

Molly's Little Pie

JOHN DAVIS SINGLE

AS rheumatism twinged at his back as he stooped to take an armful of wood from the pile. The winter wind blew beneath the thin fringe of white hair beneath his old fur cap, and brought tears to his still fiery black eyes. He groaned as he went with his burden toward the neat little farmhouse. He was laboriously lifting the woodbox after doing the morning chores and he was very tired.

Ma opened the door and closed it after him, but she did not speak. He avoided her gentle blue eyes. It had been almost six years since he could talk to her without disagreeing. Ma went back to her plunking on the table near the window and looked past the serene countenance, half buried in shadow, to a little brown house from whose chimney the smoke seemed to rise almost grayly into the dead gray day. There was a red barn near the little house, and to and fro in the yard ran a small figure in a red coat and cap. Ma's heart yearned toward her daughter Molly's four-year-old Jimmy. Then she sighed and looked around at her husband's obdurate face.

John Davis was what is called a good man, but he was hard; he boasted that his great-grandfather was an Indian, and that he himself never forgave an injury. He had wanted Molly to marry Peter Andrews, and had therefore considered himself hopelessly injured when she insisted on loving and marrying Richard Burns, though he had no real objection to Richard himself. Molly was as stubborn as he and there had been no visiting between the two households by his own command. He had never left his own house and Ma obeyed, though under protest, for their two sons were out West and Molly was all she had. She had long since ceased to argue with Ma about it, and though she did not go to Molly's house, she made the most of any chance meetings with her or the small Jimmy. She had not been in her daughter's house since the time Jimmy was born. Pa had not tried to stop her then.

And now it was the day before the new year began. Ma went on with her pie, big and rich, and thick with her best mince-meat, and she did now as she had

always done since Molly had been a tiny girl—made one pie in a little yellow saucer—Molly's little pie. Each year she continued to do this, her husband's contempt notwithstanding. This time she did it ostentatiously, holding it high on her hand as she trimmed the crust off around the edge. She intended to attract his attention.

He had removed his mittens and had taken down his old gun from the rack; he was clearing the gun with his feet on the hearth, and his teeth set. He was in torture from rheumatism, and so weak he could scarcely get through with what work must be done out of doors, but he carefully hid his condition from his wife, for Ma would put him to bed and he would tell him he had to forgive Molly and have Richard over to relieve him of the heavy work. Richard wanted to do this, but he was too old to be alone, and too old to be unforgiving. He was only 60, and he never had forgiven any one, and he did not intend to begin now. And he had said he would never see Molly's baby lamb, he never would either.

Then he looked up and saw Molly's little pie balanced on her mother's hand. It was the last straw.

"Ma," he said, "you're a worse idiot ever yet. Quit making that little pie!" Molly'll never come over here to eat it, and you can make up your mind to that—you've had time enough! And I forbid you to be ever again meetin' her here over there after this. She'll lock you up, old as you be, if you can't have any sense! I don't want to have to say this ag'in next year! You throw that pie into the slop-bucket this minute or I'll cross the streamin' deck and get rose, but his rheumatism made him pause. And then Ma did what she had not done once before in the forty years of their marriage. She faced him with blazing eyes and said: "You've got to eat the pie, and he stood speechless beneath the torrent of her words. He had not seen Ma raised before!

"John Davis," she finished, after she had spat out the words, "Lord, can't you know your wicked pride if I can't? You know Molly had a right to marry Richard and you know you're as wild to see your only grandson as I am, too! I'm going over there after this. She'll then please me going to take that pie when it's baked. I've sent it on the sly too long—I'm tired or sneakin'! I've knuckled



JOHN DAVIS, SHE FINISHED AFTER SHE HAD SPAT OUT THE WORDS, "LORD, CAN'T YOU KNOW YOUR WICKED PRIDE IF I CAN'T?"

under to your whim as long as ever I intend to. You're too old to be so hard. You better stop tempting Providence with the hardness of your heart, and go and fetch home Molly an' Richard an' Jimmy—I'm cookin' the best in the land. Like I always say, do what I say an' see how good it feels to be decent once. This will be New Year's eve, an' a good

time to begin. This is the last word I'm goin' to say about it." She closed her mouth and slammed the oven door on the pie.

