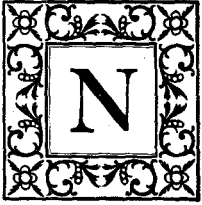


Spring Festival

BY MARGUERITE WILKINSON

Author of "The Dingbat of Arcady," "The Great Dream," etc.



NEW YEAR'S DAY ought to be a movable feast. Conservative people are content with it where it is, but if a change were made they would soon think the new way right, for they always like things just as they are. Jim and I have long wanted to move New Year's Day out of the winter where, obviously, it does not belong, that we might put it into spring where it surely ought to be. We would have the new year begin when Swinburne's hounds are on the winter's traces, when the blue lilacs are like smoke upon the sierras of California, when trillium sanctifies the woodlands of Illinois, when arbutus or fruit blossoms glorify our Eastern homeland. Consider the effect of such a beginning on New Year's resolutions. They might be less respectable than they are now, but they would be more effective. They might even be kept!

Because it is our bad habit to begin the new year when it is not new our resolutions are negative and dull. In the dead winter we reluctantly promise ourselves that we will try to do without certain of our cherished and lamented sins. We say little about what we will do with our possible and problematical virtues. But how could a person look at a violet and be content to stop resolving with the phrase "I won't"? Every candid petal would challenge his "I will." When we say "I will" we are positive and imaginative. When we are positive and imaginative miracles can be wrought (without the aid of M. Boué), for the imagination is always translating prosy inhibitions into valorous poems. And when miracles can be wrought—

This is only one reason why Jim and I keep our own New Year's Day in the season of initiation, when life is ardent and affirmative. Our spring festival in

the open has divers and diverse meanings for us, but we begin it with a resolution. We resolve to drink deep of the wine spring decants into flowers. We resolve to share the fine intoxication of Emerson's BACCHUS that suffers no savor of the earth to escape. The new world of spring drips with the sweetness of many saps. Such liquors we have tasted many times.

I remember a time when we drove north from New York into Connecticut in Bobbie Fliv. Bobbie looks as if he were blind in one eye where the lamp lining has rusted, but he sees well enough to keep to the road even at night. When we climbed into him in the morning the town was a fever in our minds. We drove silently away from it into shiny, bewildering weather.

On our way we collected materials for our first evening feast. We bought a pound of steak, onions, bread, butter, and fruit. We stopped for a few minutes of gossip with an old friend in Norwalk and she gave us a quart of cider in a mason jar. We drove on and on quietly through the cool, vivid day until, at about sundown, we bumped over a dirt road near New Boston and saw a farm that was unoccupied save in summer. Everything about it seemed lonesome. We had permission to camp there.

An old barn near a broad brook stood open to the elements and to us. We entered with the wind. On the floor was dark, musty hay that may have been old when we were young. The night bade fair to be sharp and blustery. We spread our blankets on the stale hay, thereby securing the shelter of roof and walls. As the sky darkened and the stars pricked through it, the wind quickened; and, by the time we were ready to get supper, we were cold enough to want a fire. We had our primus lamp for cooking, but how good it would be to toast our tired selves over a real blaze before turning in! Of course we could not build a fire in the

barn and it would have been difficult to cook over a wind-scattered flame in the open fields, so Jim went out to seek a natural fireplace.

The one he found, however, was made by hands. It was at the top of the nearest hill in a sugar-house that stood wide open like the barn. The hearth was safely built beneath a brick chimney. Slowly we carried our provisions and cooking utensils across a hummocky field covered with stubble and soggy with the spring. Stiffly we climbed the hill. There, out of ancient chips and bits of mouldy shingle, ready as if to meet our need, we built a marvellous fire. It burned the fever of the city out of our minds. There Jim sat at one end of a plank, in a brown flannel shirt, making toast and thinking of nothing more important. I sat at the other end in a gray flannel shirt, and all there is of my intellect was in the frying-pan with the steak and onions.

How good they tasted! We ate in the deep relaxation of silence, realizing that food is a friendly thing, as important to the mind and heart as to the body. The brown flannel shirt took a place beside the gray flannel shirt. We opened the mason jar, for we had no drinking water, and sipped our cider.

