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FIFTH AVENUE PILGRIMS AMID THE GOATS

This account, written as a letter from “Tex” to a friend, draws a clear line between real hunters and outdoorsmen who might smoke and be thin as a rail, but who can walk up and down mountains all day, and university graduates from fancy schools with degrees and athletic achievements but no sense of outdoorsmanship. Authenticity, class, education, masculinity, and bodies all matter very much here. Tex strongly identified himself as the former, and clearly found the poseurs he sometimes had to guide very tedious. One gets the sense that he was sometimes treated rather cavalierly by customers because he was a working man for hire, and not “one of them.” Rather than complain about it, he found a way to make them look as foolish as they were—in stories such as this one. A young Ivy Leaguer eager for a chance to shoot a grizzly declines, when they finally find one, because he would have to cross a stream and get his feet wet, which he refuses to do. The story ends with Tex contemplating how he might even prefer the effete and pointless work (at least for a mountain man) of driving a bus to guiding this sort of customer. The question of authenticity is addressed clearly here: a man who can hunt and take care of himself in the mountains is a real man. People with money and fancy degrees from fancy schools start this game at a disadvantage. Supposed athletic prowess also knocks points off. Mockery directed at a guide with a thin body (of which he even makes fun himself) only makes the mocker look silly. The hunter’s refusal even to cross a stream and get wet is the final nail in the coffin of his masculinity—the guide retreats in disgust. This is an odd mixture of machismo and a kind of anti-establishment counterculture sensibility, characteristic of the place betwixt and between inhabited by Tex.

—AG and JR

FIFTH AVENUE PILGRIMS

AMID THE GOATS

A letter from a disillusioned guide

By N. Vernon-Wood

DEAR FRIEND:

I promised you when you were up here fishing last summer that I would let you know how we came out with the hunting this fall.

Well, we had quite some hunt. Our three pilgrims were all from New York, and when we met them at Lake Louise, to pull for the hunting country on the Saskatchewan River, they looked just about the usual run of the mill. Two middle-aged birds and a young feller. The king-pin of the bunch was a large man name of Fogg. The other elderly man was sort of quiet and didn't seem any too husky, and the young buck was John Julius O'Toole, just out of Yale or Harvard or some one of those seats of learning Down East.

I had started Frank ahead with the pack train, to make camp as far up the Bow as we could make that day, so as soon as I had packed our pilgrims' war bags and rifles we hit out up the trail. There wasn't much conversing done, just the usual line about, "How far is it to camp?" and "What are the prospects for a grizzly?" John Julius was just busting to tangle with a grizzly. You know how it is the first day or so, the pilgrims are sort of sizing up us fellers, and we are not missing anything that will give us a line on the folks that we have to guide, council, and herd for the next month or so.

We caught up with the boys along about four o'clock, and as soon as we had ourselves sort of organized, the pot wrangler hollered, "Come and get it."

Then we did what was to do, to make camp snug for the night, and lay around the camp fire, sort of getting the feel of each other.

Suddenly, John Julius pointed his finger at me, like it was a gun, and said, "Wood, you smoke."

"Shure I smoke," I said.

"You smoke continually.

"Uh, uh," I replied.

"Well, you can't smoke like you do, and climb."

"Maybe I can't, but I never seen the pilgrim yet I can't keep two jumps ahead of," I come back. It's kind of one of the things you don't do, telling a mountain man he can't climb, especially before you have been out with him; but if you learn anything in this guiding game, it's the gift of patience with your fellow man.

Mr. Fogg says, "You men will have to look out for John, when you hunt with him. He is an athalete, and has got medals for the track and swimming and throwing the skillet," or words to that effect.

When we guides got into our tepee that night we did some mild arguing as to which of us were going to hunt with John, and which with the others. John looked good to all of us, and we all wanted him. You know how it is, each of us wanted to be the bird that got the most game. Well, to make it all according to Hoyle, we drew for them, and Frank got John, Jim gets Fogg, and me, with my usual luck, gets the little old fellow, whose name I find out is Boyle. To my mind he's the cull of the herd.

We got out of the park and into goat country on the third day out, and got all set to give the old billies a going over the next morning. Frank took a nice-looking draw east of camp, and I picked a long, grassy slope that was easy climbing, more with the notion of exercising my man than with getting any game. I always like to sort of break them in before I start to do any real hunting. I don't care how good shape a man keeps himself in in the city, 6,000 feet altitude and using new muscles takes the starch out, for a day or two, until you sort of get climated.

However, after poking along, onward and upward, for two three hours, darned if we didn't spot a bunch of goat sunning themselves on some ledges, about half a mile off. There was a steep shale slide behind them, which ran up to a cliff that was pretty straight up and down, and we were lucky to have the wind on them. There was a dry wash that ran up to the

cliff, where the snow water had run off in the spring, and we could keep out of sight in that until we were close. The goat were plumb unsuspecting, and I figured everything was about as if I had ordered it.

