

The Tales Hunters Tell



Stories of Adventure and Inspiration

Steve Chapman



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Although the majority of incidents described in this book are real, a few are fictional accounts based on true incidents told to the author. In other cases, some names, circumstances, descriptions, and details have been changed to render individuals unidentifiable.

The special feature *Full Draw* is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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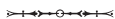
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1

We'll See Him

I looked toward the eastern skies as I exited my truck that early morning in mid-October. My arrival at the farm where I was going to bow hunt for whitetail was later than I preferred. Though the fog was thick and made it impossible to see the sky, I could tell by the ambient light that sunrise was around 15 minutes away.

I hurried as I changed into my camo, shouldered my pack, grabbed my bow, and quickstepped along the edge of a large, freshly harvested field of soybeans. I looked back toward the east and saw that the light was quickly growing. I was still at least 500 yards from where I wanted to be. As I skirted the huge field, I realized I wouldn't make it to my stand before the sun peeked over the hill behind me. I stopped walking for a moment and considered my only two options.

I could continue to follow the fencerow that led to the distant thicket where I planned to hunt. However, I knew that a late entry into the woods where my lock-on treestand was located would probably spook any deer that might already be there. My other option was to abort my trek to the treestand in the woods and go to "Plan B." Because I always keep a portable, three-legged stool on my pack, and because the slight breeze that was moving that morning would be in my face, I considered the viable alternative. I looked to my right at the fence that was just five or six yards away and thought, *No time for going any further. This place will do.*



Being as quiet as I could be, I stepped out of the field and into the knee-high weeds and small saplings that lined the fence. I knew I had to be as quick as possible. I cleared a trio of shooting lanes with my handheld trimmer. As I carefully clipped a few branches, I was grateful for the fog. *At least the mist will shield my movements from the eyes of any deer that might be in the field.*

Any disappointment I felt from being unable to follow “Plan A” that morning was wiped away when I unfolded my tri-stool and sat down. Instead of feeling defeated, I was invigorated by the challenge of hunting the wily whitetail from this impromptu ground blind. With some unplanned-but-welcomed excitement in my soul, I turned my attention to the hunt.

I scanned the few yards of the field that the dense fog allowed me to see. About 20 minutes passed, and very slowly the fog lifted. I looked into the field and slightly to my right I noticed something sort of dark in the mist 60 or 70 yards away. I watched the blurred form for about 30 seconds before I believed I detected a little bit of movement. *My eyes are playing tricks on me.* Then the brownish-gray blob, for lack of a better description, seemed to move again.

I slowly raised my binoculars and looked toward the mysterious shape. The misty cloud that still hung over the field made it hard to find the blob, but when I did my heart started pounding like it always does when I spot deer in my vicinity. “A buck! Who’d a thunk it!” I whispered, deliberately keeping my voice almost inaudible. I couldn’t tell exactly how many points were on his rack, but I was able to determine that it was sizable enough to put in the “shooter” category. I noted that he was relaxed and casually feeding on the residual beans the field offered.

Another 10 minutes passed, and now the mist began to dissipate, allowing me to get a better view of the buck. He seemed to be alone. He was moving from my left to my right and had no idea I was nearby. And he didn’t know I was desperately wishing he would change direction and wander toward where I was sitting.

My wish didn’t come true. He continued his course toward the back corner of the field. After watching him feed and stroll along for another 15 minutes, he disappeared behind a wall of fencerow foliage. I

was tempted to stand up and take a few steps out of my hiding place—maybe even walk to the field edge—so I could get another peek at him. However, I opted not to make that move for fear of spooking any other critters that might be nearby and yet unseen.

As I sat there on my stool replaying the mental video of the sighting, two distinct feelings became clear to me. On one hand, I was pleased that I had made a hunting choice that had at least allowed me the opportunity to see a deer. That's always a satisfying outcome for any deer hunter even if no shots are taken. On the other hand, I felt the sting of the likelihood that my tardy arrival to the farm had cost me a better chance at being successful that morning.

As I went back and forth from feeling satisfied to kicking myself, another thought came that restored some hope in the moment: *Give the grunt call a try*. As if someone had pinched me and brought me back to reality, I quickly unzipped my jacket, found the plastic tube, and put it to my lips. The stillness of the morning seemed to amplify the two-second grunt. I hoped the buck hadn't wandered out of range of the sound.

I waited about a minute and delivered a second subtle blast on the call before placing it inside my jacket and zipping it back up. Because I wasn't sure if the sound had found the ears of the buck, I thought it best to be prepared if he responded. I lifted my bow off my lap and placed it in a horizontal position between my knees, resting the lower wheel on my right boot. I was ready if he happened to come back into the field and within range. The anticipation that mounted was plenty enough to keep my spirits up.

While I waited and watched carefully to my right for any movement, I knew it would be smart to occasionally check to my left just to make sure I wouldn't miss other deer that might come strolling down the field. I spent a half minute or so peering to my left. When I slowly turned my head to the right, once more looking toward the back corner of the field, I couldn't believe what I saw.

There he stood!

