



# Why the Cheetah's Cheeks are Stained with Tears

A Zulu story from South Africa

Kwasuka sukela (once upon a time), a lazy hunter sat under a tree watching a herd of springbok graze in a nearby field. He was so enjoying the shade of the tree and the gentle breeze that he didn't feel like hunting. But, before long, the hunter noticed a cheetah approaching the herd — and the cheetah did feel like hunting.

The hunter watched the cheetah creep through the grass toward a small springbok who had wandered away from the herd. Suddenly, Cheetah sprang forward and ran so fast that the hunter could hardly see her. Cheetah was a great hunter, and she easily caught the little springbok.

The farmer watched the cheetah carry her prize to her three cubs who were waiting in a patch of shade nearby.



The lazy hunter thought, “If I had someone who could hunt like that for me, I could spend every day napping in the shade of this tree.” Then, the hunter had an idea!

He waited until the mother cheetah went to get a drink from the waterhole, and then he crept to where the three cubs were hidden, waiting for their mama to return. The cubs were too young to be frightened of the hunter. The hunter looked at the cheetah cubs, trying to decide which to steal. Finally, he decided to take all three — they would hunt for him and make his life easy!

When the mother cheetah returned to find that her cubs were gone, she was heartbroken. She wept and wailed and cried for her lost children. She cried all night and all the next day until her tears made dark stains down her cheeks. She cried so much and so noisily that an old man heard her and came to find out what was wrong.

When the old man learned what had happened and who was responsible, he went quickly to tell the village elders and told them about what the lazy hunter had done.

The elders were furious!

The lazy hunter was a thief, and he had dishonored the tribe by breaking with tradition: Hunters must use only their own strength and skill to hunt.

The villagers found the lazy hunter, ordered him to go far away for the rest of time, and brought the three cubs back to their mother.

The mama cheetah and her cubs were overjoyed to be back together, safe and sound. But the mother cheetah’s face remained stained with tears forever. Cheetahs still wear those tear stained cheeks today to remind hunters to hunt honorably.

