

TWENTY-FIVE

IT'S A WOMAN'S WORLD

In this story, women get Tex's respect when they attain a type of "mountain manhood." But in this case, mountain manliness is mediated by the domesticity of the heroine: she stays close to camp and avoids strenuous scrambling yet bags the most game. See a similar attitude about women in the remarks about the parallel piece, "Sawback Changes His Mind." In this piece, Tex's rustic sidekick Sawback expresses typical misogynist attitudes; Tex chides him for them but in doing so, uses a racist slur about Indian drunkenness ("we've guided many a female that took to huntin' like an Indian takes to lemon extract"). The female protagonist attains a variety of mountain manhood, but mediated, in this case, through the feminine gender role of domesticity. The moral here is rather different from those stories in which women accede to full mountain masculinity, such as the alternative version of this story (as above) or "This Guiding Business," but the message is still clearly that women can hunt and be mountain women, in this case.

—AG and JR

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Nello Vernon-Wood

"WHILE I'VE GOT NOTHING personal agin matrimony," says Sawback Smith, "I claim it should be confined to them areas sanctified by precedent and custom, like Niagara Falls, Bermuda, an' such. A huntin' trip's no place for the mele de lune."

"Mile of what?" I ask, mystified.

"That's what the pea soupers down in Quebec call the honeymoon," elucidates Smitty. "Only in this case it means miles of grief. Miles and miles of it."

"Ain't you squealin' afore the loop tightens?" I inquire. "I figger that if Doc is bringin' his bride along she'll probably fit like an old glove. He likes his huntin' trips too much to risk gummin' the works with a female he's only married to. I bet Doc's picked him out a gal what can take it, an' you know good an' well that we've guided many a female that took to huntin' like an Indian takes to lemon extract."

"Yeah," admits Sawback, "which is all the more reason why I'm spooky as a doe with fawns about this trip. Considerin' the law of averages, attraction of opposites, an' the axiom that woman's place is behind a bridge table, I got a forty-calibre hunch that we're in for bushels of trouble."

Well, we'll know all about it P.D.Q. Doc an' his newly acquired Missus'll

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be in on the Trans Canada tomorrow, an' we are due to drag our tails for the East Kootenay the day after.

I'm down at the deepo with the rest of the hoi polloi next afternoon an' soon's the cars stop, I see Doc eruptin' from a Pullman accompanied by the followin': 1 woman, blonde, 1938 model; 2 rifles, Springfield, .30-06; 3 suitcases, 4 duffel bags, 5 novels, 6 cushions, an' 7 baggage checks to cover the rest of the impedimenta.

Other years, Doc comes boilin' out of the cars, an' grabbin' my hands says, "Tex, you blankety-blank onregenerate son of a blank-blank female coyote, how in blank are you?" an' I reply "Smile when you call me that, you dash-dash unprincipled appendix snatcher! Fine; finer'n frog wool!"

This time we're not so free an' unrestrained in our greetin's. I've got a idee that from now on me an' Doc have got to do our friendly cussin' only at such times as we're removed from the ennoblin' influence of lovely woman.

The two-three days it takes to get into the game country ain't what you'd call eventful, outside of the restraint Mrs. Doc's presence puts on Sawback's pack horse drivin' rhetoric. Them cayuses are used to bein' hollered at in man's language, an' to hear Sawback tryin' to keep them strung out on the trail without enlargin' on their ancestry, personal appearance, an' probable hereafter, struck me as right funny.

We get into camp at the head of the Horse Thief, and from where we've pitched the rag houses we can see a couple of goat sunnin' themselves on a ledge, only about a mile an' a half across, an' mebbe a thousand feet up. I check 'em over through the field glasses, an' decide they're billies, an' trophies.

All we got to do is sneak along the summit grasslands in the stream bed until we get behind an old moraine. From there I figger we can climb above 'em to not more than 150 yards away. It looks like an easy stalk. I'm explainin' this to Doc when his squaw asks do we ride, or go afoot.

"We go afoot, of course," I tell her. "In the first place, it'll take an hour to wrangle an' saddle the ponies, besides which we have to keep out of sight while crossin' this open country. After that, there ain't a cayuse in Canada could climb in that broken rock."

"I don't think I have the inclination to go scrambling about in all that horrible rock," she decides. "Haven't you got any goat somewhere down where it's all grass, and I can chase them on my pony?"

I let Doc explain the habits, disposition, an' method of huntin' billy goats to her, but I can see that she thinks it's all mostly hooley, an' that there must

be better ways of bustin' a goat than to go side hill gougin' after 'em on your own feet.

"How far will this gun of mine shoot?" is her next question. "It would kill a man at 2000 yards, I suppose," replies Doc. "Well, why don't we walk along until we are below them? It can't be more than half a mile from the grass to where they are. If this gun shoots 2000 yards, I'm sure it should get one of those things at 880."

"Which it undoubtedly should," I chips in, "but it's got to have a heap of co-operation from the butt end."

Her only reply is a look that reminds me of the time I got caught by a blizzard while crossin' the Columbia ice field.

However, we get her started, an' injun along the crick bed until we get to where the goat can't see us, an' stop for a couple of minutes at the foot of a mess of glacial deritus an' slide rock. I point out a big old boulder just under a cliff, an' opine that if we climb to it, we'll be high enough to start a traverse that will bring us over our quarry, at the same time givin' us the wind on 'em.

Mrs. Doc takes one look, an' right there decides that she ain't lost any goat on that mountain.

"You men go ahead," she says, "and I'll stay here until you come back, or I get bored." I can see Doc waverin', an' before he can pull a bridegroom act, an' decide to stay an' keep her company, I start climbin' an' tell Doc to get goin'.