It was old to the point of veneration, that cider, but it was exhilarating, not bitter. We drank it bravely and innocently at the end of our meal, accompanied by Gargantuan slices of toast. Our tongues grew warm with the friction of good conversation. We talked of things that we had wanted to discuss all winter. We laughed and chatted merrily while the good fire flared before us, a focus for our mirth in the darkness of the night. Then, suddenly, we realized that we were not alone. Serious masculine faces looked in on us from the door and window of the sugar-house. They stared as only countrymen and cows can stare.

"Good evening," said Jim without a moment's hesitation and without any of the appearance of guilt that rightly belongs to trespassers. "Good evening! Glad to see you!"

One of them, a man with a thatch of reddish hair, found his voice and spoke diffidently, somewhat abashed, I suppose, by Jim's air of confidence.

"Good evenin'," he said. "We come to see if everything was all right. We seen the fire up here——"

Jim explained that the owner had given us permission to camp on the property.

"Campin'—this time o' year?" queried Red Head.

Jim explained cheerfully that we liked to camp in the spring. Red Head looked at his companions doubtfully.

"You'll get *pneumonia*," he said to us.

Jim explained with a jovial air of conviction that we had done this many times before without getting pneumonia. The serious men looked at each other. Perhaps they wanted to tap their foreheads lightly with their fingers, but they refrained.

"You're city folks," said Red Head. "You don't know what it's like up here this time o' year. You'll get *pneumonia*, sure."

He hesitated, and then, with the clumsy, lovable kindness of the country, he added:

"Come right along home with me. I got an extry bed at the house and you'll be more'n welcome. The lady'll catch cold here, or *pneumonia*, sure."

We thanked him warmly, wondering whether we would have been as hospitable under the same circumstances to two queer strangers from the city in brown and gray flannel shirts. We explained that it was our custom to take a spring vacation out of doors. They did not understand. Red Head looked at his silent comrades again inquiringly, but found no answer in their eyes. He gave up.

"Well, I live right over there, second house across the brook," he said. "I reckon you'll get tired of this by midnight. If you do, come right over any time, even if it's two in the morning, and I'll let you in. I wouldn't like for you to get the *pneumonia* on your vacation with a house so handy and all."

We thanked him once more, warmed by his kindly solicitude as much as by our fire. Then he and his comrades disappeared, going down the hill together as quietly as they had come up.

If there be anything dire and dreadful in the power of suggestion, we should have begun to sicken with pneumonia right

away. But we did nothing of the sort. Perhaps the curse was lifted by the goodwill that went into what Red Head said. However that may be, when we were left alone to finish our cider and toast, we were happier than ever. While our fire grew old we grew young. The years of our middle-age flew up the chimney after the fever of the city. We said young, extravagant things and hailed the world with superlatives. Never had there been such a fire, such a supper. Washing the dishes was a merry rite. Then came the joy of running down-hill!

Not in years had we found it amusing to run down-hill. But now! Our feet were as light as the feet of the Sidhe. It was as if we leaped over puffy clouds, scarcely touching the rough hummocks of that hill. Our stubby calfskin boots, made water-tight with viscol oil, were as fleet and gay as the slippers of Cinderella, or as those other frisky slippers of which we sing

"Oh, dem golden slippers,
Oh, dem golden slippers,
Golden slippers I'se gwine to wear
To walk de golden streets."

In spite of our exquisite hilarity we reached the barn safely and found our blankets on the musty hay. We were not troubled by its mustiness, for clean winds came in at the door. The broad brook, running away from us into lower and warmer country, played a lazy piano accompaniment to the violin tones of the breeze. Without more ado, suddenly, we were in the land of Nod.

I woke early when the stars were just beginning to be uncertain of their places in the sky. The cold wind had gone to visit elsewhere—probably to see a poor elation—and the air was much warmer. The sugar-house on the hill was hidden from sight by a gigantic ball of downy cloud that was rolling slowly, slowly, through the valley. Earth was quiet with the numb quietness known only in the early morning. Our revel of the night before seemed as remote as if it had been years ago. So had sleep changed my mood. I put on a sweater and entered deliberately into the great ball of mist.

