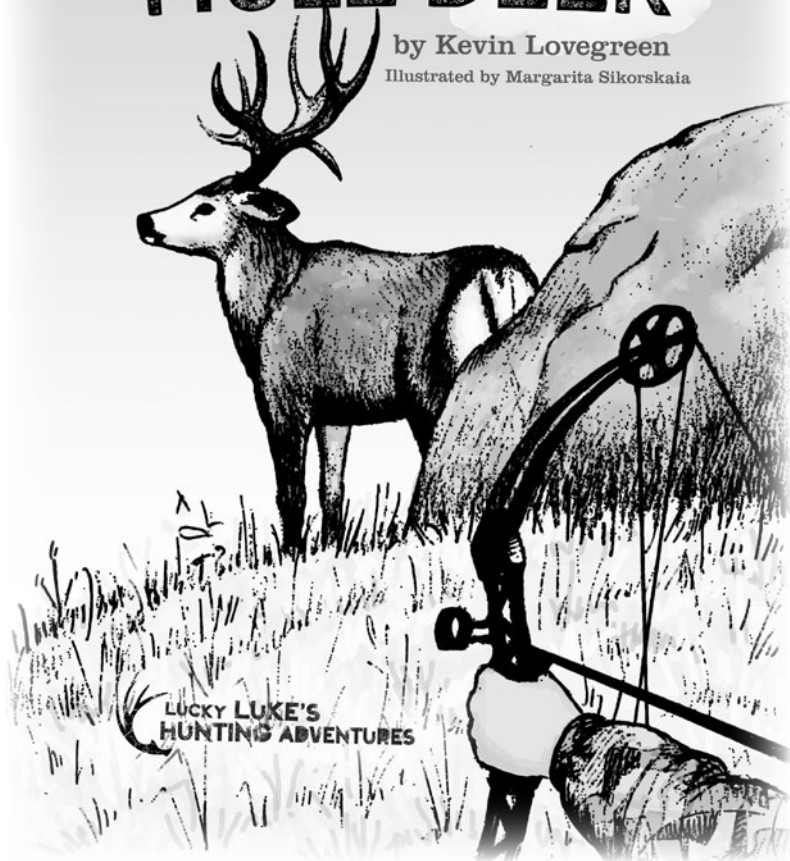


# MONSTER MULE DEER

by Kevin Lovegreen

Illustrated by Margarita Sikorskaja



LUCKY LUKE'S  
HUNTING ADVENTURES

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*This book is dedicated to my  
great friend Mel. Going on hunting  
adventures is amazing in itself,  
sharing them with a good friend  
makes them that much better.*





## **Chapter 1**

There wasn't a cloud in the sky on this gorgeous October day and here I was on my belly, crawling like a special forces Marine through a golden wheat field. After rummaging across the length of four football fields, the only thing aching more than my knees was my right palm. The light glove wasn't providing much relief from the rock-hard ground. My left arm wasn't much better off, visibly shaking from slowly lifting and pushing my bow in front of my face for the hundredth time. As the sweat dripped off

my forehead and on to the black dirt, I could finally see the tree I was straining to reach.

When I made it, the job only got harder. Ever so slowly I rose to my knees. The giant mule deer buck was standing in silence and had no idea I had just snuck up behind him. I clenched my jaw and with all my might pulled my bowstring toward my right cheek. I aimed carefully, then released my arrow, piercing the air as it headed right toward the monster mule deer . . . BING! “Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for flying with us. We will be landing shortly. Local time is 9:36. The current temperature is twelve degrees Celsius, which is about fifty-five degrees Fahrenheit for the Americans on board. It looks to be a beautiful October day in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Flight crew, please prepare for landing,” the captain announced.

My eyes popped open and I was back in the airplane sitting next to Dad. Whoa! What a crazy dream. One that I hope will come true on this hunting adventure.

I get a little nervous on landings, so I gripped the armrest tight and prepared for the wheels to touch down. To my amazement, I barely felt the wheels hit, but when the louvers on the wings turned up to slow the plane down, it was loud and I was shoved forward in my seat. Dad's comforting hand on my right shoulder helped calm me down. The plane quickly slowed to a crawl and suddenly everything was quiet. My anxiety melted quickly into excitement, knowing another amazing hunting adventure had begun. I looked at Dad and we shared a big smile. He knew this feeling well; this was not his first rodeo. Dad has been on a lot of hunts, but this will be our first time hunting mule deer with a guide. This is a two-on-one

guided trip, which means one guide will be helping both Dad and me get our deer. I can't wait to see how good of a hunter this guide will be and to see what I can learn from him.

“We made it!” I said, taking a relieved breath.

We fist bumped with our usual little explosion sound at the end. We were fired up and ready for this adventure to begin.

It seemed like an hour before it was finally our turn to file off the plane. Now the only thing on my mind was my bow and hunting gear. I hoped they both made it safely. Like a herd of African animals looking for the watering hole, we followed the line of people to the baggage claim area.



“You go look for our bows over there and I will wait for our bags,” Dad said, pointing to the oversize luggage pickup area.

“On it,” I replied.

I was relieved when the doors opened and our bow cases came sliding down the slick steel ramp. I grabbed a handle in each hand and went to find Dad. His bag sat next to him and he was patiently waiting for mine to come out of the big square chute. Most people already had their bags by now, so I was feeling a little nervous again. After a short wait, my green duffle bag popped out and slowly rolled down the conveyor belt. When it reached the bottom, I grabbed for the strap and heaved it over my shoulder.

“We’re set now!” I said in relief.

With a heavy duffle bag in one hand and the bow case in the other, we headed for the door. I felt like my arms were stretching out of their sockets, but I wasn't about to let Dad think I couldn't carry my own gear.

Standing by the door was a tall, thin guy, with a clean white cowboy hat and a huge belt buckle. His long sleeve camo shirt was ironed as smooth as his blue jeans. He seemed to be somewhere between Dad's and my age. "You guys from Minnesota, eh?" he asked.

"We sure are. Are you Cody?" My dad asked.

"Yep. Welcome to Canada."

Cody reached his hand out to me. "Howdy. You must be Luke. I'm anxious to

see if you're as lucky as your dad told me over the phone." Cody had a friendly smile.

"It's nice to meet you. My dad calls me Lucky Luke because I have had some really good luck hunting and fishing. I sure hope some of that luck came with me on this trip," I said with excitement.

"Well, let's get moving and find out." Cody grabbed Dad's duffle bag from his hand.

We dodged our way through the crowd and made it to the glass doors that led to the open air. It was easy to pick out Cody's truck in the line of vehicles; it matched his hat! It was a spotless white four-door pickup with huge wheels. It had a rodeo sticker in one window and a picture of a huge mule deer buck in the other. Cody opened the back gate and slid our gear in.

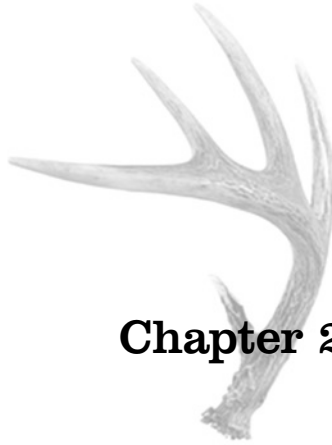
“This sure is a nice pickup,” I said.

“Thanks Luke. Yeah, it gets the job done,” Cody replied.

I walked over to the rear passenger door and popped it open. I used the handle above the door to launch myself up and in. The brown leather seat was smooth and clean.

“Good luck, Dad. Let me know if you need a hand,” I said with a smirk.

Dad pulled himself in, clicked his seatbelt and gave me that disgusted look. I smiled back, knowing he can take a little harassing. I was pushed back into my seat as Cody shot away from the curb and found a gap in the line of cars heading out of the airport.



## **Chapter 2**

On the drive to Cody's place he told us all about the mule deer he had been seeing. I listened intently as he explained that Canadian mule deer are a lot bigger than the whitetail we are used to seeing back in Minnesota. The average mule deer buck weighs about two hundred twenty pounds compared to our one hundred sixty pounders. He also said that hunters don't typically sit in deer stands waiting for animals to walk by, like you would for whitetails. Instead, Cody explained that in the evenings, hunters

will sit at the edges of fields, but the real fun is hunting in the morning, when they use binoculars to spot and then stalk the deer.

