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Illustrated by AI

Barron Von Biteyface: A Most Strategic Evening (Eh)



The night was perfect. The moon hung low—just as it should when greatness was about to unfold. The wind whispered through the wheat like applause waiting to happen.

And at the center of it all...

Me.

Barron Von Biteyface, leader of the most formidable hunting pack this prairie had ever known.

I adjusted my scarf.

Let it be known, I do not need the scarf: it is a symbol. Presence matters.

Behind me, my pack assembled. Boots stomped. Loudly—too loudly.

“Quiet, Boots,” I muttered, not turning. A great leader does not need to look.

“I’m bein’ quiet,” he said, stomping again.



Yes. Of course. This was fine. Everything was fine.

Because tonight—

We feast.

And then... as if summoned by destiny itself—

There she was.

A rabbit.

Small. Round. Vulnerable.

Perfect.

My heart surged—not with hunger, no... with opportunity.

“Behold,” I whispered dramatically, “a feast beneath the moon.”



Steve drooled.

Ned started whisper-panicking.

Sam said nothing, which I appreciated. Loyalty.

This was it.

The moment they would remember.

The night I proved—once again—why I lead.

She ran straight into us.

The field opened wide beneath the moon, and she ran freely into it—into *our* world.

Perfect.

You see, many believe the hunt is about speed.



It is not.

It is about timing.

Presence.

Control.

She slowed.

Relief.

Yes... good.

Let her feel it.

That was when I lifted one paw—slowly, deliberately.

A signal.

A command.



A masterpiece of leadership.

Behind me, the stomping stopped.

Good.

They were learning.

I let the silence stretch, just long enough to feel important.

“Tonight,” I said, low and rich, “we hunt with precision... with dignity... with—”

Boots sneezed.

Loudly.

The rabbit’s ears twitched.

My eye twitched.

I did not turn. A leader does not react. A leader absorbs.



“We proceed,” I finished, as though nothing had happened.

The wind stopped.

The grass stilled.

We stepped forward as one.

Crunch.

A low chuckle slipped through the dark.

I will admit—it may have been me.

Or Steve.

We share a certain... theatrical quality.

“Well now... what have we here, eh?”

She froze again.



Her heart—louder now than ever.

One shadow stepped from the trees.

Then another.

And another.

We revealed ourselves slowly, deliberately.

Never rushing.

Golden eyes blinking open in the darkness—

one...

then another...

then another...

Until she understood.



She was not alone.

Not anymore.

“Looks like we’ve found ourselves a little midnight snack, boys...” one of us whispered.

Her ears flattened.

Her paws trembled.

And just as she gathered the courage to move—

A twig snapped behind her.

We had her.

Or so we thought.

The rabbit lifted her chin.

Bold.



Interesting.

“Oh dear...” she said, “you’re too late.”

Too late?

I narrowed my eyes.

Too late?

“There’s a much bigger rabbit over that ridge,” she continued. “Round as a hay bale.”

A bigger rabbit.

My mind moved quickly.

This was clearly...

A test.

Yes.

A test of leadership.

Only a fool commits to a lesser prize when a greater one presents itself.



I nodded slowly.

“Bigger, you say...?”

The pack leaned in.

And then—

Without hesitation—

“FORWARD, MY PACK!!”

We ran.

Oh, how we ran.

Across the ridge—over loose dirt and wind-carved grooves, through patches of brittle grass that snapped beneath our paws like applause beneath greatness.

The moon stretched long shadows ahead of us.

And in my mind...

I could already see it.



A rabbit the size of a hay bale.

Round. Glorious. Legendary.

A feast worthy of song.

“Keep formation!” I barked, though we did not have a formation.

Boots barreled ahead, tongue flapping.

Ned muttered behind me, “What if it’s **BIG BACK**—like... bigger than me **BIG BACK**—”

“It is exactly as huge as it needs to be,” I snapped. “Trust the process.”

Steve drooled.

Sam stayed quiet.

Good.



They were focused.

They were learning.

We crested the ridge.

And there—

...

Nothing.

The land opened up wide and empty.

