two peach in Little Hahsie’s han’s, an’ fust ting he knows he’s flipped his way out o’ de water an’ he’s comin’ to Hahsie, where he’s a-sittin’ wid one leg crossed over toder, makin’ hisse’f all nice an’ comfy. ‘Here you is,’ ses Hahsie, givin’ him de biggest an’ de ripest o’ de two. ‘You squot now, an’ we’ll fair enjoy dese ole peaches.’

“So Ou’ Sculpat he squot, an’ dey rolls dem peaches in deir han’s, an’ dey suck ’em wid deir lips, an’ dey squeeze deir teef in yust a leetle bit an’ taste de yuice o’ dat. An’ dat’s so nice dey cahnt hold off no longer, but dey fair yum-yums into dem peaches an’ scoffs ’em down an’ suck de stones clean. ‘What you tink o’ peaches now?’ ses

Hahsie.

“I tinks I’d like to know where dere’s some mo’,’ ses Sculpat. ‘I’d yust fair live on peaches if I had ’em.’

“So’d I,’ ses Hahsie; ‘an’ I’ll tell you what, Sculpat, I’s bin a-studyin’. What you say now if we plant dese two stones an’ grow two trees for us ownselfs, an’ yust sit under de branches an’ watch de peaches ripen? Wouldn’t dat be fine?’

“Wouldn’t it yust,’ ses Sculpat. ‘Wouldn’t it yust.’

“Right-o den,’ ses Hahsie. ‘Here we is now. You pick a place an’ we’ll plant dese two stones, one for me an’ one for you. We’ll soon have peaches ahter dat—tons an’ tons,’ ses he.

“Right you is,’ ses Sculpat. ‘Yonder’s de place. We’ll soon plant ’em.’

“So dey plants dese two stones, an’ de trees spring up, an’ den comes de time to be waterin’ ’em every day. An’ every day Ou’ Sculpat’s at it, carryin’ de water in his mouf to his tree; an’ a-carryin’ all de day ’cause he cahnt on’y hold a mighty little water in his mouf at one time. So his tree kep’ on a-growin’ an’ a-branchin’.

“But Little Hahsie he ain’t a-waterin’ no trees. If darie ole tree o’ his want water, den it ’ad a-better sa’nter over to de water-hole an’ get it; or if it want to die, well, it can yust die an’ be blowed to it, ses he. Den he’d go off an’ squot down an’ watch Ou’ Sculpat carryin’ water, an’ he’d laugh an’ laugh; but he don’t let nob’dy ketch him at dat.

“Well, dis went on an’ on, till Little Hahsie’s tree’s dead wid de want o’ water, while Ou’ Sculpat’s is big an’ bushy wid de plenty of it, an’ in a while it’s fair hangin’ full an’ bendin’ down wid peaches—nice, big, juicy, girl’s-cheek peaches.

“Ses Ou’ Sculpat to Hahsie: ‘If you’d on’y a-watered your tree you’d a-had peaches too now. Don’t you wis’ you had?’

“Well, dem peaches is look nice,’ ses Hahsie. ‘But dey’d be a lot nicer for you if you could get at ’em to eat ’em. How’s you gun’ to do dat, Sculpat?’

“Ou’ Sculpat swivel his eye to look at Hahsie. Hahsie don’t wink a word. Ses he: ‘It’s all right, ain’t it? Dere’s

your peaches an' dere's you, but dere ain't de eatin'—an' de eadn's de ting, ain't it? How about dat part, Sculpat?'

“Ou' Sculpat yust drop right flat at dat; he hain't never tink o' dat. He look at dat tree an' he look at dem peaches, such nice big peaches; an' den he look at Little Hahsie. ‘What'll I ha' to do?’ ses he.

“Well,’ ses Hahsie, ‘I reckon dere ain't on'y one way. You'll ha' to get some'dy to climb up in de tree an' drop 'em down to you.’

“An' you's de on'y one I knows dat can do it,’ ses Sculpat. ‘How if you was to go up in de tree den?’

“A' right,’ ses Hahsie, like he's doin' de bigges' kind of a favour. ‘I'll have a try, anyhow,’ ses he, like he ain't so sure he can do it. But he gi'es a hop, a skip, an' a yump, an' you can hear him laugh as he land up in dem lower branches like a bird. Den he climb an' he climb till he's right up where de nicest peaches is. An' den—why, den he 'gins to eat 'em.

“You should a-hear Ou' Sculpat shout at dat. ‘Ho yeh!’ ses he, ‘what for you eat dem peaches up dere?’

“‘Cause dey's nice, what else?’ ses Hahsie. ‘Dey's about de nicest peaches I ever tasted. Here you is; dis stone now,’ ses he, an' he drop a peach stone fair on Ou' Sculpat's nose. ‘You plant darie stone, an' by'n'by you'll have a tree o' your own to eat off, an' den you won't need to dance an' prance round dis one while you's watchin' me eat peaches.’

“Sculpat he fair whistle, he's dat mad. ‘By gum! You flop right down out o' dat or I'll knock de by-gum stuffin' out o' you,’ ses he, an' he yust paw de air. ‘Dem's my peaches,’ ses he.

