

NEW YEAR'S DAY IN THE MORNING

By Blanche Gertrude Robbins, in East and West.)

Whoever first crosses the threshold of New Year's morning, bearing a message of prosperity for the year to the household," quoted Granny MacPhail from her bountiful Scotch lore.

Shirley MacPhail smiled whimsically. "There were not many of the MacPhails left to cross Granny's threshold, bringing gifts, on New Year's morning. Grandfather and Derry were up in the woods at the lumber camp with the men cutting and hauling logs. "Seems like the winter stretches out until the spring comes," said Granny. "With you going back to college after the Christmas holidays, your grandfather and Derry all the time at the camp, I am left time about my hands. I get to thinking about when I am alone so much. I haven't a doubt but if he had come back from the war he would be settled with us and I would have his children with me and I'm always happiest when I see little children to do for."

There was a break in Granny's voice and the girl, too, was silent. Rodney is the brother, older than either Shirley or Derry, who had gone overseas in the very beginning of the war, and had not among the missing long before the war ended.

"But we will make so merry this day even if we have to spend New Year's Day all by ourselves, that you will be constantly thinking of it until I come home at Easter," comforted Shirley.

"Grandfather and Derry will be coming out of the woods then with the ring drive down the river, and the ring won't be lonesome any longer. Derry says it is a winter of prosperity for the lumbermen; think of that, Grandfather."

"To my way of thinking, Shirley, the best prosperity that can come to a household is happiness," said Granny. "Those days when the wood was still thick about the bit of clearing, where we all our home, so that Grandfather and my father and then Rodney could stay home nights and still manage the lumber camp, were happiest for me. I was so busy taking care of my duties that I had no time for loneliness. Now that they have to go many miles away to cut the bush, I am missing my own sorely."

And only he, who crosses the threshold of New Year's morning, bearing a message of happiness, will be bringing this household prosperity?" questioned Shirley.

Up in Deep Woods Derry MacPhail stood at the door of the camp, watching the men come up the trail. There was a stranger with them and he carried a pack on his back—an object banded in a bear skin. Derry made forward to meet the stranger, and he saw that the object banded in the bear skin was a rosy-cheeked youngster.

"Hello, you the boss?" questioned the stranger. "I come looking for wood cutter's job. I walk ze river by a long, long mile, ze smell of ze wood and ze spruce cones along, and ze tell me big camps in ze woods." "I am sorry, but our camp is supplied by men," Derry broke in upon the stranger's explanation. "We have the men we can comfortably bunk, if they are sufficient in cutting for then at a glimpse of the disappointment in the man's face the boy stopped.

"You have no other work?" he questioned.

"All ze we enter since I come to Canada I am looking for ze work," responded the man, a tired note in his voice. "I want to find the big woods where ze work is plenty. Since ze war and ze mamma of little Jack go away, we look for ze happiness."

Two bright eyes, glowing like coals in the depths of the bearskin, fastened on Derry, and hypnotized him. He leaned forward the pack on the stranger's back and playfully thrust his hand inside the bearskin. Instantly gurgling laughter rewarded him, and Derry found himself laughing contagiously.

"Little Jack good company—he be mascot for ze camp," praised the man. Derry hesitated. A great load of logs is now making ready to leave in the morning for the village and the railroad. It was the chance to send the man and the youngster back to the town, and their fruitless quest for work up the trail. The lumber camp was crowded with men. There was not a vacant bunk. He stepped up into the man's face, haggard and worried. Underneath the thick, shaven cap, white locks of hair straggled over his unshaven cheeks, giving him an unkempt appearance as though he had struggled with life in seeking work in the woods.

"I sure would like to give the beggar a bunk," mused Derry, and he caught the magnetism in the laughing eyes of the youngster.

But there was no bunk for the man and the boy—unless Derry made himself a bed of fir boughs on the floor. Without doubt the man had suffered much in the war, and he was making a desperate attempt to re-establish himself in the civil world again. Derry had not been out of school in the days of the war, but he had not forgotten the artifices of his heroes. Perhaps this was his chance to make a fortune in helping one soldier re-establish himself.

