

CHAPTER ONE/The Deer Hunt

They hunt deer in Utah at the frosty end of autumn. Ice rimmed the shady side of rocks, but it wasn't really cold yet. The certain knowledge of the coming winter added to the chill in the air.

A man in a red coat paused and decided to rest on a rock. He jammed his bare hands inside his coat until they were just outside his garments. He was almost glad, for once, that he had to wear his Mormon underwear. Every little bit of protection from the cold was welcome. He could feel the sweat running down his chest. How can your body sweat while your hands and feet freeze?

An expensive hunting rifle with a telescopic sight lay across his knees. It was clear evidence of his commitment to get his deer this year.

An insult floated down on the frost morning air through manzanita, juniper, and pine. The man in red could just hear it. "Move your rear! The deer ain't gonna walk down to you and give up." But the man in red just kept puffing little clouds of steam into the thin mountain air.

The insult continued, "The deer ain't impressed by you like we all are! They're jus' as soon gonna stay up where they are as walk down jus' to meet you." The man in red looked up the mountain toward the insults. It didn't look that far a few hours earlier.

The man in red was Grant Miller, future corporate star with great family connections. He had been hooked into the deer hunt before and he wondered how it had happened again. The mountaintop tormentor was Taylor Lee. Grant was from Salt Lake City, in the populous north of Utah. Taylor was raised in Orderville, a tiny community named after "The United Order," the pioneer Mormon experiment with the communist way of life.

They were the same and very different. Grant was getting a degree in business from Brigham Young University, the center of Mormon culture and learning. He was already planning to go on to an MBA from UCLA.

Taylor was expecting final confirmation for a congressional appointment to West Point in a few days. On the next July 1, he would enter the Academy. Grant would be a captain of industry. Taylor would be a captain in the infantry, and an engineer.

Everyone always knew Taylor would be an engineer. It was the kind of disciplined life he was born to live. His geneology went straight back to the Mormon martyr, John D. Lee. His family knew he had John D. Lee's strength in his blood. Taylor knew it. Everybody knew it.

They looked their parts, too. Taylor was the rifle slim young man you see in every military ceremonial guard. He was six foot four inches of raw boned muscle and no bulk. He had the looks of a young Lincoln.

Grant wasn't as tall, but he had more of a "football hero" body. And he had a handsome face with dimples and great hair. He was usually smiling, like he just heard a good joke.

Grant was also three years older. It was a lot for two friends so young, but they were both adults by the time they entered high school. It could have been one or twenty years and it would have been the same.

Taylor had lured Grant away from the stress of starting the new academic year at Brigham Young with an old reliable sales pitch, "Hey! Come on down for deer season. We'll jus' hike up the mountain a ways before all the city hunters get here. They only get but a few feet from their trucks. I'll show you where the big bucks hang out."

Grant remembered that about this same time last year he was sitting on a rock just like this one; thinking that a football game on TV was a better way to spend an autumn afternoon; thinking that he drove three hundred miles to listen to some farmer yell insults; thinking that he couldn't sit on this rock all morning; but wondering how long he could sit on it before he had to start climbing that mountain again.

A crash in the dry oak brush flushed all that. He could

hear the *thump thump thump* of a mule deer bouncing over the low brush. They were headed toward a stand of quakies across the ravine. Mule deer don't run when they're in a hurry, they bounce. Powerful, four legged kangaroo hops take them across the clay and limestone hills with unexpected speed.

Grant's cold hands slapped the rifle stock up against his red cheek. He could see a proud buck leading two does in the telescope cross hairs. Breath held, his finger pulled against the steel trigger.

Nothing.

"GOD damned shitass sonofabitch safety!" Grant thumbed the lever on the side of the rifle and searched through the scope again as the deer ran for their lives toward the black and white tree trunks of an aspen sanctuary. The image in the scope pulsed in time with Grant's heart. A satisfying kick knocked back against his shoulder. Two more kicks knocked him back, but the shots were wasted. An aspen branch fell behind the buck as he disappeared into the trees. The moment had been spent on the buck. The two does were already gone.

Taylor arrived in a cloud of dust. "What do you think you're shooting at?" Taylor's country language and placid manner was suddenly harsh and angry.

