



## Sweet William

**SWEET WILLIAM AT STUD** read the bold print. Beneath, in ordinary script, was Purebred Nubian Goat available for service. \$50 breed fee.

The ad in the local newspaper caught my attention. I smiled. He might not be the only old goat in town available for stud, but he was probably the only one worthy of a fifty-dollar fee.

I was looking at the classifieds in the Creston Valley Advance to try and come up with a notice of my own. As soon as I got a phone installed, I was going to have to get my name out there.

"Hello, anyone here?"

"Yes, just a minute." I tucked in my shirt and headed for the door.

A slight woman in her twenties stepped back as I opened the screen door. She wore tight blue jeans, a red plaid wool jacket, and well-worn men's hiking boots. Her cascading dark brown hair framed a pleasant, if discerning face. She had a confident, nononsense air about her.

"Are you the new vet?"

Yes, I'm Dave Perrin.

Hello, Dr. Perrin, I'm Jean Melba." As she extended her hand, I could detect an unusual combination of fragrances—the musk that was popular with the hippies of my era and just the faintest trace of garlic, but what else?

"I was visiting one of your neighbours down the road. She told me that the MacKays said you're starting a new practice in the valley."

"That's right. I just arrived a few days ago; haven't exactly gotten things off the ground yet."

"Well, we're new to the area, too. We just moved up here from the Fraser Valley with a herd of Nubian

goats. We wanted to introduce the breed locally and are hoping to sell our stock. So far, I've been disappointed in the attitude of a lot of the breeders." "Why is that?" I really didn't want to get into a discussion about another breeder. They could be a difficult lot.

"I was talking to one of them about her deworming program—she uses garlic once a month. I have a healthy respect for garlic, but I maintain a regular deworming program as well."

"I'm a big proponent of preventive medicine, Mrs. Melba, and certainly agree with you."

"Would you have time to deworm my goats?"

"Sure thing. It's getting a bit late tonight, but I'd be happy to pop by tomorrow morning."

Mrs. Melba wrote out the directions to her home on a piece of paper, and I watched her retreat down the driveway to her pickup. I smiled as she turned and waved—a real live client!

I settled in to rummaging through the boxes of drugs and miscellaneous household goods that were scattered throughout the house.

It didn't occur to me to question why I was here. Why, after spending seven years at university in an ivory tower with the best of equipment, would I even consider establishing my own practice here—in Creston, British Columbia, with an old log house as a facility and only a few cardboard boxes full of drugs and equipment?

I was determined not to tie myself to a telephone, not to lose sight of my personal life. So why was I so bent on establishing a one-man practice that couldn't possibly succeed without my twenty-four-hour attention?

Was it the overwhelming beauty of the Creston Valley, the relationships I had already established with some local farmers, or the failed negotiations to buy Dr. Marling's practice?

Whatever the reason—fate, enchantment, or stubbornness—I was ready to give this venture one hell of a try!

Sitting in front of the kitchen window, I sorted through the medications, looked up prices that Cathy Morganthaler had put on the invoice, and marked the individual prices on the bottles. Many of the drug names were completely foreign to me and, only by finding their generic names, could I decide what they were for. It would take time to get used to all the new names.

The fact that I had no previously established links with any of the drug companies had been a worry. I hadn't the slightest notion which of them produced what and no idea where to start ordering my supplies.

It was Dr. Morganthaler in Trail who came to my rescue. When I stopped at his office to discuss my plans with him, he provided me with both phone numbers and catalogues. I was on my way out the door to leave for Creston when he said, "Tell you what, I'll give you a bit of a stake to get started—you pay me when you get the chance." That led to a whirlwind trip through his clinic, with his wife Cath following in his wake.

"You'll need six or eight grams of Biotol, maybe a couple of the five-gram size for horses."

"What about some atropine and Demerol," Cath prompted, "and probably some Atravet."

So it was that a couple of hours later I departed from the West Kootenay Animal Hospital with everything I was likely to require during the coming weeks.

As I marked the last bottles of injectable vitamin ADE, the kittens distracted me from my task. Perched on a rickety old washstand, they paused in their pursuit of an elusive bat that led them from one end of the building to the other. The two mischievous felines which I had chosen from a litter at my parent's home had spent the better part of the last half hour chasing the creature, and they were now exhausted. I had to admit that this building was better suited to a bat than it was to a veterinarian.

Poor Grandma would roll over in her grave to see the condition of her once picturesque home. I thought back to the last time I had visited my grandparents in this house—it was their final day in West Creston. Grampa had just been hospitalized with rampant high blood pressure that launched him into fits of rage and left him unconscious for ever longer periods of time. Poor old Granny, her huge frame no longer able to support her weight, was being loaded into our waiting car. Her eyes brimmed with tears as my parents plunked her on the seat and struggled to squeeze first one leg, then the other, into a space that was too cramped to accommodate her.