"It was ze woods—ze great spruce woods—that bring me and little Jack to Canada," explained the strange man. "Listen, I will make a place for you, and Derry, determinately. My grandfather, who is the real boss of the camp, is up the river and won't be back late tonight, but it will be all right. There is a bunk that you can have. You will not be sorry, boss. I can give ze axe like I was born to it. You call me 'Big Jack' and me and little Jack will make ze camp happy," exclaimed the man, huskily. "That night when Big Jack made Little Jack ready for his bunk and the youngster knelt down to say his prayer, a hush fell over the camp. A mighty fine mascot to have in me, I'm thinking," murmured Derry. When the youngster was asleep, Big Jack came out among the men, lounging about the big drawing-room table, and told his story, and the room was hushed with interest.

"Ze pick me up in ze little village for ze big fight. A good woman and little Joan take care of me in ze stage and make me well, queeck, but

I forget—forget all ze time—no remember ze days before ze fight. I learn to talk like Mademoiselle Joan. By and by I go up to the forest and work by ze Canadian soldier and learn ze English speaking. Ze little boy only one year old when his mamma Jean go away and leave us alone. The Canadian soldiers in ze beeg forest tell about ze beeg forest in Canada, so we come to find them."

"Queer, too, how the Canadian forest would lure a chap from France, muttered Derry, as he went out into the darkness to cut for himself a bed of fir boughs.

Throughout the night Derry MacPhail was conscious of his bed, but the sacrifice lighted a sweet solace in his heart. Once the youngster sleeping in his bunk cried out happily in his sleep, and Derry's eyes twinkled. He was glad that he had given Big Jack a chance, and had brought the little mascot into the camp.

Grandfather MacPhail laughed at Derry's impulsiveness, but he found no fault with him for giving the stranger work in spite of the crowded camp. It had ever been the way of the MacPhails to be impulsive and generous. The very next morning Grandfather MacPhail was down on his knees playing with the mascot. Even the camp "cook," became pals with little Jack, and the youngster romped happily in the camp kitchen while his father went out to cut timber.

It was the third day that Big Jack was in camp that Grandfather MacPhail came upon him in the bush, and stood watching as if hypnotized. Twice he brushed his hand across his eyes, and Derry caught a glimpse of tears.

"Big Jack handles the axe with the MacPhail swing. The trick has been handed down from generation to generation of the MacPhail wood choppers," muttered Grandfather. "I was sort of born with it, and your father hid it. Rodney had the trick, and you are getting it. Derry boy, I haven't seen a woodman handle the axe with that swing since Rodney went overseas in the forestry battalion. I wonder how it happens that this chap from France has the MacPhail trick?"

It was the day preceding New Year's and Derry was thinking of Granny MacPhail and how she loved to have folks—especially folks of her own class—cross the threshold early. New Year's morning, bearing a gift. It would not be possible for Grandfather and Derry to go down the river in the clearing so soon again after the Christmas holidays, and Granny and Shirley must spend the day alone.

Suddenly there was a shout from the men chopping, and instantly the ring of axes ceased in the wood. The sound of a terrific crash, and as the great tree fell a man's cry of pain. Derry ran forward and saw Big Jack, the father of the little mascot, crumpled up under the fallen tree.

A moment of quick action and the tree was lifted and the injured man lifted to a more comfortable position. Derry and Grandfather bent over the stranger. He was not unconscious and evidently only his right leg was crushed. But in his face was a curious startled expression, as though he were suffering from a shock that strangely alarmed him. He stared with incredulity at Grandfather.

"Quick, help me to remember—it is all so real—the woods and the choppers—and you—just when the tree felled me to the ground," stammered the man, and curiously enough the French accent was gone. "Things seem to be coming back—things before the war—before the forest in France and the days when I knew my Joan and little Jack—there were woods like this, and Grandfather—there was Granny cooking in the house in the clearing and making pies—mince pies for the camp—and I was proud to be swinging the axe—Grandfather said I had the MacPhail swing."

The man was muttering deliriously—at least it seemed so to Derry. Grandfather's cheeks had gone suddenly white. He leaned forward and laid his hand on the white locks of the man with the young face, and his pulses quickened for in those black eyes he saw the flash of the MacPhail spirit.

Derry was thinking hard of the thing that had puzzled Grandfather—the swing of the axe in the hand of the stranger.