“So that means we try to find a deer bedded down and then sneak up close enough to get a shot, right?” I asked.

“You got it. It takes patience, skill, and lots of luck, Luke. These deer are smart and have incredible hearing. It’s a tremendous challenge.” Cody said.

When I looked out the truck’s window, to my surprise, the city was quickly fading away. We were heading into the country, where there were very few houses. The landscape was filled with what looked like hay and wheat fields, and lots of trees in between. It was wide open around here.



Cody was full of stories and I was full of questions, which made the hour-long drive go by like a flash. I sat up on the edge of my seat when we slowed down and turned off the highway.

When we came to the end of a fairly long driveway, there was a house on the left and two small log cabins on the right. The cabins looked like they were hand-built, judging from the uneven logs. They were

stained a dark brown and had bright white chinking between the logs.

“You guys are in the far cabin. I finished building that baby this summer and it was quite a job. After you get settled in, grab your bows and head down to the practice range over there. Take a few shots with your bows to make sure they are still sighted in after the flight.”

We grabbed our gear and made the short walk to the cabin.

“Wow!” I opened the door and took a step inside. The walls were filled with trophy animals. Even though the cabin was small, there was a bunk bed, table, mini fridge, and plenty of open space for our gear. The ceiling was about twice as tall as me, the tan carpeting was the color of an elk hide, and you couldn’t find a speck of dirt



anywhere. There were two deer mounts just above eye level that had huge racks with a bunch of points. Up higher were three mule deer bucks and a giant bull elk hung above the door. The elk rack was so massive both sides of the antlers hit the ceiling.

“I would be happy with any one of them, how about you?” Dad said, smiling.

“Absolutely! They’re all giant!” I said, still inspecting each one closely.

“Let’s lay out our gear, get organized, grab our bows and head down and shoot some arrows,” Dad said.

“Sounds like a plan.”





## **Chapter 3**

With the adrenaline flowing, it didn't take long before we were out on the small porch opening our bow cases. We headed down along the driveway into an open field where Cody had two deer targets propped up. Dad pulled out his laser rangefinder and pointed it at the first deer.

“Thirty-five yards,” Dad mumbled.

“Let's move up a little and take some thirty-yard shots,” Dad instructed.

I took five steps forward, slid an arrow in, pulled back, held steady, and let it fly.

“Yes!” I said.

“Perfect shot right behind the shoulder. Your sights haven’t moved.”

We each took several shots from different distances and found our sights were still dead-on.

Confident with our shooting, we made our way back to our little cabin and laid our bows back in their cases. Then we headed over to Cody’s house and knocked softly on the front door.

“Come on in!” Cody called from the inside.

We eased the door open and slid our boots off. It was a really cool house that struck me as just the right size. Everywhere I looked there was something related to rodeos or hunting. Like the stiff rope that was coiled up and hanging next to the closet. It sure looked like something a rodeo guy would use to lasso a cow.

“I’m in the kitchen, come on in and grab a sandwich,” Cody called out to us.

We peeked around the corner and found Cody at the counter next to a white fridge. On the rough wood table was a pitcher with some dark drink in it. Next to it sat a pair of glasses with pictures of deer on them.

“Have a seat, help yourself to some sweet tea,” Cody said.

“Thanks,” Dad replied.

The kitchen opened up to the living room where the walls were filled with all kinds of animal mounts, pictures, and belt buckles.

“Wow, did you shoot all the animals you have mounted around here?” I asked.

“Most of ‘em,” Cody said.

*This guy must be the greatest hunter who ever lived!* I thought to myself.

“You all settled in?” Cody asked.

“Yep,” I answered.

“How about your bows, they on?” Cody asked.

“They are right on. We can’t use them as an excuse,” Dad joked.

“As soon as you’re done with your sandwiches we can head out and see if we can find a deer.”

Cody set a sandwich down in front of me, and not wanting to waste any time, I started tearing into it.

“Holy cow, take your time and enjoy that turkey sandwich. It didn’t do anything to you!” Cody joked.

“Sorry, I’m a little excited to go hunting,” I said with a mouth full.

After trying really hard to slow down, and mostly failing, we finished eating and I poured some of the sweet tea in my glass. I wasn’t altogether sure about it, so I started with a small sip. To my surprise, it was amazing. Nothing like I ever had at home.

Well, come to think about it, I'm not sure I had ever tried ice tea before.

“Wow, that's some good stuff!” I said.

Cody looked at Dad in amazement.

“What can I say; he's easy to please,” Dad explained.

“I'll clean up your plates while you guys grab your gear. Let's meet by the truck in ten minutes,” Cody said.

Dad and I thanked Cody for the meal and hurried to the door. We pulled on our boots and slowly walked down the porch. Then, with a glance at each other, we took off, racing back to the cabin across the yard. I beat Dad by two steps, or he let me, I'm not sure. Either way, I was first in the cabin and



quickly started to change into my hunting clothes.

“How cold do you think it will get tonight?” I asked Dad.

“I think it will drop to around forty-five degrees. Not too bad, but definitely bring a jacket for the last half-hour or so,” Dad said.

It didn't take us long before we had all our gear and were standing next to the big white pickup.

“Throw your stuff in the back,” Cody said as he walked out of the house.

Cody was decked out in camo from head to toe. He looked like he jumped right out of a hunting magazine.

As we drove down the road, Cody told us Dad was going to sit in a deer stand on the edge of a field and I was going to be positioned on the ground at the edge of a field that no one had hunted yet this season. He told me to pick a spot where the wind seemed right and sit tight. The deer should pile into the field about a half-hour before dark.

“Remember, it’s your first night. Only shoot one if it’s giant,” Cody reminded me.

“Got it.”

It was a short ride down a dirt road to the field where they dropped me off. I slid under a fence and started walking through a pasture filled with nervous black cows that weren’t too excited about sharing their space with me. I kept a close eye on the cows and hurried through the pasture. At the far



end, I found the fence line Cody told me to follow. It didn't take long before I was standing in beautiful, boot-high, emerald green alfalfa. I put my finger in a spider web that was spread out on a bush. I used the silk to check the wind direction, watching as it drifted in the breeze. It was a light wind coming from the north, so I headed to the north side of the field to find a good spot to sit.

It was hard to choose a spot because there were so many deer runways coming into the field. I finally decided to sit on the fence line in the tall grass. I settled in and got ready.

After sitting for about half an hour without seeing anything, I started to get tired. The long trip was catching up to me.

Just as my eyelids were getting heavy, a shocking sound electrified the area around me. My eyes popped open and my heart skipped a beat. My first sighting of a mule deer! It walked into the field without hesitation. He was a medium-sized buck, not a shooter, but magical all the same. My mind was still racing, trying to figure out what had caused that crazy sound.

I watched the buck disappear over the hill. I was at full alert now and my eyes were focused hard looking for another deer. TWANG! It got me again! That same sound rang out, just as loud as the first time. My heart skipped another beat and I nearly jumped up out of the grass. I turned my head down the fence line and noticed there was a whitetail doe walking into the field. Then it hit me. Those deer were jumping the pasture fence and hitting the top strand of

the barbed wire. It was a warning sound for me, letting me know a deer was coming.

The doe walked out about forty yards and started eating her way toward me. When she came within twenty yards, I became worried she would see or smell me. And that is exactly what happened. As she moved downwind of me, she raised her head and started to walk directly at me. Her nose was telling her something wasn't right with that clump by the fencepost. That clump was me. When she was about five yards away, she blew a startled warning snort through her nose and sprinted to the middle of the field.

It took me a minute to calm down after being that close to a snorting deer. I was glad she ran out into the field and not back into the woods. I was hoping she did not spook any other deer.



It wasn't long before I noticed several whitetail doe standing thirty to forty yards back in the woods, trying to figure out what had caused all the fuss. *That's not good*, I thought, so I laid down in the grass hoping to blend in better.

After a few minutes, I heard the early warning twang again. To my disbelief and excitement, I heard that sound five times in a row! From my position lying on my back in the grass, I couldn't see what came out from the woods. It was driving me crazy, so I slowly raised my head up to take a peek. To my surprise, there were five whitetail doe standing just twenty yards in front of me. I wasn't hunting for whitetail, but I sure didn't want them to get spooked and scare any mule deer in the area.