“Is dey?’ ses Hahsie. ‘Den if dey is I'd advise you to shake yourse'f a bit an' come up an' get a few while dere's some left,’ an' Hahsie sort o' smile down at him.

“Ou' Sculpat he reg'lar stretch his neck down dere on de ground. ‘You's smart,’ ses he, ‘almighty smart; but I know what I'll do. You yust stop up dere an' see if I don't fix you. You wait a bit, dat's all,’ an' he turns an' he offs back to de spruit, wid Little Hahsie singin' a song to him as far as he can hear him, about how nice it is to eat peaches in de tree.

“But it ain't no time at all 'fore here comes Ou' Sculpat back agen, an' de hool gang o' de sculpats wid him. An'

dey make no mo' to do, but dey marches right up to de tree an' 'gins to bite it round to cut it down. 'Now we's got you,' ses Sculpat. 'We'll see how you like it when we get hold o you.'

"When you get hold o' me,' ses Hahsie. 'Fire away den,' an' he yust keep on a-eatin' peaches like dat's what he was born doin'.

"By'n'by de tree's mighty near cut troo, an' by dat time dere ain't one peach left. Little Hahsie's eat de last one. 'Dat's a' right,' ses Sculpat. 'But I's yust a-gun' to knock dem peaches out o' you agen now, wid all de rest o' de by-gum stuffin'.'

"Den car-r-rack! goes de tree, an' it 'gin to swing dis way an' dat way, an' all de sculpats stand ready to ketch Little Hahsie. Den cur-rack-rack sounds de tree an' down it come; but, yust as it's a-fallin', dere's Little Hahsie, dar soh! away out yonder. For he gi'en one fair ole winger of a yump, an' he land far out de yonder side de ring o' sculpats, an' dere he goes now a-streakin' over de rise an' out o' sight. 'Who's a-knockin' de stuffin' out o' who now?' ses he, as he send de heel dust a-flyin' behind him.

"But de sculpats dey ain't done yet. Dey's too mad to gi'e up so easy as dat. 'I know what he'll do,' ses Ou' Sculpat. 'He's yust so full o' peaches he'll squot right down dere over de rise an' go to sleep. So we'll do dis; we'll get round him in a great big ring a mile wide, an' den when he 'gins to run agen we'll keep a-poppin' up an' a-poppin' up everywhere he stops, till he'll yust run on till he drops. Den we has him.'

"Dat's yust what we'll do,' ses all de sculpats. An' right dere dey start to do it.

"Well, Little Hahsie was a-sleepin' on de yonder side de ridge, where he'd squotted down, when up pops Ou' Sculpat, yust dat close dat dere ain't no time for foolin' or anytin' but gettin' away. But Hahsie flick up his heels an' laugh as he go. 'Why don't you ketch me?' ses he.

"Ou' Sculpat grin, but he don't say nawtin'. He yust flop down in de grass agen an' wait.

"In a while Klein Hahsie rinks he's run fur enough, but he hadn't more'n stop 'fore up pops anoder sculpat a-comin' at him.

“Hello!’ ses Hahsie. ‘Here a’ready, is you? Allah Crachty! how you manage dat?’ But de sculpat keep a-comin’ on, an’ Hahsie has to off agen, an’ dis time he don’t flick his heels.

“Well, de same ring happen once an’ de same ring happen twice, an’ it went on like dat till Little Hahsie was dat near done for dat de sculpats ’gin to close in on him. ‘Now we’s got you,’ ses dey.

“Has you?’ ses Hahsie, an’ he look round, an’ dere he sees a dead elephant lyin’ in de grass. ‘Dat’s de ting,’ ses he, an’ he makes a dive an’ he pops right inside dat elephant, troo his mouf.

“Now dat elephant was all swelled up wid bein’ two days dead, an’ when Little Hahsie dives inside it, head fust it set up such a morion an’ commotion dat it look like de elephant’s a-gun’ to roll over an’ get up on to his four big legs. De trunk lift up, an’ de top ear wag, an’ de sculpats all rink, by jimminy, darie elephant’s de liv’est elephant dey’s seen dis many a day.

“Run now!’ shouts de sculpats. ‘Darie elephant’s Klein Hahsie’s daddy, an’ he’s a-gun’ to get up an’ tromp us to smash! Get away now!’ ses dey.

“Little Hahsie, inside, he hear all dat, an’ he fair ’gun’ to ramp about in dat elephant, an’ he shout outen his trunk like billy-o, an’ it made dat big a row, an’ dat big a wiggle, dat you hain’t never seen no sculpats ever doin’ no sich a gettin’ away as dey did. ’Fore dat time dey used to have hair on ’em like a otter, but dey went dat far an’ dey went dat fas’—for sculpats—troo de bush an’ de stones an’ de grass, dat dey wear all de hair off n’em, till dey get’s quite smooove an’ polish like you sees ’em now.

“An’ dat’s why de sculpats is got no hair on ’em,” concluded the old Hottentot, with all the dignity of a learned professor to his class.

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