Pa stood in the middle of the room holding his gun, too dumfounded to speak or move. At last he started for the door and she called him in her usual voice:

"It's most 11 an' dinner'll be ready at 12. What you want with the gun, pa?" He answered dully:

"Saw some fat rabbits over in the corn-stalks—thought I'd like to taste one—when the waters drenched about when she goes down, and it'll be best clear of that. Will you trust to us?"

"I trust you in everything," she said.

Deeper and deeper the steamer sank in her rallow. The lower decks were swamped by this, and the miserable cattle were either drowned or tumbled overboard and washed out of her. There was no need for the three to jump—they just let go their hold, and the next instant they were swimming strongly in the sea. The water was clear of the steamer's spar deck and sprang them 100 yards from her side.

They found themselves among a herd of floating cattle, some drowned, some swimming frenziedly, and with the inspiration of the moment laid hold of a couple of the beasts which were tangled together by a halter, and so supported themselves without further exertion. It was no use swimming for the present. They could not tell which way the shore lay, and they were obliged to conserve all their energies for the morning, so well as the numbing cold of the water would let them.

Of a sudden the bellow of the steamer's siren ceased, and a pang went through them as though they had lost a friend. Then came a dull, muffled explosion, and then a huge, ragged shape loomed up through the night like some vast monument and sank swiftly straight downward out of sight beneath the black, tumbled sea.

"Poor old girl!" said McTodd, spitting out the sea water, "they'd a fine keg of whiskey down in her messroom."

"Poor devil of a skipper!" said Kettle, "to be drownded out of his own barn's way, or it'll take lying to keep him any rags of his ticket."

The talk died out of them after that, and the miserly of the situation closed in. The water was cold, but the air was piercing, and so they kept their bodies submerged, each holding on to the bovine raft, each man sparing a few fingers to keep a grip on the girl. One of the beasts they clung to quickly drowned; the other, strange to say, kept his nostrils above water, swimming strongly, and in the end came alive to the shore, the only four-footed occupant of the steamer to be saved.

At the end of each minute it seemed to them that they were too bruised and numb to hang another sixty seconds, and yet the next minute found them

still alive and dreading the successor. The sea mounts poor horses could give; and the dead, and the fleet of drowned cattle surged helplessly to this way and to that, brushing them with rude collisions; and the chill bit them to the bone, mercifully numbing their pain and anxiety. Long before the dawn the girl had sunk into a stupor and was only held from sinking by the nervous fingers of the men; and the men themselves were merely automata, completing their task with a legacy of will.

When from somewhere out of the morning mists a fisher boat sailed up, manned by a ragged, kindly Irish, all three were equally lost to consciousness, and all three were hauled over the gunwale in continuous dripping strings. The grip of the men's fingers had endured too long to be loosened for a sudden call such as that.

They were taken ashore and tended with all the care poor homes could give; and the men, used to hardships, recovered with a dose of warmth and sleep.

Miss Carnegie took longer to recover, and in fact, for a week lay very near to death. Kettle stayed on in the village nursing her pain and anxiety. For a long time he ought to have gone away to seek fresh employment. He ought to have gone back to his wife and children, and he upbraided himself bitterly for his neglect of these duties. He had no money, and he had no self away. For the future—well, he dreaded to think what might happen in the future.

But at last the girl was able to sit up and see him, and he visited her, showing all the deference an ambassador might expect to a queen. I may go so far as to say that he went into the cottage quite infatuated. He came out of it disillusioned.

She listened to his tale of the wreck with interested ears. She was all most stricken to hear that others, including the captain and two of his mates, were saved from the disaster besides themselves, but at the same time unfeignedly pleased. And she was pleased also to see that Kettle was not so far from the evidence before the forthcoming inquiry.

"I am glad of that," she said, "because I know you will speak with a free mind. You have told me so many times how incompetent the captain and crew were, and you will be able to tell it to the proper authorities."

