

**CHARITY**

Yes, honey, mamma is fixing somethin' to do you good. Yes, my baby, jus' you wait — I'm a-coming.  
( *Knock is heard at door. It is gently pushed open and Tildy comes in cautiously.* )

**TILDY**

( *Whispering* )

How is she?

**CHARITY**

Poorly, poorly. Didn't rest last night none hardly. Move that dress and set in th' rocker. I been trying to snatch a minute to finish it but don't seem like I can. She won't have nothing to wear if she — she —

**TILDY**

I understands. How near done is it?

**CHARITY**

Ain't so much more to do.

**TILDY**

( *Takes up dress from chair, looks at it* )

I'll do some on it.

**CHARITY**

Thank you, sister Tildy. Whip that torshon on and turn down the hem in the skirt.

**TILDY**

( *Measuring dress against herself* )

How deep?

**CHARITY**

Let me see, now

( *Studies a minute with finger against lip* )

I tell you — jus' baste it, 'cause you see — she wears'em short, but — it might be —

( *Stops.* )

**TILDY**

( *Bowing her head comprehendingly* )

Huh-uh, I see exzackly.

( *Sighs* )

You'd want it long — over her feet — then.

**CHARITY**

That's it, sister Tildy.

( *Listening* )

She's some easy now!

( *Stirring poultice* )

Jest can't get this poltis' hot enough somehow this morning.

**TILDY**

Put some red pepper in it. Got any?

**CHARITY**

Yes. There ought to be some in one of them boxes on the shelf there.

( *Points.* )

**TILDY**

*( Goes to shelf, looks about and gets the pepper)*

Here, put a-plenty of this in.

**CHARITY**

*( Groans are heard from the next room)*

Good Lord, them pains got her again. She suffers so, when she's 'wake.

**TILDY**

Poor little thing. How old is she now, sister Charity?

**CHARITY**

Turning fourteen this coming July.

**TILDY**

*( Shaking her head dubiously)*

I sho' hope she'll be mended by then.

**CHARITY**

It don't look much like it, but I trusts so —

*( Looking worried)*

That doctor's mighty late this morning.

**TILDY**

I expects he'll be 'long in no time. Doctors is mighty onconcerned here lately.

**CHARITY**

*( Going toward inner room with poultice)*

They surely is and I don't have too much confidence in none of 'em.

*( You can hear her soothing the child.)*

**TILDY**

*( Listening)*

Want me to help you put it on, sister Charity?

**CHARITY**

*( From inner room)*

No, I can fix it.

*( Coming back from sick room shaking her head rather dejectedly.)*

**TILDY**

How is she, sister Charity?

**CHARITY**

Mighty feeble. Gone back to sleep now. My poor little baby.

*( Bracing herself)*

I'm going to put on some coffee now.

**TILDY**

I'm sho' glad. I feel kinder low-spirited.

**CHARITY**

It's me that low-sperited. The doctor said last time he was here he might have to operate — said, she mought have a chance then. But I tell you the truth, I've got no faith a-tall in 'em. They takes all your money for nothing.

**TILDY**

They sho' do and don't leave a cent for putting you away decent.

**CHARITY**

That's jest it. They takes all you got and then you dies jest the same. It ain't like they was sure.

**TILDY**

No, they ain't sure. That's it exzactly. But they takes your money jest the same, and leaves you flat.

**CHARITY**

I been thinking 'bout Zeke these last few days — how he was put away —

**TILDY**

I wouldn't worry 'bout him now. He's out of his troubles.

**CHARITY**

I know. But it worries me when I think about how he was put away . . . that ugly pine coffin, jest one shabby old hack and nothing else to show — to show — what we thought about him.

**TILDY**

Hush, sister! Don't you worry over him. He's happy now, anyhow.

**CHARITY**

I can't help it! Then little Bessie. We all jest scrooged in one hack and took her little coffin in our lap all the way out to the graveyard.

( *Breaks out crying.* )

**TILDY**

Do hush, sister Charity. You done the best you could. Poor folks got to make the best of it. The Lord understands —

**CHARITY**

I know that — but I made up my mind the time Bessie went that the next one of us what died would have a shore nuff funeral, everything grand, — with plumes! — I saved and saved and now — this yah doctor —

**TILDY**

All they think about is cuttin' and killing and taking your money. I got nothin' to put 'em doing.

**CHARITY**

( *Goes over to washtub and rubs on clothes* )

Me neither. These clothes got to get out somehow, I needs every cent`

**TILDY**

How much that washing bring you?

**CHARITY**

Dollar and a half. It's worth a whole lot more. But what can you do?

**TILDY**

You can't do nothing — Look there, sister Charity, ain't that coffee boiling?

**CHARITY**

( *Wipes hands on apron and goes to stove* )

Yes it's boiling good fashioned. Come on, drink some.

