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Out of the Woods

By JAMES STEVENS

Ride on Old Paint . . .

For 11 years the white paint on the west and south outside walls of my house, now aged 25 years, has been breaking out in boils, scabs and hang-nails. The east wall has kept fairly healthy, with each new paint coat only starting to get hairline checks or to chalk off after three or four years. During the war this was expected, but the results of a 1948 paint job were even worse.

I picked off the blisters as they rose and daubed expensive mixtures of magnesium silicate, barium sulphate, boiled linseed oil, mineral spirits, zinc oxide and soya bean oil in the hollows—and seldom failed to grow two blisters where one had grown before.

This summer I found a painter who was willing to go over all the walls for me without burning them first to the bone. His was Lute Hinote, he was a

man fresh the Ozarks and he had his own particular and peculiar way of painting a house. He rode an old paint, Lute did, the kind of paint his grandpa had taught him to use. And as the job has gone, so far, so good. Look close and you can see the old scars on the cedar siding but no new blisters as yet.

Wet Walls . . .

Lute wouldn't paint the north wall. He said the last job was still good it and he didn't like to paint over anything as sound as it is, after four years.

"You've got a steep hillside protecting your north wall from storms and no sun hits it," Lute explained. "Any kind of paint would do there—even Russian paint."

Lute allowed that Russian paint was being brought into this country somehow. "Dadgunned subversive paint being sneaked in and putting good old white lead and raw linseed oil American paint out of business," he said. "Look at all them Rooshian names on the labels. I'd rather scald hogs for a living than to use it."

He did a lot of looking into the moisture situation from the inside, after I told him some experts claimed that most house paint failures were caused by moisture from the interior condensing against modern "gas-tight" building paper. Lute found that my 25-year-old house has had plaster and lath on the inside of the wall studs and sheathing and bevel cedar siding on the outside. No building paper whatever. All kinds of escape routes for inside moisture.

"Kitchen is next to the north wall," Lute Hinote pointed out. "Steamiest side of the house. But the north wall is the only unblistered one."

No sign of wet walls could be found. It was all a mighty mystery still to me, as the first blistering had been 11 years ago. Of course I couldn't imagine that Ozark Lute know more about it than the big paint experts. That would be laughable.

The Buck Story . . .

Lute worked cheap, by contract. So I was tolerant while he held forth on how he didn't go on any high-powered explanations from anybody. He said once back home he was a game warden and caught a city man bringing a buck's head out of the woods before the season had opened. The city slicker told Lute he had spied the buck at sunset the evening before, hindquarters against a tree. The hunter went on to tell he'd never seen any living critter so tormented by such a big itch.

"I trailed the buck all night," the hunter had told Lute Hinote. "Sunup time he'd scratched himself so much and so hard he'd simply worn himself down to the neck—nothing left but head and horns — and I thought I might as well bring the head in."

Lute went on to remark, "When I hear all the talk about inside moisture and condensation, and the like, as high-sounding explanations for paint failures on good wood siding I think of that city hunter's explanation of his buck's head. Of course I paid no attention to him," Lute said. "It was a good story, though. The big paint experts tell a good story, too. But I don't pay any attention."

All I'm telling you is the plain facts of my house paint trouble and what what Ozark Lute Hinote said.

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