I slowly lowered my head back down. I had no choice but to stay perfectly still and hope they moved deeper into the field.

Unfortunately, two of the deer began eating their way toward me, just like the first doe. Within moments, they were just three or four steps away from me and I could hear them chewing. I peered through the blades

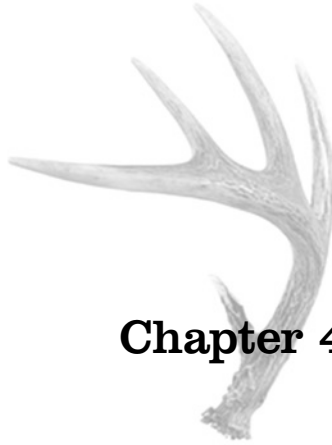


of grass and could see them enjoying their dinner. I had never been so close to a deer. Then the one closest to me must have caught my scent, because she perked up and looked right at me. She was so surprised to be that close to me she didn't know what to do, so she just stood there, almost in disbelief, I thought. That lasted about ten agonizing minutes during which I thought I was going to melt into the ground. Suddenly, she jumped back and trotted out into the field.

I took a long breath of relief and lifted my head to see how far out into the field she went. My eyes nearly popped out of my head when I saw seven other does standing with her about eighty yards out in the field, a party for sure. They must have all come out of the woods when I was stuck lying down on my back. *Wow!*

The evening light was fading fast and from my vantage point, I could see no other deer come out. Finally I decided to stand up and sneak out of the field. As I stood up, I saw the most amazing sight. There were brown spots all over the field. With my binoculars I was able to identify what they were: a bunch of whitetails and four huge mule deer bucks eating in the middle of the field. I had no idea which direction they came from or how they got there. All I knew was this was a great way to start off the hunting trip.

I snuck out of the field and made my way back to the road where Cody and Dad were already waiting with the truck. It turns out Dad had also seen lots of deer. What a great first night.



## **Chapter 4**

I must have slept well, because the next morning came quickly. We woke up, ate breakfast, and were headed down the road well before sun up. Just as the half-dim light of daybreak started peeking over the hills, we pulled off the road and drove out into a field.

“We’ll use our binoculars and spotting scope from here,” Cody said.

Dad and I carefully pulled out our binoculars and started glassing for deer. As the light filled the sky it started to illuminate this amazing country. We were parked high on a ridge and could see for miles.

After not spotting any deer for a half-hour or so, I became impatient.

“Should we try a different spot?” I asked.

“Nope. They’ll show.” Cody was confident.

“Okay,” I said, trying to adopt some of his optimism.

We glassed every nook and cranny looking for a deer. By now the sun was up and it was turning into a beautiful day.

“There they are! Finally you show yourselves. Where have you been hiding?” Cody said as if he knew the deer personally.

Dad and I both looked in the direction of the spotting scope Cody had mounted on the truck window. We couldn’t see what Cody was looking at.

Cody opened the truck door and realigned the scope.

“Here, take a look.” Cody motioned toward the scope.

I slid out of the back door and quickly put my eye to the lense.

“Holy cow! There are five of them and they are huge,” I said with plenty of excitement.

“Let me take a look!” Dad said anxiously.

“Check out the one on the far left. Do you notice anything about him?” Cody asked.

“Let me see . . . whoa, he has a long drop tine on one side,” Dad noted.

“That’s right. He’s the one we’re after. You don’t see too many with drop tines. And he’s an old bugger, too,” Cody said.

The crazy thing was I could barely see them with my binoculars. They must have been a mile away.

But they still looked absolutely magical walking through the golden wheat field.

“Now we watch them and wait,” Cody said.



“Wait for what? Let’s go get ‘em!” I said impatiently.

“We wait until they bed down. Then we devise a stalking plan, and *then* we go get ‘em.” Cody explained.

We watched the deer for about half an hour as they eased their way across the wheat field and finally made it to a ravine.

They each picked a spot on the side of the hill and plopped down.

“That’s good!” Cody said with confidence.

“What’s good?” I asked.

“They picked a nice spot for us to sneak in on them.”

Just as we were ready to pack it up and head out after them, I looked over and saw a truck making its way toward the deer.

“There’s a truck over there by the deer,” I said.

“What?” Cody exclaimed.

“Look. There is a truck heading right to where the deer are.” I pointed.



Cody quickly looked through his spotting scope to check it out.

“You have got to be kidding me. That’s my little cousin Connor. He knows he isn’t supposed to be over there. I told him yesterday that I was going to be hunting in that field. I bet after hearing me talk about that old drop tine buck, he couldn’t resist. He had to try and get him for himself.” Cody explained.

“Oh no, he is going to drive right above the deer,” I said.

“Yep. Watch this. He has no idea they are there and he is going to blow the whole thing.” Cody was frustrated.

We watched through our binoculars as the truck pulled closer to the deer. Suddenly, like we were watching it in a movie, the deer

jumped up and ran right in front of the truck. Four of the bucks ran back across the wheat field and old drop tine ran right in front of the truck and up the hill, away from us.

“That was a bad deal. I am going to have a chat with Connor later,” Cody said with a stern voice.

Frustrated, we packed up and headed out. We drove around and glassed a couple other areas, but didn't spot any deer. Around noon, we made our way back to Cody's for lunch.



## Chapter 5

“Well, look who’s here, dirty truck and all,” Cody said as we pulled into his driveway.

Cody calmly got out of his truck and walked over to Connor. We followed Cody, figuring there would be some fireworks.

“It looks like you have yourself a handful with a couple of city slickers,” Connor said.

Connor was wearing a stained brown baseball cap and had messy black hair

sticking out from under on all sides. His dirty white shirt hung un-tucked and his pants looked like they were two sizes too big. Everything about him was a little rough around the edges.

“These guys are easy compared to you,” Cody replied.

“What were you up to this morning?”

“Nothing much. Just hanging around Mom’s,” Connor said.

“You didn’t happen to make your way out to Cliff’s field this morning, did you?” Cody looked him in the eye.

“Nope.”

“That’s interesting. We were glassing from the high point and spotted the deer I’ve

been watching for over a week. The good thing was they managed to bed down in just the right spot for us to make a good stalk. The bad thing was they saw a truck that looked just like yours drive into the field and it scared them away,” Cody said.

Connor shifted from side to side and looked in every direction but at Cody.

“Uh, yeah, maybe that was me out there. I wanted that drop tine buck. I had no idea they were laying in that ravine,” Connor said.

“You would have known if you had gotten yourself up early enough and put in the time to glass them. I have spent days tracking that deer and you wouldn’t even know about him if I hadn’t told you. You also know that I am the only one with permission to hunt Cliff’s field. I help him farm, pick rocks, and do whatever else he needs to earn

that permission. Now don't be going in there and messing things up again. Do you hear me?" Cody said.

With that Connor shoved past me, just about knocking me into Dad as he flung open his truck door.

"Did I make myself clear?" Cody said a little louder.

"Got it! Good luck, city slickers," he said sarcastically.

Connor started the engine and peeled out of the driveway.



## **Chapter 6**

That evening we drove to the same area, glassing again for the deer. After arriving at the second spot and glassing for about an hour, Cody finally exclaimed “Got ya!”

Dad and I quickly peeked around our binoculars and tried to see what direction Cody was looking with his spotting scope. We followed the line but again couldn’t see anything.

“What is it, Cody?” Dad asked.

“Look real close on the side of the hill just below the big rock,” Cody gestured.

After scanning back and forth, Dad and I said at the same time, “I see it.”

“See it? How about see them?” Cody asked. “Look real close and you will see all four bucks from this morning; they are lying down just below that big rock. Old drop tine’s not with them, but he shouldn’t be far away.”

After straining my eyes, like trying to put a thread through the eye of the smallest needle, I finally spotted three of the bucks.

“I see three of them but can’t find the fourth,” I admitted.

“Well, I know they’re there and that’s all that counts,” Cody replied. “We need



to get moving and put up a ground blind in the field right above them. It shouldn't be very long before they get up and start feeding again.

Let's get moving! It will take us a while to get over there." Cody's eyes glimmered with excitement.

