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The Surprise from the Maple Trees

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When David Wylie went to live in the country, he did not know which way to turn. There was so much to see and so much to hear. He coasted on the snow, skated on the ice, watched the winter birds, and helped to feed the horses, cows, hens, and chickens. Just back of the house was a grove of great maple trees, where he liked to play when the snow was not too deep. In the midst of this grove was a small log house. David often asked his father what this house was for, and father always replied: "Wait until spring, and you shall see; these big maple trees have a surprise in store for you!"

One morning in early spring, when the sun shone very warm, and the snow was beginning to melt, father said: "David, after breakfast you will find me at the log house." Then he hurried away. David soon finished his breakfast and started off in great haste but stopped short at the first maple tree, for there hung a bright, shining, tin pail! He wondered how it came there and started to take it down when he saw that it was hanging on a spout, which was driven into the tree-trunk. From the spout was trickling something that looked like water as it "drip, dripped" into the pail below. As he looked around, he saw that every tree in the grove had one, two or even three pails hung on spouts! This must be the surprise, but what was it for?

Off he went to the log house, and there he found that his father had built a fire, and over the fire was swinging a great iron kettle. "Dad," he said, "why is the water running out of the trees? What is the kettle for? Why have you built the fire?" "Well," replied his dad, "I am very busy, but here comes mom, who can tell you all about it, while you watch the rest of us work."



Then mother told him how the maple trees had been sleeping and resting all winter, and how the warm sunshine and soft spring rains had wakened them, and set the sweet sap running from the roots way up to the highest branches. "But the trees do not need all of the sap," said mom, "so dad has driven these spouts in, that he may catch some of the sap as it hurries through the tree-trunk. And what you thought was water was this juice or sap of the tree trickling into the pails." Just then up came two or three men with buckets full of sap which

they had gathered from the tin pails; they poured it into the kettle, but father first gave mother and David some to drink. It tasted like water with a little sugar in it, and David didn't care for it at all.

They then watched the sap in the kettle as it boiled and bubbled away, and every little while dad skimmed it with a big spoon, until it was clear. David said, "It smells like maple syrup!" and father replied, "That's just what it is!" He next poured it into big pans and little pans and middle-sized pans, and it looked thick and brown and sweet, and David knew that when it was cool and hard, it would be maple sugar!

Then mother said: "There are ever so many kinds of maple trees, but only this kind gives us sugar. Now what do you suppose we call it?" David thought its name must be sugar-maple, and sure enough, it was! And now he wonders if there are any other children whom the sugar-maple is waiting to surprise.

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