

The Inglenook.

Jones' Little Girl.

Annie and her mother had had a difference of opinion, and spanking had been mentioned as a possible result. It was all a matter of some few scraps upon the floor. To Annie's mother's mind there were reasons why the scraps should be picked up; while to Annie's and doubtless from her point of view as logical, there were reasons why they should lie where they were. Annie did pick them up, as spanking is not agreeable to contemplate; but she uttered, rising on her short legs from the task, an awful threat.

"I won't be Annie Lowe," she said, "a minute longer! I'll go be Jones' little girl."

Now this, as she knew, should have brought any proper-feeling mother straight to terms; but instead of begging her to stay, Mrs. Lowe continued dusting, and said cheerfully: "Very well, Annie; run along!" Unable to believe it, Annie stood staring, first in sheer surprise, then in astonished wrath and grief. She had not in the least intended to carry out the threat, but after that there was only one course left to take.

Without another word she walked upstairs to her little corner in her mother's room and took out her dolls. These, Big Dolly and Little-Dolly, with Little-Dolly's clothes, and as many of her own as she could find, she packed, with an occasional jolting sob, in a valise. Big-Dolly had only one dress, and that was fastened on—facts which Annie, as she squeezed the satchel to upon her, was for once too much engrossed with other matters to regret. Putting on her best hat, a straw with brown ribbons down behind, and crown scooped out to accommodate a brown silk pompon on the top, she descended with her burden bumping after her, and walked out through the kitchen, without a glance in the direction of the room beyond, in which her mother was. A little gate in the fence between led from their yard into the Jones'. Opening it, she went through, and reached up from the other side, to hook it fast behind.

Mrs. Jones was sitting on her back stoop, peeling apples for pies, when she looked down and saw Annie, whose tear-wet eyes were trying to regard her with a smile. The small person looked up bravely, realizing that something might depend upon a good impression in this her new start in life.

"I'm not Annie Lowe any longer, Mrs. Jones," she hastened to explain. "I've come to be your little girl."

Mrs. Jones went on with the apple, and Annie thought she caught on her new mother's round, good-natured face a suspicion of something like her late mother's smile. But her words belied her looks.

"Well, now," she said, "if that isn't nice! I've always thought I'd like to have a little girl. Come right in, Annie, and take off your hat."

Annie climbed the steps with some difficulty, and when she reached the top set the valise down, for she was warm.

"What all," Mrs. Jones demanded with a return of the expression which had troubled Annie at first, "have you in there?" The tone, too, was just the least bit disconcerting.

Annie edged up closer to her bag.

"I have Big-Dolly," she said, "and timidly, "and Little-Dolly, and my clothes

and Little-Dolly's clothes. I think," she added, with another very pleasant smile, lest Mrs. Jones should feel that she had brought too much, "they'll all go in one drawer."

"Oh, don't you worry over that," Mrs. Jones answered reassuringly; "I guess we'll find a place for them. There's a great big empty bedroom up above the porch that's been waiting for some little girl. You sit down until I finish here, and then we'll go upstairs."

Sitting on the top step, with her feet on the one below it, Annie watched patiently while apple after apple lost its coat and was chipped up into the blue bowl on the bench nearby.

"Do you ever make sauce-pies, Mrs. Jones?" she ventured finally.

Mrs. Jones flung off the last green curlicue, and scraped her knife against the pan.

"Why, I never have," she said. "Mr. Jones has never seemed to want them. But now I've got a little girl I suppose I'll have to, won't I? Perhaps," she added, as though the thought had just occurred to her, "you'd like to make the sauce-pies yourself? I don't believe I know just how"

Annie was silent because she found no fitting words. She had deemed it bliss at home, to roll up little dough balls out of what was left, and bake them brown, on bits of paper on the oven rack. But to be allowed to make a real pie on a real greased dish, to pinch it with her thumb, and lay the curly slats across, had been beyond her dreams. Well, if it were going to be like this!