We quickly hopped in the truck and sped off. I was amazed at how long it took to reach the field; that spotting scope makes you feel like the animals are a lot closer than they really are.

Finally we reached the field. In one fluid motion, Cody stopped the truck, jumped out, pulled a ground blind from the bed and threw it over his shoulder. "Let's go! Grab your bows," Cody said.

We quickly grabbed our bows and followed Cody through the wheat field. We came to the end of the field and could see the edge of the ravine about fifty yards in front of us. Cody put his finger to his lips to make sure we knew to be quiet. He carefully and quietly opened up the ground blind and set it next to a small bush for some cover.

“Get in;” he whispered to me. “They typically start feeding about an hour after bedding down. With any luck, they will come over the ridge and head straight toward you. I’ll put your dad down at the other end of the field just in case they decide to slip out the back.” Cody continued.

“Which one should I shoot?” I asked.

“All four are shooters. Take the one that gives you the best shot.”

I gave him a thumbs up and slid into the blind.

“Good luck, bud,” Dad said quietly as he poked his head into one of the blind’s windows.

“You too!” I answered, my voice a whisper.

I got situated inside the blind as Cody and Dad quietly moved farther down the field.

The wait was on. I knew the deer were just over the hill, and that knowledge made it easy to stay ready.

After about half an hour, I peered out the window and noticed a tiny white glare a long distance away. I looked through my binoculars and could see Cody’s truck

parked where we had spotted the deer from the other side of the valley. I figured he was looking through his spotting scope and could see both the deer and me. An hour and a half later, my legs started cramping from kneeling for so long. It was hard to stay focused on the deer with my knees aching so badly. Suddenly, the breeze picked up. I was on top of the ravine and had no wind protection; the small bush near the blind wasn't much of a windbreak. But for some reason, I had this feeling the wind would work in my favor and get the deer moving.

When it happened, it all came so fast I couldn't believe it. Just as I looked up, I saw antlers coming right at me. At that moment the windows of the blind started flapping in the wind and then the whole blind began to shake. In desperation, I put down my bow and tried to quiet the blind by gripping both sides. I was ready to do anything to keep the

hunt going. I looked out the window in front of me and there were two bucks standing thirty yards away, looking right at the blind. I couldn't believe this was happening after waiting all this time.

Suddenly, the wind gusted so hard it picked up the blind like a kite, tearing it from my grasp. The blind flew up and over my head in an instant. I am not sure who was more surprised, the two bucks or me! There I stood, feeling almost naked, in plain view, with my bow on the ground. In a flash the deer were running at full speed across the field. I didn't blame them one bit. I knew that Cody was probably watching the whole ordeal through his spotting scope, so I faced his direction and raised both arms in the air in disbelief. Even as far away as he was, I'm sure my disappointment was obvious.

Dad showed up not long after I finally tracked down the runaway blind.

“What is going on?” Dad asked.

“You won’t believe me if I tell you.”

Cody arrived to pick us up, and on the way back we laughed over and over as Cody and I both told our version of what happened. As he saw it, I threw the blind over my head to shoot at the deer. He couldn’t imagine any other reason for the blind to take flight. He laughed and said he will be telling that story for many years to come.

“Are you sure you’re Lucky Luke?” he kidded me. “Because that didn’t seem too lucky to me.”

We headed back to the camp and found ourselves in bed early. It was a big day and all the excitement had worn us out.



## Chapter 7

I was already awake when the alarm went off and I quickly jumped out of bed and got dressed for another day of hunting. I was ready for it to be a great one. After two pieces of peanut butter toast and some orange juice, which were consumed in a hurry, we were back in the truck heading down the road. “What’s the plan for today?” I asked Cody.

Sipping on his hot coffee he said, “Spot a shooter, sneak up on him, throw off your blind and put an arrow in him.”

We all broke out laughing.

“Sounds good to me; I’ll do whatever it takes.”

I realized that my flying blind story was the only thing I’d heard Cody laugh about; last night as we told Dad, and again this morning. He was a pretty low-key guy, though, so I was glad my botched hunt could bring him some humor. We parked the truck and walked out on to a high bank overlooking a big river meadow. We hadn’t glassed this area yet.

“Stay low so they don’t silhouette us,” Cody warned.

We crawled on our bellies up to the edge and peeked down. We all lifted our binoculars, which hung around our necks, and started glassing the meadow, hoping



to see some monster deer. After about five minutes, Cody said, “I see one little buck, a doe, and a mother moose with two calves.”

Dad and I looked at each other, brows wrinkled, sure that he was pulling the wool over our eyes.

“Where do you see them?” Dad asked. I was glad he asked, and not me.

“See that big pine tree in the middle?” Cody gestured.

“Yep,” Dad and I said in unison.

“Go to its right about ten yards and look really closely in that dark spot.”

We both focused in on the spot, and much to our surprise, there was indeed a small buck lying there.

“I can’t believe it,” Dad said. “That sure isn’t easy to see.”

As Cody guided our binoculars to each animal he saw, we were once again impressed with his ability to see animals that we had no idea were there.

Then the moose and her calves stood up as we watched them make their way out of the bottom of the meadow, a truly cool sight.

“There should be a nice buck or two down there. They were there just a few days ago,” Cody said. Just as he got the words out of his mouth, a huge buck popped out of the edge of the trees and started hopping across the meadow.

“Now that was some luck,” Cody said with a little more passion. “That moose did us a huge favor. That buck was bedded down

and she nearly stepped on him. He had no choice but to get out of her way. Now he is forced to search for a new place to bed down, which gives us a chance to sneak up on him.”

It didn't take the buck long to find another spot, right behind a patch of thick bushes.

“Perfect,” Cody said.

“What do you mean, perfect?” I asked.

“If we follow the river around the other side I think we can sneak up and get a shot from the bank. I should be able to get you within forty yards. Hopefully that's close enough?” Cody asked, looking at me.

“Absolutely!” I said. “I was sticking the bullseye every time when practicing at forty yards.”

As Cody analyzed the route with his binoculars, I grew impatient and finally asked him, “What are we waiting for?”

“I’m trying to figure out how to get around that buck lying on the bank. He is right in our path and I don’t want to spook him. He could blow the whole thing,” Cody explained.

Dad and I simultaneously raised our binoculars and searched the bank that Cody was looking at. Sure enough, we found the spot and there was a nice four-by-four buck on the bank.

“I don’t know how you do it. You must have really good eyes,” I said.

“Like anything else, it comes with lots of practice,” Cody replied.

“It’s a good thing he’s not a shooter, because we couldn’t get within bow range to him. He is in a perfect spot to live another day,” Cody said.

“Okay, time to slide back and get moving. I have good news and bad news. The good news is I have an alternate path mapped out. The bad news? We’re going to get wet. I hope that’s okay?” Cody asked.

“No problem. Whatever we have to do to get close, I’m in,” I said with enthusiasm.

We slid back from the edge and methodically made our way down the bank, crossing a small creek at the bottom.

“Okay, one of you should stay right here in case he tries to slip out,” Cody said.

“I’ll stay here, you take Luke with you,”  
Dad said.

“Sounds good to me,” I said with a  
big smile.

I knew Dad was being nice, giving me  
the first chance at a stalk. He is amazing that  
way. He says that he gets more excitement  
out of watching his kids get an animal, than  
if he gets one himself. Maybe someday when  
I’m a dad I’ll understand. But for now, I  
really want a chance at that buck.

“Let’s get moving. From here on out, we  
need to be extremely quiet and move slow.  
With those big ears, a monster mule deer can  
hear the slightest sound of danger and he  
will be gone. They’re not big because they’re  
dumb!” Cody said.

“Okay,” I whispered.

With his fist extended, Dad said “Good luck buddy, make the shot count!”

“I’ll do my best,” I said, as we bumped knuckles. Then I left Dad and followed Cody through the tall grass.

Walking slowly and methodically through the river bottom, we eventually came to another creek. This one looked deeper—I couldn’t see the bottom.

“Move very slowly and don’t make any noise going through the water, the deer pick up on that sound quick,” Cody said.

