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J. S. McCAIN.

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A KETTLE OF SOFT SOAP.

By Mary E. Deane.

I wish all young women who are dissatisfied with their peaceful home-life, could have known my heroine, Elsie Meyer was her name, and a hundred years ago she lived in the Mohawk valley.

Hither had her father and mother come from Germany a year or two before Elsie was born. A rude but had been the first home, but Martin Meyer worked hard, and when Elsie was still growing into womanhood, he built a new house for his family.

True, it was of logs, with the mossy bark still clinging to them; but it was stoutly built and had a good roof and a substantial chimney. The inside rooms were made warm with a thick plastering of clay. The four small windows were protected by heavy oaken shutters, and the two doors massive in structure, were well secured by bolts and bars.

Scarcely was the house finished ere the vague rumors which had been floating about for some time turned into stern realities. War was declared between Great Britain and America. Of the Meyers, the valley in which the Meyers lived would, like every other frontier, be subjected to frequent invasion of the enemy.

Poor Frau Meyer, however, escaped all coming dangers, for just about this time she died, giving birth to her fourth child. For a time the husband was prostrated by grief; then the fast approaching dangers and the duty of caring for his family compelled him to lay aside his sorrows and to take up again the responsibilities of life.

His daughter Elsie was his great help and comfort. Barely 17 years old was she, yet the household machinery went on as smoothly as during her mother's life. The spinning, the weaving, the baking and brewing, the watching over the 10-year-old twins and little baby Liza, were all done most faithfully.

Very little time had Elsie to spend at the quiltings, husking-bees and other festive gatherings of those primitive days. But, although so seldom mingling with the young people of the valley, her company was eagerly sought by many a gay gallant.

And no wonder for Elsie was indeed a pretty maiden. Tall and straight, with a lithe, graceful figure, clear red and white complexion, soft blue eyes, and with the thin braids of hair about her shapely head as bright as sunshine.

Pretty and gentle, tidy and industrious, she did not lack for suitors; but to Nicholas Stelly, an honest young farmer, was her heart given. Then the cruel war separated them, and it was many months, and Elsie's betrothed marched away to fight for liberty.

"Father," said Elsie, one morning, as they sat down to breakfast, "father, the meal is nearly out."

"Ach—so!" said Herr Meyer, as he took another spoonful of soup. "Well, to-day I'll take two bags of corn down to the mill and have them ground. Thinkest thou will be afraid to stay at home alone with the kinder?"

"Oh, no," was Elsie's reply. "There are no Indians about, are there?"

"Our scouts report none. However, the redskin is a wily reptile, and I don't know where he's lurking in the grass. I like not leaving you alone still, I might get the meal to-day as well as at any time. It is cloudy, and should it rain, I could do no harvesting. I will start right away."

And accordingly, fifteen minutes later, Herr Meyer jogged away on his old brown horse, with a big sack fastened panier-like on either side, and Elsie, after she had seen his figure vanish over the hill, went back to her housework.

"What a pity it rains!" she said to herself, half an hour later. "I did intend making my soap to-day. It is time that it was done. Frai! Webber and Frai! Heine, as well as many of the other women, have theirs made, and surely I do not want them to think me a lazy housewife! The lye is ready and the soap-grease, too, and if father were here and the weather fine, I would have the big kettle swinging on the yard. As it is, I believe I will try and make it in the fire-place. Hans, you watch little Liza; and you, Peterkin, take a pail and draw the lye out of the leaching-barrel." And with a busy, bustling housewife's air, Elsie set about her day's work.

Kinds of Park, bits of tallow-candles, and all the odds and ends of grease that had accumulated during the year, were tossed into the big black kettle, and as soon as they were "fried out," dipperfuls of lye were gradually poured in.

It was interesting work for the boys, and even little Liza was kept amused by the bubbling sizzling going on in the mysterious caldron.

Outside the rain poured down steadily all day. Late in the afternoon, however, a brisk western breeze swept away mist and vapor,

and redeemed the dull gray sky by a gorgeous golden sunset. When its bright rays illumined the panes of the window, Elsie turned from the fireplace, saying:

"There! It doesn't need anything more only to boil slowly. Peterkin, you see that it doesn't run over, though there's no danger unless the fire starts up. Hans, you stir the cradle while I run down to the spring and get a pail of water. And a minute later Elsie was tripping down the little footpath leading to the spring. As she held the pail under the flowing water, she was startled at hearing a slight noise near her. She glanced nervously around her.

Away in the distance were the hills, and through the white mists rising from them could be seen faint gleams of the scarlet and yellow autumnal foliage. At their feet was the Mohawk, its silvery curves undotted by canoe or bateau. Nearer still were the flats, as fresh and green as in springtime. Back of the house loomed up the vast forest of pines and hemlocks.

Again she heard the noise—a rustling—then a hoarse whisper: "Elsie! Elsie!"

Broken and unnatural as its accents were, Elsie knew the voice, and impulsively she sprang toward the clump of bushes whence it proceeded.

There, stretched on the damp ground, was the form of young man, whose face was pale and haggard, and whose clothes were torn and travel-stained.

"Oh, Nicholas!" cried Elsie, falling on her knees beside him and pressing her lips to his brow, "how came you here? Ah, you are wounded!" as she saw bloodstains on his garments.

"Don't be frightened, sweetheart, really, it's nothing serious. It is only a slight wound, though, to be sure, it has caused me much inconvenience."

"But how did it happen and why are you here? I thought you were twenty miles down the valley."

"I was, yesterday morning. But never mind now. I'll tell you about it as soon as I get to the house. Call your father."

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