

JANUARY 14, 1988

I all but missed the 1987 deer season. The red caps had come and gone before I realized the big event had ended. Back in the summer, I'd nearly have offered a Land Rover hunting wagon for a few hunter prospects, but by fall when the money got to rolling in from my mutton lambs and steer calves, I forgot how desperately I was going to need extra income to get through the winter.

Of course January is too late to sell anything except a few loads of fireplace wood. However, the last experience I'd had from my deer hunters was so unsettling that I may turn to being a wood cutter. About the last week of the season, one of their wives called my house at midnight, wanting me to go to a distant camp to ask her husband to come to the telephone.

She was crying and carrying on something awful. In between the sobs, I finally made out that it wasn't an emergency, but merely one of those belated peace offerings that I suspect have been arising in the fields of domestic relations since that contract was invented.

A light sleet was pelting my bedroom windows at the time of the call. It took a lot of explaining to convince her that a professional gamekeeper such as myself couldn't do anything as unethical as delivering a night message in defiance of the Western Union franchise. I suggested that a solution might be for her to call Western Union in the morning and have them contact me, so I would be free to run the errand without violating my principles.

Like I told her, I didn't mind appearing in her behalf after my breakfast. I cautioned her against wasting her money on a singing telegram. The soles of my feet were frozen to the kitchen floor. If she hadn't slammed down the phone when she did, I'd have promised to send her husband home in a cotton sack if she'd allow me to get back in my bed.

The merest flurry of domestic turmoil makes me tremble like an ice skater having a chill. I haven't the slightest intention of being a midnight Abigail Van Buren. Things must have worked out, because I noticed that hunter's signature on the final game report.