

# The Bride's Biscuits

PREPARE TO SHARE YOUR PITY WITH A ROOSTER, A YOUNG  
PIG, AN OLD GOAT, A BANDIT, AND A NEW HUSBAND

By Robert McBlair

"NO more biscuits, thanks," Mr. Rollo Parsons replied.

Mrs. Parsons, his wife, considered herself six pounds too heavy, and did not eat wheat.

One biscuit, dismembered, lay in artfully concealed fragments upon the red oil-cloth underneath the edges of Mr. Parsons's plate; while two others, like bulbous and reproachful eyes, stared at Mr. Parsons from the cracked white platter.

"I'll put these in my pocket," Mr. Parsons added, diplomatically, "and take them along for an afternoon snack."

"All right, darling."

Mrs. Parsons arose with a bustling of starched linen and carried the granite ware coffeepot into the kitchen.

Mr. Parsons hurriedly pushed back his chair, scraped the biscuit fragments into his palm, and threw them out of the small square window, where they were greeted by a high, shrill pipe of inquiry from the dominicker rooster.

Mr. Parsons picked up the two biscuits, put one in the pocket of the khaki coat hanging on the wall, and, after glancing toward the kitchen door, threw the other out of the window. There was a sharp grunt of pain and resentment from the spotted shoat, which rustled rapidly away through the drying grass outside the log cabin.

Mr. Parsons's little head—large at the freckled cheek bones and small at the receding chin—was thrust forward to investigate. He heard Mrs. Parsons's returning footsteps, and became interested, instead, in adjusting the horn spectacles which curved behind his flaring ears.

When his wife entered, his bodkinlike body was bent like an elbow, his thin neck was twisted as if he were trying to see over

the top of the mountain. The shoulder blades, pointing like fingers through the gray flannel shirt, helped to emphasize the leanness of the shanks incased in oiled leather boots. The butt of a revolver protruded from the pocket above the shiny seat of the khaki pants.

"They haven't caught that fellow yet," he remarked, by way of diversion, as he stood up. "Hennessy said he glimpsed him on Bear Mountain yesterday. Said he looked kind of sick and peaked, living on what he can find. I don't imagine Hennessy wanted much to come too close to him. I am just a bookkeeper, a private citizen; but if I was a deputy—"

Rollo let this menace to lawbreakers brood unfinished in the air.

"Now, Rollo, don't you do anything!"

Rollo sucked in his underlip, thoughtfully. The overhanging nose, the spectacles, gave his triangular countenance an appearance of owl-like wisdom.

"There's a reward out for him," he mentioned, threateningly.

"Now, Rollo! Please!"

Mrs. Parsons pressed her square white hands together against the bosom of the blue checked apron. Her protruding brown eyes, rather large for her plump oval face, were pointed upward and outward at him, pleadingly.

Rollo Parsons enjoyed the implications of the situation. Four months earlier he had been a teacher of bookkeeping and accounting in a night-and-day business school in Cincinnati. He had been considering joining himself in matrimony to the teacher of stenography, a spinster of uncertain years, but of no uncertain willingness to be his bride.

In preparation for the responsibilities of the event, Rollo, who was nothing if not

painstaking and thorough, had applied for a twenty-year paid-up endowment policy of life insurance.

The life insurance company's examining physician had been, in a sense, flattering. He had said that Rollo had some of the most interesting complications he had seen in thirty-nine years of practice.

He added, confidentially, that his company was pretty lax in its physical requirements, but that if they took on persons like Rollo, they would go bankrupt in a year.

And he remarked, without extra charge, that if he were in Rollo's shoes, he would get a job away from the city somewhere, in a slightly higher altitude, where he would have to walk to and from work. And, by all means, not to worry.

Rollo, trying not to worry, had hurried around to his regular physician, who, after an examination, and after asking Rollo a few questions about his appetite, had made the quite positive diagnosis that the life insurance doctor was a jackass.

But a man can't be on the brink of death from organic complications at one moment, and back in perfect health the next, without entertaining the suspicion that life, after all, may be of very uncertain duration.

So Rollo had compromised by locating a bookkeeping job with a contractor who was building a railroad tunnel in the West Virginia mountains. The salary considerably exceeded his pay as a teacher.

The spinster of stenography, who was none other than the present Mrs. Parsons, had expressed a willingness to accompany him, and a determination to learn to do their cooking. A month ago they had arrived, and had set up housekeeping two miles from work, in a deserted log cabin which had the unexpected charm of being rent free.

"Well," Rollo agreed now, as to bandit catching, "if you ask me not to, I won't."