It's steep, an' broken all the way to the big rock, an' we're blowin' hard by the time we reach it. Stoppin' to catch our wind, I notice that the bride ain't where we left her, but I don't say anything to Doc, figgerin' she's probably settin' behind a scrub balsam or somethin'.

The traverse ain't so awful bad. Once across the moraine, there's grass ledges an' shale slopes, so we make good time to where I figger we should begin to start down. We sneak along, right circumspect, expectin' to spot them billies any old time now. After a while I whisper to Doc that I'd swear we're on the same ledge that we saw 'em on, so let's drift up wind a mite. That brings no luck, so we continue to descend, checkin' over every foot of the visible terrain.

Fifteen or so minutes later, we both stop with a jerk, as a shot rings out, an' echoes all over hell's half acre. Then another, an' whammy-bang-bingo; it begins to sound like a busy day in Madrid.

There's no sense stayin' where we are after all that ruckus, so we hightail down as fast as the broken country will let us. Doc is quite some trepidated, as he thinks mebbe the little woman has tangled with a grizzly, or seen a mouse or somethin'.

We found her settin' on a knoll about five hundred yards from where we left her, an' as Doc dashes up to see if she is still all in one bundle, she says, "You'll find your goat just over there, by the creek. I knew all the time it was just silly to go scrambling after them all over that mountain. I just waited until they came down to eat, and shot the biggest."

She had him, all right, but whoinhell would have expected them ornery critters to come down? An' the worst of it is, Doc goes all mushy, an' tells her that she's the best little hunter in five Provinces, includin' Rupert's Land an' the Arctic, 'stead of explainin' that she's lucky enough to fall into a garbage scow an' come out with a diamond ring.

Next mornin' Doc an' me take a pack pony over to the kill, and skin out the head, also savin' the meat for eatin' purposes. The little woman is left in camp, not being interested in the bloody details of side hill surgery. When we get back to camp, she's missin' and Doc has another spell of inquietude until she comes strollin' in.

"Oh, you're all here," she says. "Tex, do you suppose there is anyone else camped near here?"

"I don't reckon so, why?"

"Those are our horses up there on the slide, aren't they?"

"Sure, they're all there, except these three me an' Doc just got in with."

"Well, then," she says, "it's all right. That must have been a bear I shot down there on that grassy slope. I didn't go right up to it, after it fell down, because I didn't have any more ammunition, but I'm sure you will find it dead. I aimed right where its heart ought to be."

Doc an' I rode down to the grass slope, an' sure enough, there's a darn good black bear stretched out dead as Dan'l Boone. An' if you'd a' heard Doc gush all over Mrs. Doc that night, your stummick would have turned almost inside out.

After we've got the hides fleshed an' salted, we move camp down the valley a ways to harry the old wapiti. The elk are about, and every so often we hear the buglin' of some pugnacious bull, answered by another from across the valley. It's mighty sweet music, an' I figger on the Doc stoppin' a royal head before many days, an' as he's never accumulated an elk, we're both right up on the front end of our feet.

For three days steady we hunt the slides, with all the pediculous luck in the world. Any bulls we see are spikes, or measly little four-pointers at most. Or if we do see a real head, he's surrounded by a flock of jittery cows that spook for no good reason at all, takin' their lord an' master with 'em.

An' every evenin' when we drag our creakin' bones into camp, the little woman tells us about some "perfectly enormous" bull she's seen through the glasses right above camp, or some place where we ain't been. She's spendin' the days trying to get Sawback to try her recipes for crapes susies, an' marshmeller fudge, 'stead of good goat mulligan an' beans, but up to now, thank God, that old misogynist is stubborn, so we continue to get man's grub.

As we're leavin' camp on the fourth mornin' I tell Doc that if we see a ten-pointer, he'd best accumulate it. I've just about given up hope of gettin' a Royal, an' he agrees.

We eat our cold liver an' bannock that noon, 'way up on a hogback that separates two slides, an' there are eight elk in plain sight—four cows, two yearlin's, a spike buck, an' a scrub four-pointer. Across from the other side, another is buglin' and tellin' the world that he's the toughest guy of the whole Rockies, an' who'd like to make something of it? If we only had a trophy stretched out, it would have been the middle of a perfect day.

"Did you hear a shot?" asks Doc.

"Nope, not me," I reply. As a matter of fack, I've been half asleep. "Just a rock fallin', I expect. Come on, let's cross the valley an' see if mebbe that feller that's doin' all the blowin' is as good as he thinks he is."

It's a long way down, an' twice as long up on the other side, an' by the time we're out of the timber, that elk has quit advertisin' himself, so we still hunt until it's too dark to see our front sights.

Sawback has a big ole campfire goin', and settin' in its light is busy takin' the scalp offen a twelve pointer, with a beam durn near as thick as my leg. "Perigrinatin' porcupines! where'd you get it?" I ejaculate.

"Didn't," says he, "Mrs. Doc blasted him this afternoon. She went down to get a pail of water, an' this bird was standin' in her way, so she got her bang stick, an' banged."

"You know, dear," she says to Doc, as we're surroundin' a mess of stew," I think you shouldn't go tearing allover the country like you do. It's all right for the guides; I think they actually like it, but I'm sure my way of huntin' is nicer. Besides, look at the game I've got."

Her goat head is hangin' in a spruce, an' her bear robe is stretched on a

frame by the tent. The elk is takin' up all the room in camp. I look, an' says to Sawback, "Hell, you just can't win."

He wags his head real doleful. "Tex," he says, "it's a woman's world." Which now I figger it is.

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