She sat stoically looking out the window as my father locked the doors to a part of her life that she would never revisit. As we drove away, she turned to gaze at the log cabin that had been a refuge for the last twenty years of her life. I could only imagine how she felt, knowing that she would never lay eyes on it again.

That had been eight years ago; since that time the house had been left to a stream of vagrant renters, and it had been more than a year since the last of them had vacated.

A leaky roof had left gyproc and paper dangling from the ceiling and walls, but a myriad of spiders had done its best to weave a matrix to hold the structure together. Everything, including the kitchen sink and the

moveable parts of the cupboards, had disappeared with the last renters; the furniture that I managed to scrounge from my parents did little to fill the void.

The kittens curled up in the box of blankets at my feet. "You girls have had enough too, haven't you? It's time to call it a day—I'd better get the light going, or we'll soon be groping in the dark."

With lantern and matches in hand, I collapsed in a chair in front of the living room window. Pumping away at the lamp, I was about to light it, when the view brought me to a halt. The valley below lay like a picture glued to the wall—peaceful and captivating.

Four years of flat, expansive prairie landscape had left me with an insatiable thirst for rugged mountain splendour; like a drunk with sudden access to booze, I strained to get my fill.

I threw open the screen door and stepped down to the verandah that ran the full length of the old house. At the far end, I straddled the rail and focused on the untamed beauty of the Kootenays.

The yellows, greens, and browns of the flat lands blended into the darker greens and blues of the surrounding mountains. The Kootenay River, whose lavish dumps of silty loam had created the Creston plateau, meandered its way from the south to the north end of the

valley, its large, lazy S-shaped curves reflecting like a mirror in the fading light.

The road that crossed the flats in a north to south direction lay like a ribbon along the river's length. An irrigation canal running parallel to it sent out perpendicular ditches to carve the land into the blocks of a patchwork quilt—the light green of the pastures dotted with grazing cattle, the lush green of alfalfa fields, the dark brown of freshly plowed earth, the green-tinged brown of newly sprouted barley and oats.

Gazing across the valley, I knew what had kept my grandfather captive for the twenty years he had lived in his house on the hill. Nightly, he would sit on this same verandah in his rocking chair watching this very scene unfold before him. Watch, as the lights of Creston and Erickson blinked on. Watch, as the benches above the flats and below the massive Thompson Mountain became a beacon in the enveloping darkness.

A pickup truck appeared at the southern end of the flats and, in deliberate, ant-like fashion, crawled its way in a northerly direction. At Rogers' landing on the south side of the river, it stopped. Within a few minutes, the mirrored surface of the Kootenay was disrupted by the lights of the ferry as it left the north shore and cut its way towards the waiting vehicle.

A dog barked in the distance, and the fat old gelding in my neighbour's pasture below the road turned his head. Assured that the noise was without consequences, he returned to grazing.

I watched until the darkness stole the last of the mountains, the entire valley floor, and the sprawling river. Drinking in the tranquillity, the croaking of the frogs, the chirping of the crickets, and the soft wooing of the nighthawks, I remained transfixed on my perch.

The chill of the evening eventually broke the spell. A shiver originating from the base of my skull rippled throughout my body—time for bed.

I felt my way through the living room clutter into the bedroom. Shedding my clothing, I crawled into my sleeping bag and stared into the darkness. I don't know what it was that made me feel so good about what I was doing. Yet, I was assured that I had made the right decision about starting on my own.

Mrs. Melba met me at her gate the following morning. She was relaxed and in a bubbly mood.

"Good morning, Dr. Perrin. You get to meet all of my children this morning. I have eight of them." She chuckled, as if responding to a well-told joke. "Six of them are goats, one's a cat, and there goes the other one."

I turned just in time to see a sheltie dog disappear around the corner of the log house. Introductions complete, I reached into the back seat of my car and retrieved my stainless steel bucket.

"Can I have this about half full of warm water please, Mrs. Melba?"

"Certainly." She walked briskly up the path and disappeared into her house. Typical of the homes that had been raised in the early part of the century, hers was one of the first built in Arrow Creek. The logs had been hewn with a broad ax and placed upon large rocks at each of the corners. Over the years the house had settled, so now the bottom logs showed rot where they were exposed to ground moisture. Many of the cedar shakes were missing from the roof, and others were rotting. Large chunks of the sand and mortar chinking had broken out to be replaced with mud or rags. A layer of ivy covered everything.

I rummaged through the back of the car to come up with a dose syringe and the enema tube that was so handy for administering fluids to calves and goats. Supplies in hand, I strode down the worn dirt path in search of Mrs. Melba.