## II

For the first time he began to feel happy in his new environment. In the beginning, the flannel shirts and corduroy or khaki trousers of the men on the job, their unrestrained profanity, their matter-of-fact acceptance of the Saturday night brawls at the saloon, ending sometimes in shooting and death, their casual "toting" of guns, had filled him with an uneasy dread, not relieved by their rather brutal hilarity at

his punctilious politeness and hesitant questions.

His hastily purchased flannel shirt, khaki trousers, and laced boots, after newness had worn off, had given him a sort of protective coloring. He had secretively adopted a gun.

And now, as a climax of his ascendancy in the midst of turmoil, his own wife was imploring him not to go forth into the mountains and bring to justice a fugitive who had killed a man.

Rollo would have prolonged the agreeable session, but the tin alarm clock on the field stone mantel warned him that his time for the midday meal had elapsed. He permitted himself a moment in which to absorb, with unwonted appreciation, the charm of his helpmeet.

Mrs. Parsons's hair, neither brown nor black, was parted in the middle, and came down over her ears to be knotted behind the plump neck in a manner which somehow symbolized for him the ultimate in feminine charm and submission. The plump figure in the blue checked apron gave him an agreeable impression of domesticity.

Impulsively, he kissed her on the cheek.

"Now don't you forget those potatoes, the bacon, the eggs, the butter, and that bag of flour," she admonished, flushing at his emotional outburst. "There isn't a thing in this house to eat. I've used up that bag of flour we found here, and, if you forget, we'll have to eat these left-over biscuits, and gravy."

"I won't forget them," Mr. Parsons promised, sincerely. He put on his coat, went out into the midday sunshine, turned to wave to her where she stood on the porch before he tramped around the bend, and plopped along in the dust of the yellow clay road. On the left the dun river coursed sluggishly beyond a sparse curtain of sycamores and willows.

Mr. Parsons heard ahead the rattle and clanking of an approaching wagon. He was alone on the road; visions of an outlaw rose before him, and he glanced around with the idea of leaping up the gradual slope of the low green mountain and finding a hiding place behind a hemlock.

But before he could decide, the vehicle, drawn by a gray mule, came at a spanking gait around the curve, and he saw in the driver's seat the squat figure of Mr. Hennessey, timekeeper on the tunnel construction work, and deputy sheriff at large.

"Hi, there, Rollo! Whoa, mule, damn yo' onery hide! Hey, Rollo, take one of these here handbills. I told the sheriff I didn't see no sense in printin' a old picture of a man everybody knows by sight; but election's comin' on, and— Whoa, mule!"

Rollo Parsons accepted the sheet of glazed white paper, reluctantly. If Izzard, from somewhere up on the mountain, should see him take it, the outlaw might assume that Mr. Parsons was on his trail. Rollo preferred not to be associated with the matter.

He examined the handbill with a morbid and uncomfortable fascination. At its top, in large black type, was "\$500 REWARD." Under this was a photograph of a slender young man in a high V collar, a coat too small for him, with a tin foil of violets in the buttonhole, and a speaking checked vest.

His hair was parted in the middle of his narrow head, and brought in a graceful spit curl down over each eyebrow. One ear was clipped off at the top.

"There's a chance to pick up a tidy bit of money, Rollo. Want me to git yo' made a deppity?"

Rollo Parsons flushed to find that Hennessy was staring at him with a good-humored grin on his fat, whisky-reddened face.

"No," Rollo replied, seriously. "No. You see, I'm busy just now."

He jumped at the sound of a blatant "*Ma-a-a!*" right in his ear. A bearded black and white goat, a rope around its horns, looked at him over the side of the wagon with an unfriendly expression.

Mr. Hennessy laughed out loud.

"I'm movin'," he explained. "Goin' to board at the commissary. Allowed I'd stop by and ask yo' missus if she'd keep this varmint for me till I gits me another place. It's fine for cleanin' up trash aroun' the cabin."

Rollo didn't find the animal prepossessing, but he nodded.

"Don't say anything to her about Izzard," he requested. "You know, women folks get scared. With men it's different."

"All right," Mr. Hennessy agreed, chuckling. "Git up, mule!"

### III

ROLLO PARSONS watched the vehicle begin to roll slowly away. Suddenly the hair arose on his scalp.

On the splintery and dusty boards, in the shadow under the driver's seat, lay what was certainly a human figure. It was arrayed in jute bagging, but surely there was no mistaking the contour of a human chest, the slope of shoulders, and the shape of a head under the wrappings.

