

fields of North Dakota. A look of exaltation came into Paul's face. The grief faded from his eyes, and there was an air of unconquerable beauty about him—the beauty that comes in the tick of a second from out the measureless distance and lights us up incredibly with a complete understanding.

Paul turned toward his manager.

"He always said, 'What's life, boy, but courage?' Isn't that a fine thing to re-

member? How can a fellow forget a thing like that? Why, it makes you strong and wise and happy!"

He threw up the window, and a breeze saturated with the fragrance of earth caressed him swiftly and blew his hair back from his forehead.

"Some day he'll turn up again," whispered Paul. "He'll be younger than I remember him, because he's a clean, fine spirit that can't die!"

The Fifollet

HOW EGIDE RACICOT STROVE TO AVERT THE DOOM OF HIS
FRIEND FRANÇOIS PARADIS

By William Merriam Rouse

THE house of Egide Racicot stands empty now, as empty as the old quarry pit behind it, but the memory of Egide is not lost to the people of Notre Dame des Anges; nor will it ever be, so long as the Angelus bell sounds from the church of Our Lady of the Angels and the calm St. Lawrence flows to the sea. Snow drifts through the roof of the house of Racicot, and the dormers are sagging down, but the two-foot stone wall will stand for another century, a monument to Egide.

He was one of those old men who seem always to have been old; and this was somewhat, perhaps, because of his appearance. He wore, summer and winter, the *ceinture fléchée* of other days—a red knitted belt that passes two or three times around the waist and hangs in gay fringed ends at the left side. He had a fondness for the lopsided blue *tuque*, which hangs jauntily over one ear and expresses so well the spirit of *beau Canada*.

There was more than this, however. Egide Racicot had been known to say, as easily as if he were swearing at his horse, that he was not afraid of the devil! One knows well that this is dangerous. It is not only dangerous, but suspicious. If Egide had not done his religious duties as well as the next man, he would probably

have been shunned by his neighbors. He lived alone and read a good many books; but in spite of these things he had friends—and among them none closer than François Paradis.

To Paradis, Egide stood something in the relation of a foster father, for the young man had had no parents of his own since the year of the smallpox. When François came back from a winter's work in the woods above the rivers, he went to the house of Racicot and stayed there until he found employment for the summer.

This was very good for both of them. It gave Paradis a home in his native village, and to Egide it gave a son of whom he was tremendously proud.

Truly, any one might have been proud of François Paradis. He was as graceful and as strong as a young elm, and, while he had the faults of the *bûcheron*, he was blessed with more virtues than most woodchoppers seem to be. All the world liked him; and so did Yvonne Laplante when she saw him for the first time the spring after her family had moved to Notre Dame des Anges.

Eh, bien! The affair went as those affairs always should, with Heaven smiling upon the joy of the young people, and the old women of the parish nodding approval. The gray eyes of Yvonne grew dark with

happiness, and François could laugh at the most trifling things.

They were betrothed. Egide grinned toothlessly; and life was as fair as the summer until the night of the 23rd of August.

There was fog that night. Egide sat late in his kitchen, smoking *tabac Canadien*, while he waited for François to come home from the house of Yvonne. For François had found work in the village, the better to carry on his courting, and the chief joy of old Racicot was to see him come in from an evening with his sweet-heart, the light of a good love shining in his face, and a cheery word of friendship upon his lips.

II

THE bell of Our Lady of the Angels had just struck midnight. Egide had counted the sweet-toned strokes, and the sound of the last one had scarcely died away when the door of the kitchen burst open and François Paradis staggered into the room. This was not that François Paradis who had gone so gayly down through the dusk to the house of Yvonne Laplante. It was a man stricken—a man whose knees were little more than capable of holding him up, whose shoulders hung loose, and whose eyes saw a horror.

"François!" cried Egide, springing up. "Has anything happened to Yvonne?"

François Paradis leaned upon a table, and his mouth worked uselessly a moment before he could reply. His words, when they came, were a whisper.

"I have seen the *fifollet*!"

The clay pipe of Racicot dropped to the floor, broke, and scattered fire. He did not tramp it out.

