"I SMELL shaa-aps vle-esh!"

"Live or de-a-a-d?"

"Dood-dood as mut-ton-on."

"Whee-ah? Whee-ah?"

"Hee-ah, hee-ah!"

That is the sort of conversation that is flung on the night air all over South Africa by the greatest proficient in the art of sheep stealing.

Talk of your Moss Troopers, your Border Raiders, your Red Reivers, your Rooi Kafirs, and all the other bold robbers who made a fine study of sheep lifting—where stands their guile and their resource compared with the infinite cunning of the Schaap Jackal, the four-footed marauder dressed in a fur coat of red and black, trimmed with silver. The Moss Troopers and the Reivers knuckled under to the forces of law and order, for law had an unpleasant trick of claiming the life of a man for the life of a sheep. A man who did not or could not pay for his mutton would be sold into slavery if caught red-handed, or strung up by the neck, and that, too within the last century.

The bold raider dropped the habit, but the jackal regards the twenty million and odd head of small stock in South Africa as his meat, and matches his cunning against the forces of law and order, against the poison clubs, the traps, the spring guns, the rifle, the wire netting, the hounds of the Cape Hunt Club, and the great host of farm dogs leagued against him; the terriers, the greyhounds, and the gaunt yellow-eyed mongrels of the Kafir kraals.

The State has declared him an outlaw, has placed a bounty on his tail and his mask. The farmers have put down wire netting and formed poison clubs. In England and Ireland vulpicide is frowned upon, and the red fox is given a free range in summer so that the hounds may hunt him in winter. The jackal carries no passport summer or winter. In England something like £7,000,000 a year is spent on the sport of fox hunting—in South Africa the jackal runs up a bill for mutton mounting into seven figures a year, and depreciates the quality of the wool to a further large amount yearly by keeping the sheep kraaled at night in a scab-infested area.
Behold Ishmael! 4

Every hand is turned against him. Yet when the sun begins to sink he insolently proclaims his intention of defying the law. There is no secrecy about the matter. He sits down like a dog, opens his lean pointed jaws and yowls aloud his insulting purpose in a shuddering wail that has a trace of a fiendish chuckle in its nasal notes.

In his eyes there is all the cunning of centuries. Nothing of the inscrutable serpentine calm of the cat; nothing of the frank hostility or the equally frank friendliness of the dog, but a sly secretive sidelong glance that is charged with an almost human intelligence. A baby jackal caught and confined will cringe, and go on his back and assume an abject submissiveness, his yellow eyes suffused with tears, but look away, and his eyes sharpen as he swiftly examines your face and your attitude, showing that he had kept something away from you, some thought at the back of his brain.

He has the royal mark of the proficient. Sneak thief, offal feeder, robber of hen roosts, slayer of fledglings, egg eater, picker up of insects, frog catcher, fence breaker, sheep stealer, and swift hunter of hares, his life is tracked by death, and he lives only by virtue of his cool brain, and his boundless capacity for sticking to his job.

He has the fox face; the thin jaws, sharpened to the efficiency of a pair of double scissors, each blade lined with teeth, which can be inserted anywhere, finished off with a nose that can sort out the intricate scents of earth and air, and based in a broad brain box furnished with keenest eyes and with large erect ears. He has a long body with plenty of room for the lungs and for meat; a big bushy tail to keep the nose and body warm, and legs that never tire unless he is hustled along beyond his ordinary pace by foxhounds in full cry.

Where does he live? Anywhere and everywhere. On the outskirts of cities, on the commonage of dorps; 5 among the kopjes of the Karoo; in abandoned ant-bear holes in the grass veld; in the bush country; on mountain slopes; in valleys, and on the plains; lying up by day and abroad by night—though I have seen them ranging by day when the cubs have to be fed. When a boy I marked an old she by day run up a small valley to a rock-strewn hill, and as she neared the hill four little forms that had been basking in the sun, poured over a rock and disappeared into a cleft where they were joined by the mother. There was a friend with me, and we shared an old muzzleloader, turn and turn about, so we hastened up the rock to bag the young and slay the mother, not being aware of the hideous crime of vulpicide. There was the rock right enough, and there was the cleft, but there was no sign nor sound of anything alive but a blue-headed salamander, who bobbed his head up and down.

