

VOWA/Dominion and Cooperative Living

2013-2014 Awards Winner

Mr. Crabs
By
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It was the perfect morning. Zero moonlight, twinkling stars covering the sky and a chill that would make Jack Frost bite his lip. Alarm banging away at half past 4:00, I slide out from under the covers. Camo slung over the holly, hair still damp from a scent-free shower, I crunch through the frozen grass in my underwear and try to hold my breath at the slap of the air. Pop-tart in mouth, boots tied and bow in hand, the golf cart starts to rumble and we head for ground zero.

Now to most people, there is just cold. But to someone who spends close to ninety percent of his life outdoors, I have felt, or not felt... the reality of it. Driving down the road on Ol' Reliable is the second coldest I've ever been in my life. From then on, I believed that being able to feel one's face is a luxury.

4:50; all is well. There is no sound except that of my boots crossing into the wood line. I slide in and out of the gurgling brook and pause on the other side. Here begins the fun part. I pull the rag and string out of my pocket, soak it in Golden Estrus and start the scent drag to my stand. Hopefully later on, this line will be crisscrossed and smelled on by numerous other brown bodied animals.

5:00, sharp; perfection. It's been one of those days where everything clicks; no hiccups or mistakes. I always aim to be in the stand an hour before first light so as not to disturb the natural flow of the deer's patterns. This is the time which is the most difficult of every hunt. Sitting for an hour in the dark running on four hours of sleep and a belly full of pop-tart is a test which determines success or failure. But this morning, this morning was different.

The bruiser I was fighting was a buck I called Mr. Crabs due to the distinct crab claw tines he sported on the end of his rack. I had had a shot at him two weeks prior but had royally fudged the opportunity by grazing his back, the worst feeling I have ever felt in my life. But this time I was confident. I was on his trail, I was sighted in, and if anyone gets lucky enough to get a second chance on a stag like this, it is impossible to miss again.

6:00; God begins to paint the sky and the birds and squirrels decide it's time to come ruin my nerves. I think of squirrels as deer's little helpers. They sound exactly like a deer sifting through the leaves, and they constantly spot me. After an hour or so of constantly shifting my sight to see another darn squirrel tearing through the leaves, I am about as far off the end of my seat enraged as possible. After another five minutes of this pandemonium I have no option but to end it. I knock an arrow and all my distraught stops. The squirrel is no longer a problem.

7:30; go time. Brown bodies and white tails flicker through the trees; does and spikes, button bucks and basket racks. None of these are shooters. What I'm looking for is called a wall-hanger. Hunting is pretty

realistic. There may be an eerie quiet before the storm, but not always. Every situation can happen; it's not all Hollywood. In this case, Mr. Crabs made it easier on me.

Movement, coupled with sound, is what wakes me from my open-eyed and dreary slumber. Senses are reborn and the red begins to flow. Upon recognition of species, the red rushes to my ears and throat with a throbbing sensation. When a herd of about 8 pass by, I settle down a little bit and get my nerves back about myself. Well, right after this pack slid past me unknowingly, there he was.

7:50; prime time. The sun is beaming through the trees and casting shadows all around. I see chocolate swaying left to right in the distance. A flicker of white and my heart is in my throat. The hog that evaded me last time is back. The moment I see maturity ready to hit the dinner table, I stand up, bow in hand, ready for as little movement as possible. A deer's senses are very acute, so even if the deer is still a hundred yards off, I prepare for him like he's at five. Lightly stepping down his trail, nose in the leaves, he makes a beeline for my scent drag trail. Eighty yards, then seventy, then right when he enters the range of my Mathews, he knows something is up.

Crown raised to the sky, he is untangling the mess of scents he smells; acorns, squirrels, doe in estrus and worst of all, human. When a deer knows something is amiss he will stomp his hoof and flicker his tail. Well there it went, the thump of the hoof and the sway of the tail. After what seems like an eternity, sitting fifty yards apart, I can thank that holly bush for keeping my camo scent free for the last week it had been sitting outside.

Nose to the earth once again, he gets inside of twenty yards. Head behind a tree so his eyes are paralyzed from view, I stretch my string. Out he comes from behind the oak at a grand total of fifteen yards; almost too close for comfort. He was still shielded under a small sapling which disrupted my shooting lane. When a deer is this close, your mind is as focused as it can possibly be; time slows down, you can hear your heart in the back of your mouth, it is just the two of you. Bow still drawn, I can start to feel the strain in my back. Out he steps from under the tree, but a problem presents itself.

He is facing head-on. A head shot being unethical, I am left with only one option, which is still very risky; chest. All of a sudden, I remember the damn squirrel. I look down at my arrowhead and realize that I had used the wrong arrow; I had shot my only broadhead before. I have a field point on now which has no blades. To this day, I have only God to thank for this luck. An entry wound with this arrow would leave a hole practically unnoticeable on a mount.

With a quick prayer and a final look, I squeeze the trigger. (I am perspiring furiously just writing this). My arrow flies in a timeless line and hits, true to its mark.

The red flows, it is done.