"I want to thank you for being so thoughtful in driving the game so conveniently into my field of fire." Grant was acting a part he figured he was expected to play. Taylor acted the part

of the country hick. Grant acted the part of the city kid. It was usually just an act. But Taylor wasn't up for it today.

Taylor was in a rare fit of anger as he jabbed his finger at the other side of the ravine, "Do you know where Lehi is? Did you forget that he's working that side of the canyon? I don't *believe* I want to pack my buddy out of here."

Lehi! Grant's blood froze for a moment. Where was Lehi?

But he didn't let it show and lied easily, "Lehi's way behind down the canyon. Don't worry about him." It couldn't hurt to establish the alibi that he had no idea that Lehi was on the other side of the ravine on the slim chance that Lehi was stupid enough to actually be in his line of fire. An image of Lehi Swensen came into Grant's mind uninvited, but he quickly dismissed it.

Grant pointed to the grove of aspens across the valley, "Your deer meat is somewhere on the other side of those trees and headed for Colorado." But even as he tried to wisecrack his way out, he was thinking about what to say next.

Taylor was more focused on the goal, "We better hike up there and look for blood signs. You mighta hit one anyway. It'd be wrong to leave a deer to bleed to death and rot." After a few steps he added, "You're sure Lehi is down canyon?"

A brief wisp of thought flashed through Grant's mind: relief that Taylor wasn't going to keep asking about his shot at the deer. With that settled, he had another wisp of thought

about whether he might get a chance to get back to the rock he had been resting on. It was cold and windswept, but resting on the rock was still better than scrambling down the rocky gulch and back up again to the grove of aspen. Two wisps of thought was enough time to let Taylor get half a dozen yards ahead. Grant stepped up his pace.

Taylor was checking the aspen leaves for blood signs when Grant pulled himself up the hill billowing clouds of hot breath at the edge of the quakes.

"Jus' where did those deer dive into the trees, Grant?" The opportunity to rest again while he looked the situation over thoughtfully was a godsend to Grant and he made a show of studying the aspen carefully before answering.

At that moment, another voice answered the question instead, "Right through here!" Lehi Swensen pushed through the red and silver manzanita above them. "I had a balcony seat on your deer. I was just up the canyon from where they started up. First thing I heard was your shot. Then I saw the deer go right through here before I could do anything."

A wave of relief washed through Grant. Dealing with a hunting accident would put a serious crimp in his progress on other goals right now. Taylor gave Grant a penetrating glance that said more clearly than words, "Down canyon, huh?" But Taylor wasn't the type for words unless he intended to do something about it and since Lehi was OK ...

Taylor returned to checking the ground and leaves like an indian scout, but the deer got away this time. Grant felt a second wave of relief as he realized that Taylor wasn't going to make him explain why Lehi was up canyon instead of down.

Taylor Lee looked down the canyon. The morning frost woke you up and filled your body with life. At least, it filled him with life. He could see his friend, Grant Miller, resting on a rock again. Well, Grant wasn't used to going up and down his mountains. Taylor allowed for that. Taylor loved these mountains. He often found himself following the high peaks and green slopes with the attention some men reserve for beautiful women and fast cars. His forefathers were all men who were used to being under a big sky and a distant horizon.

But there were deer to be hunted. Grant should be rested enough by now. Taylor shouted down the mountain to get Grant moving again and, out of the corner of his eye, saw the deer jump. Taylor's rifle slipped into place and cross hairs instantly found a buck following two does across the ravine. Then Taylor remembered that Lehi was somewhere over there and he hadn't seen him for a while. He followed the buck in the telescopic sight as spring steel muscles in the deer's legs made bouncing up the steep canyon a fluid, effortless wilderness ballet.

The sound of a gunshot jolted his mind back to the present

moment. Taylor suddenly realized that Grant didn't know Lehi might be in the line of fire! Taylor lunged down the mountain toward the sounds of two more shots, balancing with his rifle held out away from his body as he leaped over bushes. Grant was peering across the ravine as Taylor arrived. Taylor breathed a silent prayer, "Please, Lord, don't let tragedy visit your children today."

"Do you know where Lehi is? Did you forget that he's working that side of the canyon? I don't *believe* I want to pack my buddy out of here." Taylor felt anger well up inside him. He didn't feel this way often and the anger didn't feel right. Grant started talking his English class talk and Taylor tuned him out. The thing to do now was to get to where Lehi might be. And the place to start looking was where Grant's wild shots went.