Without hesitating Cody slipped into the water. His feet seemed to move in slow motion. He wasn’t making a sound and barely left a ripple on the water. I had to force myself to move that slowly. My heart was racing and all I wanted was to get to

that deer. When I finally eased each soaked boot out of the water on the other side, I was relieved that I didn't make a sound. I took a slow, deep breath and exhaled in relief.

“We will leave our boots here,” Cody whispered. I untied my boots and slid them off. They were still filled with water. I poured the water out and laid them upside down. In our wet socks, we continued our stalk. It was awkward walking in my socks, but it was quieter than walking in my boots.

After a short distance we got down on all fours. I kept my head lower than Cody's and tried hard to keep my bow from snagging or clacking into rocks, tree roots, or brush.

We came to a small tree and Cody eased down to his belly. I did the same thing. It was nice to lie down and take rest. My bow



was getting awkward and heavy. Cody put his binoculars up to his eyes and scanned forward. He lowered his binoculars and looked back at me with a big smile. He jerked his thumb forward and nodded his head. I knew exactly what he was telling me. The buck was there and we were close.

Cody eased back to me and whispered, “He is just to the left of that small pine tree about forty yards in front of us.”

I slowly lifted my binoculars and strained my neck to get the lenses above the grass. I searched the spot but couldn’t see the deer. “I don’t see him,” I said with frustration.

“Look very close, you can only see his antlers,” Cody said, still in a whisper.

I pulled my binoculars up again and concentrated hard on the spot Cody had pointed out. After methodically scanning inch by inch, I finally saw what looked like an antler tine.



“I think I see a part of his antler,” I mumbled.

“He is facing left; if you look close you can see his whole left rack. It looks a lot like branches. Look close,” Cody explained.

I zeroed in hard on the one tine I had seen, and like magic, the whole rack appeared. It was there the whole time but it blended in with the branches of the bush and was difficult to see. My eyes grew wider in my binoculars as I realized how big the tines were. Suddenly, the buck turned slightly, and the whole deer’s head came into focus. If Cody hadn’t shown me that deer I would never have seen it. I lowered my binoculars to look with my bare eyes and to my surprise I could not see that deer.

“He’s huge,” I said to Cody.

“He’s a good one, that’s for sure,” Cody replied.

“What now?” I asked.

“We wait. He should get up in an hour or two and when he does he should give you a clean forty-yard shot.”

So that was the plan. We took turns watching the buck with our binoculars, waiting for him to make a move. After an hour, my mind started playing tricks on me. Even though I could see the deer with my binoculars, I doubted he was real or that he was ever going to stand up.

But then it all happened, and fast. Cody was on watch and I was on my back.

“Get your bow ready, he’s going to stand up!” Cody said in a hurried whisper. “Hurry up!”

In one quick motion I pulled my bow up and got on my knees. By the time I looked the deer’s way, he was standing. My eyes popped wide open. Now that I could really get a good look at him, he was huge. His rack looked like two trees stuck to his head. My heart started pounding and adrenaline surged through my body.

The deer was covered up by branches and I did not have a shot. “No shot yet, just wait,” Cody whispered.

My eyes were locked on the buck and I waited for any opening to make a shot. He turned toward us and took one step. He was clear of the branches, but did not present a good shot because he was facing

me. Suddenly, as if he sensed us, he looked up and stared right at me. My heart sunk and I realized I couldn't do anything but stay frozen. Instinct took over and the buck turned and bolted.

“No, no, no!” I said in disbelief. Cody quickly jumped up to try and see which direction the buck ran, but there was no sign of him.

“That was unfortunate,” Cody said in a calm voice. He took it so well, I had the feeling this has happened to him before.

Suddenly, we heard a triumphant cry of “Woohoo” from across the meadow. It was the distinct sound of a hunter who had just landed an arrow on a trophy.

“Your dad!” Cody said in disbelief.

“DID YOU GET HIM?” I yelled to Dad.

“NAILED HIM!” Dad shouted back.

I yelled back with a little disbelief and excitement. “YES!”

Cody and I quickly scurried to our boots, trying to hurry but also trying not to step on anything sharp.

By the time we reached Dad he was kneeling next to a beautiful, majestic, giant mule deer. The smile on his face said it all.

“Way to go Dad!” I said as I ran up to him and tackled him with a big bear hug.

“Thanks Luke Man.” Dad said in a muffled voice, hugging me tight.

I jumped upright and held out my hand for Dad. He reached up and I pulled him to his feet. I walked over to the buck and lifted the huge rack. Running my hands over his antlers gave me great satisfaction. We worked hard for this buck and I was so glad that Dad got him. In a sense, I felt that Cody and I had done the hard work and Dad was able to benefit from it. And after all that Dad has done for me, it felt good that I got to take part in helping him get his first big mule deer.

“How’d it play out?” Cody asked.

“It couldn’t have worked out any better. I was sitting behind a small tree when I heard the distinct sound of hooves crashing through the brush. I got to my knees, and before I knew it, this huge mule deer was running right to me. I drew my bow and when he was twenty yards away, I whistled



at him. He instantly stopped broadside to see what made the noise and gave me a perfect shot. I let the arrow go and it hit him right behind the shoulder. He ran about ten yards and fell over right in front of me. I couldn't believe my eyes," Dad explained.

"It looks like we got lucky and picked a good spot for you to sit. I like it when a plan comes together," Cody said with a smile.

After a few more stories and lots of pictures we began the long drag out of the bottom. It took us forty-five minutes to haul the deer up the steep hill, and it was worth every agonizing step.

Exhausted from the morning's adventure, back at camp, we had a big lunch and took a long nap.





## **Chapter 8**

“Time to get moving.” Cody peeked in the door. I jumped up, looked at the clock, and sprang out of my bunk. It was already five o’clock and I had been sleeping for two hours. I couldn’t believe it.

After putting my boots on and grabbing my gear, I was in the truck and ready to go in under ten minutes. I was pumped to get out hunting and have another chance at one of Alberta’s giant mule deer.

Dad and Cody jumped in and we were off on the next adventure.

“What’s the plan for me tonight?” I asked Cody.

“We are going to drop you off at a bean field that I know the deer have been using at night. You can walk to the far end and pick a spot. I can’t see the back of the field so I don’t know where they are coming out. Pick a spot that seems good and let’s hope you get lucky, Lucky Luke,” Cody said.

“I’ll give it a try,” I said, confident.

After a twenty minute drive on several dirt roads, we pulled up to a good-sized bean field.

“Grab your stuff and head across the field to the back side. You should see some

nice runways that come into the field. Pick a spot and wait. They should really file in about half an hour before dark. Your dad and I will drive around and see if we can spot some more deer for tomorrow,” Cody explained.

“All right.” I grabbed my bow and backpack out of the bed of the truck.

“Good luck, Luke. Remember, tonight could be the night,” Dad said as he high-fived me from out the window of the truck.

The sun was bright and hot as I made my way across the field. When I finally reached the other side, sweat was dripping from my forehead and I was steaming up.

I stopped and scanned the fence line trying to find the biggest runways. They all seemed big and I had a hard time picking a

spot. I finally settled on one near the middle, hoping I could get a shot if the deer were out eating in the field. I picked some sage brush and made a small blind about two feet tall to sit behind. I knew it wasn't much, but I figured it would give me at least a bit of cover. I sat down and put my back against a fencepost. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. I was finally ready.

I pulled my sleeve up and checked my watch. It was 6:30 and I had about an hour and a half of light left. I put my rangefinder up to my eye and checked a few distances. I wanted to be ready and minimize my movement when deer were in the field.

Just as I put my rangefinder down, I spotted movement down the fence line. I arched up so I could see better, and to my surprise, there was a small buck walking out into the field. This early and deer were

already moving? This was going to be awesome.

I watched the deer until he disappeared over a hump in the field. I sat motionless, staring down the fence line waiting for another one to appear. After about fifteen minutes of not seeing any other deer, I felt like I had to see where that buck was. I slowly pulled my feet in, rolled over to my right side and eased to my knees.

My eyes just about popped out of my head when I looked across the field. Not only was the small buck out there eating, but six or seven doe were out there as well. I could not figure out how they all got out there without me seeing them. Then I noticed two of them were eating their way in my direction. If they kept coming they would be right out in front of me, and I didn't plan on that. The little blind I had made hid me from

deer crossing the fence and heading out into the field, not from deer already in the field.

