

Trouble Over Trouble

Bobby Johnson marched out the barn to feed the animals. Whistling a jovial tune, he was in a good mood. His mood could not be better, though his whistling could be improved. Upon entering the barn he saw Matthew in the corner, doing whatever it was Matthew pleased. At the very grown age of eighteen, Matthew helped to run the farm now. He seemed to think that as just another reason why he could boss his younger brothers around. (Excepting John, who was only a year younger than Matthew, and really needed no bossing around.) Regardless of what he thought, his younger brothers thought it laughable. They only listened to him when their father was there to back him up.

Matthew looked up when Bobby entered the barn. "Hey you."

"Hay is for horses."

"Well, in your case for goats. You don't go messing around with those horses." Luke Johnson, their father, was very pleased with his horses and Bobby really could not handle them, and Matthew knew it. Bobby, though saddened that he could not go near the horses, knew his brother was not trying to be annoying, though oftentimes that was his only intention. Matthew was simply making sure Bobby didn't do something he would regret.

"I wouldn't: I'm not dumb," Bobby said.

"You might do more to go about proving that," Matthew said, squatting down to grab something he had dropped.

Bobby kicked at the ground in response, sending dirt flying at Matthew.

Matthew stood. "Bobby!"

"Sorry," Bobby shrugged.

Matthew shook his head. "You have penitence written all over your face," he said sarcastically. He paused.

Bobby slid over to the side of the barn where Trouble, the goat, was housed. Trouble was an aptly named goat. All he did was cause trouble. None of the Johnsons could tell where the goat came from, though John supposed it was not from any of their previous goats. All of the Johnson boys fought with the goat, but none of them had had as much animosity towards the goat as Bobby. The goat and Bobby fought to the degree where his brothers found his battles with the goat hilarious, and so they thereby kept the goat, just as all properly annoying older brothers ought.

The goat was Bobby's responsibility, because he took charge over all of the goats, but now they had no goats but Trouble, so he only had the one to care for. The goat caused him nothing but pain. What never occurred to Bobby was, that as the owner of the goat, he controlled its life expectancy.

Bobby grabbed at the feed bucket only to see that it was not there. Sweeping around the place, his eyes fell on the pen, which was short a goat.

"Ah nuts!" he exclaimed crossly. He kicked the side of the post, which was not a good idea. "Tarnation," he yelled, his foot smarting. The last thing he wanted to do was go traipsing after the goat.

Matt, having heard his brother's exclamation, came to see what the noise was before it

grew. "What in blazes are you doing?" he asked, completely taken aback.

Bobby ran past him. "Trouble got lose!"

Matthew stared at his brother's vanishing figure. "You better catch that goat!" he yelled, wondering whether or not Bobby would catch the goat. He had no doubts that Bobby had heard, of course, but he did have doubts as to whether his willful younger brother would actually listen to him.

Bobby burst out of the barn. He stopped at the door way and looked around, but he did not see the goat anywhere. He marched out a little while, but stopped. A most peculiar munching sound was near him. Confused, he looked around, wondering where the noise was coming from. It had piqued his interest, and so now he needed to know.

Unfortunately, the moment he found out what it was he wished he hadn't. Trouble the goat was eating his mother's flowers. Bobby cried out and made a wild dash at the goat, who presently looked up at him and, realizing the boy was running at him, turned on his heel and fled.

Then the chase began. The goat ran with ease over the field, and Bobby bounced after him, struggling to keep up, but he made good ground and had nearly caught up with the goat when he tripped on a branch. Down he went, tumbling in the grass, looking up just in time to see the goat vanish from sight, at least sight from the ground.

Bobby stood up sorely, his ankle aching dully. Standing up tentatively, trying his ankle, he became aware of just how hungry he was. His stomach growled, and he sighed to think of catching the goat, by now off who knows where.

He stood and looked to the forest line, where the goat was last seen, and to the house, where his mother would be preparing breakfast. "Well," he said, "I don't need to catch the goat *now*. I can do it after breakfast.... It's not like he is in any pressing danger. Besides, a creature'd be crazy to try and eat that goat. He can take care of himself for a few hours."

Bobby looked back to where the goat had disappeared once more. He chewed his lip, thinking that perhaps he ought to catch the goat. But, it would take so dreadfully long, for the goat detested to be chased or penned up. Bobby finally determined, chiding himself firmly: *Oh, stop your worrying. He'll be fine, and no one will be the wiser.*

So, with that, he started limping off to the house, but broke into a slight run when he realized his ankle was fine.

