

## Briendon's First Hunt

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Briendon could barely keep himself still as he sat with his family around their morning fire. Looking over the embers of the fire and out into the wilderness, the young rabbit's mind was burning with anticipation. Today was the day, a day he'd waited so long for, and he was eager to get the morning's meal over with so he could get on with it.

His mother noticed his excitement, and she reached over to playfully scratch one of his long ears. "All anxious for your big day, aren't you Briendon?" she asked, a proud smile forming on her lips.

His eager nod widened her smile. "Well my brave hunter, you'll just have to wait until after breakfast before you go running off with the others."

Briendon's impatience was obvious as his lips curled slightly downward at her remarks, much to the amusement of both his father, and his brother Ashter. "Come on Briendon, you can wait a little longer," Ashter impishly teased him.

Briendon gave him a resigned nod, his ears drooping slightly. He knew his brother was right, that he could wait a little while longer, and without a good meal to start out with it would be hard to keep up with the others in the hunting party. Still, he felt as if he could barely contain his excitement, he was so anxious for his first hunt.

For several months he'd been watching the cycles of the moon, knowing the time of his emergence into adulthood was approaching. Last night had been the full moon of his birth month, and now it was time for him to take his place among the other hunters of their village. Looking at his father and brother he saw the bead necklaces they each wore around their necks, the simple jewelry standing out against the light colors of their chest fur. The necklaces were a symbol of adulthood given to each male by his father after the return from their first hunt, and Briendon was very eager to receive his own token of the rite of passage. He could barely wait for his chance to prove himself, and the morning's meal seemed to be taking much longer than usual.

When breakfast was cooked, Briendon tried to rush through the meal, but slowed his pace a little when he realized that the rest of his family wasn't going as quick as he was. Finally they were all finished, and looking around the village, Briendon saw the hunting party was starting to form. He eagerly rose to a standing position and waited for his father and brother to join him as they smiled at his impatience.

As they were leaving to join the rest of the party, his mother quickly reached out and hugged him. He squirmed a little, thinking that it looked silly for a brave hunter to get a hug from his mother. Looking up at her he saw the warmth in her eyes and relented, hugging her back. When his mother had released him, she watched him leave with the others, a smile on her muzzle and a few tears in her eyes. Ashter caught that, and grinning at him, he gave his younger brother a playful swat on the arm. Briendon returned his brother's affection in a

similar manner, matching Ashter's grin with one of his own. Today at the hunt he'd finally get to show his brother his own hunting skills. He no longer would have to watch enviously as Ashter went out with the hunting party and left him behind in the village, for today he was finally joining the hunters.

Soon after they joined the group of hunters, everybody was there and ready to go. The leader noticed Briendon and smiled, pointing out to everybody that it was his first hunt and the young rabbit received congratulations from all of the older males there. Along with his excitement, he felt a growing pride and wanted even more for the hunt to begin, so he could prove himself to the members of his village.

With the congratulations finished, and the members of the party already assembled, they set out into the wilderness, carrying their spears with them in readiness for the hunt. After a short journey, they spotted their prey, large, orange-skinned animals, their bodies long and narrow. The beasts had squat legs, pointed heads and peculiar tails of green tendrils sprouting from their backs. They ate grass to survive, not other animals, so their lack of sharp teeth or claws did not threaten the hunters. However, they still could pose a threat for their size, being larger and weighing more than any single rabbit. It would take a few hunters working together to bring down one of these animals.

Briendon watched and listened to the leader of the hunt as he quietly gave instructions to the rest of the party. They formed small groups of three or four rabbits each and spread out. Getting into to position, they moved as silently as possible so as to not disturb their prey as they grazed on the grass, the animals oblivious to the imminent danger facing them.

As they made ready to attack, Briendon felt nervous anxiousness stealing over him, mixing with the excitement and boldness he'd felt earlier. Now that they were about to spring on the animals, the tinge of self doubt stung at him. What if he messed up and didn't do it right, what if he couldn't go through with the hunt? Up until that point he'd been sure he'd do wonderful at the hunt, thinking of how thrilling it would be to take down their prey, but now it seemed harder than he'd imagined it would be. Ashter was in his little group of hunters and Briendon stole a nervous glance up at him. If Ashter noticed his younger brother's uncertainty, he failed to acknowledge it, keeping his attention focused on the animals they were stalking.