216
“Absurd,” said my friend, “no jackal could get into that slit.”

“Didn’t you see the young go in?”

“I thought I did.”

“And the old one—didn’t we watch her right up to the rock?”

“Suppose we did.”

“Then the mother and young are in there.”

“Not possible,” he said. “We must have dreamt it.”

So reluctantly I gave in; but the jackal and her young were at the back of that crack, thin as it was; and this shows two things: first that a jackal will go through any hole big enough to take its head and ears; next, that these creatures have a quite remarkable power of protective restraint. Neither the young nor the old one made the slightest noise. A jackal will lie up anywhere, and an old she would bring up her family within a few hundred yards of a busy homestead without her presence being detected.

The schaaps jackal came out of his lair among the tangled roots of a red-wood tree on the brink of a donga, and informed the world that he was hungry. He was joined by his mate, who had been lying up amid an isolated outcrop of rock in the centre of an ostrich camp, and the two of them grinned as the farm dogs rushed out. This was an infinite source of amusement to the jackals. The dogs, with their bristles up, would tear out to the road barking furiously, then they would stop, glare around, sniff loudly, growl out one or two unprintable remarks, and trot back quietly to their own sleeping places, where they would curl up with one eye open. Then if the jackals were not particularly hungry, they would repeat the performance and start away sniggering while the dogs made another aimless rush. But the two were hungry, and when the dogs had retired they trotted off, first taking a look in at the outbuildings, from which issued all the perfumes of Rimmel and of Araby, the ammoniated stable blend; scents of fowl and duck, all fragrant elements in the pervading smell of sheep. The two footpads sampled these delicious odours, had a look at the stud rams standing just inside the wire fence, and ambled off for pastures not so well guarded. Also they gave a wide berth to the Kafir huts, for the yellow mongrels were keen-nosed and swift-footed; but once well away, they picked up the serious business of life, together with an unmistakable scent of fresh-killed meat. They held an inquest on the trail.

“Schaap’s vlesh,” said one. “Ja,” said the other, “also horse.” The trail was broad. It started from the road, and went side by side with hoof-marks, of a ridden horse.

“May as well see what it means,” said one, biting suddenly at a flea.
“Right-o,” said the other, and they trotted along for a hundred yards, when they stood with both sharp noses pointing at something on the ground.

One of them gingerly reached out a paw and turned it over.

“Fat,” he said, “burnt fat.”

“Smells daarom mooi,” said the other; both being bilingualists from stern necessity.

“Well, it’s your meat,” said the smaller one, “you found it first.”

“After you,” said the other, “you were the first on the trail.”

“Smells all right,” said the smaller one taking a deep smell and touching the ball with the tip of his red tongue. Then he took it in his mouth, and savoured it, and the flavour was so good that he swallowed it.

“Well?”

“Fine!” said the smaller one. He took up the trail and a hundred yards farther on there was another nice ball of fat.

The big one smelt it, and turned away. There was a slight smell of man discernible, even through the smell of scorched fat. He let it alone.

The smaller one wolfed it up. “May as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb,” he said with a grin, and the grin remained on his sharp face. Also foam gathered about his jaws, also an anxious look appeared in his eyes, also he was seized with violent convulsions and stiffened out.

“I thought so,” said the big one. “Seems to me I remember that my revered mother died of a ball of fat.” He sniffed at his dead friend. “This is very shocking,” he muttered. “Drat that flea,” and he made a bite at his flank. After that he went on the trail and examined five other pellets of fat, turning each one over and sniffing it. Finally the trail ended in a sheep paunch; and a sheep paunch without a sheep attached to it was not a common object of the veld. He examined it carefully, and discovered that it had been handled by a man, bound by a rheim, and cut open in one place. There were a few grains of white powder about the edges of the cut, and the jackal, at the smell, streaked off, for that smell explained the sudden passing away of many of his boon companions.

