

More of Us

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Mum says that we are the last of our kind: me, my brother, Mum, and Dad. I know there are others; I can feel them. When I look out the entrance to our den and sniff the air, I just know that there are more of us out there hiding in the thick undergrowth, staying away from the evil that is the human race. When I grow, I will find them. I will need a mate, and so will my brother, if Thylacines are to continue.

Humans think that we are extinct, Mum heard some talking about us. In the old days, our ancestors were blamed for killing sheep. They were hunted so hard, and many were killed, so they had to hide in the thick forest and learn to stay away from humans. I will find the others but not yet, my stripes are still not defined enough to camouflage me in the bush. Mum hunts for our food and brings it back to our den—mainly rabbits or rats but occasionally chicken. Mum has very strong jaws and can bite through the chicken wire. Humans blame the chicken theft on dogs, feral cats or quolls because they think we are extinct... they are wrong.

I eat everything our mother brings. I must fight my brother for the best of it, but I need it all to grow as strong as I can and leave the den to find others.

Time passes, and I know I am growing quickly. I can see Mum's eyes now when I stand in front of her; I am nearly as big as she is. My stripes are dark on my back, and my strong jaw has developed. My brother is bigger than me, but that is as it should be.

The time has come; I must leave the den and fend for myself. Our mother has not brought us food for several days, so she also believes it is time for us to leave. I need to hunt and find a safe place to live. Mum will have more cubs, but I need to find more Thylacines as we can't inbreed. That would be the true end of us.

The world outside of the den is a scary place. But I am ready. I creep along through the thick vegetation using all my senses as Mum had taught us. First, I need to find shelter; a cave would be ideal with a bush all around it. As I moved through the bush, I came across a dead rabbit; it was caught by its neck in some sort of very hard vine. I remember Mum talking about chicken wire and thought that I could bite through this stuff. It was too hard to bite, so I chewed off the head and pulled it out, very proud of my problem-solving. I ate the rabbit, and then it dawned on me that only humans could have done this, so there must be some close by. A little further on I heard water, a stream was close, I need water so I creep silently onwards keeping to the shadows where my stripes will help to hide me. I sense something behind me, but I can't see what it is.

I take a long drink from the stream. As I drink, I notice large, strange prints in the mud, and from what Mum has told us, they could only be made by a human. My instinct is to run very fast away from this danger, but I smell Thylacine, there is at least one nearby, I also smell fear and desperation from the Thylacine, so I creep on towards a clearing in the bush.

What I see is horrific; there is a human camp with fire and shelters. Worst of all, there is a large cage, and there are 2 Thylacine in it.

What to do? They are pacing up and down, looking for a way out, but there is none. They are Thylacines, so they have strong jaws, but the cage can't be bitten through. I must get a closer look at that door; there must be something I can do. I sense that presence behind me again, but I don't have time to worry about it; I need to find a solution. Just then, a human comes towards the cage. It has food in its hand, not the kind of food a Thylacine can eat. The meat smells really bad. I watch carefully as the human opens the door, throws the food in, and slams the door shut. I can't work out what it has done.

I feel breath on my back and swing around, ready to fight; I come face to face with my brother. He must have followed me; he was the presence I had been feeling. He wants me to hunt for him as our mother had done, but he must stand on his own feet and learn the skills of survival; he is bigger than me but not smarter. He tells me he has seen what the human did and can open that door. I feel foolish as I must have lost concentration and didn't see what I needed to see.

Working together, he and I can free those Thylacines. He creeps forward while I keep watch, sticking to the shadows so he is almost invisible. He touched noses with the caged ones, then goes to the door and pulls back the bolt. Those inside push, and the door swings open. They are free.

We all run and run for our lives.