

The Cook

The cook wears funny, thick black shoes with turned up toes, and has an annoyingly new black and white checkered patch on one faded trouser leg. He is greasy, and overly comfortable with the waitresses. He enjoys life thoroughly through self-appreciation of his own humor and wit. He becomes over-irritable when too hot, or defied, and over-ingratiating when in a good humor.

Through the Swinging Doors

The nurse's office is a white place and a quietly busy one. Through the swinging doors at the left is a small resting room, with three cots, a locker, a mirror, a small old-fashioned desk that is closed and locked, and a chair. Each narrow bed has a gray army blanket at its foot. This room is not entirely separate from the other, but is only partitioned off. While you lie in its remote nearness, you hear a murmur of voices from the other side of the wall, as the doctor and nurse welcome, advise, and admonish all comers. Occasionally another person stops momentarily in the rush of the day, and she, too, finds a resting place through the swinging doors. And especially if it happens to be late in the day, a curious companionship springs up between the stranger and you, through your mutual weariness.

—GENE SMITH.

THE HIRED MAN

Some say I'm lazy; don't know why.
I rake and mow the Parson's lawn,
And milk and clean old Betsy's sty.
I take down screens when summer's
gone,
I'm powerful good at shuckin' corn,
And mighty quick at cuttin' wood.
Just 'cause I don't own any land
Don't see why folks say I'm no good.
Won't take a job, like brother Dan.
This town jest needs a hired-man.

—JANE MOORE.

Good Crop

Max Stuckey

The sharp spiteful crack of a rifle stirred the peaceful little mountain town into a hubbub of excitement.

The figure lay face down in the muddy street. The faded blue denims and ragged black coat were splashed with mud. The head and shoulders nestled deep in a large puddle.

No one approached it. A few people stood on the board walk and discussed the incident in whispers.

One tall grey-bearded mountaineer nudged his companion.

"I know'd hit would happen, Anse. Younguns always did stir up these old feuds. I heerd Mark Benton was goin' to kill th' kid. Mark never was a hand to say things he didn't mean."

Anse shook his head. "This is one time Mark bit off mor'n he kin chew. Thet kid's brother, Tait, is th' pizenest man in Pine Mountain country. Mark my word, this little fuss Mark started is goin' to end by Mark bein' laid right beside his pappy over there in the churchyard."

The grey-beard disagreed violently. "Mark's a smart boy. He'll have Tait under the Laurel before the first snow."

The argument grew more and more bitter.

"I'll bet my tobaccy crop agin your'n thet Mark gits Tait before spring," sputtered Big Dan, the tall grey-beard.

Anse nodded his head. They shook hands.

Fall came. Other men had paid with their lives in the family war Mark Benton had precipitated, but Tait and he were still treading the twisty clay mountain paths. Some day they would meet. One would see the other first and that other one would never know. That is the way most

quarrels ended in Pine Mountain's lofty ridges.

Big Dan stored his tobacco crop in the rickety log barn to dry. It was a fine crop. The leaves were big and brown, and silky. Crops like that did not happen very often.

The short autumn days flew swiftly, leaves began to fall. The mountains were shedding their gaudy fall dress for their white winter overcoats.

On this day a heavy rain was falling—a rain that was cold and hard, nearly sleet. Big Dan was two miles from home. He cursed and clutched his rifle tightly as he slipped and slid in the sticky red clay.

Suddenly he stopped.

From just ahead there came the sharp crash of a rifle. The echo rolled back from the ridgetop.

Big Dan left the path. He picked his way in a wide circle through the dense underbrush. He paused every few moments to listen. People didn't shoot on days like that unless they were after big game.

A few moments later he stood hidden at the top of the winding path. His sharp grey eyes caught a movement down below.

He finally picked out a man lying on the pathway. A yard or so above him lay a big black hat. Even from where he stood Big Dan could see the large holes a few inches above the brim. Big Dan gasped. The man below him was Tait.

Tait was watching something up the hill side. Big Dan couldn't see anyone but he sensed that it must be Mark Benton. Mark shouldn't have missed that first shot.

Suddenly Tait moved. His rifle crashed loudly.

The old mountaineer gasped. From a spot directly below him a form came tumbling from behind a tree. That twisted grotesque shape could not harbor life.

Tait fired once more into the hud-

dle of black that had lodged in a clump of sumach. Smoke still curled from his rifle as he walked a pace or two forward and stooped for the black hat.

Big Dan raised his rifle. He poked it between the low hanging limbs of an oak. For a second his eyes traveled over the long barrel. He pulled the trigger.

Rain beat into the open hat, filled the crown, and ran out through the big holes close to the brim just inches from the still hand that reached for it.

Big Dan clumped into his cabin. He warmed his hands at the fire. He cleaned the last trace of dirt from the rifle barrel.

He sat thinking for a while. Suddenly he muttered, "Hit was too good a crop to waste on a killer."

SAND CASTLES

Today
 I built my castles
 On the sand.
 The tide came in
 And the sky was gray.
 The waves
 Swooped and roared
 And crashed and surged
 And overwhelmed my castles.
 Soon
 Only a shapeless mass
 Lay sodden on the beach.
 But
 Although I know
 That ever the waves return,
 That ever
 The pounding hoofs
 Of the foam-flecked sea horses
 Rush to destroy,
 I shall build my castles
 Again.
 Tomorrow.

—LOUISE DAUNER.