"Name of God!" he muttered. "The *fifollet*!"

"But yes—behind the quarry pit! I am done for, Egide!"

Egide Racicot shook himself, and the color came back to his leathery cheeks. He managed a cracked laugh.

"Bah! Nonsense! I should know better at my age! It's fog you've seen, or a mist, rising from the bottom of the pit. It's damp there. Poof! That is all!"

Paradis groaned. He sank into a chair.

"It was the *fifollet*! It curled up like a finger and beckoned to me. I shall die within the year!"

Egide swore earnestly, and with the practice of a lifetime.

"The *fifollet*! *Saccagé chien*! I have said often that I was not afraid of the devil, and I am not afraid of the *fifollet*! Old women's stories—these tales that a man must die because he sees a strange shape in the fog! Nonsense!"

"Amédée Painchaud saw it when I was a little boy. They said it came and drew a circle around him; and a year afterward, to a day, he went through the rotten ice on the river!"

Now Egide knew this story very well. He had watched Painchaud grow old through that terrible year of waiting. Nevertheless, he did not allow François to see that the memory stabbed him like a knife.

"If a man walks on rotten ice, he will go through, naturally," he shrugged.

"I have seen it!" persisted Paradis stubbornly. "It is the 23rd of August."

Egide Racicot drew a long breath. Mechanically he hunted up a new pipe, and lighted it with trembling fingers. Then he sat down and blew a furious cloud of smoke.

"Curse the *fifollet*!" he snapped. "I defy it to harm you! Waggle your fingers at it, François Paradis! If you do not act less like a sick chicken, and more like a man, Yvonne Laplante shall know about this!"

"She must know," said Paradis, raising his tragic eyes. "I am a dead man now, and it would not be right to marry her."

Racicot snorted. He gathered all the force that was in his worn old soul, and he argued—he used every means he could think of to drive despair out of the heart of François; but all without success. Paradis went to bed walking like an aged man.

The next day François Paradis did not go to work. He went through a pretense of eating, and after that he sat sunk down in his chair by the stove, looking, but seeing nothing. He did not even smoke. All day he sat there while Racicot worked about the house, grumbling to himself, and when evening came he showed no intention of going to the house of Yvonne. Not since morning had he moved.

Egide made up his mind that it was time to do something; but before he could do what he had in mind—which was to appeal for help both to Yvonne Laplante and to the *curé*, Father Gauvin—there came a knock upon the door, and he opened to find Yvonne herself hesitating in the dusk. She was not a timid or a nervous girl, but

to-night her eyes were star-bright in the lamplight, with a brightness that was not of joy.

"François—" she began. "He did not go to work to-day. I felt as if there was some trouble—"

"Enter, Mlle. Yvonne," said Egide gravely. "There he sits by the stove, well in body, but with disease of the mind which only you and *le bon Dieu* can cure."

"François!" she cried, running across the kitchen.

She stopped, reached out a hand, and touched his arm. His head turned, and he looked at her out of his tortured eyes.

"What has happened to you, François?"

He began to tremble, so that the chair in which he sat moved upon the floor.

"I have seen the *fifollet*, Yvonne!" he whispered. "Last night, when I was coming from your house!"

Yvonne swayed, and turned as if she instinctively sought help from Egide. He thought of a rose, hit by a sudden gust. His heart ached.

"My little one!" he cried. "Tell him that it is all nonsense, this *fifollet*! Tell him to be a man, for your sake, for his own sake, and for the sake of old Egide!"

"It beckoned to me like a finger," said François monotonously. "I am not afraid of ten men, but the *fifollet*—"

III

THAT was a hard night for all of them. There is, *grâce à Dieu*, a magic in love, however, which lifts the sick soul as good cognac does.

Left to herself and to the fear of François Paradis, Yvonne would no doubt have been overcome, as well as he, by the doom which had appeared to him out of the night; but the scoffing of Egide Racicot first made her doubt the power of the *fifollet*, and then led her to lend him her aid. From childhood she had believed in the *fifollet*, but love and the indomitable spirit of old Egide gave her strength until she was able to add her influence to his own. Thus love raised Paradis out of the darkest depths of his despair, and when Yvonne at last went home he had promised to go to work the next day—to go about the affairs of his life as usual.