He made it to the house very quickly and dashed in, trying not to look at the munched up flowers.

"Hey, is breakfast done?" Bobby asked, entering the room.

"Breakfast? Ma is thinking about starting supper," John supplied.

Bobby huffed. "Oh really?"

"Yeah, you just go and ask her."

Hattie had heard Bobby's voice and came to the doorway. "Bobby, there you are. Come on, I've kept your breakfast warm."

As Bobby went after his mother, Matthew called after him, "Hey, you catch that goat?" That warranted no response from Bobby, who quickly left the room.

"Hmm?" their father questioned.

"Oh, Trouble got out this morning," Matthew answered.

"I don't see why you boys are so keen on keeping that animal. It is nothing but, well, trouble," Luke said, looking inquisitively at his eldest son. The conversation never took off, and died without any more comments. Luke soon rose and left the room, going out to the barn.

Bobby, in the other room, sat down as his mother put a bowl of oatmeal in front of him, "What's this they say about you starting supper now?"

"Oh is that what they say? Well, I'll have you know, I've got to start supper now because it will take me a few hours to do it the way your father likes," she said crossly, flying to and fro. "Oh, are you making that chicken dish?" Bobby questioned in a slightly disgusted voice. "Yes. Why do you say it in such a voice?"

"No reason. Ma, slow down a bit. You're making me dizzy."

Hattie stopped and put her hands on her hips. "I simply haven't got the time. I'm hosting the Quilter's Society meeting today, or are you so apt to forget? The house is a mess. I just haven't had the time to clean these last few days, so I must do it all today."

"Well, I didn't realize they would be in the kitchen. The quilts might get dirty." One look from his mother told Bobby he'd gone too far. Fairly kicked out of the kitchen, Bobby was the center of attention when he entered the living room. All his brothers looked up at him.

"What did you do?" Kenneth asked jokingly.

"Whatever it was sure got her riled," John added.

"He was probably just eating. You know he eats like a cow. He spends too much time with the cows," Matt said in a very serious voice.

"You mean with Trouble?"

"Yes, about Trouble," Matt said, looking up at Bobby.

"What about Trouble?" Bobby asked, glaring at Matt.

"Well, where is he?"

"Figure that out yourself."

"Ah, so he's not in the pen," John said. Bobby looked angrily at him, but said nothing audibly, though his look did most of the talking.

Then there was a clatter in the kitchen. "Ayy, no!" they could hear their mother exclaim. John looked at his brothers and got up to help his mother.

"Wonder why she is so riled up," Timmy commented.

"Mrs. Perry is coming. You know how she riles Ma."

Mrs. Perry was a captious, pretentious, persnickety woman. Pretentious to the degree that she would use big words just like pretentious, she fancied herself the most prominent woman in town, both rich and intelligent. She was willing to help everyone, and everyone needed her help. She helped everyone even when they did not want her help. Insults bounced off her, and most of them she thought compliments. Her special talent was annoying people to the degree that their wits all left them, so that they were helpless to defend themselves.

"Ma isn't the only one she riles," Timmy said. "Sometimes she makes me so mad..."

"You mind your manners, Timmy," Matthew warned.

"I will, I will! I won't say anything rude. Pa'd kill me."

"Well, at least you aren't the only one to be riled by Mrs. Perry," Kenneth said.

"Mrs. Perry riles everyone," John said. "Even Louisa Adams."

It was common knowledge that Louisa Adams had the patience of Job and then some, but she was very nasty when people riled her; this was known because when younger, Matthew bugged her, thinking her patience would last, and never he did it again. It was also common knowledge that John was sweet on her.

"Hello Pa," said Timmy, heralding his father's entrance. The subject was dropped as Luke entered the room.

"Bobby, that goat of yours is not in the barn," Luke said, sitting down. Bobby looked imploringly at his father. "I reckon you better go and get it in the pen."

"But Pa—"

"No," he said, "That goat is your job, and you have got to care for it, which means you can't let it get eaten by a coyote, and sure enough it will if it is out of that pen tonight." Bobby sighed. "Yessir," he said, rising. He walked outside quietly, not daring to stomp within earshot of his father, but when he was out anyone could hear him from a mile away, so why he waited to be out of his father's earshot to stomp really was pointless, because his father was surely within a mile.