Mr. Hennessy looked back over his shoulder, saw Rollo gazing after him, turned away, and curled the blacksnake whip around the belly of the gray mule, which broke into a startled gallop.

Rollo experienced a queer feeling at the sight of the bouncing body, obscured occasionally by the black and white goat which was doing a galvanic dance from side to side of the wagon in an endeavor to keep its footing.

The wagon disappeared around the turn. The sounds of its flight diminished.

Faintly, on the air, floated a shouted: "Whoa, mule!" It had stopped at Rollo's cabin.

Rollo Parsons stared at the white dust settling slowly back to the road. Maybe Hennessy had captured the outlaw. Maybe the crude humor of the mountain explained the grin that had accompanied Hennessy's suggestion of making him a deputy.

Even a hardened mountaineer, however, would scarcely be paying a casual social visit, concerning a goat, while the body of a dead man lay in his wagon. But Rollo recalled the alarmed expression on Hennessy's face, when he had looked back.

These mountaineers were as thick as thieves. The law, which tried to keep them from turning a crop of corn into whisky, they considered an instrument of obvious injustice.

It was possible that Izzard, with a reward on his head, was being conveyed by gradual degrees to safety in the wagon of Deputy Hennessy. Or it was possible, in these barbaric mountains, that the body had to do with, maybe, a private quarrel of Hennessy's own.

The whole business gave Rollo a sense of uneasiness. He thought of returning home and leaving his revolver with Mrs. Parsons for her protection. Reaching into his coat pocket, where he sometimes kept it, he brought forth, instead, the biscuit.

This momentarily diverted him. Mrs. Parsons had followed with fidelity the directions in the cookbook. But, whether it was the book, or Mrs. Parsons, or the bag

of flour which they had found there, Mr. Parsons had found the biscuits to be of a strange consistency.

He had not mentioned it to his wife, but one time they would be springy and elastic, with some of the unchewable qualities of a rubber heel; while at others they would be as hard as concrete.

The biscuit under inspection seemed to combine both of these qualities. It would stretch and spring back into place, in one corner, whereas the rest of it was more adamant than stone.

Rollo, always of a philosophical turn, gave the two aspects of the biscuit some consideration as his large feet plopped through the yellow dust of the road. Not being able to arrive at any satisfactory explanation, he threw it over the river bank, where it slid and clattered down a shelf of shale, until, apparently having landed on its elastic side, it leaped wildly into the river.

This agility reminded Rollo, for some reason, of the outlaw on the mountain, and he thought again that Mrs. Parsons should have a gun for her protection. If he took her his own revolver, however, it would mean that he would have to return in the evening along two miles of lonely road without a weapon. He decided that a visit from the outlaw at the cabin was entirely unlikely.

"You've got to take some chances in this life," he concluded, bravely. He pushed on toward the commissary.

#### IV

MRS. PARSONS, meanwhile, had heard a wagon rattle to a stand, and had hurried to the front door, to find Mr. Hennessy climbing puffily down from his springless seat.

"Mornin', Mis' Parsons," he said, untying a rope from a seat stanchion. "Jes' run into that husban' of yo'rn, and he ast me to lend yo'-all the loan of this here varmint for a spell."

Mrs. Parsons's surprise was mingled with alarm as Mr. Hennessy dropped the tailboard of the wagon and began to pull on the rope, the other end of which was attached to the crumple horns of a goat with one white and one brown eye.

The animal *Ma-a-ed* unpleasantly, shook its tail, and planted its four horny little hoofs far apart; but Mr. Hennessy ruthlessly dragged it out to where it was

forced to make a scrambling leap to the ground.

"I'll tie it by this here dogwood sapling under the window," Mr. Hennessy said. "He's a wonderful trash remover, Mis' Parsons. Las' Thursday he et the leg outen my best pants. Come here an' pat him, Mis' Parsons. Gentle an' kind as a dove."

Mrs. Parsons gingerly touched the springy hair between the crumpled horns. The creature shook its stub of tail, and reared, but Mr. Hennessy kicked it in the stomach, and it quieted down.

"Yo' see, I'm movin' over to the commissary for a spell, and I'm jes' leavin' my things around." Mr. Hennessy took off his black Stetson and scratched a mop of graying red hair. "Say, Mis' Parsons, yo' reckon yo' can keep a little secret with a fellow?"

"Why, yes," Mrs. Parsons replied, moving beyond the goat's reach. "It's men that can't keep secrets."

"Mebbe so," Mr. Hennessy agreed. He scratched his head more vigorously. His veined face seemed to grow redder under its week's bristle of graying beard.