On the other side of it, I knew, were the

solid rock and earth of the hill that held the sugar-house. But through the damp white veil I could see only a few feet ahead. Beyond the hill, I knew, were other hills that I could see by climbing it. Beyond those hills were rivers and plains and cities, even to the edge of the world and around again, but I could see them only by my imagination. And beyond the world's edge were ethereal rivers and the multitudinous planes of the firmament and millions of whirling suns and riotous comets that I could not adequately imagine. And beyond them, through them, in them all, was one life and that life even in me. . . . I stood there a long time, dumb and wondering, until the stars had faded out, until the red dawn came.

Dawn reminded me of the wifely duty of waking Jim. I accomplished this pleasantly persuasive feat by a brief discourse on coffee and fried eggs. After breakfast we packed quickly and climbed into Bobbie. We lurched out of the barn and into a clear morning.

At first roads unwound themselves before us like great reels of brown ribbon let down from the hills, roads clear of snow, now, but darkened by the moisture dripping from rocks, crossed by small runnels from brooks too full for their channels. On the hills the trees were still bare, but they burned with life to the very finger-tips. In the valleys the catkins delighted us, large yellow ones heavy with pollen, dangling green ones, downy gray ones. In marshy places stiff brown reeds, the children of the dead year, shuddered against clumps of living brushwood, and the skunk-cabbage was there, cheery green. When we stopped to water Bobbie I saw a patch of bloodroot snowy-white against the dark loam by the side of the road. I picked a single flower. Then I remembered that purity of heart and life is a red-blooded thing, that anæmia is not the fire that burns whitest. We went on. Then came a stretch of driving through mire so deep that branches of trees had to be laid across it so that cars would not sink into it and be lost. We went slowly.

We wanted to travel far that day, so we did not cook our own luncheon as

usual. We stopped for coffee and pie at a cheap restaurant in a small town. We chose it because we were not looking our very best and did not care to be conspicuous in a larger place. Our faces were burned red with wind and sun and our hair was distraught. Like the late King Perneb of Egypt, who slumbers in the Metropolitan Museum, we were wrapped in so many layers of old clothing that no pin could have scratched, even in the hand of a dear enemy. Our humility was rewarded. Such pie!

Such crust!—flaky, brown, sweet. Such fillings of cream, apple, mince, and with the heartiest good humor we sampled several kinds. Ten cents a cut! And each cup of coffee was browner, clearer, more fragrant than its predecessor. Man has never really savored any experience until he has known it at its best. This stands out in our minds as our great experience with pie—the superlative work of the fairy pie-cook. “Mince pie,” murmured Jim as we climbed into Bobbie. “Cream pie,” said I gently, meditatively, “cream pie.”

The afternoon was like the morning. We drove gaily over brown roads wrapped in heavy clothing and a treasured Navajo blanket. At sundown we were in low, level country. We came upon a small cottage, isolated and humble, and decided to ask the owner if we might spend the night on his land. We went in together and found a decrepit old German couple, a gnarled and weather-beaten Baucis and Philemon, rheumatic and well-nigh toothless. They looked out at us through a dingy window. Then the old woman came to the door, listened to our request, stared at us solemnly, and shrieked at the old man.

“They wanta campen, poppa; they wanta campen.”

The old man came to the door, grunted, looked us over carelessly and then led us across his field to a bit of wood-lot where he said we might camp if we were not afraid of freezing. It was obvious that he was very poor and had few comforts, but he offered to do anything he could for us. Then he hobbled painfully back to his old mate. He was a figure for a Millet to paint. There was a dumb docility in his kindness that only a hard life can teach.

There must have been a pool in the wood-lot, for, when we turned in after a supper of hot canned beans, we could hear frogs singing their inimitable spring song.

“Listen,” said Jim, “they say life is deep, deep, deep, deep.”

I listened. I remembered what we tell babies about it:

“What does the little frog say?”

(In a high squeaky voice) “Pepmint!”

“What does the big frog say?”

(In a low, throaty voice) “Choclit ice-cream!”

But the frogs said other things to me. I tried to comprehend and define a music steadier and cooler than bird song. It seemed to me to be an intense serenity. Over and over again it trilled:

“We know the law . . . the law is good . . . we keep the law, O Pan!”