When she found herself perched on a chair beside the rolling board, after taking off her hat and setting up the dollies in the bedroom that was all her own, like big folks, she thought emphatically that it was worth while being Jones' little girl. Her eyes shone as she squeezed the dough up through her fingers, and her cheeks glowed beneath the grimy tracks of tears. She floured her head, she floured her dress, she floured her shoes, all of which, as every one should know, is unavoidable in flouring pie-crust; and Mrs. Jones, who clearly proved herself to be a mother who could view things in the proper light, never once said, "There now—just see!"

When the pies, hers and the larger ones, were in the stove, and she had been washed off, Annie sat in the rocking chair and swung her feet, while Mrs. Jones washed up the rolling board and pins.

The wave of suds mounting about the big bare arms—how often had she yearned in secret for that feeling on her own!—moved her, fresh from achievement, to try if other wonders were in store, and slipping down she edged up to the sink.

"Can't I wash, too, Mrs. Jones?" she hinted helpfully. "I think that I could do the cups"

Mrs. Jones' hands, stirring beneath the surface, came up with a splash, and set in the tray the bowl that had held the apples.

There are no cups, ducky deary," she responded, scrubbing the bowl with the towel until its blue pagodas shone. "I'm only doing up the baking-things. You wait and help me when there's something nicer. You don't want to get your pretty fingers wet!"

But that was just what Annie did want very much. The rainbow foam, left to itself when the last dish had been rescued, sank down crackling, melting, as it had done so many times before her longing sight.

"Oh, Mrs. Jones," she gasped, with a sigh that popped out of itself, "mayn't I put my hand in there just once?"

Mrs. Jones dried her own hands, untied her apron, tied it round Annie's neck, and tucked up her sleeves.

"Well, then," she answered, "muss away—until I get the flour wiped up."

Annie put in first one arm and then the other, with such contortions of her face as might have indicated pain to any one unversed in the extremes of joy.

"Oo-oo oo!" she ejaculated as she brought up the arms, covered, warm, and dripping with bubbly reefs and shoals. She held them out, watching with devouring eyes until the last small dome glistening on the wet brown skin had broken, and then, with undiminished ardor, plunged them in again, ruffling the foundations of the deep that it might yield more bubbles on the top. Higher and yet higher, in answering abandon, rose the foam, until it would have cast itself, but for Mrs. Jones' intervention, upon her little gingham breast. The smell of pies escaping from the oven, permeated all the air, but even it failed to reach her nose, filled with the intoxicating smell of suds.

While the chops were fried for lunch she stood beside the stove and held the pepper-box, and was allowed to take a dish, a small white dolphin with gilt fins, and get the jumbles from the jumble pot. Each one, crisp and sugared, had a gum drop on the top, and at lunch she ate as many jumbles as she could and the gum drops of some she could not eat.

"Do we have these often, Mrs. Jones?" she asked.

After lunch Annie dressed Little Dolly in the frock she wore for afternoons, and sat with her on the top step of Mrs. Jones' back stoop. She wore Mrs. Jones' sun-bonnet, as the sun was warm, and as she rocked to and fro, holding to Little Dolly's lips a candy she had saved for her, she cast an occasional condescending glance toward the house across the fence.

"Little-Dolly by-by, Little-Dolly by-by!" she sang aloud, just to show, if anybody over there should happen to be listening, how very well content she was.

She was roused from the peacefulness that was a joint effect of sun and jumbles by a shrill alarm. A few yards before her, in the garden, pluming himself as though he, too, had a right to be there, stood a bird with which she was acquainted.

"Why," she exclaimed, running to shoot him back with indignant flapping of her skirt, "there's Lowe's old rooster scratching up our onion-bed!"

The long summer afternoon passed by, and the sun, creeping home at last, slipped out of Mrs. Jones' yard with many a backward peep, and stopped to play a little longer in Mrs. Lowe's next door—perhaps because it was so lonely there without a child about.

Mrs. Lowe herself, in a pretty ruffled dress, sat by the window with her sewing. She looked up every now and then and cast a glance over toward the Jones', and once she saw Annie and Little-Dolly on the step; and once she laughed outright, and then she very foolishly wiped her eyes as she saw the rooster come back through the fence.

Mr. Lowe came up the path toward tea-time, glancing about among his shrubs, and stooping here and there to clip a dead twig