Kettle looked at her blankly. "But that was different," he said. "I can't say to them what I said to you."

"Why not? Look what misery and suffering and loss of life the man has caused. He isn't fit to command a ship."

"But, Miss," said Kettle, "you're living. He's been brought up to seafaring, and he isn't fit for anything else. You wouldn't have me send out the man to starve? Besides, I'm a shipmaster myself, and I know how to handle a ship. I'll take away another master's ticket? The cleverest captain afloat might meet with misfortune, and he's always got to think of that when he's put up to give evidence against his fellows."

"Oh, well, you're going to do, then?"

"Oh, we've got together a tale, and when the old man is put up on his trial the mates and I will stick to it through thick and thin. You can bet that we are not going to suffer away his ticket."

"His ticket?"

"Yes, his master's certificate—his means of livelihood."

"I think it's wrong," she said excitedly; "criminally wrong. And, besides, you said you didn't like the man."

"I don't; I dislike him cordially. But that's nothing to do with the case. I've my own honor to think of, Miss. How'd I feel if I went about knowing I'd done wrong? I'd be a brother captain for good and always."

"You are wrong," she repeated vehemently. "The man is incompetent by your own saying, and therefore, he should be sent to the gallows."

"Miss Carnegie," he said, "I am disappointed in you. I thought from your poetry that you had feelings; I thought you had charity; but I find you are cold."

"And you?" she retorted, "you, that I have set up for myself as an ideal of most of the manly virtues, do you think I feel no disappointment when I hear that you are deliberately proposing to be a liar?"

"I am no liar," she said sullenly. "I have most faults, but not that. This is different; you do not understand. It is not lying to defend one's fellow shipmaster before an inquiry board."

"The old hid her face. 'Oh, go,' she said, 'go! I wish I had never met you. I thought you were so good, and so brave and so honest, and when it comes to the pinch, you are just like the rest! Go, go! I wish I thought I could ever forget you.'"

"You say you don't understand," said Kettle. "I think you deliberately won't understand, Miss. You remember that I said I was disappointed in you, and I stick to it. I have got a wife and family to remember that I have got a wife and family to am fond of. You make me ashamed I have not gone to them before."

"But you don't think I'm a liar," she said, "how much I cared for you once, Good-by, Miss."

"Good-by," she sobbed from her pillow.

"I wish I could think you are right, but perhaps it is best as it will cure me."

In the night she was visited by Mr. McTodd, clothed in rousing serge and inclined to be sentimental. "They're whiskey here," he said, "with a jerk of the thumb. I wish you'd talk to me, when you've got over the first dislike. I'm out of silver myself or I'd stand you a glass, but if you're in funds I could guide you to the place."

Kettle was half tempted. But with a wrench he said: "No, I adder that if he once started, he might not know when to stop."

"Quite right," said the engineer, "you're quite (lie) right, skipper. A man with an inclination to level himself with the beasts that perish should always be abstemious." He sat down at a wayside fence and prepared for sleep.

"Like me," he added solemnly, and shut his eyes.

"No," said Kettle to himself, "I won't forget it that way. I guess I can manage to get a little poetry, but I'll write myself. But a sign of the missis will do the rest."

And so Captain Owen Kettle went home to where Mrs. Kettle kept house in the by-street in South Shields, that unlively town on Tyne-side; and a worrying time he had of it with that estimable woman, his wife, before the explanations which he saw fit to give were passed as entirely satisfactory. In fact, he was not quite forgiven for his escapade with Miss Carnegie or for that other involuntary excursion with Donna Clotilde La Touche till such time as he had acquired fortune from adventure on the seas and was able to take Mrs. Kettle away from her unsavory surroundings and settle down in comfort in a small farmstead on the Yorkshire moors with a hired maid to assist at the housework. But that was not until some considerable time after he was wrecked with Mr. McTodd on the Irish coast, and between the two dates he assisted to make a good deal more history which is (or will be) elsewhere related.