He came to a wire fence, slipped through it and flung his mournful wail into the still night. An answering call came out of the distance, and he slipped smoothly on, holding up for a few seconds to greet an ant-bear who in a workmanlike way was breaking into the hard roof of an ant-hill.

“Hallo, Snuffles—let your old cellar?”

The ant-bear shot a long glutinous tongue among the ruins of the ant-village, drew it back covered with indignant ants into his absurd little mouth and grunted.
“I left it, sir—drove out—sir, by a mangy sheep-stealing uncle of yours. That’s him crying out.”

“Mangy! You surprise me.”

“Mangy. Got the complaint from a scabby ewe of his acquaintance.”

“Disgraceful! And where’s your new house, Snuffles?”

“Look here,” said Snuffles, “if you come into my new place I’ll bury you!”

“So long, Nosey!” said the jackal, continuing his journey till he met his disreputable uncle waiting for him.

The two of them trotted off to a fence protected by vermin-proof fencing, and the new-comer followed the fence to the left at a steady lope for half a mile, when he stopped.

“Take a look at that,” he said, and the nephew, looking through the fence, saw a bunch of fat sheep at rest.

“Luck, isn’t it. You see this is the only place the fence can be entered. I was just going through when I heard your cry. Says I, that’s the chap for this job. He’s young and spry. He could squeeze through that hole and hold a sheep till I help him.”

The nephew looked at the hole. It was a small hole at the foot of the fence. Then he looked at his uncle. “It’s a fine hole,” he said.

“That’s so. Just slip through, my boy, and we’ll eat fresh mutton.”

“Seems made on purpose, that hole,” said the nephew carelessly, but with his left eye on his uncle, who certainly smelt strong, and had bare patches on his elbows, very much like mange.

“That’s what I said when I saw it. Made on purpose—that hole,” and the old villain leered at his young friend with an intimation to get to business. The young jackal advanced to the hole, stopped, and flung a look over his shoulder which discovered his amiable relative in a state of quivering excitement.

So he made a new plan. If his respected uncle went some distance along the fence and howled, the sheep would bunch together, looking that way. Then he, the nephew, could crawl through the hole and take them in the rear! How was that for a plan?

The old reprobate agreed, moved off, and at his lugubrious howl the sheep did bunch together; but the nephew did not go through the hole. He scrambled up a pole, slipped through the upper wires and had a sheep on its back kicking in no time. The other jackal raced back. The hole was evidently quite safe after all, thought he, for there was the youngster on the other side. He crawled through—that is, he crawled half-way, but on the far side two iron and toothed jaws rose up and bit into his forearm. The nephew finished his
meal, then he strolled over to investigate the unaccountable (?) detention of his distinguished relative, who was bearing his agony in silent fury, biting at the iron jaws, at his leg, at the wire fence, but making no whimper even, for a trapped animal attracts no attention to his weakness.

“A very fine hole, uncle, but a trifle tight, eh,” and with a wicked grin the nephew put his fence trick to use, scaled over the fence by the pole, and after drinking at the dam, went off to hunt out the ant-bear’s new hole; and was asleep when that gentleman returned. His selection of that lying-up place was the result of sound reasoning—for said he to himself, the dogs would be out on his spoor next day, and the powerful scent of the ant-bear would disguise the bouquet de jackal.

He slept throughout the next day, and spent the next night at his leisure watching the ungainly spring hares feeding on the bottom lands by the river-bed. They hopped along like small kangaroos, sat up on their hind-legs, and kept a very bright look-out on both sides at once, their eyes being wide apart, and as they had their sentinels well posted, the thief of the night was viewed as soon as he left cover. He raced them to ground, and then nosed about on the scent of partridges which he was sure were lying up somewhere near. So he quartered the ground like a pointer, then fell over backwards, and slunk away at a horrid noise which turned the blood to ice in his veins. A bloated puff-adder was also out on the hunt, and had let off his signal with a peremptory warning to the interloper to clear out, and the interloper cleared without argument. He picked up a frog or two by the dam, and sought his old quarters, from which he at once emerged, followed by a storm of chattering abuse. A family of black and white skunks had taken possession of the den, and being aroused from a refreshing sleep, had forthwith released sulphuretted hydrogen mixed with other more offensive perfumes, so that even the jackal, familiar as he was with searching odours, had revolted from the baneful stench. He slunk off to the cluster of stones formerly the possession of the gentleman who had died of strychnine concealed in a ball of fat; whence he was rounded out by two terriers and a black mongrel, who raced him into the next camp—where the shepherd’s dogs joyfully took up the game and ran him to earth three miles away. The pace was altogether too fast for the terriers, but their young master noted their keenness, and formed a plan which boded no good to the Schaap’s Jackal.