"Yo' see," he continued, "I got some-thin' in the wagon there I want to git yo' to keep for me till I calls for it. Oh, they ain't nothin' wrong about it! But I wouldn't want yo' to tell nobody, not even Rollo, 'cause the boys would kid me to death."

"But what is it?" Mrs. Parsons asked.

"A figger," Mr. Hennessy confided, and unmistakably blushed.

"A *what*?"

"Figger!"

Mr. Hennessy reached over the side of the wagon, lifted out an object wrapped in gunny sacking, and, after a glance up and down the road, stood it in the grass. He unwound the covering, and disclosed a leather-covered human shape, without arms; taller than himself, but not so large around the middle.

It was mounted on a globular iron base, which permitted it to sway in any direction, yet seemed to keep it from falling. Four steel springs dangled from staples about its waist, and at the end of each was attached a wooden pin about two feet long.

"Yo' see," Mr. Hennessy explained, "it was in one of Uncle Mont's mail order catalogues. I was kind of expectin' a fist fight with Caleb Hadfield at the time, and one night—well, it was one Saturday night,



I reckon—I sent off for it. They give yo' a book with it on the manly art of what they call the self-defense."

He looked down at his stomach, and sighed.

"I mean," he went on, "if the boys see me with this here contraption, I'd jes' have to move plumb out of the county."

"You still want to use it, though?" Mrs. Parsons asked.

"It ain't that," Mr. Hennessy confessed. "I figger, living over to the commissary, I kin git the boys to lookin' over the catalogue, an' maybe wantin' to buy one of these things for fun. If they do, I'll take over the orderin' of it, and jes' ship 'em this one here. Yo' know, Mis' Parsons, this blame thing cost me all of a hundred dollars!"

"Why, certainly, you can leave it here," she consented. "You can put it in the spring house. It's dark in there, and if you stand it in the corner, nobody will ever notice it."

Mr. Hennessy rewrapped the dummy and swung it over his shoulder.

Mrs. Parsons led the way up the path that wound between stumps and boulders around the rocky elbow of a narrow ravine to where, out of sight of the cabin, the hewn log spring house, chinked with clay, rested against the bouldery cliff, in the shade of an overhanging cedar. Three logs bridged the trickle that ran over dark wet rocks from beneath the house, to make its way, in silvery leaps, down the rocky "drain."

Mrs. Parsons pulled open the weather-beaten door, and admitted a triangle of sunshine into the cool, damp darkness of the interior.

"You can put it over there," she said, indicating the corner farthest from the sunken spring, where they kept their butter and eggs. Mr. Hennessy stepped inside.

"I'll jes' push these pegs in to keep him settin' up," he puffed; and, after standing the dummy in the corner, and securing it in an upright position by forcing the pegs into the damp ground with his foot, he rejoined Mrs. Parsons, and they returned down the winding path.

"I hopes to come for that air figger mighty soon, Mis' Parsons." Mr. Hennessy puffed again as he climbed to the driver's seat. "Thank you kindly, ma'am. Git up, mule!"

He wrapped the whip around the lean

gray beast, which broke into a gallop, and the equipage bumped out of sight beyond the bend.

## V

MRS. PARSONS went back to her housework. After washing and drying the dinner dishes, she proceeded with the business of pasting newspapers over the walls.

She herself would have preferred the rough logs, thinking that they went with the heavy beams of the ceiling, from which still hung a few dusty strings of peppers and a long twist of tobacco. But the previous tenant had begun the papering, and Rollo had thought it best to complete it.

The flour they had discovered in the kitchen made perfect paste, clinging, sticky, and elastic, and it dried like stone.

She stood on a chair, sopped the walls, then laid the paper on and smoothed it with her hands. It gave her a crick in the neck, and made her arms ache, so when the goat began to *ma-a-a!* she was glad enough to stop work and go to the window to look at him.

She decided that he grew more curious in appearance the longer you looked at him. His mismatched eyes and crumpled horns were funny enough; but, in addition, the head, tail, and feet were white, while the black, like a carefully fitted waistcoat, covered his neck and body and legs.

"*Ma-a-a!*" the goat cried, looking up at her.

"Hush!" she answered; made a ball of a bit of paper and threw it at him.

He ate it, looking up at her, and again cried "*Ma-a-a!*"

"You poor thing. You are hungry!" Mrs. Parsons hurried into the kitchen. There was really nothing in the place to eat, except seven biscuits, which she did not like to touch for fear that Rollo might forget to bring home any provisions.

"*Ma-a-a!*" called the goat.

Mrs. Parsons put two of the biscuits on a tin pie plate, so the animal would not have to eat off the ground, and took them out to him.