THE WRECK OF THE CATTLE BOAT

(Continued From Page 4.)

they were in the gallery of a theater?"

"There was some misunderstanding when the crew were shipped. They say they never signed on to handle dead cattle."

"I've seen those kind of misunderstandings before, captain, and I've started in the smooth-then-away."

"Well," said the captain of the cattle boat.

"Oh, with me!" said Kettle truculently. "You straightened out as soon as ever I began to hit. If your mates know their business, they'd soon have that crew in hand again."

"I don't allow my mates to knock the men about. To give them their due, they wanted to be there brought up in a ship which would probably suit you, captain, all three of them; but I don't permit that sort of thing. I am a Christian man, and I will not order my fellow-men to be struck. If the fellows refuse their duty, it lies between them and their consciences."

"As if an old sailor had a conscience!" murmured Kettle to himself. "Well, captain, I'm no small piece of a Christian myself, but I was taught that whatever my hand findeth to do, to do it with all my might, and I guess bashing a lazy crew comes under that head."

"I don't want either your advice or your theology."

"I wasn't a passenger here," said Kettle. "I'd like to tell you what I thought of your seamanship and your notion of making a master's ticket respected. But I'll hold my tongue on that. It is, I think, sometimes a good idea to consider this ship safe, run the way she is."

The captain of the cattle-boat flushed darkly. He jerked his head toward the deck. "Get down off this bridge," he said.

"What?"

"You hear me. Get down off my bridge. If you've learnt anything about your profession you must know this is private up here, and no place for blooming passengers."

Kettle glared and hesitated. He was not used to receiving orders of this description, and the innovation did not please him. But for some time in his life he had been sitting under the lee of the deckhouse aft, watching him, and somehow or other he did not choose to have a scene before her. It was all part of this strange new feeling which had come over him.

He gripped his other impulses tight and went and sat beside her. She welcomed him cordially. She made no secret of her pleasure at his presence. But her ideas were jarred upon him, like other things merely from the amateur's view, she was able to detect romance beneath her present discomforts, and she was pouring into his ear her scheme for making a name for herself in Kettle's mind, to build an epic on such a groundwork was nothing short of profanation. He viewed the sea, scarred and scummed with ice, and thought of the furthest degree; no trick of language could elevate their meanness. He pointed out how she would prostitute her talent by laying hold of such an unsavory subject and extolled the beauty of his own ideal.

"Tackle a cornfield, miss," he would say again and again, "with its butter-yellow color and its blots of red poppies and the green hedges all round you, write poetry such as I know you can about a cornfield, and farmers, and farm buildings with thatched roofs, and you'll wake up one of those mornings (like all poets hope to do some day) and find yourself a famous poet. And because you want to know? Well, miss, it's because cornfields and the country and all that are what people want to hear about, and dream they've got handy to their own back doorstep. They're so peaceful, so restful. You take it from me, no one would even want to read four words about this beastly cruel sea, and the brutes of men who make their living by driving ships across it. No, by—No, miss, you take it from a man who knows, they'd just despise it. And so they argued endlessly at the point, each keeping an unchanged opinion.

Perhaps with all the human freight that the cableboat carried, Mr. McTodd was the only one person entirely happy. He had no watch to keep, no work to do; the mess-room was warm, stuffy, and entirely to his taste; liquor was served, and the official engineers of the ship were Scotch and an English eye; he never knew a deck for a width of fresh air, never knew a moment's tedium; he

lived in a pleasant atmosphere of broad dialect, strong tobacco, and toasting oil. He ate and drank and smoked, though when the moment of trial came, and his shrews and energies were wanted for the saving of human life, he quickly showed that this Capua had in no way sapped his efficiency.

The steamer had, as has been said, carried four weathered men, all the way across the Atlantic from the River Plate, as though it were a curse inflicted for the cruelty of her stevedores. The crew forgot what it was like to wear dry clothes, the afterward lived in a state of some weariness. A hardy captain would have still contrived to keep them up to the mark; but the man who was in supreme command was feeble and undecided, and there is no doubt that vigilance was somewhat slackened.