"Rodney, Rodney—our Rodney, who was missing, and whom we mourned as lost all these years," muttered Grandfather, huskily.

"Rodney—why, of course—wasn't I stupid to forget—funny how it is all coming back," then a spasm of pain crossed the man's face and he floundered for words.

"Quick, get him into the house for he is in pain," commanded Grandfather, and Derry beckoned to the wood-choppers to help him carry the brother to the camp.

In the dusk of the evening Grandfather sat beside the injured man's bunk with the little mascot playing about.

"Daddy says I am to call you Grand-pis," laughed the little mascot.

"And you will have to learn to say 'Granny' too," urged Derry. "Say, but the little shaver ought to be back on the clearing with Granny and Shirley this minute. The camp isn't a fit place for him."

"He does be needing mothering, that is sure. I can't help thinking what Granny could do for him," offered Rodney from the bunk.

"I don't see how we can get the lad out to the clearing yet, and his dad won't be able to hobble for another two weeks," protested Grandfather.

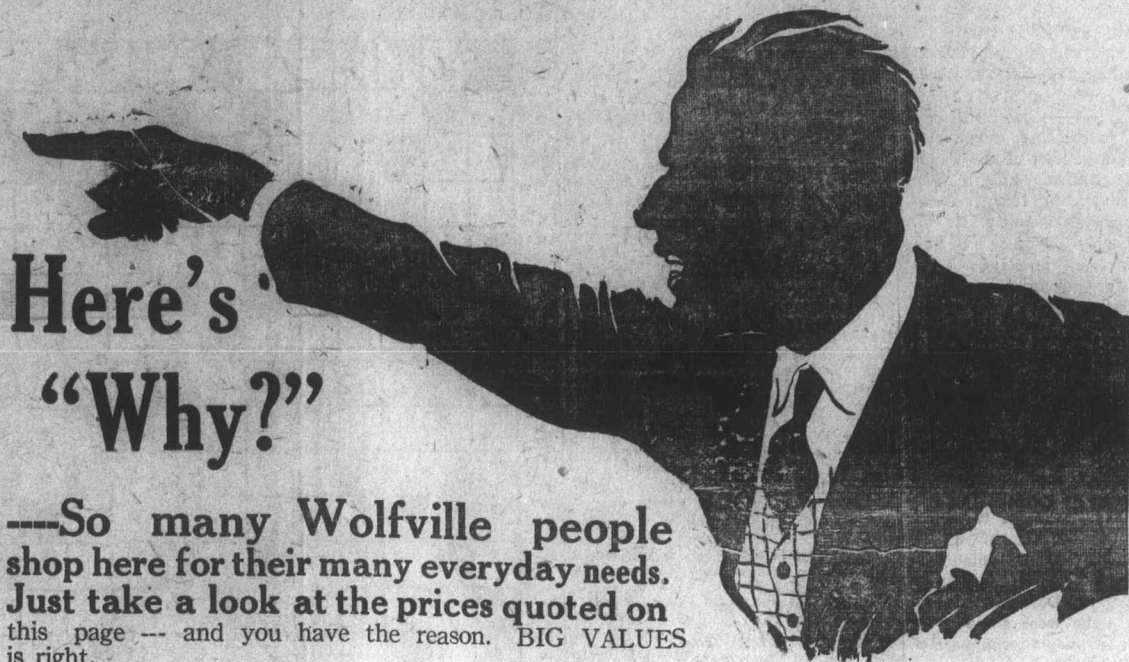
"Listen, Grandfather, the river is solid," broke in Derry excitedly. "If I leave before midnight I can make the clearing by daybreak—New Year's morning, don't you see? Tuck the little fellow in his bear skin and strap him to my back, and he will travel as snug as in a Pullman. It will be a prime skate down the river."

"A good idea, Derry, and likely the little mascot will sleep all the way," agreed Grandfather. "But it will be a strenuous skate, boy."

By the light of the moon Derry MacPhail set out down the river, the little mascot snug in the bear skin pocket, and strapped to the boy-skipper's back. Twice through the night Derry halted, and turning in-shore built drift-wood fires to warm himself by. The soft sleeping sound of the youngster made Derry laugh softly.

Never before had Derry MacPhail skated the length of the river, and his

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"Where it pays to deal"

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