He made a pleased sound as she approached, and when she put the plate down, he crunched up one of the biscuits promptly, and with evident relish.

Mrs. Parsons couldn't help beginning to like the animal. After all, she thought, it wasn't his fault if one eye was white and the other brown. And there was some-

thing in his studious manner while chewing which reminded her of Rollo.

The goat seemed to have difficulty in chewing down on the second biscuit, and then in opening his mouth after he had chewed. He backed away from the plate, lifted his head, and made curious smacking sounds. Finally, after an effort, he swallowed. Then he coughed.

Mrs. Parsons observed the lump course down the shaggy neck, and when the swallow was over, if the goat hadn't been an animal, she would have thought it had tears in its eyes. At any rate, it was looking at her in a funny way, and wagging its ears, so she stepped out of range.

It began to swallow again, although there was nothing in its mouth; and the next moment it was making perfectly awful sounds, like hiccups. Mrs. Parsons ran into the house and came back with a pan of water, which she set down for the goat in the shade of the dogwood tree.

She was just rising when something struck her. She landed up against the cabin, ten feet away, with one shoulder higher than her head, and an elbow in the tin pan which, somehow, had flown along with her. She climbed painfully to her feet.

The goat, wagging its tail and ears, was looking at her soberly, more in reproach, it would seem, than anger.

"You are a bad, wicked, ungrateful thing!" Mrs. Parsons cried. "And I'm going to punish you!"

She untied the rope from the sapling. When she had taught grammar grades, ten years ago, she made a pupil stand in a corner if he was bad; but there was no way of making a goat stand in a corner.

"You come with me," she commanded, and held it by a horn so that it could not sneak up on her again as she limped up to the spring house.

"Now you get in there," she directed, pulling open the door. "It 'll be dark as pitch when this door is closed. And you can just stay there all night, without any supper."

The heavy plank door swung shut of its own weight, and she turned the wooden button on the outside. She limped back to the cabin, where she rolled up the newspapers, put a cover over the paste, so it would keep, and lay down on the bed, on her side, to compose herself.

She must have fallen asleep, because the

next thing she heard was a footstep on the porch.

"Rollo!" she called.

The footsteps came down the short hall. They sounded strange. Mrs. Parsons sat up, and put her hands over her mouth.

## VI

THE visitor's soft black hat was held politely in his hand. His blue flannel shirt and corduroy trousers, thrust into laced leather boots, were creased and stained as if they might have been slept in out of doors.

The top of his right ear had been clipped off. His lean countenance, the glow of a pallor breaking through its bronze, intimated that he was not essentially vicious. But he had a revolver in his hand.

"Excuse me, lady," the man said, in a weak, agreeable voice, meanwhile searching about with his sunken brown eyes. "I didn't aim to skeer yo'." The curly black beard only emphasized the youthfulness of his face.

"Been watchin' this here place, an' figured I could drap in about now an' git yo' to give me a snack." He laughed without mirth. "Time was when I was mighty particular 'bout what I et; but after feedin' on huckleberries an' wintergreen for nigh a week, you kin jes' dish me what you got."

"Y-yes, sir," Mrs. Parsons agreed. "There's nothing in the house, sir, except a few biscuits."

The visitor's eyes hardened.

"Don't yo' lie to me, lady!" he commanded sharply. "I'm a easy man, mostly, but I cain't afford jes' now to stan' for no projeckin'."

"That's the honest truth," Mrs. Parsons said. "Mr. Parsons is going to bring home some things, if you want to wait."

"No, thank yo'," the visitor replied, ironically.

"There's some gravy," Mrs. Parsons added. "I forgot that."

"Put it all in a can an' give it to me, quick," the gentleman directed. "That air husban' of yo'r'n may come in, and start somethin', an' I don't want to kill no mo' people."

"No, ma'am," he added, sighing as he followed Mrs. Parsons to the kitchen. "That little diffunce I had las' week sho' has made me peaceable. I reckon a feller's got to kill his man befo' he comes to recog-

nize how plumb comfortable it is to be a law-abidin' citizen."

"Yes, sir," Mrs. Parsons agreed, politely but hurriedly.

Her hands were trembling so, at the thought of Rollo's ever being shot, that she could hardly shake the biscuits out of the bread box into the small tin bucket. She winced as the outlaw reached casually over her shoulder and took up a biscuit.

He dragged it through the cold gravy in a plate on the back of the stove, and with two bites filled his mouth.

"Gimme another biscuit," he directed, "an' scrape the rest of this here gravy right into that bucket."

