

NINETEEN

SAWBACK CHANGES HIS MIND

This story is one of a pair, written at some remove from each other, that addresses a trip with a long-time client, Doc Kent and, with his new wife, Diana (Di). In this version, Sawback is skeptical at first, but is won over, as is Tex, by the woman's "sporting" nature, good sense and ability to climb and hunt, reversing gender roles and winning the mountain mens' approval for her ability to assume mountain masculinity. Di insists on first names (and an abbreviation at that), carries her own rifle through the mountains, refuses to give up trailing a gut-shot animal until she finishes the job, and skins it herself (thus getting properly dirty, of course). She is, therefore, a proper hunter, and a "reg'lar," one of them: not just an honorary man, which would not yet be much, but an honorary mountain man. In the other, less charitable, version, "It's a Woman's World," the female client plays it closer to the gender conventions of the time, refuses to climb or participate in the strenuous business of stalking or skinning, preferring to stay near camp; but she manages cool-headedly to bag three prime specimens within walking distance of camp, while Tex and Doc scramble up and down mountainsides to no avail. Her aplomb and success as a hunter win her the guides' grudging respect. The Pipestone Letters, written in the middle of Tex's writing career (1932–37), are characterized by a high generosity of spirit; some of the other stories concentrate more on mischief, low fun, or cussedness. A photograph of Diana standing with a rifle and a felled mountain goat on scree completes the story.

—AG and JR

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Another Pipestone Letter

By N. Vernon-Wood

WB Ranch

Pipestone Creek, Alberta

Mr. John Lincoln

Wall Street, New York City

DEAR FRIEND:

I get a letter from Doc Kent last summer, which amongst other things says, "You don't have to put on any frills, Tex. She is a good sport, and wants to rough it just as I have done on previous hunts."

I shows it to Sawback, who remarks, "Mebbe yes, but I'll bet you that hand-made skinnin' knife agin fifteen centavos, that we add Ladies' maidin' to our other accomplishments before the trip's over."

We ain't either one of us feelin' so good about this, an' that's a fact. The Doc has been comin' west every fall for quite some time, an' we've got past the Guide and Pilgrim stage. We've smoked each other's tobacco, used the same towel, an' shivered ourselves warm on the same summits. Onetime, Sawback has stopped a grizzly that was hell-bent on takin' Doc apart, an' Doc has plumb ruined one vacation by quarryin' a busted appendix out of me. An' now he's been an' committed matrimony, we do speculate some on how a Park Ave. gal is going to fit into a teepee, an' if she'll pack her own rifle.

"It might be an idee for you to practice up on callin' them knot-headed

cayuses somethin' besides what you generally do," I tell Smitty. "Mebbe she won't appreciate your intimate details of their ancestry.

"You're tellin' me, eh?" he comes back. "How about you usin' a little gentlemanly restraint yourself next time that passel of equine orneryness you call a saddle-horse wampoos with you. Last time she dumped you off, even my sunburnt old ears fried."

So, feelin' like I'm the chief mourner, I take the buckboard down to the deepo when the time comes to gather up Doc an' his impedimenta.

He comes boilin' off the cars lookin' right fit for a guy that's been settin' in a office prescribin' for Dowagers. "Tex, you old hellion, you're appearin' just as young an' twice as ornery as ever; this is my wife."

"Glad to meet you, Mrs. Kent," I says, tryin' to like I meant it.

"The name is Diana," she comes back; "Di to you. I feel that we're friends already."

While me an' Sawback is saddlin' up the knotheads I tell him what she said, an' venture the opinion that she might be reg'lar, but that the time to make shure is after we've stalked a goat for about a million feet, to find that in the meantime he's gone places.

"Why wait for that," answers the old misogynist. "They ain't none of 'em reg'lar in camp. It's temptin' Providence, an' jeopardizin' a beautiful friendship, not to mention crampin' our style, to lug any female into the hills. Me, I'm agin it."

On the way to the huntin' country she kind of makes a hit with the old longhorn though, by not tryin' to be helpful. If they's anything that gets him onhappy it's havin' one of these-here willin' little helpers around camp, male or female, that insist on helpin' with the chores.

We are camped under The Monarch to the east of Wapoose Pass the first time I take Mrs.—Di huntin'. As per usual I aim to try her out on Goat, them same Oreamnos havin' been created special for guides to blood Tenderfeet on. They are plentiful, not too hard to stalk, but at the same time, frequentin' country that will give you a good workout gettin' up to them.

The first one we see is roostin' way up on a grass slide, without any cover within a million miles of shootin' distance, an' he knows it; so we pass him up, an' toil up a mess of broken rock, mighty steep, big enough to make poor footin', an' generally lousy. I made a jestchure of carryin' her gun, kind of feeble, I'll admit, but it don't have to be very convincin' for most females to take you up.

"I'll let you lug it sometime, Tex," she says, "when my arm's broke."

I'm beginnin' to like that woman, by Judas.

Long about two P.M. we get a poke at a pretty nice Billy. No, she don't lay him out with a well-aimed shot in the heart. She aimed there all right, but planted a 6.5 in the digestive arrangements.

We have to trail that fool Goat about six miles an' up to the top of several unnamed peaks before she lays him out. An' before she does it, we navigate some ledges that are right horrific, what with snow an' ice an' straight drops. I suggests once that we call it off; but, no sir, leavin' a wounded beast don't fit in with what she calls the Fitness of Things. When we finally stop that Goat, he drops about a hundred feet straight down. If they hasn't been a snowbank for him to land on, he'd sure be plumb ruined.

It's dark when we get to camp, but Sawback notices that her hands wouldn't make no advertizment for Front's Honey an' Almond.

"Did she help you skin that goat?" he asks.

"She did, an' what's more she took out the tenderloin with ease an' facility."

He comes as near smilin' as he ever does, an' carries a pail of warm water to where she is washin', an' as he goes I hear him mumble, like he don't quite believe it himself, "Red-Eyed Old Jiminey, she must be reg'lar."

Which she was.

Yours,

TEX.

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