And from time to time one of the chorus would croak a truculent “Amen.” The frogs were singing of the tree of life and their song meant love and worship and obedience. As I listened, it was borne in upon me that the roots of the tree of life are all interwoven. Perhaps that is one convincing message of the spring.

If we go deep enough into the subsoil wherein ourselves are planted, we shall learn that this is true. If we seek in ourselves the root of truth, we shall find it enmeshed in the root of beauty. If we look for the root of the love of mankind we shall find it bound about by the root of the love of God. All of the living roots are filled with the sap of love; else they could not work well enough to sustain us they could not strike deep enough to lift us. Without love there is no growth. If we do not understand this, it may be because we have profaned the word in our minds as Shelley would not profane it in his song. It may be because we have profaned it in fact.

Love is even more than the sap of life that feeds us; it is the light in which the sap is made. To scatter it like sunshine is to be eased of its burden. To give it gladly, freely, constantly, to world visible and invisible, is to be saved from the bitter desire of it and from the morbid desire of counterfeits. Such eternally scattered love has its own higher ranges and deepest sanctities that nobody knows; it claims for one life one only

mate, one only God; but it never centres itself exclusively on one object, nor does it hold any one joy so hard against the heart that it must wither in life's heat. It is both thrifty and extravagant; both generous and pure. . . . While the frogs sang the shadows of sleep darkened my mind.

We were awakened early in the morning by a pattering, scratching, slithering noise on the front flap of our tent. A ruffed grouse slid to the ground just a yard away from us. He stood there a moment, shaking ruffled plumage and looking as if he liked us immensely.

We travelled far up-hill that day on the west shore of the Hudson. Slowly we creaked and rattled into the mountains near Phœnicia, making our way over hard ruts that had once been deep mud and would be again when they thawed. An occasional flurry of light snow blew past our ears and tingled against our cheeks. It was cold in the mountains. Finally, near the edge of a roaring brook at the end of the day, we found a lean-to, evidently placed there for summer campers, and decided to remain for the night. Not until we had pitched camp did I remember that I had bought nothing for dinner. Under such circumstances it is well that negligent wives of hungry chauffeurs explore the larder alone. I tactfully suggested that Jim fish until dinner-time. He is always willing to fish. With chattering teeth he got out his tackle and went to try the brook.

Then I investigated our provision box. In it I found three dilapidated strips of bacon, the stubby end of a stale loaf, one large onion, and several small cans of vaporated milk. Out of them I had to make a dinner. I had to think of breakfast, too. No. On second thoughts, I decided to eliminate breakfast. It would not be needed for twelve hours. Sufficient unto the day are the meals there-
!!

I sat with three strips of bacon in one and an onion in the other, wondering what to do. Nothing could be done without fire, so I built a good one against a big backlog. Then my years of experience as chef in a humble household stood me in good stead and, in the firelight, in-

spiration flashed in upon me. Bacon, onion, bread, and milk! Out of them I could concoct a dinner fit for—Jim—if I could only find a little flour to thicken a milk sauce. I found no ordinary flour, but in the bottom of a carton was a spoonful of self-raising pancake flour mingled with sand. It would do.

I cut my bacon into small bits and browned them in a pan. Then I took them out and browned my onion slices in the fat. Then I took them out and thickened the fat with the flour, adding two small cans of evaporated milk and a cup of brook water. When my sauce was ready I put bacon and onion back into it and called Jim. Out of the loaf-end we made four slices of good toast on which we served the feast. Jim did not guess that my impromptu dish was not the carefully planned culinary event of the day. While we ate slowly, thankfully, with the scented smoke of our fire smarting in our eyes, we watched the light snow flurries come and go. First, for a few minutes, winter would blow delicate flakes through the ravine. Then, for a few minutes at a time, the wind would stop and fading spring sunshine would glisten on the dark water of the brook. Jim forgot that he had caught no fish. He took out his familiar corn-cob pipe and walked up and down under the trees. I sat still by the fire, dreamy and content.

It is my moods of acquiescence that are rewarded. Perhaps that is because I am of a militant nature. Perhaps for others the secret crown that rewards every victory is given on the battle-field. But for me good things come out of quietness. After that impromptu dinner, while I was resting on a log, as quiet as the log, a little wild brown bird flew out of the dusk and, like a winged blessing, rested on my head!