He was reaching for a third biscuit, when a battering sound fell upon them from a short distance up the hill.

"What's that?" the man demanded, his voice suddenly taut and harsh.

"It's only a goat," Mrs. Parsons explained, following him as he stepped swiftly to the main room window. "Mr. Hennessy left him here, and I put him in the spring house. I guess he's trying to butt his way out."

"Yo' better be tellin' me the truth," the visitor stated. He hiccuped slightly, as he rested his gun hand on the window sill. "If a man comes down that path, I'm goin' to pot him befo' he gets to that there persimmon tree, as sho' as God made little apples."

Mrs. Parsons, fortunately for her peace of mind, did not know that the noise at the spring house was caused by Rollo. He had left his ledgers a little earlier than usual, and in an affronted mood. The men at the office had stolen and hidden his gun; he had found it at last in the waste paper basket.

"I don't mind a joke," Rollo had told himself as he followed his twenty-foot shadow along the dusty road. "But they think I'm a city fool, and haven't got any business with a gun."

The sun slid behind the mountain, and he came to a dip in the road where the tree branches met overhead, making a quiet tunnel, damp and dim. His footsteps, plopping into the dew-crusted road, echoed uncomfortably loud.

Things were moving in the undergrowth, birds, most likely; but the dampness had fogged his spectacles, and a man might creep down the hill to the edge of the road,

and he could neither see nor hear him. A twig crackled on the hillside.

Rollo bent his narrow frame and set out on a limping gallop. The flour bag leaped up with each step to whiten a flaring ear, and dropped to the sharp shoulder with an impact that sent out a puff of white. The paper bags of eggs, potatoes, and butter, rustled like a hundred "*Ps-s-sts!*" from the shadowy forest, challenging him to halt.

Around a sudden turn the hewn logs of the cabin, pale and golden in the afterglow of evening, looked very homelike and comforting. Rollo's freckled countenance was bathed in perspiration as he slowed to a walk and turned into the short cut that led through the dewy sumac bushes and up over the cliff to the spring house.

He could save distance by taking the eggs and the butter up to the spring, and continuing to the cabin by the path that led down the ravine.

The dense leafy saplings dimmed the fading brilliance of evening to a gleaming and uncertain dusk. Rollo scrambled over the back of the cliff and slid down a shale path to the little bridge of logs.

As he lifted his crowded arms to unlatch the wooden button of the spring house, he thought he heard a sound inside the weather-beaten door.

He laid down his bundles and took out his gun. The spring house, it occurred to him, would be an ideal place for the outlaw to hide if he had planned a descent upon the cabin in the night. Mrs. Parsons might have been strolling by and innocently have turned the button.

He snapped open the revolver to make sure that it was loaded, and discovered, with a chilly shock, that its chambers were empty.

"This is absurd," Rollo said to himself, shakily. "There can't possibly be any one in there. The door is buttoned shut."

## VII

HE took the eggs and butter in his left hand, and drew the door open with his right. A triangle of lesser gloom revealed the almost invisible silver of the spring in the farthest corner.

"I've got to clean out that spring again," he thought, detecting an unusual odor.

The soft earthen floor was lower than he had calculated; he was jolted as he stepped down, and to catch his balance, released the door, which swung shut. He knew the

way to the spring, however, and crossed to it gingerly in the darkness; knelt and lowered the eggs and the butter into the tin bucket whose top arose above the level of the icy water.

He was on the point of picking out four eggs for supper, when something hit him from the rear.

Partly dazed by his impact against the log wall, Rollo scrambled up with a muffled squawk. It flashed through his mind that it would have been better to die of organic complications in Cincinnati.

All was dark and silent. One of his feet was in the icy water, but he feared to move it. He waited, holding his breath.

Suddenly, the chill from the spring ran up to his scalp. There was the sound of a step. It was near the wall. It was coming closer.

Rollo's throat dried; he swallowed with a *click*. Cautiously he drew forth his foot for a dash toward the door; leaped, and slipped on a mossy rock; arose and leaped again, to meet in mid-air a body across his knees.

He pitched over it and fell flat, and scrambled upward with a stifled shout in time to be struck heavily again from the rear. A headlong stumble across the floor landed him full tilt against the yielding body of a standing man.

In the terror of desperation, Rollo grappled. They fell against the wall together. Rollo twisted his adversary, trying to throw him, but met with a springy resistance, as if the man held to a yielding board.

Rollo was struck again from behind, below the knees. He felt the man's coat come off as he himself slipped down. With a wild effort, he forced himself up, grappled the figure afresh about the shoulders, and sank his teeth in the neck.

