



The Hunter

As I write this, I am getting ready for the first fitting of my prosthetic foot—an ugly, mechanical stand-in for the flesh and bone that once was mine. What follows will be months, maybe years, of painful rehabilitation. The doctors have already told me: I'll walk again, but always with aid. And as for hunting—never again. It all feels so damned unfair.

All I did was shoot that deer. A fine buck, at least ten points, maybe twelve if you counted the little brow tines that jutted like afterthoughts from the base of the rack. It was a clean shot, right in the throat, severing the windpipe in an instant.

As it lay gasping, its great brown eyes locking onto mine, I dispatched it with a single round through the ear. The smell was unforgettable—fear and sweat undercut by the hot, copper tang of blood. And, though I don't care to admit it, that moment stirred something primal in me. A thrill. A surge. The feeling of the hunter standing victorious over his quarry.

Dragging the carcass back to the clearing where my truck waited was exhausting, but I took pride in the strain. A trophy like this was worth every aching muscle.

Halfway there, I stepped off the trail to relieve myself on a sandy patch—and that's when it happened. The jaws of the steel bear trap slammed shut on my right foot with a sound like the snap of a thick branch.

The pain was instant and incandescent, surging up my leg and into my skull until it felt like my vision would go black.

I dropped the deer where it lay and collapsed beside it. I found myself staring back at its dead eyes, the mirror image of the moment just before. The hunter... and the hunted.

I tried everything—prying with my rifle barrel until it bent and cracked, wrenching at the trap with my bare hands until my fingers bled. My phone showed no signal; no help was coming. The sun slid westward. The sand beneath me darkened with my blood.

When the grizzly arrived, it was almost anticlimactic. It didn't roar or charge—just circled, head low, eyes on me. Maybe it smelled my helplessness.

I managed to grab a thick branch and swing wildly, catching its snout, buying myself a few precious seconds. It swiped me across the shoulder, tearing muscle and cloth like paper.

I remember thinking—so this is how it ends—before a volley of shouts and rifle shots rang out from the trees.

The other hunters drove it off. They freed me from the trap, but one look at my ankle—already darkening to the color of overripe plums—told us all the truth. I'd lose the foot. And I did.

Now, from my hospital bed, I replay it all—the buck, the trap, the bear—in an endless loop. The meat in the cafeteria tonight is venison, ironically enough. I think I'll have the fish instead. Somehow, the taste for deer has left me.