When she didn't appear, I settled on a rock in the back yard to wait. What a gorgeous setting! Sandwiched in

a draw between two ridges, we were removed from the noise of the highway and of human activity in general. The surrounding mountains were rolling, wooded, and green to the very top. I glanced at my watch. Mrs. Melba was taking her time with the water.

"Everything all right?" I called, knocking at the screen door. "Oh yes, fine. There's no hot water in this house so we'll have to wait for it to heat on the stove."

"That's all right, just bring what you have. I'm sure the girls won't mind getting a chaser of cold water."

She grabbed the bucket. "Living here is really special. It's so peaceful and perfect for the goats, but it's not without its drawbacks. It's harder living without hot running water than I thought it would be, and the house is literally crawling with mice."

We walked to a small listing shed surrounded by a temporary-looking corral constructed of newly cut rails. They hadn't been peeled before they were put up, and the goats were busily working at the task.

Mrs. Melba was attentive as I mixed the thiabendazole powder with water. I had eyeballed several of the goats as they came up to nuzzle her hand through the makeshift bars of the shed. In excellent condition, they were probably the least wormy goats I was likely to encounter.

"This beautiful little girl is Lizzy. You're my favourite baby, aren't you sweetie?" She gave the floppy-eared goat a big hug. Talking as though to a child, Mrs. Melba stroked the animal's sleek head, repeating to her what a pretty girl she was.

Lizzy soaked up every morsel of Mrs. Melba's attention, staring back at her with big brown eyes. Occasionally, she stretched her Roman nose to nibble on the lapel of her owner's jacket.

"So you want to be first, do you, Lizzy?" I squeezed between the rails on the front of the shed. Ducking the rafters, I continued to rub Lizzy's forehead until her "Mother" stepped into the pen to help. As if searching for treats, the goats circled around me, pulling at first a sleeve, then a pocket, then a pant leg.

With Lizzy still competing for attention, we backed her into the corner. Before she realized what was going on, I introduced the tube into her nostril. She reared back, her eyes bulging in horror. She uttered a mournful little blat, like the sound of a baby crying for its mother, and the other goats scattered to the far end of the corral.

"Take it easy, sweetie," soothed Mrs. Melba. "You know that Mom wouldn't do anything to harm you. This won't hurt a bit. It'll just feel funny when this nice man puts a tube into your tummy. We'll kill off all those nasty worms that are hiding down there."

Her body rigid, Lizzy stared straight ahead as I passed the tube through her nasal cavity and into her pharynx. Moving it back and forth, I turned the tip upwards and pushed forward until she swallowed. To dilate the esophagus, I puffed on the tube and passed it down her throat into the stomach. After delivering the thiabendazole mixture, I followed with a syringe full of water as a chaser. With a puff of air, I emptied the tube and withdrew it.

"See how easy that was, Lizzy; that didn't hurt at all. All those disgusting worms are going to die now, and you're going to feel so much better." Mrs. Melba continued placating Lizzy, but the look in the goat's eyes made it evident she wasn't buying it. The moment we released her, she scurried away to hide amidst the rest of the herd. Catching and handling the remaining four animals was far more difficult than it had been with Lizzy but, after a small rodeo, I tubed the last of them. We crawled out between the rails.

"I thought you mentioned you had six nannies to deworm, Mrs. Melba."

"I hope you don't mind my telling you, Dr. Perrin," she said in a disapproving tone, "that we goat breeders find it a sign of ignorance on the part of people who don't know goats, when they talk about 'nanny' goats and 'billy' goats. We much prefer to call a female goat a 'doe' and a male goat a 'buck.' "

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Melba, but didn't you mention that you had six 'does' to deworm?"

Her smile was almost sinister. Whether it was in acceptance of my admission of ignorance or in anticipation of what was to follow, I wasn't sure.

"We are finished the does, Dr. Perrin! All we have left is Sweet William."

"Sweet William?"

"Yes, Sweet William is my buck."

Nearing the log shelter that housed William, I became aware of why I wouldn't strive for a large volume of goat work in my practice. Cuddly, nibbly, attention-loving nanny goats were one thing; stinky, obnoxious, unmanageable billies were another.

Why the hell hadn't it dawned on me that I would be dealing with the notorious Sweet William? My feet dragged as I followed Mrs. Melba to his pen.

As we got closer, the odour intensified. Between the rails on the front of the enclosure, I could make out the form of an enormous goat. He had a massive forehead that extended into a prominent Roman nose. His forelock was shaggy, his beard thick and greasy. Large floppy ears hung on either side of his face; his neck was broad and muscular. Comparing Sweet William to the delicate, gentle nannies, I wondered if he could possibly be a member of the same species.