They fell together, Rollo twisting on top while holding his grip. The man lay still beneath him.

Then came the welcome sound of a hammering at the spring house door. There was a heavy blow, twice, three times, repeated, and it was accompanied by a horny scratching.

The door yielded. Without relinquishing his grip with arms and teeth, Rollo rolled his eyes upward.

In the doorway, beard and horns outlined against a lattice of branches and the blue evening sky, stood Mr. Hennessy's goat.

Rollo recalled a bouncing body, on the bed of a wagon, obscured by a dancing goat. He cautiously removed his teeth from the prostrate figure's neck. There was no movement.

He loosened his embrace of the body, and brought his hand up past the bulge of the chest. Then he gave a cry of horror and pushed himself sharply away.

The figure, cold and motionless, had no arms.

Rollo's fingers trembled so that he could scarcely light a match. At last, however, the yellow glow spread to reveal a buxom, leather-covered chest, four dependent springs and uprooted stakes, and on the leather neck a neatly clipped oval hole, the size of a bite, through which showed cotton inside.

Mr. Parsons drew a quivering sigh. He brushed off his clothes, washed his hands at the spring, keeping a wary eye on the goat, then picked out four eggs, cut off a pat of butter, went out, closed and latched the spring house door, took up again the flour and potatoes, and, after chasing the goat into the ravine, started off down the winding path.

The cabin, coming suddenly into view around a shoulder of the cliff, looked very sweet and homelike, still palely gilded by the afterglow which lay on the western sky like a veil of dusk and amber.

Rollo missed the waiting face of Mrs. Parsons at the window, but remembered that he had started out from the office today a little earlier.

Nearing home and wife, he began to feel strong and dangerous, as befits a man who has faced the threat of violent death, and emerged victorious.

He would chide her for leaving a goat in the spring house, he decided, but would say nothing about the battle with the leather figure, nor about being butted. A woman wouldn't understand things like that.

Mr. Parsons's bodkinlike figure was erect, the thin chest expanded, the small head at an arrogant tilt, with the retreating chin thrust forward, as he reached his house and castle.

## VIII

"HONEY!" he called. There was no answer. "In the kitchen," he concluded.

As he strode down the brief hall toward the living room, Mr. Parsons dreamed a dream. In his youth he had visions of be-



ing a knight in shining armor, wooing with brave deeds a beauteous princess.

But this present dream, he felt, was different. It was in keeping with life.

It showed Mr. Rollo Parsons marching into his own log cabin castle, chest expanded, head erect, holding in his extended hand a five-hundred-dollar bill.

The dialogue would run thus:

"How did you get that?"

"I captured the outlaw, single-handed."

"Oh, Rollo! You are wonderful!"

This vision and this imaginary conversation were dissolved abruptly by the sight that met Mr. Parsons as he stepped into the living room.

Mrs. Parsons, her brown eyes very prominent against the unusual pallor and tensivity of her plump countenance, was seated in a chair with her back to the pine-board table, staring with the fixity of fear at a figure reclining on the bed against the wall.

And the sight of the gentleman on the bed might have made a braver man than Rollo Parsons pause. A blue flannel-blouse had taken the place of the high V collar of the handbill.

But there was no mistaking the way the hair was parted. The ear, just visible above the pillow, was clipped off at the top.

Mr. Parsons, a little dazed, noticed next that the outlaw's skin was a sickly green; that his eyes were half closed and listless. His hands were pressed over his stomach, so that the revolver was unguarded where it lay on a red patch of the crazy quilt.

Rollo dropped the flour and the potatoes, the butter and the eggs, and sprang for the gun.

A rolling potato had preceded him, however, and Rollo's fall jolted the glass lamp, a wedding present, off the side table as he landed on the rear of his hips at the outlaw's side.

But he grabbed the gun. And, sliding easily away on the seat of his trousers, he pointed the weapon at the outlaw's head.

"Hold up your hands, Mr. Izzard," he commanded, "or I shoot to kill!"

The outlaw rolled heavy-lidded and sunken brown eyes reproachfully upon Mrs. Parsons, then carelessly upon her husband, seated on the floor.

"I wish to God yo' would!" he murmured, and closed his eyes.

You can't shoot a man who acts like

that. Mr. Parsons climbed up stiffly, still pointing the gun at the uncaring captive.

He was wondering what to do next, when, to the accompaniment of a great clumping of feet in the hall, there appeared the squat and perspiring figure of Mr. Hennessy, bearing in his arms the leather dummy of the spring house.