Yvonne herself half believed, half doubted, the reality of the thing. She hoped.

So François Paradis went to work in the morning, and for many days thereafter;

but the world was not the same for him. It became known, as such things always become known in a village, that he had seen the *fifollet*, and men looked upon him as marked by the dark angel. Those he worked with drew away a little, and at the same time treated him with respectful gentleness, as if he were already in his last sickness.

Tongues wagged throughout the parish, and in parishes beyond. Many said that Yvonne Laplante ought no longer to consider herself bound, but she was an obstinate girl, and would hear of nothing like that. If it had been possible, she would have seen even more of François. If he had consented, she would have married him at once; but he would not marry her until after the year of the *fifollet* had passed, and so their wedding day was set for the 24th of the next August. In his heart François Paradis never expected to see that day.

The *curé* talked to him without much effect. *Monsieur le curé* told him to pray; he told him that the power of God was greater than any power of the devil. But, *parbleu*, when all the world believes a thing, it is true, without doubt!

All the world believed that a sight of the *fifollet* marked a man for certain death. Old stories were dug up. The case of Amédée Painchaud had not been the only one in the parish of Notre Dame des Anges. There was André Roy, who, to foil the devil, had remained in the house a full year after seeing the *fifollet*. At midnight on the last day he had fallen downstairs and broken his neck. The doom was sure!

Thus the year wore on, and the approaching end of François Paradis became accepted as a matter of course by all except the *curé*, Egide Racicot, and Yvonne Laplante. Just what *monsieur le curé* thought Egide did not know. He did know that Yvonne no more than half believed that her lover would be saved. The rose red had gone from her cheeks and the lightness from her step. François bore it like a man now, but his eyes carried the look of one hunted.

Egide Racicot stood alone.

Autumn came and passed into winter. The winter melted into spring, and with the coming of another summer Notre Dame des Anges prepared to see the end of François Paradis. It was a generation since any one of the parish had been claimed by the *fifollet*, and there was all the more

interest because the event was rare. Some had thought that Paradis might meet his fate at any time during the year, but the old and the wise shook their heads and predicted that the 23rd of August would be the day. It was usually like that.

IV

ON that day a hush flowed over the whitewashed stone houses of the little village. It was as if there were death, with the bell already tolling. The next day they would hear, they believed, the nine strokes which indicate that a man has died; and the echoes of the nine strokes seemed to come ringing mournfully out of the future. No one had ever been known to escape the *fifollet*.

François Paradis remained at home with Egide that day. He had conquered fear, so that only a feeling of fatalistic resignation remained; but he did not want to hear the whispers, to see the looks, that would greet him if he were to go about his ordinary work. Lately people had stared at him as if he had been a ghost. So he sat in the kitchen, gazing out over the fields ripe for the harvest—waiting.

The afternoon clouded, and with twilight fog came up from the river. Egide silently cursed the fog and the St. Lawrence from its headwaters to the sea as he stood in the doorway and watched the waves of gray mist rolling up over the village.

The steeple of Our Lady of the Angels disappeared. The black roofs of the houses became merely dark blots. All else was hidden; but the blue Laurentians still stood out against the northern sky, like eternal promises. Egide stopped swearing as he lifted his face to them. He found himself praying.

His fingers drummed upon the casing of the doorway. Why should people fear the *fifollet*? He felt certain that, except for the *curé* and himself, there was not a person in Notre Dame des Anges who did not make a sacrifice of terror to the idea. Did he himself believe in it at all? He did not know exactly what he believed, but of one thing he was sure—the people of Notre Dame des Anges ought to be delivered from their slavery.

Yvonne came out of the mist, like the wraith of a woman. Of late she had begun to walk like a *habitant's* wife who has done too much work, bent forward from the hips. It was pitiful to see a young girl like

that—a girl who had been fairer than the cornflowers in June.

Only love and hope held her up. She had come to fight the last hours of the battle with François. Egide was glad.