I felt like my entire body jumped about a foot in the air and landed back on the stool. Thankfully, only my insides had flinched. The buck

was standing 12 to 15 yards from me. At the moment he was looking out into the field, away from my position, likely trying to find the other deer he'd heard a few minutes earlier.

I forced myself to quickly recover from the shock of the sudden reappearance of the buck and tightened my left hand on the grip of my compound bow. While I watched the deer's head for movement, I maneuvered the mechanical release strapped to my right hand to the nocking point on my string. I was totally ready to stop the process if his head turned toward me.

Hoping the buck's keen vision and attention would remain pointed toward the other side of the field, I slowly raised my bow. When I was only five inches from fully lifting it to where I could come to full draw, he turned his eyes in my direction. I froze.

Well, I tried to freeze. My fight against buck fever made it doubly hard to hold the bow still so he wouldn't notice any movement. I feared it was a lost cause until I realized I could squeeze my knees together against the lower riser to stop the entire thing from shaking.

For about a dozen seconds the buck stared right at me. I was mentally preparing to lose the battle between his wits and mine when, to my great surprise and elation, he dropped his nose to the ground and started searching for more breakfast. When he took a couple more steps to my left, I took the opportunity to get to full draw.

The soft material of my camo jacket didn't make a sound as I struggled against the tightness of the bow string. About the time I reached the point where the bow's draw weight went from 58 pounds to 25 pounds or so, the buck looked up again. He instantly turned his head toward the movement he'd seen out of his peripheral vision—my arm motions. But it was too late for him. His vitals were already covered by the round, red, 15-yard pin on my sights.

The arrow took off like a missile! In an instant it passed through the buck and torpedoed into the dirt somewhere beyond him. He jumped and ran straight across the field, probably headed to where he'd entered it from the other side. About halfway across, I saw him stumble and then crash into the moist dirt. Within seconds he passed from this life and into my book of treasured memories.

I sat on the stool feeling quite stunned by what had taken place. Needless to say, the unplanned stand choice, the unexpected sighting, the quick choice to try the grunt call, and the unpredicted outcome of the morning hunt were very pleasing details to think about. I decided to sit for a few minutes and bask in the glow of success. To this day that glow hasn't lost its shine. I still enjoy recalling every little moment of that morning. And, as it often happens, the more I think about a particular hunt, the more likely it is that I'll discover a connection between something that took place during the experience and something I've read in the Scriptures. This hunt was no exception, and what I saw was helpful to me. Perhaps you'll also see some value in it.

When I first realized that the nearly colorless, fog-distorted blob that I saw through my binoculars was a buck, my heart leaped with excitement. The thrill remained until I could no longer see him because he disappeared behind some foliage. As joyous as the feeling was that came with having seen him, the opposite is how disappointing it felt to assume I'd never see him again. It was this pendulum swing of emotion that I thought about again when I read John 16.

In this passage, Jesus warned His disciples about what was about to happen as the time of His crucifixion was approaching. He said, "A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me" (verse 16). The disciples didn't totally understand their Master's statement and questioned what He meant by "a little while." Apparently they had a rousing discussion about it in Jesus' presence because He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me?'" (verse 19).

Knowing that His disciples were troubled by the mere thought of Him not being with them even for a little while, Jesus offered them some comfort with His next words:

Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth

to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you (John 16:20-22).

In time, after the death of Jesus and His glorious resurrection that followed, the disciples fully understood what the Lord meant by “and again a little while, and you will see Me.” What abundant joy they must have felt when Christ once again appeared alive in front of them the third day after His death on the cross. This is a joy time has not erased.

Christ’s statement recorded in John 16 was obviously about the fact that He would be crucified and buried, thus being out of the disciples’ sight for a short while. But when He was raised from the dead, He appeared before them again. However, His words go beyond that specific point in time. In fact, His words bring hope to countless hearts today, including mine. Those of us who have seen Jesus Christ through eyes of faith and feel the joy of the reality of His presence through the Holy Spirit in our lives cling to Jesus’ words, “And again a little while, and you will see Me.”

We believe that someday the One we see through faith will appear again! In that moment we will “see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). Yet, to be candid, just like the disciples felt an acute sorrow that Jesus was out of their sight even for a while, there are times when holding to the hope of seeing Him again is a challenge for those of us who follow Him today. It’s not easy to maintain a high level of anticipation for His return when there’s so much loss, sorrow, doubt, and dread in our world.

In the face of that challenge, I’m encouraged to recall how I sat that morning on my tri-stool at the edge of that soybean field feeling down that the buck had disappeared...but still holding on to the tiny hope that he’d “heard my cry” when I used the grunt call and I would see him again. In a similar, yet far more important way, the Lord hears the call of my heart as I wait at life’s field edge. I know He will appear again! This anticipation keeps me engaged in the hunt to become more like Him and makes the time pass more joyfully.

We'll See Him Again

Oh, what a morning it surely will be
When our eyes of flesh are blessed to see
The One who till now has only been known
Through what we have seen by faith alone

The sorrow and sadness that have hidden the view
Of His glorious form from me and from you
Will lift like a fog from life's troubled field
And His marvelous presence will be revealed

Then the joy that once seemed so far away
Will enter our hearts, and it will stay
And until that morning when our sorrows will end
We can trust in a while we'll see Him again¹