So he stomped around, but the goat was nowhere to be seen. "Darn goat," he said, kicking the ground, hitting a rock. "Ow!"

Then Bobby heard what sounded very much like laughing, goat laughing. Sure enough, when he turned his head, he saw Trouble down in the field, looking at him. He took a few looks at the goat and ran violently after it.

"Get over here you little demon goat!"

Jenny Fisher, who happened to have been just a bit away at the time picking berries, heard, and subsequently dropped her berry basket in amazement as she saw a goat running wild and free followed by a boy yelling at the top of his lungs.

"Hello Bobby," she called, scaring Bobby quite a good deal, as he could not see anybody to go with the floating voice. He turned his head her way, and never stopped running, straight into a thorny bush. Jenny winced.

She jumped gracefully over the rock wall and stepped up to Bobby. "Hiya, Bobby."

"Hi Jenny," Bobby said stiffly.

She put one hand to her chin and looked at him, confused. Seeing he was not going to supply facts without a prior question, she asked, "Whatcha doing?"

He sighed.

"Well?"

"You're not going to leave me alone till I tell you, are you?"

She put her hands on her hip and raised her eyebrows.

Bobby rolled his eyes. "Well, if you must know."

"I must," she said, nodding.

"I am trying to catch my goat."

"You need to put more emphasis on the trying, not the goat. Besides, you don't look like you're doing much catching."

He narrowed his eyes.

"Would you like some help?"

“No.”

She paused for a moment. “Okay, if that’s what you want. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I should be getting home. Ma’s going to make a pie with the berries I’m getting to bring to the quilters society meeting today. You know, the one at your house. So, I’ll see you soon, since Ma said she might let me come, seeing I’m fourteen now and all. Bye!” And without further ado, she turned and returned to get her berry basket.

Bobby yanked himself free of the berry bush. Walking slowly didn’t improve upon the fact that he had no clue where the goat was. Pretty soon squirrels began to scream at him, and so therefore all of the creatures anywhere near knew he was there. He yelled at them to shut up, but they very rudely ignored him. Picking up a stone, he threw it at one but missed so terribly he would never tell a living soul about the matter. When the road going to town was near, he stepped out onto it and began walking, wondering how far the goat would have gone. Surely not this far!

Woah! was the sound that brought Bobby back from his thoughts on the goat. Bobby jumped, and turned his head, having stopped walking. My Taylor, a friend of his father, was looking down at him from his buckboard. “Hey, Bobby Johnson, you’d better be a might more careful. Are you looking for trouble, walking into the road like that?” “As a matter of fact, sir, I am looking for Trouble.”

“Excuse me, son?” Mr Taylor said, taken aback.

“Trouble’s my goat, sir. He got loose,” Bobby responded quickly.

Mr Taylor nodded. “Oh. Is Trouble really out this far?”

“I don’t know sir. I lost track of him cause I was talking to Jenny Fisher.”

“Isn’t she a might old for you?” Mr Taylor said, smiling.

“Oh, no, not like that! I ran into her. Well, I more so ran into a berry bush.”

“I can see that.”

Bobby looked at him questioningly.

“Look at your shirt.”

Bobby grabbed the bottom of his shirt and looked at it. Sure enough, it was covered in berry stains. “Aww, no!” He looked at his shirt, aghast.

Mr. Taylor waited a bit before he spoke again. “Well, Bobby, I hope you can find your goat. I’ve got to get now. Tell your folks I said hi.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.” With a click of the reins, Mr Taylor drove off.

“I hope I don’t find that goat,” Bobby mumbled. He paused. He didn’t want to stay out here looking for that goat that caused him nothing but trouble, but his father had told him directly to find it. He stewed on it in his mind, unsure what to do. He wasn’t going to find the goat any time soon, he knew that, and he did have other things to do. What those other things were he didn’t think much on, because they weren’t really any more enjoyable. Finally, he said to himself, “I’m going home.”

Bobby walked calmly towards home, which for Bobby meant he was not walking without any noise. Jenny was no longer by the berry bush, he noted happily, or if she were he would not hear the end from her till he caught his goat.

He walked till he came upon the little pond, then he heard a goat. He looked down to the pond and saw Trouble by the little pond. The goat was eating the bark off of a tree very placidly. Bobby took one look at the goat and marched right up to the goat, who with a sure foot started to run.