Her eyes were as caverns in the yellow lamplight. Silently she drew a chair up beside that of François. He reached for her hand, without speaking, and together they sat with their eyes upon the clock. The hands did not seem to move at all.

Egide paced the floor, streaming clouds of tobacco smoke behind him until the room became hazed with blue. He knew that there were people outside—in fence corners, behind neighboring barns, hidden in the fog. Probably nine-tenths of the village had come to see.

The eyes of all of them were upon the house of Racicot. They were waiting for a cry from the house, for a call for help, for the announcement that the *fifollet* had claimed its own in the eleventh hour. Good people all, Egide knew, ready to give their help the moment it was asked for. Eager human hands would instantly be stretched out to him and to Yvonne if they should call. The people believed that death was riding toward the house that night. They were afraid. Egide pitied them almost as much as he pitied the stricken lovers.

Eleven o'clock! Neither Yvonne nor François had moved.

The hour drew on toward midnight. The hands of time crawled across the dirty face of the clock, unbelievably slow.

A quarter to twelve! A weight lifted from the soul of Egide. He felt the muscles of his face relax. His head went up, his shoulders back. He knocked out his pipe briskly and put it into his pocket.

"*Parbleu!*" he exclaimed. "It's over now! You see, my François, I told you all along that it was not necessary to be afraid—"

He stopped, as if a giant hand had crushed him down. François Paradis had risen from his chair, and his eyes were fixed upon the open doorway. In them was the look of that other 23rd of August. He began to walk slowly toward the door.

"François!" cried Yvonne.

She dragged at his arm, but Paradis went on as if there were no weight pulling at him, no little hands clutching frantically at his sleeve. The girl let go, and in mute supplication turned to old Egide.

"François!" he roared. "Stop!"

"The *fifollet*!" answered Paradis, and the word rang as hollow as sound in an empty cask.

He stepped over the threshold and disappeared into the night.

V

EGIDE RACICOT and Yvonne flung themselves after him. He was not in sight. Racicot caught at the girl, standing bewildered in the fog.

"The quarry pit!" he panted. "Come!"

They ran. Dimly Racicot was conscious of voices at a distance, but he gave no heed to them. All his thoughts and all his strength were concentrated upon the finding of François Paradis before it should be too late. Straight toward the old quarry they ran, Egide instinctively avoiding obstacles on ground that he knew as well as he knew the rooms of his own house.

They dashed out of a fog bank, and stopped. The stars were shining. Ahead of them, walking along the crest of a little knoll, was a figure that was unmistakably that of François Paradis. Before him moved a blurred shape. It drifted slowly. It twisted and curled up like a beckoning finger, and Paradis followed it, measuring his steps to the movement of the ghostly finger. It led toward the quarry pit.

"*Dieu Seigneur!*" whispered Egide, and the words were a prayer.

On that side the quarried walls fell sheer for all of thirty feet, to a bottom of broken rock. It was the other side, where formerly the stone had been drawn out, that sloped gradually. François Paradis was following the *fifollet* to his death.

A high resolve filled old Egide Racicot. He seemed to burst with it. Two men, to his knowledge, had been claimed from the parish by the *fifollet*, and here was a third who was about to die. He, Egide Racicot, would forever bring to an end the nightmare in the parish of Notre Dame des Anges.

For the first time he felt absolutely sure of his thoughts, of himself. He knew that the village was and would be a witness. Talking would not convince them—certainly not at this moment when the *fifollet* was proving its power. *He would have to show them!*

"François!" he cried, as he leaped forward. "It's nothing but mist, my son!"

The legs of Racicot carried him like the legs of a young man as he sprang up the

hill. Straight at that curling white finger he hurled himself, into it, through it, striking out with his arms to show that there was neither substance nor power in the thing. He glimpsed that Paradis had halted, and he cried out in triumph.

Then it seemed that the bottom had fallen out of the world. Egide knew, as he dropped through space, that he had fallen over the edge of the pit. He had a second in which to understand this, and then he struck the bottom with a jar so mighty that for a little interval his consciousness was dimmed to a whirling mistiness as vague as the *fifollet*.