As for that confident freebooter, he emerged quite pleased with himself as usual, and pleasurably hungry. What was it to be? A fat rooster! Good. He knew an out-house where the fowls roosted conveniently low, and proceeded to establish an alibi by yowling lustily.

After that, silence and a swift loping gallop to the out-house, which he circled carefully. All seemed well—but as he prepared to carry out his coup a
keevikee (plover) saw him and flew up shrieking above his head till the dogs came out to investigate. He snarled at them, and went off in a great hurry—for one dog came at him in silence, and he had the greatest dislike to dogs which ran mute. When he brought up he found himself in an ostrich camp, aware of that from a curious rattling set up by the hen ostrich snapping her beak. Of course he immediately began moving around, and came upon the cock bird sitting. Eggs, thought the jackal, and licked his chops. He sat down and eyed the cock bird, then he crept round on his stomach, and the cock twisted his long neck till he could twist it no more—but as the crawling thing still crawled, he stood up. Then the jackal ran at him, and he danced about with his wings lifted and his tail up. The jackal led him away, and then disappeared. The cock bird stared around, and in the meantime the thief hooked an egg from the nest, and started rolling it away to a bush where he crouched. When the cock bird covered the eggs again, the thief continued to roll the egg along out of sight. Then he held it first in his forepaws and bumped it against a stone till he laid it open. It was a good meal, but sticky, and he spent a long time combing himself clean.

To kill a sheep is bad. To destroy the eggs of a thousand-pound pair of breeding birds is worse, and when the farmer found the broken egg-shell he sent for a foxhound and several days later our friend was early one morning roused from his old retreat among the roots. He slipped up the donga, squirmed through a wire fence, doubled and twisted through a thicket of bush and trotted off down a dry sluit9 to an old hollowed-out ant-hill. He sniggered to himself, for no dog yet had unravelled the mystery of the scent in the thicket—but a moment later he stole out of the hole and listened. This was a new dog, with a new sort of hunting song? He had been too busy to listen to the song before, but now he knew it had sounded unfamiliar when he left the lair. A strange, eager, ominous, bell-like sound, and with it came the yapping of those terrible pests the terriers. They had hit off his trail, too, and he went off at a long slouching gallop on a wide curve, crossed the river, jumped to a tree trunk and flattened himself against the ground under rushes. He curled his tail over his nose and prepared to sleep, but there it was again, that new song, and there was the dog—a big black and white brute—dashing on his scent without a pause.

The jackal began to feel nervous. He made up-river a little way into the denser growth—but relentless as fate came that strange hound after him, the terriers yapping all the time far behind. The jackal showed his teeth and looked as if he meditated a stand when he glimpsed the hound aiming straight at him, and this time he flew out into the veld, a thing he had never done before—a foolish thing—but three miles across country he knew of an impregnable fastness. On a slight ridge he turned to look back. There were two horsemen after him at a gallop, behind were two white specks—the ter-
riers—between him and them was the new hound—and far off, coming up at terrific speed was a greyhound. The hunter, who was now the hunted, took in the pursuit with a steady glance, then he settled down into a bee-line for safety.

