

THE PIE IN THE OVEN

AS his spouse entered the kitchen, Mr John M'Nab, seated in his arm-chair, turned a lowering countenance from the bright fire—

“Where the mischief hae ye been?” he demanded crossly; “are we tae hae nae supper the nicht?”

“I was jist at the gate lookin' tae see if I couldna hear Flora comin' up the road wi' the constable.”

“Tits, Susie, can ye no ca' him polisman an' be done wi' it?”

“Flora likes us tae ca' him constable.”

He proceeded to relight his pipe. “Weel,” he said, “did ye hear the polisman comin' up the road?”

“Na, John.”

“But in that case he'll no' be within a mile o' the hoose, so we'd best tak' oor supper, you an' me. I haena had a proper meal the day. A body wud think ye was tryin' tae starve me.”

“Havers, man, we canna tak' oor supper afore Flora an' the constable comes.”

“What wey that?”

“Come, John, ye ken fine what's bringin' the constable, decent lad, here the nicht. Ye needna pretend. I wish ye wud gie him a chance this time. He's bashfu' and backward in comin' forward, it's jist

his modesty ; but ye'll gie him a wee bit encouragement tae say his say, eh, John?"

"D'ye think I'm gaun tae let the man imagine I'm wantin' tae get quit o' Flora, the only bairn we've got left? No' likely."

"Flora's willin' and so am I, and so are you, John, if ye wad but confess it yoursel'."

"If Peter Duff wants Flora, he can ask for her like a man. What hae ye got in the oven, wife?"

"Oh, jist a pie."

"A pie!"—sniff—sniff—"that's guid. Is't ready, Susie?"

"Ay, it's ready, but it'll keep till they come."

"But I want my supper noo," he declared ; "I'm terrible hungry."

"I'm sure they'll no' be lang," she replied. "Maybe the constable'll no' be sae bashfu' the nicht."

"Bah! the man hasna the pluck o' a hen."

"Well, promise ye'll gie him a chance. Three times has he come here tae ask ye for Flora."

"An' sat like a stuffed owl till it was time tae gang tae oor beds."

"I dinna wonder at him no' sayin' muckle, for ye put the fear o' death into the man. If ye wad gie him a bit hint that ye ken what brings him. It's got tae be settled the nicht."

"They're footerin' awa at the gate. I suppose he's feer't tae come in. I nicht as weel get oot the pie an' we'll be ready tae mak' a start."

"Ye'll leave the pie whaur it is, ma man. I'm no gaun tae be affronted in ma ain hoose."

"D'ye think I'm gaun tae be starved in ma ain hoose? What's wrang wi' haein' oor supper first an' then I'll hear what Duff has got to say?"

"Wheesht, man, wheesht! I hear them coming."

"Gang ben, Peter."

"But I doot it's ower late. I'll bid ye guid nicht, Flora."

Mrs M'Nab flew to the door. "Come awa ben, Maister Duff. We're rale glad to see ye. Kin' o' cauld the nicht, is it no'?"

"Ay, it's kin' o' cauld, as ye say. It is that. Ay, it's kin' o' cauld. Ay, I hope ye're weel, Maister M'Nab?"

"Sit doon, sit doon," he said shortly, and turned to his daughter. "Ye're late, lassie."

"It's time I was gettin' doon the road."

"Hoots, Maister Duff, ye maun bide an' tak' a bit o' supper wi' us."

"Aw thank ye, but I'd best be gettin' doon the road."

"If he wants tae gang," said Flora, "let him gang."

"Sit doon, man," thundered Mr M'Nab. "Ye'll be fair famishin', Maister Duff?"

"Me! Aw, as sure's death, Maister M'Nab, I couldna eat a bite."

"Come awa, Flora," said Mr M'Nab, "ye'll fin' the pie in the oven. See here, Susie, I'm famishin'."

"Patience, patience;" she said mildly, "John, you an' Maister Duff can hae a smoke an' a crack till I come back."

She went quickly from the room. A groan came from the constable.

"Eh, did you speak?"

"Na, oh, no-no."

"I thocht ye was maybe tryin' for tae say something. It's been a fine day. I'm saying it's been a fine day."

"Ay, so it has."

"If ye're cauld, draw in tae the fire," said the host.

"Aw thank ye," said Peter, wiping his brow.

"Dod, ye're sweetin, man."

"Ay, am sweetin'."

Now its comin', thought Mr M'Nab.

"I was gaun tae ask ye."

"I am listenin', Maister Duff."

"I was gaun tae ask ye."

"Weel, what is it?"

"It was aboot that coo o' yours that was badly. The coo's deid, man, an' the pigs——"

"Ach, man, haud yer tongue and gie yer brain a rest."

Mrs M'Nab came briskly into the kitchen and had a look into the oven. "If the pie's ruined I suppose it canna be helped."

"Aw," said the constable, "is that a pie?"

"Man, can ye no' smell it. Does it smell burnin' or singein', Susie?"

"The pie's burnin'. Aweel, I canna help that."

Flora came to the kitchen and had a look in the oven. "Na, its no' burnin' yet."

"Guidsake, are we tae wait till it's burnt?"

She fled from the kitchen.

Mr M'Nab shouted, "Tell yer mither if she disna gie me my supper I—I'll kill somebody." He went to the door and shouted, "Susie, Susie."

Flora flew to Peter and whispered, "For ony favour be a man."

The door was slammed and the two were left alone.

"Aff wi' yer buits, Maister Duff, or leave this hoose for ever; ask nae questions noo. Gosh, but I've an appetite. Piff, but it's het. Hurry up, Duff."

"Ye're no' for eatin' the pie, are ye?"

"Jist what I'm gaun tae dae. Ye'll eat yer share, my lad. Gang ower tae the dresser and get twa plates."

Peter took down a couple of plates, at the same time disturbed something on the dresser—a large rolling-pin.

"Oh, ye great goat!"

Mrs M'Nab appeared. "Oh, is that what yer after, ma man."

"I think I'd best be gettin' awa'."

“No’ likely.”

“Let him gang,” said M’Nab, “it’s a’ his faut.”

She raised the pie above her head. “If ye let him gang, I’ll drop it.”

She carried the pie to the oven. “John, will ye gie the man a chance noo?”

“Never; I’ll starve first.”

“Maister M’Nab,” said Peter.

“What the mischief dae ye want?”

“Oh, naething; I jist want—I jist want Flora.”

“Guidsake, man, what wey did ye no’ say that at first? Here, Flora, Susie. Something has happened.”

Ere they arrived he was conveying the pie to the table. “Flora, tak’ him, he’s yours; and the pie, praise heaven, is mine. Never heed, auld wife, ye got the best o’ me, but what’s the odds as lang’s we’re happy. Wha’ says pie?”

His wife held up her hand. “Wheesht, John; ask a blessin’.”

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By arrangement with the Author.