

will arrive on the fourteenth inst., via Coast Line.'

That and the terse, formal letter that preceded it were all that Miss Annissa had to 'go by;' the rest she had woven out of her own fancy, to suit herself.

'Lawyer's letters ain't real human, anyway,' she thought. 'You can't make much out of 'em on account of so many 'whereases' and 'aforesaid.' I really do wish the Lord had spared Serena long enough to write about the little girl herself. I should have liked to call her by her name the first time I saw her.'

In her heart—it was part of her woven fancy—she had named the child Serena, and given her Serena's mild, blue eyes and fair, wavy hair. It made her feel a little acquainted already.

The 'fourteenth instant' was today. Allowing fifteen minutes for Cornelius Quinn to stop and gossip at the post-office, the stage would lumber up to the neat, little white house of Miss Annissa's at a quarter past five o'clock. It was five now. The supper was already set out on the kitchen table on the best blue and white china. Miss Annissa fluttered out frequently, and re-arranged the cups and plates with nervous fingers. Her ears were strained to hear the groan of Cornelius Quinn's wagon-wheels—hark!

'They're coming!' she gasped softly. It was one of the few crises in Miss Annissa's placid life. She hurried to the door, and stood with her hands out, waiting.

'Whoa—back!' shouted Cornelius Quinn, loudly.

A little boy leaped over the wheel, and came running up the gravel path to Miss Annissa.

'I've come,' he announced briefly.

He was little and stocky and freckled. It was not Serena's face that looked out from under his crop of red-brown hair. Serena's!—there was no part of stately, fair Serena in this little, homely boy! Miss Annissa gazed down at his brief, shabby little trousers in speechless horror. Her eyes refused to rise above them. She drew in her breath with a little shivering sigh. This was Serena's little girl!

'I've come,' repeated the child with diminished eagerness. In his soiled, weary little face was the

first dull premonition of unwell-comeness. 'But I—I reckon it's a mistake, ma'am,' he went on, fidgeting with his clumsy little shoes on the walk.

Miss Annissa's eyes left the shabby, abbreviated trousers, and descended to the heavy shoes. She groaned under her breath. 'Yes,' she said, 'I guess it's a mistake.' She was remembering the little long-sleeved tiers and the little round red comb with sudden, sharp pain. Serena's little girl would never wear them.

But she rallied under Cornelius Quinn's curious stare, and even gave the boy a certain stilted welcome. It had to answer; the little fellow accepted it gratefully, and with a child's quick forgetfulness made himself at home.

Miss Annissa put away the dainty blue and white cups and plates, and called him in to supper. She had taken her bitter disappointment with stoical resignation, but in her soul there was rebellion.

The days went on—enough of them to make a summer. Miss Annissa was gentle and kind to Serena's little boy, but she went about with cotton in her ears and vague unrest in her heart. The boy's noise fretted her; and his little, honest, homely face failed to appeal to her love. Even his love and devotion to her did not touch her. She mourned—continually for Serena's little gentle, well-behaved girl. It wore upon her strangely; and, when she caught a sudden cold late in the fall, she succumbed to it weakly. It made terrible inroads upon her slender strength, and presently she was very sick indeed.

Maiah Nye shut up her little shop and came to nurse her. The little white house was full of the awe and hush of illness, and Serena's little boy stole about it in his stocking feet, on tiptoe. He was very, very quiet. He pleaded with Maiah to be allowed to sit in the sick-room, and many and many a time Miss Annissa woke from a restless sleep to see him sitting there quietly, with his small brown hands folded. In the delusion of fever she took him for Serena's little girl, and babbled to him happily.

'I'm glad you've got here,' she said. 'Dear land knows I've been waiting long enough! There was a boy,—I can't tell, maybe it was

a dream,—but I thought he came instid of you, little Serena. He was a little mite of a homely thing. He wore such heavy shoes—I dreamed they made my head ache, stomping round so, all day long. He couldn't help it, but I'm glad you've got here—dear land, how glad I am!'

She was very often delirious. One day she started up in bed excitedly, and pointed to the boy with her thin, hot forefinger.

'Where's your tier? Why don't you put your tier on that I made for you, little Serena? It's in the lower chest-drawer—and the red comb. I got 'em all ready for you,—why don't you put them on?'

The child slipped away out of the room. When he came back Miss Annissa was asleep. He came in, tripping clumsily over the folds of a long calico tier. It got in his way uncannily,—its sleeves reached to his little cracked knuckles. A stiff ruff of red-brown hair made a halo around his face, pushed upright by a little round red comb. He slipped in to his seat at the foot of the bed hurriedly. Maiah's face twitched with laughter in spite of herself, and a flush of embarrassment reddened the boy's forehead. But after that he wore the tier and the round comb always, even away from the sick-room. He was trying to get used to them. In his heart he had made the great sacrifice. 'Dear, good Lord,' he prayed at night, 'I love her—she don't love me, but she's good to me. If you'll let her live, dear Lord, I'm willin' to wear the girl's things always,—I'm willin' to, dear Lord. Please let Miss Annissa live!'

And Annissa lived. Through a terrible day she struggled for her life, and at its end awoke, fragile and like a child, to her first clear consciousness and to life. The boy was sitting at the foot of the bed. She lay and looked at him a very long time. Gradually the meaning of him in his little, crumpled tier and red-brown halo—and the wistful love in his plain little face—arrayed themselves as clear facts in her mind. She understood, at last, and with the understanding was born her love for Serena's little boy. It swept over her in a warm, sweet wave. There was healing, there was strength, in it. She called the child to her by and by.

'Dear boy!' she whispered weakly, and drew him down and kissed him. 'Now take them off. I want my boy again. I want just you,' she said.