I had to do something fast. The only option I could think of was to lie flat on my back in the grass. I slid down the fencepost and held my bow to my chest.

I felt trapped. I had no idea how I was going to get a shot and I had no idea how I would know if a buck came out anyway.

Several minutes went by, and again, I couldn't take it anymore. I had to look around and see what was out there. I slowly raised my head up to peek. Eyes wide, I lowered my head in disbelief. There were now about fifteen deer in the field and two other small bucks. Most of them were about fifty yards away, and the two that had been coming my way earlier were now heading out into the middle of the field. Just when



I thought I was clear from deer seeing me, I heard a hoof stomp behind me, down toward the other end of the field.

My heart sank because I had heard that sound before. That was the sound of a mad deer stomping its hoof because it either smelled me or saw me. I realized I hadn't been able to look down to the other end of the field. I just about bent my neck out of joint as I rolled my head back trying to see what was so stomping mad. Through the grass I could see two doe staring straight at me.

I slowly laid my head back down. I grimaced when I imagined what they must have thought when I raised my head up earlier. I once again was trapped and laying on my back. I figured every deer in the field must be looking at the doe, trying to figure out what she was mad at. The only thing I

could do was to lie still and hope she forgot about me. At the very least, she did stop stomping her foot. But I figured that meant she and every other deer in the field must be gone. It had been about twenty minutes, and again, I had to look. I was exploding with curiosity, a burning need to see what was left in the field.

I eased my head up and what I saw simply was not possible. Not only was every deer still there, there were even more and they all acted like nothing had happened. The bad news was that out of the twenty or so deer feeding in the field, I didn't see a shooter buck in the group.

Suddenly, I heard deer running behind me. Trying to see what it was, I cranked my head to the left as far as I could. It was the two doe; they must have spotted me again. They galloped out into the middle of the field

and joined up with several of the other deer. I slowly turned my head back to the large group of deer, figuring I would see them all on alert. But they weren't. Yet again, they acted like nothing had happened.

I couldn't hold my head up any longer and had to lay it back down in the grass. My mind was racing to plan my next move. I didn't know how to get into position so I could be ready to shoot. Then I noticed just how dark it was getting. The daylight was fading and I was running out of time. Suddenly, like a bolt of lightning going through my veins, the sound of vibrating wire shocked me. Catching my breath, I realized it was a deer jumping the fence behind me. Again, I cranked my neck to look, and to my surprise there were two giant mule deer bucks standing in the field behind me. With the sun setting behind them, their tall antlers created massive silhouettes.



*Shooters!* I had to roll over and get a shot. *I have nothing to lose, after this crazy night,* I thought to myself.

Moving ever so slowly, I pulled my bow up to my chest and used all my strength to slowly roll onto my left side and then onto my stomach. I shoved my face down into the grass and pulled my knees up toward my chest. My heart was hammering, so I took a slow, deep breath and tried to calm down.

*I am going to kneel, pull, and shoot. You can do this, just relax and make it happen.*

I peeked up, hoping the bucks wouldn't spot me and would still be in bow range. One was in the same spot, eating, and the other was walking into the field, now out of range. I mentally stepped off the distance and calculated it as forty yards.

I took a deep breath and in one motion rose to my knees and drew my bow. To my disbelief, none of the deer saw me move, or if they did, they didn't react. I carefully held my sight pin right behind the big deer's shoulder and let the arrow fly.

Like it was in slow motion, I watched the arrow pass right over the buck's back and disappear into the sunset. The buck flinched and trotted out into the middle of the field, looking around, trying to

determine the source of that sound. All the air deflated out of me and I hunched over in defeat. How could I have missed? I had practiced that shot so many times at home.

With the sunlight almost gone, I could see the brown blobs, which were deer trotting to the other side of the field. I don't think they knew I was there but I am sure they figured something wasn't right, especially with the loud twang sound from my bowstring. I stood up and kicked the ground in frustration. As I calmed down, it occurred to me to step off the distance to where I thought the deer had been standing, just to see how far away he really was. To my surprise it was only twenty-eight steps. I had misjudged the distance and used my bowsight's forty-yard pin, which caused me to shoot high. I shook my head and marched across the field to where Dad and Cody were waiting.



## **Chapter 9**

The beeping of the alarm pulled me out of a dream and a dead sleep. Five AM is early, and I had a little more trouble getting out of bed on this morning.

“Come on Luke Man, this could be your lucky day,” Dad said as he pulled his socks on, sitting on the edge of his bed.

I slid out from under my covers and got dressed in a little morning daze. After a bowl of cereal and some hot chocolate I

started to come alive. It wasn't long and we were heading down the dark road again.

“Well, what do you have up your sleeve this morning?” Dad asked Cody.

“I have an idea or two of where old drop tine might be hanging.”

By now I'd noticed that in the morning when Cody's drinking his coffee he isn't too talkative. I started to get anxious, realizing I was the only one with a tag left for a deer. This was all me and that drop-tine deer was a giant.

We pulled up to a high vantage point just as the soft glow of morning began overtaking the sky. Cody lowered his window halfway and screwed his spotting scope mount to it. As the cool morning air crept in, he slowly scanned the fields a mile



away with his amazingly powerful scope. Dad and I hung tight in the truck, waiting for a little more light so we could see with our binoculars.

After about fifteen minutes I grew impatient and slid out of the truck. The morning air was crisp and sent a chill right up my spine. I pulled up my collar, laid my elbows on the truck's hood and started searching for anything that looked like a deer. I was proud when I spotted two doe and a small buck eating in a green field. In the morning light, their brown-grey hair kind of glowed in the green grass. It was cool watching them from so far away because they had no idea we were there.

Then Cody said, "Look who we have here."

"What is it?" I asked quickly.

“Mister drop tine is in the house.”

“Where is he?” My heart rate started climbing.

“Look at the far back corner of the green field.”

Now Dad was out of the truck too, and we were both propped up on the hood searching the field.

“Got him!” I said.

“Me too,” Dad responded.

We sat and watched him for about an hour. He didn't move much; he was really concentrating on eating. Then something caught my eye while I was scanning the area around him looking for other deer. It was a hunter walking along the edge of the wheat

field just to the left of the green field where the buck grazed.

“I see someone walking in the wheat field,” I said.

“What? Where?” Cody asked.

Like a field sergeant, I guided Cody to the location.

“Connor. That little turkey,” Cody spat.

“It’s your cousin again?” I asked.

“Yep. And it looks like he’s going to blow it for us again.”

We all watched through our binoculars as Connor tried to sneak up on the big buck.

“If the wind is blowing in the same direction as up here this isn’t going to take long. Connor is directly upwind of the buck. That buck will smell him before he gets within one hundred yards. Especially the way Connor smells.” Cody half laughed.

The whole thing was playing out just like Cody predicted. As Connor sneaked along the trees behind the deer, the buck lifted his head from eating and turned in Connor’s direction. In a flash the buck was trotting across the field, directly away from Connor.

“And there he goes,” Cody said, frustrated.

We all kept our eyes glued to the giant buck as he bounded through the field and into the ravine on the opposite side of the field. He slithered his way down some game

trails and quickly bedded down right below a rock ledge. It seemed like he knew exactly where he wanted to hide.

“Well that’s interesting,” Cody said. “Young Connor might have done us a favor, without him knowing it, a course. That buck is bedded down in a perfect spot for us to sneak in on him. That’s the beauty of this hill. You can watch an awful lot from up here without ever being detected. Both Connor and that deer have no idea that we saw what just went down.”

“Now what?” Dad asked.

“We pay Connor a visit and then get Luke up and close on old drop tine.”

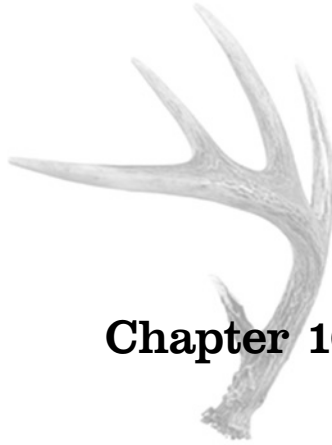
I had forgotten all about Connor since the deer ran. I glassed back over to where

he was and found him still crawling up to where the buck had been.