Grant was pointing vaguely toward trees across the ravine. Time was the most important factor now. Taylor didn't want to get Grant worked up without a good reason so he said something about checking to see whether a deer had been hit and started off without waiting for an answer. If Lehi was hit, Taylor felt sure that Grant would punish himself more than any other person could.

Taylor's mind went back to ROTC training and battlefield first aid. He had never seen a real wound in a man, but ROTC, Boy Scouts, his father and all his uncles and cousins made sure

he knew what to do. He had seen lots of wounds in deer. The thought that his friend Lehi might have a wound like that made him say another silent prayer, "Lord, forgive my anger, and help me to have the understanding I may need."

The grove of aspen covered a lot of territory up close, but Taylor had time to scout the center section by the time Grant finally arrived. "Jus' where did those deer dive into the trees, Grant?" Taylor could tell that it would take Grant a while to catch his breath before he could answer, so he kept checking the aspen while Grant puffed and billowed.

Just then Lehi's welcome voice cheerfully rang out of the bushes. Taylor allowed himself a moment of pleasure that Lehi was still safe. He had warned Lehi to stay with them as they started out that morning. He now felt an inner anger that was different from his wild anger a few moments ago. It was anger with himself for allowing his friends to get into a situation like this. Both Grant and Lehi were more at home on city sidewalks. But Taylor knew better.

Taylor told himself that he should have known that Lehi was like a kid whenever he got into the mountains. Taylor knew that Lehi loved them as much as he did. Lehi didn't much care for hunting deer, but he loved to breath in the clear air of Taylor's mountains.

Lehi Swensen could see both of his friends below him as he

leaned on his deer rifle to catch his breath. The thought of what Taylor would say if he caught him leaning on his rifle this way passed through his mind briefly, but Lehi didn't care. He made sure that it was unloaded, and then it was just something to carry. It was a hand-me-down from a relative who died and Lehi wasn't sure he would trust it not to blow up in his face anyway. Lehi had to hike hard to get above Taylor as they worked their way up the mountain. He knew Taylor would be worried about him, but he didn't want to miss the chance to be by himself on the mountain.

Like most good Mormon boys, Lehi had gone on a Church mission to preach the Mormon gospel and convert unbelievers as a teenager. The Church made the miscalculation of sending Lehi to New York City where he ran into a completely different type of thinking than he had ever found in Utah. He didn't finish out the mission. He discovered that he didn't believe the Mormon story after all. And he discovered that he did miss the mountains of Utah.

Lehi looked back briefly to check Grant's progress, or lack of it. Grant had stopped again and was much further down. He wasn't sure if it would be safer to be completely visible or behind a rock. Lehi decided to trust the rock and dropped into a small gully out of sight. The gully helped shield him from the whip of the cold, high mountain wind, too. And it heightened the illusion of being completely alone on the mountain.

He wondered just what it was that made him feel this way on the mountain. Was it a primeval feeling going back to his anthropoid ape ancestry? Perhaps it was a cultural attitude programmed into him as he grew up. Not a lot of people today could enjoy the luxury of being high on a mountaintop in clean air and unspoiled forest. He picked up a lump of grey soil capped with black cryptobiotic crust. He read somewhere that the disappearance of cryptobiotic crust was one of many ways that the wilderness was being destroyed. This particular lump was probably centuries old. It had been waiting those centuries for him to pick it up and think these thoughts. He tried to put it down again without damaging it any more than he had already.

Suddenly, a shot rang out and he jumped up to the lip of the gully to see what was happening. A few hundred feet directly below him two does and a buck were running for their lives. Lehi breathed a quiet, heartfelt wish, "Run Bambi! Run!" There were two more shots before the deer entered the relative shelter of the grove. The last shot clipped a branch from an aspen. From his vantage point, Lehi could see them take a sharp left just inside the trees and run parallel to the ridge line. Finally they clattered past him just yards away. They were close enough for him to hear their pounding breath; to see the individual grey hairs on their bodies. They topped the ridge line and were gone.

When Lehi rejoined his friends, he lied and said the deer

went the other way.