

Sike And Joe

It didn't take Van long to know that he had good neighbors. The more he saw of Sike and Joe the better he liked them. Joe was a healthy well nourished woman in her early forties. Van asked her if she was willing to board him until he got settled in his cabin. He knew by looking at her that he would be well fed.

Sike had been busy while the cabin was going up. His work on the barn and his own farm chores left him no time to talk to Van except at meal time. Now the barn was in good shape and

20.

he was taking time off to show Van around the farms. They stood by the little wooden gate that opened to Van's front dooryard. Van examined the rough stone hitching-post outside his gate, a tall grey slab with a hole drilled through near the top.

"How far, do you suppose this slab goes down into the ground?" he asked.

"Probably five or six feet," said Sike. "It has been here as long as I can remember."

"It occurs to me," said Van, "that this farm of mine has raised quite a crop of stones."

All of my fields are divided
by stone walls."

"Yes," said Sibe, "there are a lot
of stones on the farm, but there's
some good farm land too, and
the soil is just right for apple trees.
That old apple orchard of yours on
the slope below your cabin is the
best apple orchard around here."

"I think you'll like this old farm
and our part of New Jersey first
rate when you get settled.

You'll find your first winter a
bit quiet, but I guarantee you'll
never get lonely in the spring and fall.
We have some interesting visitors

up this way, the kind who like to get off the beaten track. They like this old back road."

The two men walked on until they reached the little knoll on the boundary between the two farms.

Said Sibe - "When all the leaves are off our maples you can see our house plainly from your cabin. You say you like farm sounds. You have them right here. Our Guinea Fowl are clacking for all they're worth right now. Some people don't like the racket, but Joe and I wouldn't be without them."

Van and Sibe passed two fine looking Jersey cows in one of Sibe's fields. "I

keep only two cows now. We had a herd of fifteen when father lived. The droppings from a herd like that is considerable in the fall. It was my job when a boy to knock the heaps of dried cow dung in the spring and scatter it over the fields. I used a stick shaped like a golf club. It was just as good exercise knocking dung as hitting a golf ball."

Sike's big fat farm horse whinnied when the men entered the stable, and when they walked around to the pigpen back of the barn Sike's hogs came running and squealing up to

the trough expecting something to eat.

After looking at a flock of fine Rhode Island Reds in the chicken run the two men turned back to Van's farm. Van's two Toggenburgs were in mischief again pulling down a branch of an apple tree.

"Did you know that early Dutch settlers imported milk goats?" asked Van. They are prolific breeders, and in the early days they furnished both meat and milk. The meat of the kids is considered a delicacy."

All the time that the two men walked and talked their dogs had been following at their heels - Van's Beagle hound and Sibe's Foxhound. Van looked down at Uno as he turned and said -

"Here are the best animals we own. This Beagle of mine is as intelligent as they come. Look at his eyes. He is as good a companion as a man could ask for."

"And my dog, the same," said Sibe. "I'd rather part with my cows and my horse than to part with Sound. He has a voice too. That's right, old boy. You can

well carry your tail high." To my mind a dog is the most faithful animal that lives."

Goe was ringing the dinner bell and the men made for the house. Van enjoyed good food. Everything Goe cooked was good. Her potroasts were the best Van had ever eaten. Goe's chicken pot-pies with light dumplings were tops. Goe put slathers of butter in everything that needed butter. Nothing skimpy about Goe's food. Her deep juicy apple pies and her creamy rice puddings were Van's favorite desserts. One noon

Goe's meat dish was salt pork that had been soaked in sweet milk, then rolled in flour and fried crispy brown, served with cream sauce. The next day they had partridge broiled in butter. For Thanksgiving dinner they had roast snedling fig. After butchering time there was good homemade sausage with buckwheat pancakes for breakfast. For supper homemade headcheese.

"Sometimes I wonder if I'm a nuisance coming over here to meals," said Van one day.

"You pay me well for what you eat," said Joe, "and what is better, you eat as if you enjoyed it."

"I brought my Filipino Boy out here to cook for me," said Van. "When he decided he didn't like the life this part of the country offered I let him go, and planned to do my own cooking. I couldn't bring myself to it after eating the good food you set before me."

Joe watched Van closely one morning while he drank his coffee.

"Do you like that brand of coffee?" she asked when he had finished drinking.

"Yes, it's good, but it tastes different."

"It's different, all right," said Joe.

"That was dandelion coffee. A Gipsy passed by here last year and he told me how to make it. I gathered a bushel of dandelion roots and dried them, then I roasted them, and ground them. I had such a small amount of coffee for all my work that I will never do it again. You just drank the last bit I had."