A fog, too, which came down to cover the sea, stopped them for three days to depend on a dead reckoning; and (after the event) he said, "I don't know how the steamer unduly to the westward."

Anyway, be the cause what it may, Kettle was pushed violently out of his bunk in the deep of one night, just after some weariness from the symptoms which loudly advertised themselves; it required no expert knowledge to tell that the vessel was beating her bottom out on rocks, to the accompaniment of a murderously heavy sea. The engines stopped, the boiler blew a hiss off noisily from the escapes, and what with that, and the cries of the men and the crashing of seas and the beating of iron, and the beast cries from the cattle deck, the din was almost deafening to split the ear. And then the steam syren burst out into one vast bellow of pain, which drowned all the other noises as though they had been children's whispers.

"Bliss Aunt Wilton's pants and trousers over his pajamas and went and thumped at a door on the other side of the alleyway."

"Miss Carnegie?"

"Dress quickly!"

"I am dressing, captain."

"Get finished with it and then wait. I'll come over when it's time."

It is all very well to be cool on these occasions. The ship had backed off after the prompt. Captain Kettle made his way up on deck against a green avalanche of water, which was cascading down the companion way. No shore was in sight. The ship had backed off after she had struck, and was now rolling heavily in the deep trough. She was

low in the water and every second wave swept over her.

No one seemed to be in command. The dim light showed Kettle one life-boat wrecked in davits and a disorderly mob of men trying to lower the other. But some one let go the stern fall so that the boat shot down perpendicularly, and the next wave, smashed the lower half of it into splinters. The frenzied crowd left it to try the port quarterboat, and Kettle raced them down the quarterboat's tackle, prepared for the worst. He plucked a green heart-belaying pin from the rail, and laid about him viciously. "Back, you scum!" he shouted. "Get back or I'll smash in every face among you. Good Lord, isn't there a mate or a man left on this stinking farmyard? Am I to keep off all this two-legged cattle by myself?"

They fought on, the black water swirling about them among them with every roll, the siren bellowing for help overhead, and the ship sinking under their feet; and gradually with the frenzy of despair the men drove Kettle back against the rail, while others of them cast off the falls of the quarterboat's tackle, preparatory to letting her drop. But then, out of the darkness, up came McTodd and the steamer's mate, both shrewd hitters, and with a few well-aimed blows, and once more the tables were turned.

The other quarterboat had been lowered and swamped; this boat was the only one remaining.

"Now, Mac," said Kettle, "help the mate take charge, and murder every one that interferes. Get the boat in the water and fend off. I'll be off below and fetch up Miss Carnegie. We must put some hurry in it. The old box hasn't much longer to swim. Tackle the lady ashore and see she comes to no harm."

"You needn't bother," said Kettle. "I take no man's place in this sort of teaparty." He splashed off across the streaming decks and found the cattle-boat's captain sheltering under the leg of a companion, wringing his hands. "Out, you blitherer," he shouted, "and save your mangle life. Your ship's gone now; you can't play hash with her any more. After which pleasant speech he worked his way below, half swimming, half wading, and once more beat against Miss Carnegie's door. Even in this moment of extremity he did not dream of going in unasked.

She came out to him in the half-swamped alleyway, fully dressed. "Is there any hope?" she asked.

ed, to find out just why the nicest girls in town stay out of everything."

"Will you listen?" Bess adjured Selina, whose eyes were dancing, though her face was patently grave as she answered: "Everybody overlooks Joe Hartwell's fibs because he fibs so nicely."

Hartwell laughed. His father being Aunt Wilton's lawyer, he knew that Ford girls, Aunt Wilton's nieces, better than anybody in Caswell town. It was a knowledge that ran back to the middle period, although the Ford knew no more of mud pies and their making than could be gathered from watching him enviously through cranialia of the hedge.

Now for two years he had been wondering how they had escaped their

discussing the most spectacular of them, the lawn party at the old Vernon place. It was to come off by moonlight, aided and abetted by Japanese lanterns, there would be dancing, of course and supper in the big hall of the deserted mansion. Everybody was to go in costume and masked. Except for that Selina and Bess might have had James' eye, but Aunt Wilton's face was flint toward masking—it savored to her so much of acting and the theater.

