

HUNTERS

Written by

Ian Sutherland

Ian.sutha@gmail.com
773 630 1700

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

A sprawling prairie stretches out beyond the horizon. On either side, two dense swaths of forest.

The grass is dry and sunbleached. The leaves on the trees are vibrant, emerald green.

A breeze WHEEZES through the field. The grass undulates under the push of wind.

A deer emerges from the tree-line. It scans the environment. It steps, one foot at a time, into the prairie.

The deer takes another step. One more. It dips its head down and pulls at the grass with its teeth.

A GUNSHOT rips through the air.

The deer's front knees fold. It falls forward into the grass. Blood gushes in soft spurts from a sizable gunshot wound in the neck.

The deer BLEATS. A raspy, gurgling and helpless sound. It topples onto its side and kicks its legs.

The deer goes limp, still GURGLING.

Small, rapid FOOTSTEPS approach in the grass.

MARKIE, 8, a nervous and awkward boy wearing shabby, hand-me-down hunting clothes.

Markie's hands tremble. Tears pool in his eyes. His lips quiver.

The deer's chest heaves. Labored breaths CRACKLE and WHEEZE through blood.

Markie takes a step towards the deer.

The deer's entire body SEIZES.

Markie stumbles back and falls into the grass.

Markie's father, DAVID, 36, a large and imposing man with a stern brow and an eternal five-o'clock shadow, crouches next to him.

DAVID

You need to finish that deer.

Markie stares up at his father. He sobs and shakes his head.

David sighs and cracks his neck side to side. He stands up and reaches for his belt line. He removes a .22 Pistol from its holster. He aims the weapon at the deer's head.

Markie wince's. His eyes wrinkle at the corners. Tears push out and roll down his cheeks.

A single GUNSHOT pops. The sound reverberates through the air.

Markie throws his hands over his eyes.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Get up.

INT. STEEL MILL - DAY

Workers bustle about a huge steel mill. An enormous ladle, hanging from an overhead crane, glides along to a pour station.

Glowing-red ingots roll along conveyor systems.

A team of men rig a pulley system into a rolling mill lift.

David stands at the open hearth. He holds an enormous set of iron tongs at the ready.

A rush of steam WHEEZES from a release valve. The guard door on the hearth pops open. David reaches a bright-red-hot slab of steel. He crosses over to a quenching pool and dunks the slab into the water.

The water immediately boils as David rolls the molten slab in the bath.

David raises the slab from the water. He turns it to inspect the cooled piece.

He turns to a nearby conveyor system, and adds the slab to a rolling track of similar slabs of steel.

David pushes sweat from his brow with a rag.

The work whistle SHRIEKS through the mill. A foreman rings a bell. All the workers finish their tasks.

EXT. STEEL MILL - DAY

Men emerge from the large bay doors of the steel mill.

The setting sun illuminates the scene in deep orange light, similar to the light that emanates from the molten steel.

Most men walk together, laughing and commiserating about the day.

David walks alone. His hands are stuffed into his pockets. He keeps his eyes fixed forward.

David approaches his powder blue pickup truck. He climbs inside and rests his head on the headrest.

INT. DAVID'S TRUCK

He closes his eyes and exhales through his nose. He begins to breath slow, deep breaths.

COWORKER

David? You alright, there?

David jerks forward. He shakes his head and wipes his hands down his face. He glances over to the coworker.

David's coworker has a huge, over-friendly smile on his face.

David gives an affirming grunt and slams the door shut.

The coworker nods and backs up from the vehicle.

David turns the ignition. The truck RUMBLES awake.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

David's home is quaint and modest.

A den with a rocking chair and a small leather couch. A fireplace with a picture of David with his family.

A macrame piece hangs from the wall. It reads "HOME IS WHERE LOVE LIVES" in pine-green stitch.

In the kitchen...

INT. KITCHEN

David sits at the wooden dining table. He sips from a cup of coffee and hovers a cigarette over an ashtray.

Small Hummel figurines populate a shelf over the table. The walls wear a sheet of yellow, floral wallpaper.

MIRANDA, 36, gentle eyes and sleepy expression, stands over the sink washing dishes from dinner.

MIRANDA
He couldn't sleep last night.

David takes a sip of his coffee and stares down at the table.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
I couldn't either.

David continues studying the knots in the wood.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
I told you not to take him. He's...

David cocks his head towards Miranda.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
He's sensitive.

David nods.

DAVID
My dad took me when I was even
younger than that. Boy's gotta
learn to fend for his family.

Miranda shifts on her feet. She purses her lips.

David leans back in his seat. He crosses his leg over his knee.

MIRANDA
There's plenty of other ways for
him to learn to work. He don't need
to be taught to kill, too.

David sighs through a long drag from his cigarette.

DAVID
He's my son. If --

Miranda turns to David.

MIRANDA
Exactly. And he's mine too. Our
son. Our child.

David shifts his weight. He rests his arm on the table. He snuffs out the cigarette. He fidgets with the coffee mug.

DAVID
He's -- it's a tradition. It's --

Miranda cocks her head. She raises her eyebrows.

David swallows his words. He stands up from his seat.

Miranda crosses her arms.

David leaves the kitchen.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

David steps out onto the front porch. A bare, yellowed bulb buzzes overhead.

David steps to the edge of the porch. He steps down the front steps and circles around to the back of the house. He takes a cigarette from his pack and lights it.

The ember glows. It casts faint orange light onto David's face.

A breeze CRIES through the nearby forest. David steps towards the woods.

Twigs SNAP just beyond the tree-line.

David freezes.

An enormous, 25 point buck emerges from the forest. It steps into the yard. It plants its feet and scans the area. It steps deeper into the yard and surveys again.

David's cigarette glows across the dark yard.

The buck positions itself to charge and holds stance.

David wraps his fingers around his .22. He nudges the safety strap open and barely lifts his hand. The firearm begins to ease out of the holster.

David inhales a large breath and holds. He keeps his eyes fixed on the buck.

The buck snorts and shakes its head, showing off its massive rack of antlers.

David pushes the hammer down on the gun as he finally clears the holster.

He holds the gun, barrel down, out at his side. He doesn't blink. He doesn't breathe.

The buck rears back.

More twigs SNAP beyond the tree-line.

The buck locks its position.

The back door of the house CREAKS open.

Markie steps onto the small back porch.

DAVID

Markie.

David holds his free hand up to Markie. He whispers with a sharp tone.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Back in the house, Markie.

The buck's head twitches to the side.

Markie backs up against the door. His arms rest rigid at his sides.

David turns the gun up towards the buck.

A young fawn steps out of the forest.

The buck shifts its gaze towards the fawn.

The fawn sinks its head down. It locks eyes with the buck.

David draws his gun towards the buck.

The buck cocks its head back towards David. It grunts again.

David squints.

In a single motion, the buck turns and leaps toward the fawn.

David keeps his aim locked on the buck. He looks back at Markie.

Markie is trembling.

David turns his head to the buck.

The buck nudges the fawn with its antlers. The fawn keeps its head down and backs up towards the forest.

The buck nudges the fawn again.

The fawn turns to face the forest. The buck grunts.

David holds his aim.

Markie sniffles and wipes tears from his cheeks. He sinks down to a crouch and covers his ears.

David finally exhales. He lowers the pistol and decocks it. He returns the pistol to its holster.

A soft wind sails through the tree line.

David turns to Markie.

Markie lowers his hands from his ears. He wipes a tear from his cheek.

David nods to Markie. He offers his hand.

Markie shuffles onto his feet and walks down the steps to meet his father. He takes his father's hand.

The two turn back towards the woods.

Twigs CRACK in the growing distance.