

Little Fellow's Reconciliation

By Alice V. Hall.

LITTLE FELLOW was left at the breakfast table alone. It was not the first time that his parents had quarreled and finally separated in anger. The outside door slammed. That meant his Dad had gone to his office. Then away off in the distance he could hear his mother's sobbing.

It was hard to eat. Things creaked him, somehow, but he was not going to let Katie see that he notices anything was wrong.

"An' all alone agin!" she burst out indignantly. "It's a shame, Little Fellow."

Little Fellow shifted uneasily on his chair. "My dad had to get off early to his office," he explained hastily, his face very red and his mouth very full. "An' my mother—she was sick. She didn't want no breakfast."

He lingered by his mother's door on his way to school, his ear pressed close to the keyhole. She was sobbing yet. He bothered her. Still he loved her a lot, all the same. Sometimes, when she wasn't busy, she told him stories nights. She certainly was "there" with the stories. And once in a while he could coax her to get out her guitar and sing those soft, sleepy songs of hers. Once his dad had found them together that way. He had stood in the doorway a long time before they knew it, mother and he; then he had come in, and he had stayed!

He heard Katie's steps in the hall, and drew guiltily away from his mother's door. But it was too late. She had seen him. She always did! She drew in her breath with little clucks of distress and handed him his lunch box.

"There, there, Little Fellow." She would have patted his head if he had not artfully dodged and bolted past her.

"Aw-quit," he said crossly. "Say, you didn't put in brown bread, did you, 'cause I hate it—an' bananas, too?" He banged the door as he went out, to drown Katie's reproving voice, then kicked viciously at the graveled pathway.

At the corner he met his dad. A sudden sickening fear pulled his heart down until it felt sagged. His father was going home to pitch into his mother some more, and maybe—his own heart began a decided tattoo against his ribs. He had heard what people said. Just because he was little they thought he didn't understand what they said! They talked with big words, behind their hands, over his head, and even spelled words, but he knew. He "got them." He was six. They said his mother and father were going away from each other for good some day. He had a startling vivid picture of himself alone with Katie and her pity. No, sir. Not much! He wouldn't stay. He'd run away, too—go off on a ship or something. A lump kept coming up into his throat. It ached.

"Dad," he ventured. His father was big—so big! When he was a man he hoped he'd be just that big. Then unexpectedly his father bent down to him. One leap and Little Fellow was held tightly, with his own arms twined about his father's neck.

"Where you goin', dad?" he asked.

"I was coming back for you, Little Fellow. I'm going to take you off with me. Say we go for some hunting—how about it?"

The child's face flashed with joy. There had been sudden reconciliations like this before. Once, when he was only four—and again only last year.

"Can I go with you when you tell her?" he begged. "She was cryin' when I left. I heard her—just a little, away low."

A light crept into his father's eyes. Little Fellow knew that things were not right.

"Oh!—She. Well, I hadn't thought of taking her, son. We're going alone, just we two men. Women don't like hunting."

"But she does," he persisted bravely, the lump coming back in his throat to bother him. "You—why, you taught her to shoot yourself! Besides, dad, we couldn't leave her alone with Katie. No man'd do that."

"Katie! Why not? She's a good cook."

"She—well, you see—" He paused uncertainly, at a loss to explain, then burst out passionately. "I hate her! I hate her! She can't be sorry for me. Nobody can."

"So she's sorry for you, eh? Because of your father, I suppose." He stood back, surveying the staunch little figure of his son. The child's face was raised to his. He was struggling with his emotions.

"Oh, no, dad," he protested eagerly. "I heard her say that you was as good-lookin' a man as she wanted to clap eyes on. I heard her. An' that mother was a dear, pretty little fool. It ain't that. It's cause—" He stopped, groping for words.

His father swore softly.

"I see," he said. "So that's the lay of the land, is it? Well, we'll chuck Katie and get a Jap. Come! I'll fix that. But how does the hunting idea strike you?"

Oh, dad, could I have a gun?" he demanded. "A regular twenty-

two? An' would you teach me to shoot?"

"A go. Sure thing."

The child breathed quickly with excitement. His eyes danced.

"An' no school! G-e-e!"

"Well, come on," his father said.

"Now—this very second!" The

idea was dazzling. For a second it

held him. Then his face fell as sud-

denly as it had lit. "Why, dad, ain't

we even goin' to tell her good by?"

Little Fellow stared up at his

father, but the man's eyes were

evasive. He had thought it all out.

They had had their last scene to-

gether that morning, he and she.

She'd never let him have the young-

ster, though. He knew that. Luck

had played him into his hands for

a while. He would take him. She

could have everything else.

"No, I guess not this time," he

said abruptly.

There was a long pause. The

child dragged one sandaled foot

back and forth, back and forth on

the sidewalk with an irritating, grit-

ty sound. If only—but no! His

father wouldn't do it. He knew

him.

"Then—why, then I can't go," he

burst out decisively, regret sharp in

his eager, fresh little voice. "I'd 'a'

liked to, dad—ge-e-e, wouldn't I 'a'

liked it—but—it'd be too mean."

The man whistled softly. A light

came into his eyes again, not the

flashing angry light that Little Fel-

low knew so well. It made him long

to leap into his father's arms. But

he only drew a little closer.

"I wish'd you'd take her, too,

dad," he faltered. "I'd—jimmy

—I'd like a gun!"

A crowd of boys were crossing the

empty lot across the street. They

called to Little Fellow. He backed

away from his father.

"I gotta go," he said, with a sigh.

"It's 'most time for school. Good

by."

His father watched him with in-

terest, watched him cross the street

and join the swarm of loud-talking,

eager boys, watched him until his

little figure was swallowed up by a

corner.

"That'd be too mean," he mut-

tered under his breath. "Um—um

—the devil!"

He turned and went back towards

his home. The roses were thick at

the windows. They hung down over

the lattice work. He had trained

them that way because she loved

them. The windows in her room

were thrown open. He caught a

glimpse of her white dress. She was

moving about the room, humming

softly to herself.

Then—her singing stopped. But

a half hour later, when Katie

shuffled by to listen, she heard

voices, voices full of life and woven

in with a woman's gay laugh and

a man's hearty amusement.

Katie smiled contentedly. "The

dears!" she muttered, as she fell to

mopping with furious energy. "The

dears! But trust me—it was ac-

count of the Little Fellow."



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