

The Duce

By
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The afternoon sun waned, and the thermals raced up hill, signaling the evening hunt had arrived. My archery partner Ivan and I were poised on the rim of a huge watershed spying a productive stand of aspens below.

I leaned towards Ivan. “This is the best hunt on the mountain, the wind is always in your face and those trees down there are always holding elk.”

Without further ado we started down the steep meadow through the tall grass. I heard the familiar sound of grass being torn out by the roots, which meant Ivan was close behind. He’s the only guy I know who rips out clods of grass when he walks downhill; it’s what I call big man phenomenon; however, when it comes time to hunt, he has the agility of a ballerina; he could sneak up on a humming bird. We moved with swag down to the edge of the aspens, there we stopped to regain our hunting composure.

“There’s a bull,” Ivan said.

“Where?”

“Ten o’clock, there’s a bunch of them.”

“I can’t see them.”

The tall man had a real advantage when it came to spotting game. Standing on my tip-toes, I finally saw the head of cow milling around some deadfall fifty yards away. We

dropped to our hands and knees in the tall grass and began to crawl forward, closing the distance to about thirty yards. Ever so slowly we peered over the top of the tall grass. There were a couple of rag horn bulls milling around with a half dozen cows, one of which was a mere twenty yards away.

“If you can’t shoot the bulls, shoot the cows,” Ivan whispered.

He no sooner finished his sentence—we drew back our bows, rose up and shot simultaneously. I caught a glimpse of my arrow in the riser, as it hit the cow in the chest behind the shoulder and passed through. She walked several paces then collapsed. The sound of that sucking chest wound put the herd on edge, but they didn’t spook, instead they walked off about sixty yards and continued to graze.

Ivan and I stayed low in the grass creeping toward the fallen cow. The first thing I found was my arrow bathed in lung blood. It was otherwise unremarked, so I stopped and place it back in my quiver. With the elk having moved off a safe distance we inspected the cow.

“I’ll start in on this one,” I said. “Keep hunting those bulls.”

While Ivan gave pursuit, I started carving on the cow. I sliced open her hide all along the spine, until I could easily remove the loin on that side. I laid it off to the side in some fresh grass and ferns then covered it with a space blanket to keep the Blow flies off. I meticulously skinned out both quarters doing my best to keep the loose hair to a minimum. Then I cut open the femur capsule and disarticulated the hind quarter slicing all the meat off of the pelvis, making sure to leave the rump roast firmly attached. I set that quarter aside and wiped the sweat off my brow, and drank long from my canteen.

I heard some rustling and looked over to see Ivan searching the tall grass.

“What are you doing?”

“Looking for my arrow, I could have sworn I hit that cow too.”

“Well, give me a hand over here.”

Ivan pulled up on the front leg while I filleted it off the ribs, then he set it aside.

“Grab the other leg and we will flip her over,” I said.

With a heave ho we rolled her over and . . . BOING!

Ivan’s arrow popped up, the fletch pointing towards the tree tops.

“I knew I hit her.”

“Hit her hell—That’ a perfect heart shot! I’ll bet you chucked a hole through both ventricles with that one.”

“No wonder she died so fast.”

“Yeah bro, a double tap to the chest.” I gave him a high five and we cavorted.

“That’s the first time I’ve ever done that,” I said.

“What’s that?”

“Shot and killed the same elk, simultaneously with another hunter.”

“Come to think of it, it’s my first time too.”

“I can’t say for sure, but I think what we did is pretty rare.”

“I wonder if we will ever be able to do that again.”

“Who knows, but I think we should try . . . say . . . tomorrow for instance.”

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