

Legends of the Hunt

By John Seerey-Lester

The old prospector enjoyed reading his own obituary years after his bloody battle with an enraged grizzly.

A veteran prospector, Hatheway was heading out from camp to stir something up for the pot. It had somehow become his task to put food on the table at the small mining camp. He was the oldest and felt somewhat responsible to use his shooting skills to keep the stewpot filled with game.

The prospectors were near Pony, Montana, in 1860 and Hatheway had been lucky keeping the cooking pot filled with his morning hunting trips. Over the months of prospecting in the area, he had created many trails, all of which were now well worn.

But this day he was heading off-trail to see if he could scare up a grouse or two. He hiked toward a thicket and within seconds his

heart jumped to an explosive sound in the bush just to his side.

He swung round and saw a bird rising; he squeezed the trigger and fired. But despite his skill, the darn thing kept flying. *How could he have missed it?* He put another shell in the gun and stepped in the bird's direction.

A squirrel high in an aspen scolded him mockingly. He raised his rifle to dispatch the little critter when another grouse flew up in front of him. He immediately changed his aim and brought the bird down.

Somehow the angle of the shot had caused the gunstock to slam hard into his shoulder. But he didn't care because he'd gotten his prize. The bird dropped into a small, brushy gully. Hatheway kept



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his eye on where it fell and raced down the hill through the scrub and dense stand of saplings.

At the bottom, to his great surprise, he almost collided with a grizzly, which had seemingly claimed ownership of the unexpected gift from the sky – a nice plump grouse.

For only a brief moment Hatheway was torn between retrieving his bird and making a run for it. Only briefly! For the bear turned and looked at the dithery hunter.

The old man gazed at his bird between the bear's front legs and was somehow in awe of the bruin's claws. The bear was clicking its jaws and clawing the earth. Its tiny eyes looked fierce as it continued to stare at the prospector.

Hatheway stepped back with his gun across his chest, his eyes riveted on the terrifying sight in front of him. Suddenly, the beast charged and Hatheway had only a split-second to fire the last of his birdshot at the approaching monster.

Not surprisingly, Hatheway's shot did nothing but anger the bruin, which pounced on the hapless prospector, pinning him with his back to the ground. Somehow, he managed to pull himself uphill and kick with both feet at the bleeding head of the irate bruin.

His hobnail boots were temporarily lifesavers, but before Hatheway could get a foothold on the slope, the bear came at him again. He still gripped his gun and as the bear lunged, he pushed the stock into its open mouth. The bear bit down hard on his right arm, forcing the old man to drop the gun. Then it lifted and shook him like a rag doll. Hatheway could hear the sound of his bones cracking like dry twigs.

The prospector was thrown to the ground, where the bear continued to rake him from head to toe with his long claws. Hatheway eventually passed out.

The next thing he remembered was lying on his camp bunk looking up at the faces of his fellow prospectors.

It seems that when his companions

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returned from prospecting all day and there was no pot stewing on the fire – and no Hatheway – they went searching for the old man.

They found him at the bottom of the gully, his arms ripped apart and badly broken, his body a torn and gory mess from head to toe. Hatheway was in severe shock when they loaded him onto a litter for the trip back to camp. No one expected him to survive, but the tough old bird slowly rallied and went on to enjoy many more years of prospecting.

As for the offending grizzly, it was tracked down and killed by the other prospectors.

Hatheway was able to enjoy reading his own obituary years later. News of the incident was slow in coming out of the wilderness, and the newspapers had reported that he'd been killed by a bear. Just one more tragic incident among many during the days of the Wild West.

CAMPFIRE TALES

This fascinating story from the Old West is among more than 60 chapters in John Seerey-Lester's spectacular new book, *Legends of the Hunt – Campfire Tales*. The 11x12 large-format, 200-page book features more than 130 paintings and many drawings depicting early hunters, explorers and trappers and their harrowing – and often deadly – encounters with wild animals from Alaska to Africa. The 11 x 12-inch book is available in four beautiful editions:

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