“Connor’s still on his stalk. He has no idea that deer is long gone,” I said. “He is just about to the field edge.”

We all watched as Connor slowly stood up with his bow ready and eased out into the field. Then we could see him slap his hip in frustration.

Cody started laughing. “Well, that was almost worth the price of admission. Let’s get going. I know where he parked his truck and I would like to have a little talk with Connor.”



## Chapter 10

We hopped in the truck and raced down a couple of dirt roads. It wasn't long before we could see Connor's truck parked on the left side of the road. We pulled up just as Connor was making his way down the grassy ditch to the road. He looked like someone caught with their hand in the cookie jar. Cody rolled his window down. I wasn't sure how he was going to handle this.

“Howdy! Cody said.

“Ya,” Connor mumbled.

“Kind of looks like someone’s hunting where they aren’t supposed to again.”

Connor didn’t reply. He just opened his tailgate and started putting his bow away.

“The good news is your little botched attempt at a stalk scared that big old buck to a place that might just help us out.”

“How do you know?” Connor looked surprised.

“We were up on the high spot. It was a good show from up there. Next time consider having the wind in your face when sneaking up on a deer.

Now we’re going to head down the east road and see if we can put that deer on the



ground. You're welcome to swing by tonight and take a look at him hanging in my shed. But I better not see you out here again. This is your last warning." Cody looked him straight in the eyes.

"Ain't no way them city slickers are good enough to get close to that buck," Connor snapped.

"I'll put my money on Luke here any day over you."

"Yeah, right," Connor responded.

"Anyway; do I make myself clear?" Cody asked.

"Got it. I'm out of here."

Cody rolled up his window and sped down the road. The dust was shooting out

behind us like a rocket ship. It was silent in the truck and I felt like Cody was really focusing on the plan. We crunched to a halt on the dirt and gravel and Cody was out the door in record time.

“Let’s go! Let’s make this happen, Luke!”  
Cody said.

“I’m ready.”

With my bow in hand, we marched single file behind Cody heading across a waist-high grass field. We stopped when we met up with a golden wheat field.

“Okay Luke, you have one shot at this. You have to stay low and quiet and remember he is already on alert, so any noise and he will be gone. Make your way through this field, and then, do you see that tall tree on the other side?”

“Yes.”

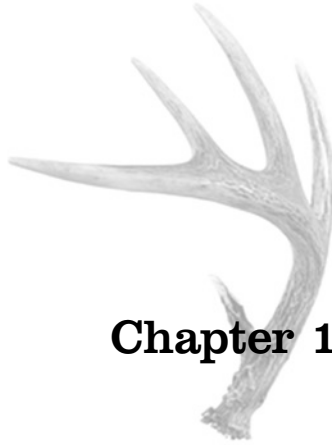
“When you reach that tree, the buck should be thirty yards below you and to your right. The wind is perfect, right in your face. You might have to wait him out for a while before he decides to stand up, so bring your patience with you. Any questions?”

“I don’t think so,” I replied, still a little shocked that I was going to do this stalk on my own.

“You can do this, Luke. Take your time, stay calm, and don’t forget to have some fun,” Dad said with a reassuring smile.

“You get going,” Cody instructed. “Your dad and I will head over to the side of that hill. We should have a good view to see all the action from there.”

After a quick knuckle tap from both Dad and Cody I was off on one of my most exciting challenges ever.



## Chapter 11

As I eased my way through the wheat field, my eyes scanned ahead of me, searching for a path. The wheat was planted in rows and I was cutting right across them. The wheat brushing against my pants was louder than I liked so I tried checker-boarding, staying on the dirt between the wheat rows, then hopping from row to row when there was a break. It wasn't as fast as a straight line but it was quiet. I caught a break when I found a deer path cut through the rows heading in

the direction of the tree. I stepped on to the trail and tightroped down it.

When I was about one hundred yards from the tree I forced myself to slow way down. I wasn't going to make a sound if I could help it. I was going to get to that tree and see that buck without him knowing I was there. Every couple of soft steps my boot would crunch on a dried leaf or piece of broken-over wheat. I remembered Cody's trick from the day before and slipped my boots off and went the rest of the way in my socks.

It was awkward walking in my socks but it definitely made less noise. I kept looking at the tree, thinking to myself

*I can make it without him hearing me,  
I can do this.*

I chuckled at myself, realizing I was using the strategy Dad had taught me years ago to stay calm when a deer was approaching. It was a great way to stay focused, calm, and on task.

I was closing the distance and with each slow, crouched-over step I was getting more and more excited. When the tree was about fifty yards away, I judged I was close enough now that I'd best stay below the wheat so the deer had no chance of seeing me. With my bow in my left hand, held vertically so it was narrow and wouldn't hit the wheat, I awkwardly inched my way down the trail. I couldn't move very fast since I was only using my right hand and my knees. After only a short distance my knees were getting sore and I had to put some weight on my bow to give my right hand and arm a break. I dug deep and kept pushing forward closer to that tree. I peeked up over

the tops of the wheat and saw that the tree now was only ten or fifteen steps away. The pain in my knees and right arm suddenly didn't bother me so much as the adrenaline started kicking in. With each push forward I was silent like a cat and getting closer to the spot I had identified.

I was at the end of the wheat now, looking at a small strip of boot-high grass to cross. I laid my bow flat down in front of me and lowered to my belly. Like a giant snake I slithered through the grass, silently and without showing myself. When I felt like I was in position, where the tree could give me some cover, I stopped and laid my head down. I took a long, slow breath and tried to gather all my energy. The grass was cooler than the air. It felt and smelled good as I lay there, battling with the temptation to peek my head up, wondering what I would see.



Finally the time seemed right, so I eased my head up like a lion looking for his prey. My eyes popped open and I gasped quietly when I saw the monster mule deer lying in front of a giant rock just twenty yards away.

*I did it! I pulled off the stalk.*

I froze as my eyes scanned the buck and sized up the situation. He was on the ground with his legs under him, facing away with his head up. His giant rack was stacked above him and it seemed like he was frozen. Then he flicked his left ear and turned his head slightly. The giant mass of antlers looked even more amazing in motion. I had to stop looking at his antlers because the sight of them was making my heart pound through my chest. I stayed in place, motionless, scrambling a plan together.

*Stay calm and play this out. You can do this.* Talking to myself seemed like the best plan for keeping me calm. That was when I realized I didn't even have an arrow nocked on my bow. I slowly lowered my head down and very carefully slid a little farther behind the tree. It wasn't a huge tree but there was enough of it to give me some cover. I rolled over to my side and with my right hand I carefully drew an arrow from my quiver.

*Nice, not a sound. Good job.*

I slid the arrow in place and tugged softly until it clicked in place on my bowstring. With my left index finger I steadied the arrow against my bow. I was ready. All that was left was to ease myself to my knees so I was in a position where I could actually draw the bow and take a shot.

*All right Luke, you can do this.*

I put all my weight on my bow and left hand and pulled my legs up to my chest. Slowly and quietly I straightened my back and turned so my left shoulder was touching the tree. I kept my body in line with the tree so the buck would not see me. I kept my bow flat and in the grass. After another slow, deep breath, I peeked around the tree hoping the deer was in the same position. *Yes!* He hadn't moved an inch.

*Now what? I wait for him to stand up? I think that's my best plan. When he stands up, I raise my bow slowly, pull back, and put my top pin right behind his shoulder. Yeah, that's it. Good thing I have this all figured out. I wasn't fooling anybody, not even myself.*

I waited patiently as the time ticked away. After what I guessed was about forty-five minutes, pain started to pulse

through my knees. I tried to carefully shift my weight and lay my head against the tree to relieve some pressure. That worked for about ten more minutes and then the pain was too much. I had to adjust my body. I slowly eased over toward the tree and sat on my left hip. I finally had some relief but it was awkward, and I knew I couldn't shoot from this position. I had to rest quickly and get back to my knees.

After about ten minutes my hips started to ache so I figured it was time to get shift again.

*How long is he going to lay there?*

*I can do this, stay strong!*

I was back in ready position and had my head resting against the tree. I was getting bug-eyed from staring at the buck

so I closed my eyes to give them a break. My eyes couldn't have been shut for five seconds and when I opened them I thought my mind was playing tricks on me. Old drop tine was standing and I hadn't heard a sound! My heart skipped a beat and I could feel my face turning to fire. He was looking away but I did not have a clear shot at his side. A butt shot is simply not ethical. But his position did give me a good opportunity to draw my bow and then hope he gave me a broadside shot.