When they were all spread out and ready, the leader gave the signal and they charged, running towards the beasts. Their approach startled the animals and they were quick to flee their attackers, but the hunters were fast as well. As they ran, Briendon could feel the powerful beating of his heart, his mind and body racing with excitement. Even with his nervousness, the feelings of the chase were spurring him on, pushing him forward. This was it, he was in the midst of his first hunt and it felt wonderful.

Running along with others, he moved his shorter legs as fast as he could to try and keep up with the older hunters. He did fall slightly behind the pack, but not so far as to be out of the hunt; he would not let that happen to him. Their strategy was simple, as they ran, they spread out more and worked to surround as many of their prey as they could, allotting one animal for every small group of hunters. Moving quickly, gaining on the beasts, they soon had a good number of them trapped.

As Briendon's group advanced on one of the cornered animals, and made ready to attack it, he finally caught up with them. A little unsure of what to do he hesitated briefly. While he

watched, the others moved around the beast, their spears at the ready, blocking the animal's chance of escape. Joining them, Briendon pointed his own spear at the frightened beast and waited. Glancing at Ashter again, he saw him silently urging him on, a look of determination in his eyes.

All of a sudden, heading an unspoken command, the other hunters thrust forward with their spears, attacking the beast. Moving with them, reacting with instinctive grace, Briendon drove his own spear into the animal, releasing a frightened squeal from it. Having taken first blow to the beast, he felt a surge of confidence run through him. All around him he was dimly aware of the other hunting groups attacking their prey, and of the whines of the animals as they fought the losing battle for their survival. The struggles of their prey and the sounds of the hunt excited him and last vestiges of his doubts were driven from his mind.

The hunters in his group worked quickly, jabbing at the fighting beast with their spears again and again, spilling its thick life essence on the ground, wetting the grass with its sap-like fluids. Working with his fellow hunters, driven on by the thrill of the hunt, Briendon noticed that the animal's struggles were beginning to die down as their prey weakened. Soon its struggles ceased all together. Seeing the beast fall before them, they all were left panting from the excitement and exertion. Briendon almost collapsed from the fatigue that overtook him at the sudden end of the battle, but he braced himself with his spear for support and kept his hunter's stance.

After the frenzy of the hunt had cleared, and they'd recovered their energy, the members of the party surveyed their work. They'd taken down a good number of their prey and were satisfied with the results of the hunt. Briendon himself was very pleased, not only having gone on his first hunt, but he'd also helped kill one of the beasts. He'd overcome his momentary uncertainties and emerged victorious from the hunt. He'd proven his skills, not only to the other hunters, but also to himself.

He knew that his part in the kill was only a small one, and that without the other hunters there, he wouldn't have been able to do it alone. However, nobody hunted alone, it was, by necessity, a group effort. Having taken part in it, he was now considered an adult, and his heart surged with pride at his accomplishment. Still panting slightly, he looked over at his brother to find Ashter smiling at him and their work.

Now he was eager to get back to the village, to help show off the spoils of the hunt that day, and he was quite happy to help carry one of the carcasses home. It was heavy, but he embraced the work with vigor. It was a little hard to keep up with the other rabbits he was helping to carry the beast, but he did his best to match their pace as they walked along. Ashter chuckled a little as his brother had some trouble with the burden, but looking up at him Briendon could see the warmth in his eyes.

When they reached home, the rest of the village watched them as they returned victorious from the hunt. Briendon could see his mother smiling proudly at him as they carried the bodies of animals into the center of the village, and his face reflected her emotions. Tonight they would eat well, and there would be extra celebration marking Briendon's passage into adulthood. The results of the hunt had been favorable indeed and the bounty was plentiful; tonight everyone in the village would get their fill of the sweet taste of carrots.

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