Thank goodness he had not supped too well! His wind was good, and if he could outstay that thing of speed, the greyhound, he could win home to the rocky fastness he had in view. The greyhound was a moving spot of dust at first, but very soon out of the dust emerged a back that was bent like a bow one fraction of a second and stretched out like an arrow the next, having swallowed distance at each spring, but could he last at that terrific gait! Ahead of him were the horsemen sitting down to it, the tossed manes from the outspread necks streaming back, the red nostrils widespread, their ears laid back, their eyes alive to the rough going, to the far-off Thief of the Night, to the foxhound running mute. Behind, in a frenzy, pelted the terriers, balls of white, yapping now only at intervals—their eyes fiery with the lust of battle, their mouths open. Ahead went the jackal at an even pace, his ears cocked back, his yellow eyes fixed on a spot of black far ahead where was safety.

The air rushed by. Ant-hills innumerable jumped out of the veld and slipped behind. Here and there a colony of red meerkats set up on their hind legs chattering. A ring crow, the sun striking on his feathers, winged across the line chuckling gleefully—and for some distance kept level with the hunted, dropping callous remarks about a meal he anticipated within a few minutes.

The greyhound now has passed the horses. The muscles on his sinewy quarters are knotted. The strain is telling, but he sees an old enemy ahead, and he will reach him or die. The foxhound pays no heed to anything. His sickle stern is no longer carried high—there is a straight line from the muzzle to the tip of the tail—and the gap between him and the quarry is closing up, but the jackal is slipping along apparently without effort, smoothly; though his tongue lolls out and his heart is thumping against his ribs. The greyhound is level with the foxhound, but neither take notice of the other, and the racing dog makes his last effort. The lips are curled back from the long, lean jaws as he flings himself forward to roll the jackal off his feet—but it is he himself who comes to the ground, making a complete somersault, for at the moment of contact the jackal slips away with a reserve of effort; slips forward, and then slips back to his old speed. He is calculating the distance. He is good for one final burst, and if that does not carry him to safety, he must give in. So his ears are turned back, and his eyes, blurring under the strain, study the distance ahead. The greyhound is up and off once more on a stern chase, and the foxhound has crept up with dauntless
determination to within ten lengths. Somehow he knows that the tree that is rushing nearer is the end of the struggle, and as he hears the panting of the greyhound, he perceptibly lengthens out. He has closed in to five lengths, to three, to two; a red light leaps to his eyes, an eager, strangled gasp comes from his open mouth—and then the jackal shoots his bolt. He slips away—the shadow of the tree meets him, a few grey stones jump up out of the veld, he staggers, and the two dogs, seeing this, call on their strength—but both trip, and before they are up a red form crawls to the foot of the tree and disappears feebly. At the last moment, when his legs had failed, the jackal had crouched flat, offering no resistance to the impact of the hounds, and that is why they had fallen.

The horsemen pulled up, dismounted, and loosened girdles. The horses stood blown, wet patches round their eyes, the hounds crouched where they had fallen panting, with eyes half closed, and the two frenzied balls of white coming up two minutes later flung themselves at the dark slit in the rock which was too small to let them in.

**Notes**

1. **Cango** This alcoholic beverage of South Africa is produced in the rich winelands of the Klein Karoo in the vicinity of the Cango Caves near Oudtshoorn.

2. **sjambok** a rawhide whip used by drivers of oxen.

3. **Troopers ... Kafirs** Centuries ago these first three were cattle rustlers and bandits from the Scottish borderlands; the Rooi Kafirs (Xhosas) were tribal hunters who wore skins or a blanket, had not adopted European customs, and smeared their bodies with red ochre.

4. **Ishmael** Genesis 16:12. “And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his brethren.”

5. **dorps** villages or small rural towns.

6. **donga** a “fissure cut deeply into the friable ground by wind and rain”—Glanville.

7. **Rimmel ... Araby** Rimmel London, founded in 1834, was and still is a very successful perfumery, its cosmetics currently promoted by supermodel Kate Moss; Araby or Arabia: nor “all the perfumes of Arabia,” Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 5:1.

8. **daarom mooi** yummy for that reason.

9. **sluit** ditch.

10. **Red meerkats** better known as yellow mongooses (*Cynictis penicillata*), they are smaller than typical mongooses and live in semi-arid open lands or in grasslands.