

Coda the wolf lay despondent in his clan's cave while his mother groomed him. Coda was depressed. He was tired of his father, Chief Gnash, ignoring him and focusing all his praise on Coda's older brother, Orion. Orion was the clan's best hunter, and recently, it seemed that on every hunt, Orion brought in the kill. Orion did not make the situation better for Coda. He treated Coda like a bug and said Coda would never learn to hunt with the pack. This was all Coda really wanted.

Coda got up slowly as he heard a commotion from the front of the cave. His mother sprinted to the front of the cave. Coda took his time. He was at the back, and the cave was seventy-five feet deep. Coda was resolute about not spending a lot of time with Orion. When he did get to the front, his father was tearing up chunks of Orion's pronghorn for the clan. All fifteen male hunters, thirteen female caretakers, and half a dozen cubs circled around Orion, praising him for his catch. Coda trotted away from the hullabaloo and to his father.

"Father?" he interjected.

Chief Gnash did not even look up and continued to portion the pronghorn.

"Excuse me, Father?"

"What!" Chief Gnash grunted, still not looking up.

“Sorry, Father, but I was wondering, didn’t anyone else catch anything?”

Chief Gnash finally looked up.

“No,” he responded.

Coda was not surprised. It was not the season for plentiful hunting, but his gifted brother always seemed to get the kill. Obviously, Coda appreciated the fact he could eat, but every mouthful of the kill seemed to taste wretched.

“Could you teach me to hunt like him?” Coda asked.

“Coda, I don’t have the time. Ask your brother yourself,” Chief Gnash replied. He then grabbed a hunk of meat and flung it at Coda.

“Here. Go eat. DINNER TIME!”

The last of Chief Gnash’s words sent the pack barreling for the fresh meat. Coda tried to sprint away, but he was painfully knocked over by the first one heading for dinner; Orion.

Orion grabbed a hunk of meat, and marched over to the moaning Coda, lying five feet away. Orion dropped his dinner and began hollering at Coda.

“Listen, you pest! I almost stubbed my toe running over your carcass! You’re not a real wolf! You don’t even know how to hunt!”

Coda shakily got up and angrily yelled at his brother.

“I could if I tried, but none of you let me!”

“You couldn’t catch a fly if it landed on your nose!” Orion volleyed back.

“Get out of my sight! Go live with the coyotes, you scum.”

Coda just stared at his hated sibling. Orion momentarily looked surprised that his brother wasn’t backing down.

“I’ll prove you all wrong. You, Father, and this whole pack!” Coda yelled before racing away, sidestepping the mosh pit around the pronghorn and outside.

Coda spent most of the rest of the night outside, lying on the edge of the cliff. The river at the canyon’s bottom grew dimmer and dimmer, the sun grew lower, and the sounds of night began their tune.

As the stars began to be visible in the twilight sky, Coda was startled as a loud clattering sound occurred behind him. He turned to see that one of the mothers had tossed the pronghorn dinner’s horns out.

Coda recalled what Orion had said, that he could not catch a fly. Coda dug his claws deeper into the ground and growled. He would prove them wrong.

Suddenly, Coda had an idea. He leaped up, excited. He would prove them wrong in the most direct way. He would trail tomorrow’s hunting party and catch something, something big so that no one could call him scum again.

Coda raced inside the cave, all the way to the back to where the sleeping clan's nests were, threw himself in his nest, and curled up for the night. He needed as much rest as possible. Through his tail covering his eyes, he could see Orion, whose nest was beside his, open one eye, grunt, and turn his head away from Coda.

Coda thought to himself, "Something really, really big!"

Coda woke up early the following day. He spent most of it pacing outside, swiping at the petty trees in his rocky habitat. The day's hunting party left in the early afternoon, and Coda wished he could make them leave more quickly. However, Chief Gnash seemed content to snooze all day.

The party finally left two hours past noon. As the party sped down the path that turned into the canyon, Coda struggled to catch up. He had almost lost sight of them as he turned into the canyon; they were so far ahead. Coda thought that maybe his plan was flawed.

Instead of bungling through the rocks, Coda took a small path that jutted out the canyon wall. He sprinted along it and soon saw the hunting party in the distance, sniffing the ground, trying to find a scent.

Unfortunately, Coda's path ended in the form of a giant boulder blocking his way. Coda felt defeated. He considered going back down the path because it was

too far down to the ground to jump when he heard multiple yelps and screeches from the direction of the hunting party.

Coda leaned over and looked past the boulder to see the whole hunting party sprinting towards him. His first thought was that they had seen him and would scold him, but then he saw a large shape gaining on them.

Coda gasped as the mountain lion gained on his clan. His brain was screaming at him to flee, but he resisted. Coda squeezed into the crack between the boulder and the canyon wall. For once, he was glad to be small.

He pushed against the boulder towards off the path, but it did not give. He kept pushing as he heard Chief Gnash and his clan run past. He leaned his head out of the crack and saw Orion running just two meters away. Suddenly, the fearsome mountain lion, twice the size of the puny wolf, came from behind and smacked Orion from behind. Orion flew into a sharp rock. He hit his head and sprawled out, unconscious. The mountain lion ambled towards Orion, licking his lips.

Coda tucked his head back in the crack. He pushed and pushed against the stubborn rock with his hind legs, pressing against the canyon wall with his front paws. His muscles burned, and sweat dripped down his facade. Coda would not give up, though. He would save Orion's life and prove his worth right then. He grunted and gave one last push.

The boulder toppled over the path and fell two meters down on the mountain lion's head. It crushed its skull into the ground. Coda, panting and trembling, watched as the lion squirmed and flinched, letting loose one muffled scream before becoming eternally silent.

Orion shook his head in confusion, awakening from his unconsciousness. He weakly looked at the massive boulder cementing the lion's bleeding head and then up to Coda, leg muscles quivering, looking proudly at his kill. Coda glanced at his brother and smiled as he saw that his brother was alive. Orion trembled.

"You..you killed that thing?" he uttered.

Coda nodded and said, "I told you I could hunt!"

Two hours later, Coda was sitting by his sleeping, resting brother. He was taking huge bites of the mountain lion. He had received the first pick of the meat, something that Chief Gnash always reserved for himself. His father had been ecstatic that Coda had killed the lion. His mother had fussed about him even more than before. Now, he told the story of his kill to the whole clan sitting before him in between bites.

Later that evening, as Coda sat outside as the sky darkened, just as he always did, Orion appeared from behind him. He shakily laid down beside his little brother. A few moments of silence passed between them. Orion broke the silence.

“I never treated you right,” Orion began. “I don’t know why. I guess all that praise I got went to my head. I feel terrible now. It seems ridiculous. I only want to treat you right after you saved my life. I’m sorry.”

“You’re right. You treated me like prey,” Coda murmured. “But I forgive you. Let’s treat each other well from now on.”

“Agreed,” Orion agreed.

Another couple of moments of silence passed, besides the fireflies coming out and singing their tune.

“You aren’t hurt, are you?” Orion asked.

Coda shook his head.

“Well then, Father told me to tell you to get ready. You hunt with us tomorrow. Two hours past noon.”

Orion hobbled up and returned to the cave while Coda howled in happiness.