

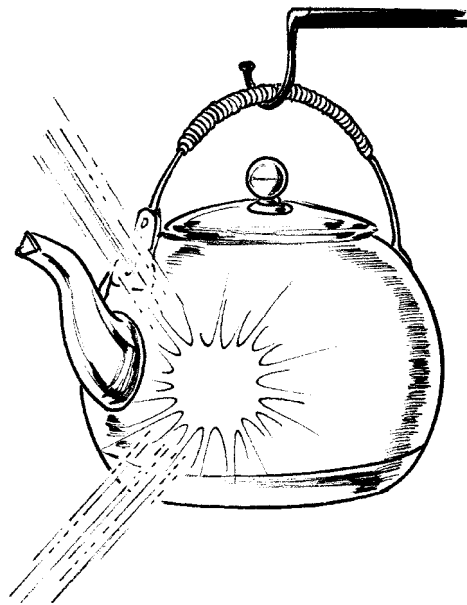
COPPER KETTLE SWEETHEART

by Madelyn Eastlund

Some folks on the ridge thought Papa called Ma his copper kettle sweetheart 'cause her hair had both color and sheen of the dented old kettle that Papa kept high-polished and hung from a fat hook in the kitchen and they laughed that Papa likened her so. When ladies met for quilting they would tease Ma and ask didn't Ma mind that Papa called her that name instead of pretty words? But Ma always answered she was suited.

My sister and seven brothers and me sat beside Pa in the evening, like steps on the porch—and we listened to him play a lively tune on mouth harp¹ or fiddle. But mostly we liked when he told us tales of when he was a boy. He'd point his pipe up at the copper kettle. Ma would say "Not again, Jeb," but she'd poke her needle pleased-like into her quilt block. I could see by fire's glow her face flushed a pretty pink.

¹ mouth harp: harmonica



He'd tell about the time he and his Pa
was sent into the cellar by his Ma
to bring up some potatoes for her stew.
"They were piled way back in a dark corner.
And darned if them spuds hadn't poked new roots
into the dirt floor. Sure a puzzlement!
Things don't grow in total dark. Then my Pa
noticed the kettle mama kept polished."
Our eyes went round oohs of surprise although
we knew the story well: how a slim beam
of afternoon sun came through the coal chute
"just about kissing the kettle," he'd say.
"That kettle just being there without plan—
that copper kettle so highly polished,
just couldn't help reflect the light that touched
right into that dark corner and the spuds
couldn't help be warmed and set down their roots."
He always ended, "We need a copper
kettle in our lives—don't never forget.
Your Ma, she's my shining copper kettle."

"Copper Kettle Sweetheart" by Madelyn Eastlund, first appeared in *The Lyric*. Vol. 80, No. 2.