The next thing he definitely perceived was the murmur of voices. Men were coming down. He opened his eyes, to meet the light of lanterns, and to look up into the faces of François and Yvonne.

He knew that the end of Egide Racicot had come. It was in the eyes that gazed down into his own; but most of all it was a certain knowledge within himself. He did not suffer, and he knew why. Just now he was too tenuously hitched to his body for suffering.

Through the night came the clear tones of the bell of Notre Dame des Anges. He counted twelve strokes. They meant comfort and a promise to Egide Racicot—François Paradis was saved and the *fifollet* beaten!

A thought possessed him. Now, in this last moment, he understood about the past year. He knew what it was that had been itching in his mind and making him curse so horribly. He forced his lips to move; and after a time words came faintly, like breaths from a dying wind.

"Tell them, François—the *fifollet* is always a mist—a dream—and the dream—and the dreamer—are one!"

Then the soul of Egide Racicot found rest.

They let his house stand empty of everything except the memory of him, and that memory is a sweet savor to the parish. The old ones look at it and nod their heads in approval. The young lovers who go out beyond the quarry pit on moonlit nights glance at it with respect, although perhaps with a dimmer understanding. It blesses them, however.

For from the night of the death of Egide Racicot to this time no one has believed in the *fifollet*. The people of Our Lady of the Angels laugh at it.

Emily

THE STORY OF A BIG, STRONG MAN AND A DEAR LITTLE DELICATE WOMAN

By Reita Lambert

"O H, Emily, my beloved, I love you! I love you!"

The words flowed from Howard Chester's lips without conscious volition. He was holding Emily in his arms at last. Emily was clinging to him, her pale little hands fluttering against his collar, wisps of her soft hair brushing his cheek—Emily, whose delicate beauty and wistful blue eyes had lent a radiance to the young man's life this long time.

The feel of her soft, slender figure in his arms robbed Howard of the eloquence he longed for, but aroused within him the latent atavistic instincts of some valorous and belligerent ancestor. She was so tiny, so fragile! By comparison, his own healthy bulk took on almost gross proportions.

"My little girl! My little wife!" he murmured shakily. "You are, you will be, my darling—tell me so!"

For answer, she buried her head in the hollow of his shoulder. The gesture thrilled him as no words could have done. It conveyed to his soaring senses the implicit trust and the utter surrender of her love. In his exultation his strong arms tightened about her slender form, and he drew her up until her downcast eyes were on a level with his own. She hung in his embrace like a confused child.

"Now, kiss me, little girl!" he commanded huskily.

Her breath came in hot little gusts against his cheek, as she struggled for a moment against his superior strength. Then, with a tremulous sigh that acknowledged her impotence, her head drooped forward until her parted lips met his.

"My darling! My little, little darling!" he murmured with unsteady fervency.

"I'm not really so little," whispered Emily, her crimson cheek against his.

"It's just because you're so big and strong."

The naïve remark affected him like a heady elixir. He carried her easily to the broad sofa before the fireplace, settled her beside him, and tilted her flushed face up to his.

"Look at me!" he ordered severely.

She gave him a glimpse of luminous blue from between fluttering lashes.

"I love you! You're going to marry me!" he announced exultantly.

"But—oh, but, Howard—" she began shyly.

"Don't 'but' me!" he warned. "I'm waiting to hear you say something quite different."

"What—what do you want me to say?" she faltered.

"That you love me."

Her flowerlike face drooped forward in his cupped palm, and red suffused her white throat.

"Well, *say* it, sweetheart!"

"I—I do," she whispered.

"Do what?" he insisted, with an ecstatic delight in her shy confusion.

"L-love you," she admitted faintly, and hid her face against his breast.

With a low laugh of sheerest triumph he held her against him, the flush of his conquest coloring the world about him, her sweet surrender awaking all the latent chivalry of his nature.

"Mine, all mine, aren't you, beloved?" he asked softly.

"If—if you're quite sure you want me," she demurred.

"Want you!"

"But marriage," she said, drawing away from him and facing him with wide-eyed earnestness, "almost frightens me. I'm afraid I'm not very wise about things—"