

said she quietly. "You can hev what Josephine and me had—crackers and milk. There ain't nothing else to eat."

"Ain't nothing else? Why, where in thunder's the store?"

"The bill o'yourn for liquors, and cigars, and candies, and clo'es, and neckties, is jest what the house is assessed for. Mr. Newman's been up ter day and he's done trusting."

"Blisret his eyes!" was the reply, as Charley began to walk up and down the room. "I should like to know what kind of a wife you be!" he said.

"I've done my best!" said she angrily. "I've turned night into day working to pay for jest what's been brought inter the house. But that bill, ef its paid, takes the house over our heads."

"Blame it all! I shouldn't think there was another house in town."

"It's a little hard that Josephine and me should lose our home so'st you and your lot down to the tavern and over to Farley—"

"Wall! So'st me and my lot—what?" and pausing before her in his excited walk, goaded perhaps by the look in her great dark eyes, or her pinched wan face, he struck her on the mouth.

She did not utter a sound, but cowered in a little heap like something from which the life had departed, till long after he was asleep. Of course the next morning he was abject and in a passion of penitence, and as she forgave him and soothed him he never knew how nearly love was dead in her heart.

And so the house went. Miss Elvira came up to expostulate. But there was the bill and it must be paid, as Priscilla felt in every fibre of her honest being. And after that Mr. Newman, in some compunction, suffered her to live on in the house at a small rent, that was never paid by Charley. But Priscilla still had Josephine, a little wild rose in the sun, a singing bird, a sunbeam, a joy that paid for all her pain, that made it almost impossible for her to regret anything, the love of her a wall between herself and outer darkness.

"That child's no end of trouble to you," said her husband one day, seeing Priscilla pause in the hurry of her sewing to brush Josephine's curls, till they stood out in a halo round the little head.

"Trouble!" said Priscilla, kissing her. "Sweet trouble."

"Yes, and you ain't any less than a slave to her."

"Not to her," said Priscilla, "oh, not to her."

"I do'no' how we're ever going to bring her up," he said presently. "No clo'es, no schoolin'. 'Twould be a mercy ef some rich folks 'ud take her for their own."

"Not to me," said Priscilla absently, giving the lovely locks a final wave.

'Twould to her. She'd never know no want and be fetched up like a lady.

'What are you talking about?' said Priscilla, looking at him now, and blanching with a sudden unnamed fear.

'About Josephine. There's a rich lady put up down to the tavern, and she see her when you went to the store, and was taken by her so't she followed you in—'

'Yes—I see her. She giv' Josephine some peppermint.'

'Wal, as I was sayin', she spoke to Barney about the child, and he told her how 'twas, and she got possessed for it,—she ain't none of her own. And she staid over night, and Barney sent for me, and the long and the short of it is, that she'll take the child and bring her up like rich folks children, and give her piany lessons and silk dresses and all that, and allow us w'atever we say for lettin' of her go—a thousand dollars down, good money, ef we say so.'

'I guess she won't,' said Priscilla, taking up her basting.

'Oh, yes, she will, then.'

'I guess she won't,' repeated Priscilla, and as she turned her face toward him, biting off her thread, there was something in that showing of her teeth, like a wild beast at bay.

'You don't mean to say you'd stand in the child's light like that, do ye?'

'I ain't fell so low as to sell my own flesh and blood yet.'

'But it's fur Josephine's good. She ain't but one life to live, and it's a pity ter spile that in the beginnin'. Fur my part, I couldn't rest easy and think I'd kept her out of all that luck.'

'I could. And I shell.'

'Now you look her, Miss Dane! That child's mine. You ain't no say about it. I've been willing to reason with you—but ef you wont hear to reason, you may to fac'. I've got a right according ter lor to sell or give her or do what I've a mind ter 'ith. Mothers don't count in lor, d'ye hear? The lor says she's my child. I've been to see Squire Hall, and he says—them's his own words—'Your will's supreme as to that child.' You see my will's the lor. And my will is that she will go!'

'Charley! Charley!' cried Priscilla, springing to her feet. 'You ain't—you ain't in earnest!'

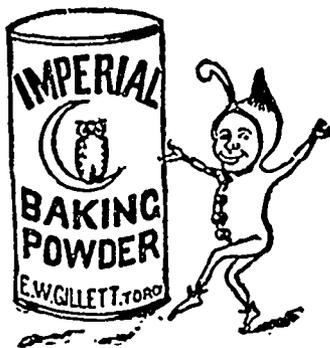
'Dead earnest.'

'Oh, Charley! she cried, clasping her hands as if she were praying to him. 'Ain't you no pity on me?'

'I've pity on Josephine,' he said. 'I've ast about that lady, and I'm satisfied, and you may just git the child ready. I didn't expect you'd make a fuss where the child's good—'

'Oh, Charley!' she cried again. 'She's my baby! She's all I've got! It'll break my heart. I can't let her go. It'll break her heart, too. She's never been out o' my sight. Oh, Charley, have mercy, have mercy, don't take her, don't kill me—my darling, my little girl, my baby—'

(To be continued.)



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