

## A THIEF'S TALE

A missing cow.  
A big panther.  
And a sly hyena.  
Read on....

By Arefa Tehsin

“We hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office.” Aesop was right on the mark. But this is not an Aesop's fable. It is a story of an evening in the Aravalis.

Around 15 km from the city of Udaipur there is a hill called Shringrishi. The hill is named after a temple on the slope of that hill. On the evening of May 26, 2001, my father Raza Tehsin and I were climbing the hill with two villagers and were nearing the ridge of the hill when we heard a commotion from yonder. We crossed the ridge and came upon a shallow ravine a few metres from the summit. There were six people gathered around a carcass of a cow in its prime. The cow was killed by a panther an hour before. A villager informed us that when he was gathering his herd to head back home, he found a cow missing. Other villagers joined the search and found the cow. By the side of the dead cow was a big panther devouring it. They scared the panther away by throwing stones and creating a racket. The resentful panther went down the hill.

### Panther's kill

We examined the carcass. It was certainly the kill of a panther. The panther had embowelled the cow. Stomach and intestines were lying a few feet away. Softer parts – liver, heart and lungs – were missing, prob-

ably consumed by the panther. By the panther's pugmarks it was apparent that it was of an exceptional size. We decided to have a look at this remarkably big panther.

Though we were equipped with only a torch and had no photographic equipment, we took our positions on a slightly raised ground behind some boulders about 20 metres from the kill. We made a hide from the surrounding bushes and requested the villagers to leave the carcass and us. We also instructed our companions, two villagers, to wait at the bottom of the hill. It was quarter to seven with the sun going rapidly down the Aravalis, one of the oldest mountain ranges of the world.

### Alert hyena

Just when the men crossed the ridge and disappeared from our sight, we spotted a big male hyena approaching the kill, cautious and alert. It cast its eyes all around and periodically raised its head, probably for the scent of the panther. It circled round the carcass three times. Once it was assured that there is no danger, it dashed towards the dead cow, picked up its stomach and trotted off, disappearing around the boulders towards our right. Within fifteen minutes again it appeared in the same manner but with a wee bit more courage. It approached the kill slowly and chewed the cow's ear. Then it started to sever the hind-leg. Torn between fear and food, it would get up and cast its eye around and then bob his head down on the kill. When the leg was finally separated, the hyena lifted it in its mouth and went in the same direction as before. A few minutes elapsed and again it approached the kill. As the sun had gone down and the jungle was engulfed in darkness, the hyena became in-



A leopard.



creasingly cautious. It removed the second hind-leg this time and took it away. After a while it took the front leg too.

### Night-time

The night intensified. At around 9 pm we motioned to each other and rose from the hide. The startled hyena sprinted away. The disgruntled panther had not bothered to turn up. As the hyena was a male, it was not taking food for its little ones. It must be aware of the strength of the panther and hence it was stealing the carcass in its absence. Usually, a fight

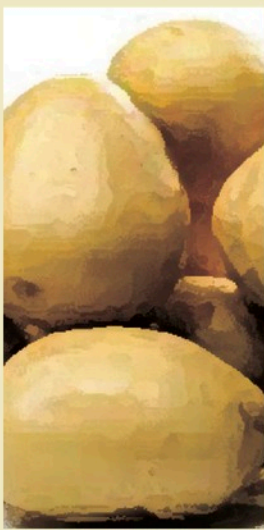
takes place between a panther and a hyena on a kill.

Although the striped hyena generally feigns dead when attacked, for food it can stand its ground against larger predators like panther. It drives away the panther or lingers in the vicinity while the panther devours its hard-earned meal. But for the first time we saw a hyena stealing away a panther's kill. The sly hyena might have returned content to its lair. But was it really a thief? Maybe not. GB Shaw had quite aptly observed, “There is no sincerer love than the love for food.” Perhaps it was only a striped hyena in love, ready to risk its integrity among other things for love's sake.

(The writer is Honorary Wildlife Warden of Udaipur district. Playing with snakes, exploring caves and treading jungles with her naturalist father has always delighted her as much as penning down words.)



A hyena.



## Did you know?

Some of us don't like potato skins, but we still hear our mothers' voice when we leave it on the plate: “A potato's nutrients are all in the skin.” While there's some basis to the statement – potato skin is rich in fibre and other nutrients – that's not the whole story.

Truth is, only about 20 per cent of the potato's nutrition is found on the skin.

The skin of a medium potato contains 920 milligrams of potassium and 3.6 grams of fibre, while the flesh (without the skin) still offers 676 milligrams of potassium (more than a banana) and 2.6 grams of fibre. Not too bad, right?

Plus, the flesh of the potato contains vitamins C, K and B6, as well as a healthy dose of niacin and thiamin.

A medium potato's flesh also has magnesium, phosphorus, copper, manganese, zinc, riboflavin and folate – all for less than 150 calories.