Hartwell had known that—but speculation is idle. He looked blank indeed when Selina let him see how the land lay. "And I got it up mostly so you might dance your fill," he said sorrowfully. "How I wish I could wash the slate clean and begin all over! Such a

age, fading and falling at last like withered roses, there in the family mansion. They had been dead twenty years with none but good words to follow them. If they did not sleep peacefully in their sunny graves, then were pure lives and good deeds were vain. Notwithstanding that, Selina and Bess, now another, glimpsed them walking hand in hand up the broad stairway, or flitting at dusk through the overgrown rose garden.

Dennison heard all this avidly. He liked whatever was old-world and unusual. Perhaps that was why, when the rain at last sent everybody scurrying within, he drew a little apart from the merry-makers and stood staring up the dim vista of the great stairway. And thus he was the first to see twin wraiths,

whirled and wheeled. The wraith in his arms answered evenly: "We've been doing it this long time—it was a sort of habit. The first thought of it, after we had found the lost key to the big gate, but she never would have had the courage to do it if I had not egged her on. She wouldn't dare be here to-night if I had let her think we have always gone home before 9 o'clock and climbed in by the library window. This time we shall have to be ghosts until morning—we can get in on the heels of the milkman. And because we shall run away before unmasking time. What would Aunt Wilton say if anybody told her we had been here?"

"Probably disinherit you. I should like that," Hartwell returned. "Then you wouldn't think you couldn't—I am hunting when I say I love you."

What more he might have said no body knows—just then there came wild cries of fire and after them general confusion. Despite the young man's warning by a raging wind, the old house burned like tinder. Hartwell had for a moment left Bess. When he looked for her he saw two vapory creatures feeling up the stairway.

Bess and Selina, madly bent on avoiding discovery, meant to vanish through the way and escape up the back stairs by which they had come. A wall of flame blocked them. As they ran back from it they heard a shout, "Stand still! We force you!" Then up the long main stair, came Aunt Wilton and Dennison—rushing down half a minute later, through licking flames, each with a girl's inanimate figure crushed against his breast.

Rightly was settled the question of double wedding. Even Aunt Wilton insisted on it—her nieces, she said, needed stronger guardians. Both matches had turned out to be ideal—so much so that Hartwell and Dennison were always called on to give evidence of such happiness by barely the ghost of a smile.

"How did you think of it? How dared you do it?" Hartwell asked as a

great lark I hoped we might have, and now to think—"

"Such a great lark we will have!" Bess cried, springing up, and whirling about in front of the garden bench. Hartwell stared at her. Selina looked puzzled. Bess stopped short in her dancing to put her finger on her lip, and say, nodding sagely between words: "Promises are made in front of you see us, Joe. I think we're coming—though we have just the ghost of a chance."

The lawn party had to take its full moon on trust—so many clouds sailed in from inside. True, a few nervous persons said that would hardly do—of course, it was all idle talk—none the less there had been talk of a Vernon ghost. Two ghosts indeed—those of the Vernon twin sisters, who had loved the same sweetheart and had refused to marry him out of regard for the other. They had lived to a great

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great lark I hoped we might have, and now to think—"

"Such a great lark we will have!" Bess cried, springing up, and whirling about in front of the garden bench. Hartwell stared at her. Selina looked puzzled. Bess stopped short in her dancing to put her finger on her lip, and say, nodding sagely between words: "Promises are made in front of you see us, Joe. I think we're coming—though we have just the ghost of a chance."

The lawn party had to take its full moon on trust—so many clouds sailed in from inside. True, a few nervous persons said that would hardly do—of course, it was all idle talk—none the less there had been talk of a Vernon ghost. Two ghosts indeed—those of the Vernon twin sisters, who had loved the same sweetheart and had refused to marry him out of regard for the other. They had lived to a great

THE GHOST OF A CHANCE