With all my strength and cramped muscles, I lifted my bow out of the grass and pulled back. The string stretched and the bow silently flexed into ready position. I held steady with my left arm straight and right knuckle anchored at the corner of my mouth.

*Come on, turn and give me a shot.*

The buck just stood motionless. He had no idea I was there.

*You can do this, hang in there.*

Suddenly, old drop tine turned left and faced out from the rock, giving me a perfect broadside shot. My muscles regained life and my bow felt steady in my hands.

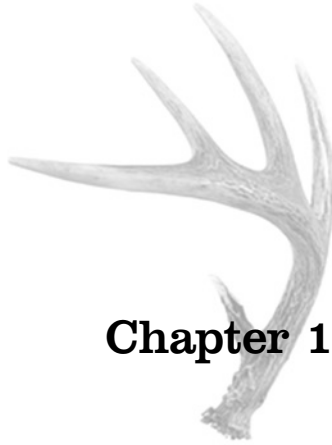
*Top pin right behind the shoulder and squeeze the trigger release.*

I aimed true and let the arrow fly.









## Chapter 12

Everything happened in a flash. I saw the green nock of the arrow rip through the air, strike the buck behind the shoulder and disappear. The buck hunched up, turned, and bolted out of sight.

“Yes!” I exhaled quietly.

I was confident the shot was perfect and that he had no idea what had hit him. Almost immediately after, my whole body started to tremble and I bent forward and

fell into the grass in pure excitement tinged with physical exhaustion.

“Yes, yes, yes, I did it!” I said with my voice muffled by the grass.

Regaining control over my body, I jumped up to my feet and nocked another arrow in my bow. My hands were still trembling as I slowly walked down to the rock and stood in the spot where old drop tine had been bedded down. I peeked around the other side and scanned the grassy ravine, hoping to see him lying in the open, but I wasn't that lucky.

From the looks of the dirt circle next to the big rock it was obvious this spot was used often. I felt like I was standing in a sacred spot, like an elephant's graveyard, that I wasn't supposed to know about. I looked out and from this spot I could see

the entire ravine and the wheat field on the other side. Old drop tine had a great vantage point from here.

I was caught off guard by footsteps behind me, and I froze. I eased around the rock and when I saw Cody and Dad relief washed over me. I held my bow high over my head and with my right hand gave them a thumbs up.

“I don’t know where he is but I think I made a perfect shot,” I said, still keeping my voice low.

Dad flashed a beaming smile and gave me a big high-five.

“Good job, Bud! That ranks up there as one of the coolest things I have ever watched. He definitely took his own sweet time to stand up, didn’t he?”

“That’s for sure,” I replied.

“I bet your knees were feeling it,” Cody piped in.

“You aren’t kidding. That was tough.”

“Well, we couldn’t see much after he ran. Have you found your arrow or blood or anything?” Cody asked.

“Nope. I scanned the ravine and didn’t see him. I haven’t even started looking for blood yet.”

“Let’s take a look,” Cody said, getting back to business. He walked over to the rock and looked around.

“That old buck sure spent a lot of time here. I wonder how many times I was

glassing and didn't even know he was here. He was standing here facing out, right?"

"Yes."

"If you were up at that tree and he was here, your arrow could as easily gone right through him as stayed in him," Cody said thoughtfully.

Cody scanned the grass below and then walked a direct line along the path my arrow would have flown through the buck. After kicking around in the grass and scanning the area, he locked on to something and marched over to it.

"Got it!" Cody said.

He picked up the arrow and made his way back up the incline.

“This looks real good,” Cody said. “It’s covered in blood, which means it was a perfect pass-through. He will be bleeding from both sides and that will make him easy to track. Let’s find the blood trail.”

Cody stood in the dirt patch looking around for a moment before he started to follow a distinct but subtle trail leading away from the dirt circle. He didn’t take five steps with Dad and me right behind him before he found blood.

“Here we go. This looks real good,” Cody said with a little more excitement than I had seen out of him.

We followed the drops for about fifty yards and then the blood trail simply ended.

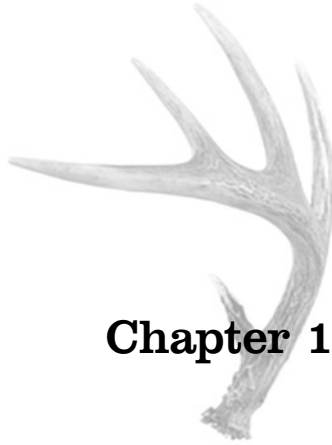
Cody was stumped. “This doesn’t make any sense. There is no way he just stopped

bleeding, and it's impossible to see his tracks in this hard-packed ground.”

Panic was starting to settle in to me as we paced like bloodhounds up and down the different trails. We even went to the last blood spot and started making small circles that grew bigger and bigger and still could not find any sign of him. This simply could not be happening.







## Chapter 13

After searching every nook and cranny for about an hour, we came back together at the last blood for the hundredth time.

“What do you think, Cody?” Dad asked.

“This doesn’t look good. I still can’t believe we can’t find any blood. That deer is here somewhere; we just aren’t looking in the right spot.”

“I’ll tell you where he is!” Startling all of us, we looked up to see Connor sitting on a rock.

“What are you doing here?” Cody asked. “We don’t need any of your grief right now.”

“Cool your britches,” Connor said as he walked down to us. “I can’t take watching you guys look for that deer any longer.” Connor sneered before he went on. “I drove around to the high point to watch this little redhead kid mess up the stalk. I couldn’t believe he actually managed to pull it off. Then I thought it would be fun, after all the waiting, to see him miss the shot. Again, to my disbelief, he managed to make the shot. Not that I could see the arrow from all the way over there. But I did watch the buck and see him fall over.”

Cody, not quite ready to believe his cousin, said, “really, and you’re going to tell us now, after watching us look for over an hour? You’re simply going to walk us right up to that buck?”

“That’s assuming you want my help,” Connor replied.

“Young man, if you can help us find my son’s deer of a lifetime, I would be forever grateful,” Dad said evenly.

“Come on, follow me,” Connor replied.

With renewed confidence (well, mine; I am not sure Cody had it yet), I fell in line behind the guys. We marched ten steps back toward the rock from the last blood and then Connor took a sharp right and headed straight down a steep drop. When he reached

the edge of another cliff about as tall as our one-story garage, he stopped and said,

“Is that what you’re looking for?”

We all hurried to the edge and carefully peered over, just like we were at the zoo looking at the new animals. There at the bottom, lying on his side was old drop tine, the buck of a lifetime.

“You have got to be kidding me,” Cody said, shaking his head. “How did he get down there?”

“I watched that buck in a dead run turn downhill and jump forty or fifty feet. When his hooves hit the ground he took another leap and jumped right over this ledge. He landed at the bottom, took a couple of steps and fell over. It was the most amazing thing

I have ever seen an animal do,” Connor explained.

“Wow, we would have never thought to look down there,” Dad said.

“Let’s get going. I’m dying to see him,” I piped in.

It took us about ten minutes to maneuver around the big cliff and get to the bottom. When I finally put my hands on that old buck, emotions were pouring through me. I was excited and honored to have taken such an amazing deer.

“Thank you, Connor, for helping us find this deer. We couldn’t have done it without you.” I shook Connor’s hand and looked him square in the eyes.

“You’re welcome. You’re a heck of hunter and I hope you come back one day,” Connor replied.

I nodded. “This has been one of the best adventures of my life. I look forward to returning to Canada someday. In the meantime, this monster mule deer will hang on our wall and remind me of the friends we made and the adventures we had.”

## *About the author*



Kevin Lovegreen was born, raised, and lives in Minnesota with his loving wife and two amazing children. Hunting, fishing, and the outdoors have always been a big part of his life. From chasing squirrels as a child to chasing elk as an adult, Kevin loves the thrill of hunting, but even more, he loves telling the stories of the adventure. Presenting at schools and connecting with kids about the outdoors, is one of his favorite things to do.



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