

## TWENTY

### TEX TANGLES WITH HORRIBILIS

Tex uses the coarse language of the times (“Chinaman,” “Chink,” and “coolie”). He is afraid that he has mistaken a Chinese worker for a bear and shot him by mistake. His tongue-in-cheek remarks are at best ambiguous: “Chinamen are sort of sacrosanct up here, a paternal govt figurin’ they are plumb harmless, an’ oncapable of protectin’ themselves in the Crude West, so it costs a man plenty even if he only takes a playful poke at one. I figger that for blastin’ one I’ll get hung.” It does not stretch charity to read this at face value as implying that Chinese workers were indeed harmless and that he was in fact afraid that he might just have shot someone who posed no threat. But the jocular tone is jarring even if it is meant to be of a piece with Tex’s mountain persona. The racist language and tone make it hard to read this story with enjoyment today.

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## TEX TANGLES WITH HORRIBILIS

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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:

There is quite a argument at the Post Office last time I'm in for my mail, if any.

Old Coyote Ben who traps the Pallisser is holdin' forth on Bears: their habits, dispositions, how hunted, an' the best way to render down their oil. With a few added remarks on the price of hides, an' how that the best Bear hunter in the Northwest Territories, Rupert's Land an' the Yukon, is ondoubtedly a old ranny called Coyote Ben.

He's holdin' forth plumb authorative on Grizzly, an' I have some difficulty gettin' old Cameron to quit listenin' long enough for him to riffle through the W, X, Y, an' Z pigeonhole to find out if there's been any Optomists who think they can sell me a saddle, or collect for the one they sold me last spring. I'm sortin' out the batch, tryin' to find something' that looks like it ain't a nasty letter from a creditor, when I hear Ben say:

"Scared of 'em? No sirree, I've hunted 'em goin' on thirty year, an' I ain't seen the Bear yet that could throw a scare into me."

Which same crack makes me think that while the old fictioneer might've

hunted 'em plenty, he'd caught up on mighty few. Me, I've monkeyed around the berry patches an' wild-onion beds, lookin' for Ursuses quite some too, an' I've been scared plumb to death more times than I can remember.

There's onetime I'm comin' down the Kananaskis with a Pilgrim who's out for Grizzly. Just as we come out of a jackpine grove to where the trail skirts a mess of broken rock from some old landslide, I spot a fair-to-middlin' Horribilis pokin' along towards us. I grab our pack pony, tie up the saddle stock, an' tell the Dude to get organized, an' when the Bear comes 'round the bend in the trail to let him have it. I ain't worried any; I've seen the Dude shoot, an' at a tomato can at a hundred yards he's bad medicine. When that Bear comes along, he won't be over seventy-five, an' right in the clear. It looks like a cinch. In just about two minutes he shows up, an' the Pilgrim takes a long careful sight. Bingo—an' the bear swaps ends so quick his hind feet get tangled up with his front ones an' he goes offen the trail over the edge into them rocks in half a split second.

"I got him, I got him!" hollers the Dude. "Bet I hit him plumb center."

I ain't so shure, so I have him chuck another shell into the barrell, an' we sneak up easy. I can't see any blood trail, an' I suggest that mebbe it was a miss. The Dude is some dudgeoned, an' insists that Bear is layin' in them rocks, dead as the Townsend Plan.

'All right, let's go find him, but be ready to shoot in case he ain't so dead as you think."

My rifle is in Calgary, gettin' a busted stock fixed an' I'd left the ranch with a .45 Colt. We ain't been searchin' them rocks two minutes when I notice the Pilgrim is behind me. I sort of ooze over, an' comin in back of him, seein' he has the rifle, an' started this thing anyway. It takes him about half a minute to circumnavigate me an' get in the rear agen, so we cover about ten acres of rockslide out-manooverin' each other in a circuitous manner. We're lookin' for Bear, but we're also spendin' considerable thought an' effort into gettin' the other feller in front. The Pilgrim is one up on me, when something' comes out of the rocks like the 20th Century comin' out of a tunnel. I hear the Dude's gun go off, an' I fall between a couple of boulders wonderin' if I'm clawed to pieces or just clean shot with a nice expandin' .30-06. No, it ain't the Bear. Just a damn Pa'tridge gettin' up, but the result on our system's synominous.

THERE USED TO BE a hotel way up on the mountain above Banff, an' they kept their meat an' air-tights in a sort of combination ice-house an' pantry, just outside the kitchen. Bein' built on a side hill, they's quarters for the

Chinese staff below. One spring a Black Bear discovered that all he had to do to make a fat livin', was pry off the odd board, an' reach for steak, chicken, jam an' sow-belly. He's raided the cache two–three times, when the woman who run the deadfall says she'll pay me ten dollars cash to ruin that bear, so I drifts up the hill one evenin'.

I have a light left on, in the kitchen so it shines through the window onto the meat-house, an' take a room upstairs overlookin' the onsemble. It's dark as the inside of a black pony at midnight, when I hear a board splinter. I peek out, an' shure enough, there's a black blob outlined agen the cache. I draw a bead and shoot twice, quick. Minglin' with the bellerin' of a wounded Bear, I hear the damdest Ki-Yi-Mukka-Hi-ing I ever heard in my life. Lovely Lizzie, I think, I've made a double, an' got a Chink as well as a Bear. I'm scared to go down an' look. Chinamen are sort of sacrosanct up here, a paternal govt figurin' they are plumb harmless, an' oncapable of protectin' themselves in the Crude West, so it costs a man plenty even if he only takes a playful poke at one. I figger that for blastin' one I'll get hung.

However, I sneak down to learn the worst. I find a dead Bear 'bout fifty yards from the kitchen, but no Chink. He shows up about noon next day. Seems like, findin' life dreary up the hill, he's been in town consortin' with the laundry coolie.

Just as I shoot the Bear, he arrives seekin' his virtuous couch, an' the Bear dashes by him bawlin' like hell. The Chink doesn't stop till he lands in the Police barracks back in town. It's a good thing for me that I have a dead bear to show the Sargeant next day, or I'd be workin' for nothin' yet. Anyway, don't let any of them Bull Artists tell you that you can hunt Bear, an' never feel the hair on the back of your neck tryin' to get up to the bald spot on top.

Sincerely,

TEX.

*Hunting and Fishing, May 1937, 15 and 46*