Now, the bank of the pond was very muddy due to the recent rain. There were certain parts of the bank of the little twelve foot pond that were very steep. The goat avoided those spots very neatly, but Bobby in his anger did not. He lost his footing and fell—Splash!—into the pond.

Bobby lost whatever control he might have had over his temper. He yelled all of the bad words he knew (which really weren't that bad) and smacked the water, which only succeeded to splash him more. He climbed out of the pond angrily. He was muddy and wet and covered in berry juice, dirty, though he had just taken a bath of sorts, and not a sight for sore eyes lest they lose whatever sight they had.

"You know what, I don't care if you get eaten by a coyote! I wouldn't care if you got eaten by a squirrel! You are just a waste of time! I'm going home, and I don't care!" Bobby clambered out of the pond, succeeding in getting more mud on him, though one would not think that possible, the amount of mud already on him. There was hardly a speck of space for more mud.

Once out of the pond, he turned on his heel, without looking at the goat again, and marched angrily off, shaking his arms. Mud splattered the trees surrounding him. He made his way to the house, stopping several times to attempt to clean himself before his mother saw him. But, his cleaning skills were severely lacking, and he made a worse mess than before. Bobby, though, having no way to view his appearance, could not see just how terrible he looked. Perhaps this was for the best: if he had seen his outward appearance, he probably wouldn't dare go within a yard of the house, just so that he would have time to run if he thought anyone might be in a place to catch sight of him.

But, Bobby could not see himself, so he marched up to the house, not at all boldly, for right now he was feeling rather pusillanimous. Unfortunately for him, three of his brothers were out in the yard. They all turned to him when they heard him walk up.

They each had a unique reaction, but each equally annoyed Bobby. Timmy gaped, unable to even laugh. John's face said "*Good grief, what did I do to deserve this?*" He stared open mouthed and placed his hand on his forehead. Matthew pursed his lips and raised his eye brows. No one said anything.

After a long silence, Timmy braved the silence and questioned his brother, "What on earth did you do?"

Bobby drew in an angry breath slowly, and said crossly, "I don't want to talk about it."

Matthew gazed at his brother. "Well, I do."

Bobby glared at him furiously, but it did nothing to Matthew. Bobby did not want to say anything, and wished something would save him. Something did. But, it was something all of the brothers wished didn't happen. Bobby began to feel as though he went directly from the frying pan and into the fire, for Mrs. Thomas Perry had just pulled into the yard, at least a half hour before the meeting was to start.

John, Timmy, and Bobby were dumbfounded, but Matthew turned quickly and called into

the house, “Ma, Mrs. Perry’s here.”

She came flying out onto the porch. “What do you mean Mrs. Perry’s here? The Quilters Society isn’t due for another hour!”

“Well, it looks like Mrs. Perry getting out of that buggy.”

Hattie untied her apron and took a look over her simple kitchen skirt, smoothing it out. Just the time for Mrs. Perry to show up, she thought. She drew a ragged breath and stepped out. “Why, hello, Hattie, dear!” Pretty, nicely dressed Mrs. Perry called.

“Hello Hester. You’re early.”

She gave a light, rather fake sounding laugh (though it was not fake; she just did not have a very nice laugh). “Why, yes, I am. I decided it would be a good idea to come earlier to help you. I know it must be very difficult for you to clean up in time, your house being so dirty oftentimes and all,” she said sweetly, looking over the house, her eyes landing on Bobby. “But I don’t fault you. It must be difficult to keep the house clean with such messy boys.”

Hattie followed Mrs. Perry’s eyes and tried to not look shocked. She looked back at Mrs. Perry. “Well, Hester, I really don’t—”

“Oh, there’s no need to feel ashamed. Some people just aren’t as clean as others. I think I am quite neat enough for the both of us.”

“I really don’t need your help. My house is clean, though you wouldn’t know it, but not too clean to where people are afraid to breathe for fear of dirtying it.”

Hester smiled. “My dear, your house is nowhere near that clean.”

Hattie reddened and her eyes flashed with anger. She opened her mouth to speak, but Mrs. Perry cut her off: “Oh, Hattie, look at your flowers! You aren’t a gardener either, I see!” Timmy whispered to his brothers, “What about her flowers?”

“Oh no,” Bobby breathed.

Matthew looked at him. “What did you do?” he accused.