**TILDY**

There ain't nothing I'd rather have than a good strong cup of coffee.

( *Charity pours Tildy's cup.* ) ( *Sweetening and stirring hers* )

Pour you some.

( *Charity pours her own cup* )

I'd been dead, too, long ago if it hadn't a been for my coffee.

**CHARITY**

I love it, but it don't love me — gives me the shortness of breath.

**TILDY**

( *Finishing her cup, taking up sugar with spoon* )

Don't hurt me. I could drink a barrel.

**CHARITY**

( *Drinking more slowly — reaching for coffeepot* )

Here, drink another cup.

**TILDY**

I shore will, that cup done me a lot of good.

**CHARITY**

( *Looking into her empty cup thoughtfully* )

I wish Dinah Morris would drop in now. I'd ask her what these grounds mean.

**TILDY**

I can read em a little myself.

**CHARITY**

You can? Well, for the Lord's sake, look here and tell me what this cup says!

( *Offers cup to Tildy. Tildy wards it off.* )

**TILDY**

You got to turn it 'round in your saucer three times first.

**CHARITY**

Yes, that's right, I forgot.

( *Turns cup 'round, counting* )

One, two, three.

( *Starts to pick it up.* )

**TILDY**

Huhudh.

( *Meaning no* )

Let it set a minute. It might be watery.

( *After a minute, while she finishes her own cup* )

Now let me see.

( *Takes cup and examines it very scrutinizingly.* )

**CHARITY**

What you see?

**TILDY**

( *Hesitatingly* )

I ain't seen a cup like this one for many a year. Not since — not since —

**CHARITY**

When?

**TILDY**

Not since jest before ma died. I looked in the cup then and saw things and — I stopped looking . . .

**CHARITY**

Tell me what you see, I want to know.

**TILDY**

I don't like to tell no bad news —

**CHARITY**

Go on. I can stan' anything after all I been thru'.

**TILDY**

Since you're bound to know I'll tell you.

( *Charity draws nearer* )

I sees a big gethering!

**CHARITY**

Gethering, you say?

**TILDY**

Yes, a big gethering. People all crowded together. Then I see 'em going one by one and two by two. Long line stretching out and out and out!

**CHARITY**

( *In a whisper* )

What you think it is?

**TILDY**

( *Awed like* )

Looks like

( *Hesitates* )

a possession!

**CHARITY**

( *Shouting* )

You sure!

**TILDY**

I know it is.

( *Just then the toll of a church bell is heard and then the steady and slow tramp, tramp, of horses' hoofs. Both women look at each other.* )

**TILDY**

( *In a hushed voice* )

That must be Bell Gibson's funeral coming 'way from Mt' Zion.

( *Gets up and goes to window* )

Yes, it sho' is.

**CHARITY**

( *Looking out of the window also* )

Poor Bell suffered many a year; she's out of her pain now.

**TILDY**

Look, here comes the hearse now!

**CHARITY**

My Lord! ain't it grand! Look at them horses — look at their heads — plumes — how they shake 'em! Land o' mighty! It's a fine sight, sister Tildy.

**TILDY**

That must be Jer'miah in that first carriage, bending over like; he shorely is putting her away grand.

**CHARITY**

No mistake about it. That's Pickett's best funeral turnout he's got.

**TILDY**

I'll bet it cost a lot.

**CHARITY**

Fifty dollars, so Matilda Jenkins told me. She had it for Bud. The plumes is what cost.

**TILDY**

Look at the hacks —

( *Counts* )

I believe to my soul there's eight.

**CHARITY**

Got somebody in all of 'em too — and flowers — She shore got a lot of 'em.

( *Both women's eyes follow the tail end of the procession, horses' hoofs die away as they turn away from window. The two women look at each other significantly.* )

**TILDY**

( *Significantly* )

Well! —

( *They look at each other without speaking for a minute. Charity goes to the washtub* )

Want these cups washed up?

**CHARITY**

No don't mind 'em. I'd rather you get that dress done. I got to get these clothes out.

**TILDY**

( *Picking up dress* )

Shore, there ain't so much more to do on it now.

( *Knock is heard on the door. Charity answers knock and admits Dr. Scott.* )

**DR. SCOTT**

Good morning. How's the patient today?

**CHARITY**

Not so good, doctor. When she ain't 'sleep she suffers so; but she sleeps mostly.

**DR. SCOTT**

Well, let's see, let's see. Just hand me a pan of warm water and I'll soon find out just what's what.

**CHARITY**

All right, doctor. I'll bring it to you right away.

( *Bustles about fixing water — looking toward dress Tildy is working on* )

Poor little Emmerline's been wanting a white dress trimmed with torshon a long time — now she's got it and it looks like — well —

( *Hesitates* )

t'warn't made to wear.

**TILDY**

Don't take on so, sister Charity — The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh.

**CHARITY**

I know — but it's hard — hard —