A stretch of pale prairie rolled out before us, silvered by moonlight. The grass bent in long, whispering waves. A crooked fence leaned in the distance. A rusted piece of farm equipment sat half-buried in the earth, like something forgotten by time.

The wind moved.

The shadows shifted.

For one brief moment—



I thought I saw it.

A shape.

Large.

Still.

My heart surged.

“There!” I shouted.

The pack froze.

We stared.

The shape loomed near a dip in the land.

Boots squinted. “That’s it, eh??”

Ned gasped. “IT’S MASSIVE—”

We crept forward.

Slowly.

Carefully.

The tension stretched tight.

The shape grew clearer...

Edges forming...

Details sharpening...

And then—

...

It was a hay bale!

Old.

Lopsided.

Half-rotted and unravelling at the edges.

Silent.

Completely, unmistakably—

Not a rabbit.



My heart sank into my stomach.

The tension tangible.

No one spoke.

Not at first.

The wind carried through the hollow space where triumph had just lived.

Something... shifted.

Not outside.

Inside.

A flicker.

Small.

Sharp.

Unwelcome.





I felt it settle low in my chest.

Not hunger.

Not fear.

Something else.

Something dangerously close to—

No.

Absolutely not.

I straightened.

Lifted my chin.

Adjusted my scarf.

This was fine.

A leader was always fine.



Behind me, Boots tilted his head.

“...That don't look like a rabbit.”

“It's not,” Steve said flatly.

Ned spun in a circle. “I KNEW IT—I SAID THIS WAS—”

“We ran the wrong way,” Steve added.

I did not turn.

“With purpose,” I said.

Silence again.

Heavier this time.

Sam stepped forward slightly.

“...She played us.”

There it was.



The word.

Played.

It hung in the air like a challenge.

And for a split second—

A very small, very quiet part of me wondered if they could all see it.

That flicker.

That moment.

That almost-feeling.

If they saw that...

If they believed that...

Then everything changed.

Not just tonight.

Everything.



So, I did what leaders do.

I reshaped the moment.

“I was testing her,” I said smoothly, turning just enough for the moon to catch my good side.

They blinked.

Confused.

Good.

“I have the rabbit right where I want her.”

Steve frowned.

Boots looked impressed.

Ned hesitated—then nodded as he believed it.

Sam... didn't argue.

That was enough.



Because leadership isn't about never being wrong: it's about never letting the pack believe you were.

Silence.

Sam sniffed the air.

No.

No, no, no.

This was still unfolding exactly as intended.

Steve stared.

Boots raised a paw.

"I lost my boot."

"...Go get it."

"Which one?"

I closed my eyes briefly.

“...The one you’re not wearing, eh.”

Leadership is exhausting.



Then—

A sound.

In the distance.

“SHOOT THE PUCK, EH!”

The pack froze.

I lifted my head.

Ah.

Of course.

There it was.

The larger opportunity is revealing itself.

“A-HA!” I declared. “You, see? Why chase a snack... when we can have a meal!”

Redirection.

Brilliance.

Momentum restored.

The pack perked up instantly.

Even Sam seemed... mildly convinced.

We moved.

Quickly.

Decisively.

From across the prairie—



Voices.

Cheering.

“...SHOOT THE PUCK, EH!!”

I froze.

Hockey?

Goats... playing hockey?

My mind expanded.

A new plan formed instantly.

Elegant.

Flawless.

“We strike during the game.”

Sam squinted.

“...We’re gonna get distracted.”

Boots shouted, “Me likes hockey!”





Yes.

Complications.

Expected.

“...after the game,” I corrected smoothly.

Adaptation.

Always adaptation.

The night was not lost.

No.

Not even close.

This was merely...

Phase one.

The rabbit had revealed herself.

The goats had revealed themselves.



And I—
Barron Von Biteyface—
had revealed nothing.
Because a true strategist never shows his full hand.
I turned to my pack.
“Tonight,” I said, voice low and powerful, “we plan.”
They stared.
Hungry.
Confused.
Loyal enough.
But as we moved...
As the ridge fell behind us...
I allowed myself one final thought.

Quiet.

Buried deep where no one could ever hear it.

She tricked me...