“Not me!” He sighed. “Trouble!”

Hattie’s eyes had flown to her ruined flowers. She put a hand to her mouth. “Oh, my goodness,” she said defeatedly.

“My dear, I had no idea you were such a bad gardener. Haven’t you time to devote to your flowers?”

“I am not a bad gardener!” she cried, bending over and fingering her eaten flowers, trying not to burst into tears.

Mrs. Perry looked at the little flower bed, shaking her head. “Tsk, tsk.”

Luke had come out at that moment to ask his youngest son where the goat was, but his attention was drawn to the scene laid before him. Unfortunately, the scene grew much worse when he came out, but not by any fault of his own, for Trouble took his cue. Bam! he shot out from under a tree, where he had been sitting unnoticed, and knocked Hattie Johnson into the dirt. The scene erupted.

Mrs. Perry screamed, John rushed to his mother’s aid, Kenneth raised his eyes to heaven, Matthew strung out a quiet line of curse words, Timmy fell over in shock, and Bobby looked at the goat with murder in his eyes.

Luke tried to grab the goat as it ran past him, but he missed it. He looked to Bobby and

pointed at the goat. Returning the look mutely Bobby ran after the goat. His father watched as Bobby walked up to the goat. Bobby then grabbed at the goat, but Trouble escaped his grasp, and Bobby fell flat on his face. He pushed himself up and sat down on the top of the hill, under the tree. Trouble ran off somewhere.

Hattie had hardly had time to stand up when a wagon pulled up: Jane Larson and her eldest daughters.

“Hello Jane!” called Mrs. Perry. She turned and whispered to Hattie, “You had better go and put on a clean dress.”

Hattie was still wearing a plain work dress that was now decorated nicely by dirt and grass.

Jane and her daughters had hardly stepped out of the wagon when Louisa Adams, Sadie Fisher, and Jenny Fisher came walking up, their quilting bags tucked under their shoulders. Bobby was sitting still under the tree, watching the women. He wondered if there had ever been worse timing in all of history, noting with dismay that Jenny’s mother had indeed let her come.

Louisa looked around, and opened her mouth to speak, but no sound came out. “My dear, ‘tis rude to gape like that,” Mrs. Perry said sugar sweetly, smiling condescendingly.

Louisa closed her mouth. “I’m afraid that unlike you, ma’am, my words purely ran away.”

Jenny, who saw no need for politeness as Mrs. Perry would call it, simply asked, “What *happened* here?”

Matt looked at John, who looked back at him. Even Kenneth, usually prepared with a patient answer, seemed irritated at Jenny. Jenny was about the only person aside from his brothers who could irritate him without too much trouble. They all felt a lack of words, except Timmy.

“Go and ask Bobby. He’s up under that tree yonder,” Timmy told Jenny, pointing to the tree.

Jenny looked at him, assessing his motives, and with Timmy, that was not an easy thing to do. “He catch his goat yet?”

Timmy suppressed a laugh. “Far from it Jen.”

She looked at him.

“Go ask Bobby—he’ll tell you everything.”

Then a most curious thing happened. Trouble walked right up to Jenny and put his head under her hand, which was hanging at her side. She looked towards her hand, startled, and smiled. She stroked the goat gently. “Hello you,” she said, looking at it.

For a minute all was quiet, till Matthew said, “Now that does just beat all!” Jenny laughed at the goat, stroking it gently. “Ah, you’re a little dear. I’ll bet you don’t cause any trouble.”

Trouble brushed against her leg innocently.

“Well, I don’t believe it— you’ve done in a few minutes what Bobby hasn’t done in half the day,” Timmy said.

“What?”

“Bobby has been out half the day looking for that goat.”

Jenny raised her eyebrows. “I see. So this is Bobby’s goat?”

Mrs. Perry actually was silent. She gaped at the girl and the goat, whom she had just previously seen enact terrible things.

“Why Mrs. Perry, ‘tis rude to gape like that,” Jenny said, leaping at the chance to get back at Mrs. Perry.

“Jenny,” Mrs. Fisher warned her daughter.

