

Predation

Breaking through the tall grass, the antelope's chest heaved with every stride against the battered savannah. The dry season had set in with no intention of leaving. With the sun to his back, he darted over the fallen corpse of a tree, changing direction sharply at the sight of a thorn thicket. Head low, he prayed to the gods not to leave him today.

Keeping the thicket to his right, he moved quickly alongside looking for an opening. Without a break in the foliage he turned around, only to be met with the face of a lion approaching fast. Out of time, he made his decision. With a leap of faith, he barreled into the thorns. Pushing against the branches, clumps of fur and flesh were torn. The adrenaline pounded the pain into oblivion; the antelope making a path that the predators would soon use to follow him. This way was his only chance though.

Just when he thought there was no end to the thorn thicket, he broke free only to find no firm footing under him. For a fraction of a second he hung in the air before gravity pulled his body back down. Tumbling end over end on the slope he came to rest in the dirt.

Knocked for a loop, he laid there stunned.

The chase was over.

Off in the distance he could see the herd. He was so tantalizing close to the end that it put a bitter taste in his mouth. What an utter failure he had turned out to be.

Closing his eyes, he rested. Only the waiting process was left.

Then he heard the slightest of whispers. Straining his neck, the silhouette of a galloping figure stretched across the horizon of his vision. The doe skidded to a halt, leaning over to look in his eyes for signs of life. Seeing them move and follow her shape, she smiled. He smiled back.

Overhead the pride of lions broke through the thicket, taking the fall much more graciously.

This was it, he thought, bracing for the impact. Quickly, another small prayer was sent.

The doe barely knew what hit her as the first lioness slammed into her side, claws flared out. The others followed suit, one claiming the jugular. With each new weight pushing down on the doe, her chance of escape dwindled till she was nothing more than a struggling mass barely visible under all the amber fur. Taking the nose in her mouth, one lioness started the slow process of suffocation.

Time ticked by, but soon enough the doe ceased moving.

The lioness got up, releasing the head. It hit the ground with a lifeless dull thud.

She nodded with approval and the pride eagerly started carving into the kill.

Sitting up as the apricot feline approached, the stag greeted her with a customary head bump.

He was scolded by her sharp tongue shortly after for his unorthodox methods in today's hunt, but ultimately was also praised for having fed the pride once again. She told him he had gotten lucky. Next time he was to stick to luring out a sick or elderly animal for dinner.

Nodding, he understood his mistake. As the pride ate, the sun fell. The shadows stretched even farther till they were but simple lines against the earth.

Off to the side, the antelope grazed contently.