Standing in front of his paddock, I closed my eyes and focused on drawing in air. After four or five wimpy attempts, I was finally able to force in enough to call it a breath.

William strained against the corral rails to reach us, peeling back his upper lip. As if frustrated by our lack of attentiveness, he went through the routine that characterizes a billy goat "in rut." Bending his head to his underbelly, he squirted jets of urine first onto his beard and then onto his forelock. Not content with that, he rubbed the poll of his head and his beard on both his sides, taking care to massage the urine into his hair. Excited now, he achieved an erection and ejaculated into his mouth and beard.

Mrs. Melba expelled a long sigh. "He's really a dream to handle when he's not in mating season. When he's like this, I don't handle him much, and I certainly don't turn my back on him."

As if to punctuate her statement, William returned to the depth of his log shack and first butted then mounted the rubber tire that had been hung there for his gratification.

I summoned the courage to do what had to be done. Why was I contemplating this, anyway? If this woman had a skunk in a cage and wanted me to go in and wrestle it, would I feel obligated to do so? Was I looking for a gold star or a badge of honour? By the time I had made up my mind to crawl into the pen, my olfactory senses had faded, and I was almost able to draw normal breaths without the desire to gag.

"Hand me the medication as soon as I have the tube in." I drew up the thiabendazole in the dose syringe and looked at it absently.

Determined to get the job over with, I squeezed through the rails and entered William's domain. More curious than aggressive, he rubbed his forehead on my elbow. I pushed him aside, and he nibbled playfully at my coveralls.

Desperate to avoid intimacy with William, I wondered how I could possibly hold the goat tightly enough to control him and get the tube into him without that wretched smell permeating my clothes and skin? I would have to burn these coveralls.

I determined that the only way to proceed was to grasp William firmly by the neck and ears and force him to the back of the shelter. I moved towards him, and he backed obligingly into the corner. It was now or never. Grabbing him by the neck, I pushed my hip against his shoulder and forced him to the wall.

William's neck was massive, and I was glad he didn't resist. He was still more curious than frightened. He was wondering, as I was, just what I would do next. The smell was so intense that I wanted to retch! How could he live with that stench?

"Okay, Mrs. Melba, give me the tube."

I was keenly cognizant of the fact that Mrs. Melba went through great pains to deliver the materials to me without entering the corral, and without coming into contact with Sweet William.

Bloody woman didn't care what I smelled like! But she knew enough to stay outside. How did she talk me into this? I bet she had never found a vet fool enough to deworm William before.

Stretching from the top rail of the corral, she tried to pass me the stomach tube. I reached as far as I dared without losing control of the goat and grasped the very tip of the tube with two fingers. As I brought the end to my mouth to hold onto it, it slipped and fell to the ground. Holding William against the wall with my arm, I stooped to pick up the tube. It was then that William made his move.

"Look out!" screeched Mrs. Melba. "He's going to mount you!"

The warning came too late. With a toss of his head, Sweet William freed himself from my grip and lunged forward. His front legs arched over my back, and the weight of his chest forced me to my knees. He lurched ahead, pushing my face to the ground. I felt a wet sensation as he slid his penis beneath my shirt collar and ejaculated over my neck and upper back. I struggled to get up but found myself pinned, as William rubbed his beard and scent gland into the small of my back.

I positioned my hands under his chest and flung him over backwards. In a blind fury, I was no longer wary of his smell. As he scrambled to his feet, I pushed him into the corner.

"Don't hurt him!" Mrs. Melba squealed in panic. "Maybe we should forget about him for today."

"Forget about him? Never! Just get in here with that bloody syringe!"

I crammed the tube into his nose and through his pharynx. He swallowed quickly, and I passed it on down.

As though sensing the gravity of the moment, he stood stock-still, his eyes riveted straight ahead.

"The syringe, Mrs. Melba!"

Scrambling through the rails, she flushed the thiabendazol into the end of the tube that I held out for her.

"The chaser, Mrs. Melba!"

She hurriedly produced the water and flushed the remaining medication into Sweet William. With a quick puff into the tube, I pulled it from his nose and released him. Shaking his head, William retired to the back of his pen, screwed up his lip, and watched me climb through the rails.

I was regaining my composure by the time I reached the car and pulled off my coveralls. Mrs. Melba scurried behind me carrying my bucket and dose syringe.

"Are you all right, Dr. Perrin?"

All right! Why shouldn't I be all right? I always went around smelling like a billy goat; the back of my shirt was frequently saturated with semen.

"Yes, Mrs. Melba...I'm just fine. Now I understand where the old saying 'hornier than a billy goat' comes from."

Without a trace of a smile, she replied, "Buck, Dr. Perrin. William is a buck, not a billy goat!"