“Yes Mama,” Jenny said meekly, her face matching her voice, her thoughts certainly not. Hattie, before Mrs. Perry regained her tongue and took the office to herself, welcomed her guests into her house. “Well,” she said cordially, “Why don’t you all come in?” All of the women then went into the house, preparing to sew and talk. The boys remained outside, not having any desire to follow the ladies in. They had been in the house once when the quilters were meeting and they certainly never planned to do it again. They had been drawn into conversations they didn’t understand, and the women had laughed and smiled at their lack of quilting knowledge. Kenneth was the only one who came out well, for he had read Jane Austen and so he and Louisa had struck up a nice conversation. Matthew came off somewhat well, but not nearly as well as intelligent Kenneth.

Jenny, having tarried behind, explained why. “Might one of you take this goat from me? So’s I can go inside?”

“Oh, of course,” John said, moving to get the goat.

“So, what did happen here?” Jenny asked, fully expecting an answer.

“Must you ask?” Kenneth said.

“Well, whether I must or not, I did.”

Kenneth stared crossly at Jenny. He and Jenny often partook in verbal jousting of one form or another, and what differentiated it from those with his brothers, was that he sometimes lost. Rarely did he lose against his brothers. Matthew, being a mature, sensible boy, rarely fought with him, so that helped keep Kenneth’s record clean. Seeing them as a waste of time, John never partook in arguments. His idea was to always say “Yes, you’re right” or “of course.” This annoyed Timmy, for he knew he wasn’t always right, and it made him feel better to have a reason to defend his view point, the reason namely being one of his brothers maintaining a heated debate with him. Bobby, as the youngest, was terrified of getting into fights with his older brothers, and would rather skip the whole ordeal, though in spirit he was much more irascible than his brothers. His desire to skip the whole ordeal was often obscured, for he would burst out in anger, and then his brothers would have to return the response. Bobby, soon realizing his mistake, would try to flee from the conversation, if he had a chance. A chance, though, was something that his brothers hardly gave. The only time he could escape an argument, was when his brothers turned upon themselves, now distracted.

“Well,” Kenneth sighed, “Trouble the goat, you’ve got him, he got loose. Bobby was supposed”-putting great emphasis on the ‘supposed’-“to catch him, but clearly he did nothing of the sort.”

Bobby glared at him angrily. “Oh, easy for you to say! You don’t know how hard it is to catch that goat!”

Kenneth stared at him. "Are you saying the goat bested you?"

Jenny said, with mock severity, "You shouldn't advertise that a goat is more intelligent than you."

"I don't think that is an unknown fact," Kenneth returned, trying not to smile.

Bobby looked at her crossly. "No goat is more intelligent than me!"

"Well then why haven't *you* got him?"

"Because, well, well, I... I was biding my time! If you hadn't come then I sure enough would have got him!"

"Oh. I see." Jenny looked at him. "You know, when you debate you shouldn't use hypothetical future possibilities. We have no way of knowing that had I not walked up at that moment you would have actually caught the goat. It's just not tenable."

"It's not tenable, nor is it easily destructible. It just hangs there, doing nothing," Kenneth added. "It kills any chance of a debate."

"This isn't a debate, it's a slaughter! I'm sticking by what I said. Two against one is bad enough, but you two together!"

Sure enough, the conversation soon petered out. Jenny and Kenneth stared at Bobby, but he would not relent, even though faced with two heart stopping looks from future teachers. Matthew, who had previously gone to the barn to tend after some animal, returned. He inspected the scene before him. "Do I even want to know?"

"That is the question, isn't it?" Jenny admitted. "Much better than 'To be or not to be.'"

He sighed, thinking it best not to engage the trap Jenny had most likely set. Then it occurred to him, as he suddenly looked more alive. "Where is Trouble?" "What? Well, he was right here," Kenneth said, looking around.

"Was!" Matthew snapped angrily. "Presently, who knows where he's gone!" Kenneth looked sheepishly at his brother, who stared him down angrily. Then came a very melodious scream, and all heads turned sharply. Mrs. Thorpe was standing in her wagon, unable to get down, for Trouble was viciously patrolling the ground where she had intended to place her feet.

Jenny gaped.

Seeing Matthew run over to help, Kenneth and Bobby followed, and firmly took a hold of the goat. Matthew, seeing to it that the goat was taken to the barn, helped poor Mrs. Thorpe out of the wagon.

"Thank you," said a shaken Mrs. Thorpe.

Jenny had regained herself and ran over to help Mrs. Thorpe. "Here, ma'am, let me take your bag."

"Why, thank you dear."

"You know, you have a very pretty voice."