It was only for an instant that he stayed, for in quick feminine fear I put up my hand. He must have been disappointed in me, thinking that if he had shown such trust I should have been more trustful. Or perhaps he had made a mistake, taking me for the stump of an old apple-tree. However it was, he did not fly far. He fluttered into a bush near by where I could see him clearly, noting the bill of a seed-eater and knowing him for

one of the dear wild sparrows. When Heaven sends birds why need we fear bats? When Jim returned I was still pondering on the strange necessity of animal life called "fear." It is fear that makes us cruel. Will the time ever come when we can greet all living things with the mystical salutation of Kipling's jungle people, "We be of one blood, ye and I"?

The next morning was clear and much warmer, without even the memory of snow. Under a mild spring sun the dead leaves of the old year glistened like curled brown shells, holding drops of water left in them by the snow. Sufficient unto the day are the meals thereof. My policy of the night before was justified by the morning weather. It was so pleasant that we enjoyed breakfasting modestly on coffee and dry prunes. We bathed in the roaring brook. We romped through the clearing like giddy children. We danced the cramps out of our bones. Then Jim took rod and reel to try for trout again—a hopeless quest—and I went seeking flowers.

Perhaps the delicately audacious blossoms that begin nature's new year put on the fairies' cloaks of invisibility for protection when the spring nights are cold. I had seen no flowers in camp in the evening. But in the morning what a lot of them there were within about ten yards of the lean-to!

I looked for arbutus and found violets—tiny yellow ones with a russet tinge, as if they were tanned already by the year's new sun, timid little blue ones, the prophetic forerunners of greater blue ones yet to come, and pearly-white ones, loveliest of all, with kind, tufty, golden hearts. Then I looked for more violets and found arbutus—full pink where winds had blown the leaves away, whitish where they still covered the woody sprigs of bloom. I found dogtooth violets, the most demure of golden blossoms. I found bloodroot in thick clumps. I found hepaticas with dangling, silky leaves, soft as the dangling ears of a spaniel puppy, on a slope, under a stark old oak. I found red trillium near the roaring brook. I found ferns and spring beauties wherever I looked. And one lovable dandelion! What was it doing there on

the mountainside? It was the only flower I picked.

I have made a great garland in my mind of the flowers I have seen and passed. In it are warm bundles of sage from the mesas of California, the white sage, putting out her fragrant gray-green leaves after the rains that bring the spring, opening her small indefinite blossoms beloved by the bees. In it are handfuls of the popcorn flower that make white patches in the California canyons and flaming sprays of the monkey-flower that grows upon the canyon's sides. For this garland I have stolen great streamers of almond bloom from the orchards of the Golden State, almond bloom whose color is more lovely than the rose of peach blossoms. Into my garland I have wove bits of holly and hawthorn taken from the hedges of England and much dark ivy. Through it all I have threaded streamers of ground-pine from Delaware Water Gap, and fastened to them are small bits of wintergreen wearing last year's berries. Where blossoms are thickest and brightest I have put the glorious wild azalea from the warm, sandy fields of New Jersey. And every wreathed thorn in my garland is covered with downy leaves of the mullein, or blanket-plant, my friend in all the pasture-lands of spring.

But I never weave dogwood into my garland. The dogwood must be remembered all alone. It is a vanishing tree. Most trees stay with us all the year, but somehow, in the strangest possible way, the dogwood seems to disappear when its season of bloom is over. I do not know where it goes. I have sometimes thought that it follows the Pied Piper through rebukeful mountain or slips over the edge of the world after Lord Dunsany's marvellous thief, Slith. I would affirm this unconditionally were it not for the fact that those who follow the Piper never turn and Slith is still falling through the "unreverberate blackness of the abyss." Not so the dogwood-tree. It comes back. So it must be simply that it grows upwardly, toward heaven, through eleven months of the year, so that in one month there may be an epiphany of perfect loveliness.

I am never conscious of the dogwood

tree until it appears with firm trunk and low outline and lifted crown of dazzling white against the taller trees that spend the whole year in our hearts and minds. The dogwood is a vanishing tree and a tree of vision. The lifted disks of firm ivory were carven for a purpose. Under them we should not stand or sit until we have discovered why and what they are.

