

## **A SAMPLE FROM WEST OF SAVAGE**

It was June, and the earth was throbbing with hidden life. A vast silence reigned over the forest, as if some magic spell held it enraptured. In the clear blue sky above, the sun shone white and blinding. Seemingly it smirked with scorching features at the puny lives of the woods-folk, at the comedies and tragedies of their existence. It was like the face of a giant clown, beaming with the humors of the gods.

Few wild creatures were about. Daylight is not their period of activity. It is to them, as night is to man, the time for concealment, for rest and for sleep. To one, it was the marvel moment of his creation; for the fawn had just come into the world, to thrive as best he might, to reproduce his kind, and to meet the end as those before him had done.

He lay by his mother's side, a trembling and feeble body of sensitive tissues, gasping faintly at the fragrant breath of the chaparral. Too young to contact readily with his environment, the warmth of the doe's body was his first realization of the world.

As he lay there, his watery eyes scarcely capable of sight, the searching rays of the sun stole into his consciousness through the tender skin of his body giving him strength and completing his state as an individual. It imbued him with life-giving forces and instilled into him

a growing vigor. Tender massaging by his mother's tongue might have done the same, but he was not to know the caresses of parental love.

Faithfully the doe had met her destiny, as was befitting her part in the scheme of creation. At the moment of his arrival she had given all she had to give - her own life.

In the wild, the heritage of life is as uncertain as the sunshine in the sky, for but few animals survive to a ripe age. Always something within their environment reaches out and claims its due, a price here, a price there, and the toll is that which can never be regained. So, it had been with the doe that now lay still in death.

In the prime of her life, having just brought her first-born into the world, she had given back an equal sum for her own creation, and passed on. A great jagged cut along her withers, and another - the fatal wound - across the under portion of her slender neck, indicated what manner of violence had overtaken her.

Just before dawn, as the doe, in company with several other deer, rounded a jutting rock at the side of the trail they were following, something dropped upon her shoulders with the crushing weight of one hundred and fifty pounds of fur, muscle, and bone. The cougar had singled her out as its prey, because the doe, which moved with less energetic stride, was the last to pass.

No animal is as deceptive in agility and combat as a deer. Especially is this true when a doe is heavy with young. Even as the cougar was in the act of descent, with gaping jaws and unsheathed claws, the never-failing senses of the doe prepared her for the attack.

She sprang out and away from the danger like a flash. At that instant, the impact of the cougar's body carried her to her knees. This fact alone saved the doe from a broken neck, for the drop of her body, as the beast struck, thwarted the usual death-dealing tactics.

Although the great cat's claws sank deep into the deer's withers, as its snaky head shot forward and under the throat, the fall of the doe dislodged the cougar's hold, and the attacker was flung to the ground at the feet of its prey.

Already rearing upon her hind legs, as the cougar struck the earth, the doe came down, driving her razor forehoofs into the furry mass beneath her. Twice she repeated the blow before the cat could clear itself. Then the doe, in great bounds, *thump thump-thump thump!* sailed away, twenty feet to the lunge.

The quiet of the dawn was disrupted by a fierce and cutting scream, for the cougar was sorely disappointed and seriously wounded. It slunk away through the brush, half dragging its rear quarters.

For more than half a mile the wounded doe fled, when she was forced by sheer weakness to abandon flight. It was her intention to mount the next ridge and gain the canyon beyond, where she had selected a birthplace for her expected young. A sudden lack of strength prevented her from going farther, and she sought immediate seclusion.

Staggering to a neighboring windfall, she forced her way deep into its interior. Her knees suddenly buckled under her. She sank heavily upon her side, a low and painful groan expiring from her panting lungs. A scarlet pool began to well from the ugly wound along the side of her neck. The jugular vein had been nearly severed by that one lightning-like slash of the cougar's fangs.

Moments passed. The doe's breathing became shorter, mere gasps, and as her life slowly ebbed away, a faint bleat emanated from the dense thicket. At the sound, the mother strove to lift her head, raising it slightly off the ground, exerting the final ounce of her strength in her dying effort. This was her last act - the acknowledgment of her offspring. A low moan and she was gone.

The hours crept by and, as time wore on, the heat of the day became less intense. A misty haze was condensing in the firmament. By mid-afternoon the face of old Sol was hidden from sight. A dark shadow had settled over

the woodland, and a slight breeze rustled through the verdure; the air was suddenly cool and laden with moisture.

Clouds hove in from the southeast, and the gray dawn of a summer shower dropped the ceiling of the sky below the crest of Saddle Peak, obscuring the rocky horns of the mountain. More sensitive than the delicate mechanism of a barometer, the tender body of the newly-born deer was seriously affected.

As a lone and individual spark of life, every separate cell of the fawn's body reacted to the repellent law of cold. He moved closer to his mother's inert form, seeking warmth where there was none to be found. Then hunger seized him, as his vitals strove to function, so that the normal temperature of the body might be sustained.

The moisture gathered. It began to drizzle; and, after a while a soft and steady rain was falling. The dense green coat of the chaparral became soaked. Glistening drops of water sang their musical tinkle upon leaf and mold beneath shrub and bough.

As it rained, a man came quietly over the trail that led down the ridge into the canyon below. A duffel-bag was flung over his shoulder, and he walked like one who was thrilled and exhilarated by the very air he took into his lungs.

**Copyright © 2016 by Gammon Irons**

**All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof  
may not be reproduced or used in any manner  
whatsoever without the express written permission of  
the author except for the use of brief quotations in a  
book review.**