

One Cent Baby

by Nathaniel Tower

Yesterday, I ripped off Dollar General. Today my baby died.
Tomorrow I will file a lawsuit. After all, someone has to pay.

Let's start with yesterday. I, a humble new mother, ventured to Dollar General with a modest list hoping to save a few bucks for my healthy newborn. I even had coupons. Quite the thrifty woman I have become, already worried about the financial future of my family in these ailing times.

My number one purpose for the visit was to acquire baby formula at the store's discounted rates for the youthful prince that had escaped my womb just ten months prior. The little prince, whom I had aptly named Henry, had recently sprouted a tooth, and breast feeding had just become too painful for my increasingly sensitive nipples. So, among other small items, I walked through the automatic doors that graciously parted themselves for me to enter and purchase a few cans of reasonably priced Instamilk Baby Formula, priced ever more reasonably due to those coupons I had found while scouring the newspapers and weekly advertisements. Oh, I was such a thoughtful mother, giving little Henry the best now while managing to save money for his college. Anything for my little scholar.

Through the store I walked, filling my cart with a few necessities: napkins, soap, tooth brushes, and, of course, the Instamilk cans, labeled as \$8.84, over five dollars cheaper than the nearest competitor. As you can see, my shopping was focused entirely on the needs of my family. Nothing was for my self, and the money I saved would go to my family, not to my self. With all these practical items in tow, I calmly approached the lone open lane where I would happily pay the store that appreciatively sold its goods for so much less.

The cashier, although I generally like to see the positive in every situation, was nothing more than a mumbling fool, barely capable of scanning my items through the register and placing them in the

plastic bags that I would use to assist myself in carrying the items into my humble home. I dreaded what this lad would attempt to do when I handed him the cash to pay for these items. Certainly, this youth had failed to graduate high school, not because he was a burn out, but simply because he was one of those rare people truly incapable of functioning in an actual society, which is why he worked at Dollar General in the first place. And this was why Dollar General's prices destroyed the competition.

On his apron, a nametag announced his name as Paul, scribbled in the unpracticed hand of a demented child, resting gently beneath the man breasts that made me feel inadequate as a woman in spite of the fact that my post-pregnancy breasts were nothing shy of floatation devices fit for a small elephant to stay above the surface. Still, the mammoths on my chest were nothing compared to Paul's and his body was strangely proportional to those oversized globules of fat. His general appearance, made worse by the fact that he likely dressed himself hurriedly in an unlit closet, was somewhat comical if not depressing. For a moment, a horrifying thought entered my mind: what if my child should someday look like this creature? Right there, I wanted to mother this poor boy and his permanently perplexed brow, something his own mother obviously hadn't done. I should have gently taken him aside, encouraged him to lose some weight, wear looser shirts, to pull his pants down underneath his belly button so as not to trap the rolls of fat awkwardly in his corduroys, three steps that would only moderately help his grotesque appearance.

But then, I heard the thing's voice, and I knew there was no hope for the lad. In a roaring but strangely squeakily toned mumble of utter nonsensical gibberish, the round manchild asked me something I can only assume was about how my shopping went, to which I could think of no other reply except, "Fine, and you," before I loaded the conveyor belt with my few items that were to be sent frightfully into this employee's clumsily oversized hands.

The misfortunate freak who made the Hunchback of Notre Dame into a suave clothing model, scanned my few items quickly and

uncomfortably. This clearly was the only job this moose was capable of holding, but his skills soon proved poor even for something so remedial. As the formula cans rolled their way through the belt and the scanner, each appeared as only one cent on the price screen, an obvious error yet a magical number for such a frugal woman.

I assumed that any fool could catch such a vast mistake, but the ogre scanned away, obviously not excelling in the art of comparison of prices, all five cans totaling five cents, a total that would save me and my baby over forty dollars. Perhaps this circular giant was a saint sent to save me a few dollars to help my family, but more likely he was just too dumb to realize the mistake the computer had made.

Hurriedly, my heart racing, I paid the beast in exact change, wanting to make a quick exit before some higher power figured me out. My heart raced as I departed through the doors that again parted as I approached, allowing me to freely escape into the outside world. For a moment, I felt like a common criminal who had just recklessly committed a petty crime, and I wondered if I should go back inside and reveal the mistake to the befuddled monster. I could not bring myself to turn back, feeling that to do so would only embarrass that already pathetic creature, and I instead opted to call my lovely husband and order him to at once get dressed and drive down to Dollar General to clear their shelves of the Instamilk Baby Formula that was on sale for one cent. As I hung up the phone and entered my car, it occurred to me that I had left so quickly that I hadn't even used my coupons, but I guess at this point I was content with the deal I had received, so I got into my car and drove home to my prince with forty extra dollars waiting in my pocket.

As I drove home, my husband drove frantically to the store and cleared off the shelves, purchasing ten more cans of the formula, assumingly from the unobservant Paul, giving us even more funds to save. Henry would soon indeed be living in the royalty he deserved.

The rest of yesterday was insignificant save for the following details: my husband and I spent the duration of dinner speaking of poor Paul, and then heroic Henry fed on several bottles of deliciously cheap formula.

And that, my unfortunate reader, brings us to today.

Oh, wretched day. Yesterday I felt on top of the world, mother of the year, bargain shopper of the century. I had defeated the evil machine that forever tries to pinch every penny out of all of us until we starve and beg at their mercy and they gave us the leftover garbage that they donate to make themselves look like humanitarians.

Only today do I realize that yesterday's one cent baby formula was not sold to me by an angel of mercy. Rather, it was sold to me by the angel of death. Paul was not the senseless beast I thought he was, although he did commit a senseless act. In fact, he was one of Satan's minions, disguised as a bumbling idiot, tempting me with the sweet nectar of life in the form of an unpassable deal. Oh, how I wish I had not met Satan and given into his temptation, but it was just so enticing. Now I know truly why Eve gave in and why Adam gave in, but they at least had been warned. Where was my warning? Why was I abandoned and left at the mercy of that winged demon, that demon who disguised his wings as hideous man breasts that made me feel self-conscious about my own appearance? Never did I know just how much the devil could torment womankind. The evil forces of the world have today taken away my prince Henry, leaving me at no mercy in this wretched hell.

This morning I awoke as usual just before the sun peaked his golden rays out upon the horizon. With a smile, I rushed to my babe to shower it with love and a sweet treat of yummy milk. When I went to waken the prince, he did not appear as his usual peaceful self. Rather, he seemed to have lost that golden warmth that usurps the sun's rays that are cold in comparison. My baby lay there, on his back, pale and lifeless, stiff as a board, dead as a nail. His soul, I assumed, had been stolen away by some evil creature, the compensation for that cheap milk. Instantly, I yanked the lad out of the crib, brought him to my breast, smothered him with the own sweet nectar I could provide giving no concern for the sensitivity of my tooth-scarred nipple. But drink he did not, and lactate I did not. The babe felt like nothing more than a limp doll in my arms. As I

weaped, I thought not of the cause of death, for I knew that he had been poisoned by an evil being sent to earth by an even more evil being. Setting down the baby, I began to plot my revenge. Eat, drink, and be merry Dollar General, for tomorrow you die.

