

THE CHEETAH AND THE LAZY HUNTER

AN AFRICAN FOLKTALE REWORKED BY MR. RINKEVICH

Long ago, a wicked and lazy hunter sat under a tree. He was hungry, but did not want to be bothered to find food. Below him on the grassy field, there were robust springbok grazing. Our friend, the hunter did nothing, he only watched the animals as they fed, wishing he could have meat without working for it.

Suddenly he noticed the movement of a female cheetah seeking food. She singled out a springbok who had foolishly wandered away from the rest. Suddenly she gathered her long legs under her and sprang forward.

With great speed, she came upon the springbok and brought it down. Startled, the rest of the herd raced away as the cheetah attacked her prey.

The hunter watched as the cheetah dragged her prize to some shade on the edge of the clearing. There, three beautiful cheetah cubs were waiting for her. The lazy hunter was filled with envy for the cubs and wished that he could have such a good hunter provide for him.

Then he had a wicked idea. He decided that he would steal one of the cheetah cubs and train it to hunt for him. He decided to wait until the mother cheetah left the vicinity to make his move. He smiled to himself, feeling like a genius.

When the sun began to set, the cheetah hid her cubs in a bush and set off to the waterhole. The hunter quickly grabbed his spear and trotted down to the bushes where the cubs were hidden. There he found the three cubs, still too young to be frightened of him or to run away.

First, he chose one, then decided upon another, and then changed his mind again. Finally he decided to steal all three cubs, thinking to himself that he would do better to keep them all.

Mother cheetah returned half-an-hour later only to find her cubs gone. She cried until there were no more tears in her eyes. Day and night she cried and searched for her cubs. Until she met an old man who came to find out what the problem was.

The old man was wise and knew the ways of the animal. For little did the cheetah know, but the old man was Oshosi in disguise. He who knows the hunt and can become the animal himself and thus can speak to the animal in its own tongue. When he heard what the wicked hunter had done, he became very angry. The lazy hunter was not only a thief; he had broken the natural laws of the hunt as well.

Oshosi is also the spirit of meals, because it is he who provides all food, so he knew the cubs were not large enough to provide a sizable meal, nor were they old enough to hunt for a sizable meal. Oshosi also knew that if the lazy hunter found no use for the young cubs, he would leave them and they would be defenseless having not acquired the needed skills from their mother. The cheetah hunts vermin and those who would eat all vegetation if not for the cheetah controlling their

numbers, so if cheetah cubs did not grow into the great hunters that Oshosi allows them to become, an imbalance will occur.

The old man returned to the village and told the elders what had happened. The villagers became angry. For as angry as they were with what the old man had told them, they also knew that Ode, the god of the hunt, would be displeased because a hunter must use only his own strength and skill. Any other way of hunting was surely a dishonor. If such a dishonorable man was allowed to remain in the tribe, the village also risked facing the wrath of Otin as well.

They found the lazy hunter and demanded he return the cubs before driving him away from the village. While the hunter was humiliated over being exiled from the tribe, he also feared that his crimes would bring upon the wrath of Ayelala, who is known to be swift with judgement and harsh with punishments.

The old man took the three cheetah cubs back to their grateful mother who offered to teach the hunter how to hunt with honor. The hunter learned quickly and soon returned to the tribe begging for forgiveness.

He was forgiven and is now a respected hunter who teaches the tribal youth how to hunt in a successful and honorably way that gives his tribe pride and pleases the mighty Orisha's Oshosi and Ode.