We took lots of time, and when we finally poked our noses over the edge of the wash we were in a good position to start the massacre. I had Mr. Boyle rest him up a bit, so that the old heart wasn't pumping so hard that the muzzle of his rifle made circles, picked out a good-looking head, and give the word to plaster him. At the range we were, it should have been pie, but as the guy once said, "What a lot of country there is over and under and on both sides of a goat." One good thing about goat, they fancy themselves a heap, and shure believe it's no sign of a gentleman to be in a hurry. They will move off very deliberate as a general thing.

After the old boy had taken a couple of sighting shots, and put another down the foul line, he hit the billy a little low, but enough to make him sick. All this time the bunch were walking up the shale, looming up like a lighthouse in a fog. Finally, my man dropped enough lead into the goat to make him so plumb heavy that he couldn't climb any more, so he rolled over and called it a day. He had a nice head, too, and I skinned him out, made a pack of the head and scalp, with the liver for breakfast, and we started down, feeling pretty stuck on ourselves. Me, because I hadn't expected to get anything that day, only I didn't tell Boyle that.

We got into camp first, and after the cook had filled us up with honest-to-God trail tea, we lay around waiting for the rest to come in, so we could start lying about the long shots we had made, and the straight-up climbing we had done.

After a while along comes Frank with John Julius, and John is all he had with him, except a fair-sized grouch. Then Jim comes in, also traveling light. Frank had seen game but couldn't get a shot, he said, and Jim hadn't seen anything but tracks.

When we got into our tepee that evening, Frank opened up, and to hear him tell it John wouldn't ever get any medals for hunting. Frank told me that if I wanted John I could shure have him. I sort of figured that John had rubbed Frank against the fur, and that no man could be quite as useless as he made out John was, so I traded pilgrims.

Now, it was my notion to lay in this camp for a few days, so that the bunch could climb around and razz the goat, and this would put them in good shape for when we got into the sheep country. Anyone that can put one foot in front of the other for a few hours, and shoot reasonably straight,

can get him a goat in this man's country, but the bighorn is a different breed of cat. He is no man's fool, and when you have accumulated you a good sheep head, you can swell out your chest and tell the world that you have done some real hunting. For this reason I like to blood my pilgrims on the goat before I hunt sheep with them. Then you have got 'em where they will stay with you all day, and shoot when the time comes. *Ovis Canadensis* doesn't wait around to see what you are going to do about it, and if you don't connect with him right smart, he goes from here to there awful pronto.

When we got up next morning, though, our pilgrims had had a powwow of their own, and wanted to break camp and hit for the sheep country right away. Nothing I could tell them seemed to cut any ice, and as they were paying for the outfit I gave in.

We chased the wrangler out after the ponies, broke camp, and lit out for the Wilcox Pass, about three days from where we were on the Mistaya. On the way, John kept pestering about grizzly. Man, oh, man, he shure wanted to tangle with one. I told him that if we did it was more luck than judgement, as at that time of the year, they were traveling all over the country. They keep mostly to the summits, digging gophers, filling up on them before they shut up shop for the winter.

Well, we got to the head of the Sunwapta and went into camp to look into the sheep proposition. Next day we hunted sheep, and the next, and the next.

Then one night it snowed about two inches. Just right for tracking. John and I started out bright and early and hit up a long slope heading for the alpine meadows on top. We were just about topping out when we ran into the finest set of grizzly tracks you would want to see. Fresh and hot, and by the look of them he wasn't in any hurry. He was angling down the hill on the north side toward a little pocket.

"Well, John, this is where you bust a bear," I said, and we followed the sign, keeping a peeled eye on the country below us. Finally, we come to the little pocket, which has scrub growing about three four feet high, and a creek running along the edge. The bear had crossed so soon ahead of us that the mud was still swirling around in his pads.

I told John to pump a shell into the chamber of his fowling piece and look at his sights, and sneaked across the stream as quietly as I could.

The water was just over my shoe tops. You know I wear usual height shoes. I think those high-legged ones are just so much more weight to pick up and put down. John has the kind sold at all the sportsmen's outfitters, seventeen inches high, anyway.

When I got to the other side, I find that John is still on the far bank, so I go back to find out how come. I didn't dare to holler for fear of disturbing our bear.

"Isn't there some kind of bridge I can cross on?" says he.

"Bridge, my foot, come on: the bear waded, and I waded, and neither one of us got drowned."

"No, I can't. You see, Wood, if I get my feet wet, my whole day will be spoiled."

Can you beat it? I told him to get the hell out of there and go back to camp, and by the nine blind pack ponies of old Joe Smith, that's just what he did.

I went back over the creek again, and followed the tracks, and about five-hundred yards into the bush here was the bear, busy as all get out, digging him some gophers.

I circled around him and hit for the camp myself. One more outfit like this, and I am going to quit and me a job chauffering one of those sight-seeing busses, from Calgary to Lake Louise.

"TEX."

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