"Say, Mrs. Parsons," he was chuckling, "I got Wade Damron to say he'll buy this here thing. Say, Rollo, what the—"

Mr. Hennessy stood with his stubbly jaw hanging open, his bleary eyes protruding bluey from his veined red face.

"Well, I'm a son of a gun!" he remarked, sincerely. "And Rollo the one who kitched him! Well, I'm a son of a gun!"

Mr. Hennessy became so interested in the fact that he was a son of a gun, he displayed no curiosity at all as to how the capture had been effected. He carried the dummy out to the waiting wagon, returned as one in a dream, and carried Mr. Izzard out, too, murmuring puffily at intervals that he, Michael Hennessy, was certainly a son of a gun.

In fact, it was not until, climbing puffily up to the springless seat, he leaned to examine for a moment the neck of the leather dummy that he varied his refrain.

"Dern that goat!" he remarked, and cracked the whip.

## IX

THE husband and wife watched the wagon until the green, cadaverous countenance of the outlaw and his reproachful eyes had faded into the dusk of the road. Then Rollo returned to the living room, picked up the bag of flour, and took it into the kitchen.

On the shelf stood an old paper bag, containing the grayish flour they had inherited. Rollo noticed, as he rolled the bag up, that it had straggling pencil letters on the bottom. They meant nothing to him—WALPAPER PAIST.

He carried the paper ball out to the goat, who was pensively chewing a cud under the dogwood tree.

The goat nuzzled the bag suspiciously.

Rollo stooped to lace his boot, and received a butt that drove him headforemost up onto the cabin porch. Mr. Parsons climbed to his feet, and, rubbing his shin, looked at the animal.

The thin chest was swelled like a filbert

on a bodkin as Mr. Parsons approached his helpmeet, who was setting the table.

"It's a good thing I came in," he remarked in a deep voice. "This sort of thing's a man's work. If I hadn't come along—" He let some terrible catastrophe go undescribed.

Mrs. Parsons dropped a fork and threw her arms about him.

"Oh, Rollo! What would I do without you? You are wonderful!" She stood off and looked up at him, a light of pride illuminating her tears. "I bet the men at the

camp will be proud of you, too, to-morrow. Catching that outlaw single-handed."

Rollo picked up the paper potato bag and began thoughtfully to rub butter off the seat of his khaki trousers. He paused and looked at his wife over the horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Well, yes, they will," he agreed.

Pleased anticipation brightened his freckled face, but he spoke with manly reluctance and deliberation.

"Well, yes honey," he repeated, "I imagine they will."

## The Good Knight

THE TRADITION OF A LONG VANISHED HERO LIVES AGAIN IN  
THE HEART OF THIS FRENCH-CANADIAN YOUTH

By William Merriam Rouse

IT was unusual to find a girl so far back in the Laurentians, miles beyond the old parishes and the sound of the Angelus.

It was more than unusual to find a girl such as this one whom Antoine Paquet saw, standing upon the top of a snow-covered ridge, and smiling down at him—a girl with a little face like a white flower above the fur collar of her *capote*, and great, dark blue eyes in which little jokes played hide and seek.

Sometimes choppers brought their wives into the stillness of the mountains, but none of those women were like this one. Here was a girl, a child, a miracle of *le bon Dieu*.

Now, Antoine was not in any way proud of himself, for he had the simple heart of a man who lives with trees eight or nine months of the year. He might well have been a little vain of his slender, compact body, along which the muscles stretched and curled under a satin skin. He might even have rejoiced in the gray-green calm of his wide eyes.

It did not occur to him that it might be because of his eyes that the girl stayed there, and smiled, and waited for him to drive his snowshoes up the steep slope.

"*Mademoiselle!*" he exclaimed, and he pulled off his woolen *toque* and kept it off at the risk of freezing his ears. "I came out of camp looking for a rabbit, and, behold, I find an angel of the snows!"

She laughed, and the light in her blue eyes warmed a little, as though what fear she might have had of a stranger had vanished at closer view of Antoine Paquet.

"And I came north seeking a man whom I have no reason to love—and I find a poet!"

The compliment was blurred in the mind of Antoine by the inference, which he somehow drew, that she was alone. It was strange to meet a girl like her in the bush; so young, and wearing clothes which indicated that she must be at least the daughter of a mayor or a notary.

But it was astounding that this small armful of beauty should be traveling alone. It could not be true.

"You do not mean to tell me," Paquet cried, "that you have no father with you? Or brother?"

"I did not tell you that," she smiled; "but it is true. Neither father nor—husband!"

"Poof!" Antoine exclaimed. "Hus-