



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE

VOL. XIX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 11, 1869.

No. 44.

JESSIE'S CHOICE.

A TALE FOUNDED ON FACT.

CHAPTER I.

The high road that lay between Puule Valley and its post town, had been thronged all day by travelling companies of equestrian acrobatic performers...

CHAPTER II.

The morning broke bright and clear, and promised no unfriendly shower to damp the spirits and persons of the expectant sight-seekers.

unasily at the sufferer, and shook her head.— 'Nay, mother, father is really better,' said Sam. 'Do try to sleep a few minutes; and he disappeared from the caravan.'

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fixing his keen eyes on her averted face. 'You are something a man might make his fortune of if he had the gumption to take pains with the training of you.'

Bessie expressed her comprehension of these words by rubbing her head against Jessi's shoulder, and she received an affectionate caress from the hands of her little friend.

The audience is impatient,' exclaimed the thin man; 'how much longer are they to wait?'

'What are you crying for?' asked the man. 'Because my poor grandfather is dying, and I want to go to him,' answered Jessi.

'Who taught you to dance the rope?' 'My poor mother and father, afore they died. I was only five years old when they left me.'

'Does your Aunt Mary ever dance?' 'The child opened her eyes very wide, and answered, half indignantly.

'I should think she don't. She says it's the devil's trade, and she hates the sight of shows and fairs and such like.'

'Oh, is she?' sneered the man. 'What religion does she follow?' 'My Aunt Mary is a Catholic. We ain't—that is me, and Uncle Sam, and granny, and grandfather—we're nothing.'

Jessie was getting restless, for the man's grim smile and inaudible colloquy terrified her more than his sarcasm and unfeeling words.

'I wish uncle would come. I should like to look at him through the peep hole. Please, sir, will you let me pass?'

'Well, you see, continued the creature, smiling so horribly that Jessi turned pale with fright, the gentleman would be kinder to you than he is to his other little girls, and would buy you a splendid frock to dance in, all covered over with silver and gold and precious stones.'

'I am afraid you want me to be a ballet-dancer,' sighed Jessi. 'Well, my dear, have you any objections? I can assure you these forty children are the nicest, prettiest, happiest, rosy-cheekiest little girls you never did see.'

'No, no, no, no,' cried poor Jessi, struggling in his grasp; 'I'll never leave Aunt Mary. I will never be a ballet dancer; I'll die first. Loose me, sir, loose me!'

'Holloo, halloo!' shouted Uncle Sam, flinging himself from the back of Black Bess and seizing Jessi with a violence that made her stagger; 'what's to do, master? Speak, Jessi; what's to do, eh?'

'He want's me to go along with him and be a ballet-dancer; and I said 'No,' and he said 'Yes,' and he looked so fierce, and held me so tight, it made me cry out. Oh, don't you hurt him, Uncle Sam. Oh, stop!' she shrieked; 'Uncle Sam, stop!'

'But it was too late; Sam's passion had blinded him, and he struck without seeing the object he aimed at.

'Aunt Mary! Aunt Mary!' cried the child, throwing herself by the side of the prostrate form of Sam's wife, who had just entered and rushed forward to arrest the arm of her husband.

grandfather lay, she slipped the chinking coin into her uncle's hand. There was no time for explanation; the man was in a hurry for his fare, and Mary was full of anxiety for the poor sufferer, who had thought the minutes of her absence long and tedious hours.

They entered their humble home, and stood by the old man's death-bed. He was propped up with pillows, his wife supporting his head on her arm. A bright smile crossed his face as they entered; but his voice, as he gave them welcome, was faint and weak.

'Mary, what kept you so long, my dear? You said you would only wait for Jessi. Surely the child has not been on the rope all these hours?'

'Let me tell father,' said Sam to his wife; and taking a chair, he sat by the bed. Mary commenced to cook the much-needed supper, and Jessi insisted that she was not too tired to help her.

'Father,' began Sam, 'I never in all my life saw Jessi dance so well.'

'Hush!' said the sick man. 'I have made my peace with my good God to-day, and I have made a true and faithful promise to Him to do my best to save that child from such a life as opening afore her.'

Jessie clung to her aunt, her face beaming with joyful surprise. 'Sam, as sure as I'm a dying man, the stage will run that child, soul and body.'

'She ain't a common child,' said Sam; 'just look at what she can't to-night,—the master paid her that touch; and Sam laid the gold on the bed.'

'Take it away, Sam; it won't buy my consent to let the child go once into any kind of play-house. I have had good advice, Sam. The blessed priest of God showed me my duty as clear as the light of day, and thousands of that yellow coin wouldn't make me yield an inch. Sam, your dying father's words to you this night is, to keep that child from plays, theatres, and dancing-houses, and every mortal thing that could harm her immortal soul.'