Matthew inwardly sighed, predicting something bad to come of that.

Mrs. Thorpe looked surprised at first by such a comment, but then she smiled and said, "Well, thank you."

Matthew and Jenny went with Mrs. Thorpe into the house, and after they had departed, the three younger boys grouped back in the yard, grateful Matthew was not there to chew them

out.

“Well,” Kenneth said, “Trouble is in the barn.”

“And he ain’t getting out less he tears the whole place down!” Timmy added.

“Isn’t,” Kenneth corrected.

“Hmm?”

“Isn’t. You said ain’t.”

“Alright, Mr. School Master, isn’t.”

Kenneth sighed. “You know, your aversion to use proper English is really quite obnoxious.”

Bobby stood watching his two brothers, wondering what he could say to get their mind off fighting each other over a simple word. He knew from experience that such a conversation could last the whole day, on and off, the oddest things reviving it.

“And your liking to use fancy words when plain and simple do the job just right is even worse.”

“I beg to differ—said plain and simple words would not satisfactorily accomplish the contemporary need where a more sizeable word would with simple ease.” “Well, then maybe you just don’t know enough small words.”

Bobby decided it was time for him to go. He wasn’t going to stick around here, and he wasn’t going to go in the house, though, so he determined to go out to the woods for a walk. This became even more firm of a plan when he saw Matthew come out of the house. Pretending he hadn’t seen his brother, Bobby bolted, wasting no time in getting away.

Timmy and Kenneth were so caught up in their brotherly conversation that they did not even hear Matthew come up, and for a few moments were completely unaware that he was listening to them, wondering how in the world they could be arguing about what they were.

Bobby strolled through the field quietly. The birds were chirping softly and loudly, depending on the bird, and the chipmunks dashed to and fro. Along with all that natural noise though, he heard voices.

Looking around for the bodies to go with the voices, he was surprised to see John and Louisa walking and talking. Really, the oddity was not his hearing those two out there, but the fact that he had been walking quiet enough to hear anything at all.

He debated for a second on whether or not he should like to creep up and listen in. He in the end decided that was a terrible idea and promptly went away. Well, his prompt was slower than the slowest allegro. Whether or not that was “promptly” is another matter.

For the rest of the time that the Quilter’s Society was meeting, Bobby did whatever he could to stay away from the house, not wanting to be drawn into the meeting. When finally all of the ladies poured from the house, the boys circled in the yard to see them off.

As the ladies said their last farewells, Mrs. Adams said, wondering aloud, “Where is Louisa, I wonder?”

The look on Bobby’s face just then must have been something, because his father asked him, “Bobby, you don’t happen to know where she is, do you?”

“I—”

Before Bobby could finish telling where she was, John and she came laughing up the

path. All eyes turned, and Mrs. Perry said, "My, my."

"Your what?" Timmy asked, finally giving in.

"Well, I never!" Mrs. Perry exclaimed.

"Never what?" Timmy responded cockily.

"Timothy," his father warned.

"Yes sir."

The ladies soon all were climbing into their wagons, and John was giving a special goodbye to Louisa, who was being looked at curiously by all the ladies there.

"Well, Bobby," said Jenny, holding herself in a very dignified fashion, "Good bye for now. Be sure to tell Trouble I said so too." And with that, she turned and joined her mother, for they were walking down the road to their home.

Bobby looked at her, hardly believing what his ears had heard, but he soon consented to believe, for not trusting one's ears can lead to problems, indeed.

Mrs. Perry was the last to leave. "Well, Hattie, this has been very enjoyable, despite the several... inconveniences. I will be looking forward to hosting the next meeting." "Yes, thank you. Good by," Hattie said cordially, as a hostess must.

"And next time you host, hopefully that heathen goat won't be loose to terrorize the earth." She turned then and went to her wagon, and departed.

Kenneth whispered, "How can a goat be heathen? It's a goat?"

"Kenneth, Mrs. Perry never thought so much about anything in her life."

"Well, everyone, let's all go in the house and have some supper," Hattie said. They all, Luke, Hattie, Matthew, John, Kenneth, Timmy, and Bobby (still unbelievably filthy), walked to the house, happy as could be.

"You know," Bobby said, "I wish Trouble'd knocked that Mrs. Perry a good one." That was not the thing to say. There was a universal cry of "Bobby!" from all but Hattie, who burst out laughing.

The End