Discoverers have learned what they can scarcely tell. But I heard an explanation once that pleased me as well as any. Once upon a time, the story goes, the little cherubs were having a tea-party in heaven, and came near to forgetting themselves and behaving as little cherubs behave on earth. Lest they should really forget, the wise elder angels took away the saucers from their celestial teacups so that they could not play tea-party again for a month. The cups were left to remind them of their lost privilege. So, for a while every year, the dogwood bears upon its branches the saucers that the cherubs need for their tea-parties. No tree on earth has ever held the cups.

Every spring festival comes to an end. One night in spring when we were driving home from one of ours we saw the great aurora. We had been rolling through a dark valley where cherry-trees were in bloom, singing Housman's lines:

"Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide."

The tune was our own, but the meaning was universal. At a turn of the road we looked up and saw that something was happening in the heavens. Reverently we stopped Bobbie Fliv.

At first we saw shafts of white light like great candles reaching to the zenith. For while they stood quite still, as if they were waiting. Then they disappeared, and were blotted out by waves of shimmer-

ing, veering colors that melted into one another. The waves of light became more luminous. They were wings, radiant wings incalculably shifting above us, rosy and golden wings, amber and green plumes of glory, terrible pinions of violet and orange. The angels were at play. They swept the sky with celestial dignity as if it were the door-step of God. They danced with celestial caprice as if they were touching the topmost pinnacles of man's vision. Deep into the deepening sky I looked until I thought the varicolored wings were singing, though it was a soundless song—until I thought that countless eyes from heaven were peering into me, passing through my body to the very quick of my spirit, going too deep for wonder. I gave back look for look as long as I could, gazing, gazing into intolerable brightness, until I was suddenly lost in it. . . . I leaned close to Jim's thick sweater, shivering, and heard him say:

"Cheer up, Peggy; the aurora never hurt anybody yet."

So be it. The unco guid have a horrid way of reminding us of the danger of beauty. Saints and poets, inspired sinners, and Jim and I believe in the beauty of danger. Nothing in the world is more perilous than the life that seems to be absolutely safe.

So do we keep our spring festival, our New Year's Day, singing in our hearts as our folk used to sing long ago:

"Here we bring new water from the well so clear
For to worship God with this happy new year;
Sing levy dew, sing levy dew, the water and
the wine,
With seven bright gold wires and bugles that
do shine;
Sing reign of fair maid with gold upon her
toe—
Open you the west door and turn the old year
go.
Sing reign of fair maid with gold upon her
chin—
Open you the east door and turn the new year
in."





The men struggled barefacedly for the favor of her bewitching baby smiles.—Page 600.

The Maverick Princess

BY RANDOLPH ELLIOTT

ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLIAM A. ROGERS

BOYS," said my father, "how would you like a little sister?" "What's a little sister?" Pat, spokesman for the pair of us, made cautious rejoinder.

"A little sister is somebody like Bill here, only he's a boy, and she would be a little girl." My father's explanation, begun glibly, petered out beneath the quizzical gleam in my mother's eyes.

Pat still refused to commit himself. "What's a little girl?" he queried further.

"A little girl—" My father stopped abruptly. "Is the kid trying to be funny? Or doesn't he really know?"

"He's heard of girls, of course," said my mother laughing; "but I don't believe he's ever seen one. How should he! Sixty miles from the nearest town, and old Della and I the only things on the

ranch who wear skirts! Not that I wear them often," she added with a glance at her trim knickers and high boots.

"But, good Lord," exclaimed my father, appalled by a sudden realization of facts, "think of Bill here, eight years old and as ignorant of girls as the day was born! No wonder he's such a young roughneck. How do you suppose he'll have when he first sees one?"

"Probably like all the rest of his sex," he rejoined my mother. "He'll first scorn her, then pity, then embrace. But had you best finish your very lucid explanation?" She was clearly enjoying her husband's discomfiture.

So my father told us that a girl, somebody like mother, only little, that one of them, the daughter of an old friend, was coming from across the ocean to live on the ranch with us and be our sister.

Pat allowed himself a gleam of interest. "If she belongs across the ocean, t