

The Cost of an Education.

Jose was coming home from school on Friday afternoon. She was just a little tired. The October mud clung close about her instep and the October mist struck her cheeks. She was thinking idly about nothing. A train of images came drifting into her head; the day at school; tomorrow's work; the apples in the orchard to sort; now that she was twelve she was old enough to help with that; her garden seeds to put in muslin bags and hang up where the mice could not get them; a list of things for Christmas; wool and silk and paper to be bought with the money her father had given her for feeding a calf all summer.

"Goot efening Yose; vill you rite?"

Old man Krueger's face beamed down from the high seat of a hog wagon as he drew in his horses. Jose climbed up beside him; it was no trouble for her, she had practiced climbing up the sides of corncribs all her life.

She began to chatter into the old man's face, her own eyes brightening and her cheeks flushing. Here was a chance to talk.

"It's horrid. I thought I never would get home. My feet were as heavy as lead and the mud kinda squashed up around my ankles. I'm awful glad you came along. A hog wagon may not be the prettiest thing in the world to ride in but it gets you up higher out of the mud anyway."

Krueger laughed at her jokes.

"Ve made him high a purpose. De pigs allus would yump out in der mut. Dey don't tink like you do. Ged up Yaks; you muss think Sharlie, he don't haf noddings to do only pull dis vagon vitout no hellup. Ged up Sharlie."

The horses started on a trot and the rattle of the wagon box drowned out Jose's attempt to answer. When they had quieted down Krueger turned to her.

"Vy your fader sells his farm! Aint de groun' good?" he asked.

"Jose drew back a little and raised her startled eyes to his.

"My father doesn't want to sell the farm," she said quickly.

Krueger's face grew heavily puzzled.

"Den vy did he say to my brudder dat he vill sell sheap any day if he could? I know dat he aint got any morkage."

Jose had recovered.

"I did not know that father wanted to sell. If he does it isn't because the ground is poor. He says our farm is the best anywhere around. He might be tired of farming. It's because I'm not a boy. Hired men don't care whether the work is done or not. And I suppose my mother wants me to go to school."

The wagon stopped in front of the house and Jose climbed down stiffly. There was a note of displeasure in her thanks that brought another puzzled look to Krueger's face. Jose in some way blamed him because her father wanted to sell. He could not see—

Jose went into the house feeling somehow that the bottom had dropped out of things. But supper was on the table and in her hunger Jose almost forgot what Krueger had said. After supper, when she began to wipe the dishes it all came back.

She turned to her mother and said in a suppressed voice:

"I rode home with old man Krueger today."

Her mother answered carelessly, "I saw you get out of the wagon. There is nothing strange in that."

"Yes, mamma, but he said—"

Jose stopped and went on stumblingly. "We were—going to sell the farm."

Her mother spoke cheerfully. "Your father did have some sort of a chance last week. He has not said anything about it since. If we can get a good

price we ought to take it. We want to educate you. After this year there will be nothing worth your while in a country school. We thought it would be better to move to town than to send you away from home."

Jose was silent.

Saturday morning the sun had come out and Jose was helping bright and early with the apples. She pressed the damp brown apple leaves into the spongy sod while she waited for the hired man to carry her seventh bushel of apples to the bins. It must be ten by the sun. She looked out under the low grey branches towards the house. She saw what made her heart stop beating for a moment, old Krueger and a younger man coming out to where her father stood on his ladder picking the last of the winesaps. She saw them stop at the foot of the ladder, saw her father come down and shake hands with them, saw him address himself in a businesslike way to the younger man—and waited to see no more, for she turned from them and walked unsteadily to the house. Her mother was in the kitchen. Jose went straight up to her own room, not to cry, but to think. She went over all the time since she was old enough to remember. She thought of the old barn with its wide stalls and heavy timbers; the creek with its bend and deep places where she had rowed her leaky old boat; the level prairie pasture across the old ford where she had found the patch of wild strawberries; the north field that she remembered best by the swell of fresh cut wheat; the orchard; the threshing; the corn husking when the wagons rattled out to the field in the early morning while she lay half asleep, yet in the dark; the long winter evenings before a drowsy wood fire; fresh violets down under the scrub oaks at the creek; wild roses on the prairie; her garden.

Jose's eyes filled slowly with tears. Along the window sill of her room lay a paper spread thickly with pumpkin seeds. She smiled through her tears.

"I'm crying before I'm hurt," she said to herself. "Likely I'll get to plant those very seeds and eat the pumpkins."

She sprang up from the bed and pushed back her hair. She would go back to her apples. She began to tip-toe down the steps slowly. She felt a little foolish. She did not want anyone to know that she had run away from her work. At the foot of the stairs she stopped. Her father and mother were talking in the kitchen. She heard her father's deep voice.

"I think it will be all right. He's willing to pay my price but wants time. He is willing to pay four thousand down and one thousand a year till it is all paid. Can we go on that? We'll want to buy in town."

Jose could not hear her mother's words. She slipped out quietly through the front door and went towards the orchard. Her body felt rigid.

The farm was going to be sold then. On the morning Jose's father and mother went to town to see about the deed, Jose spoke out all that was in her mind. She had watched her father put on his overcoat and draw on his gloves.

"If you're doing it for me," she had burst out bitterly, "you needn't mind; I'd just as leave never know a thing as to go to town to live."

Her father looked at her mother with a shamefaced expression.

"I didn't know she'd care," he said awkwardly. "Perhaps we'd better not—"

Her mother interrupted.

"You don't know what you are talking about, Jos. You'll know better when you're older."

Jose said no more. The farm was sold; all that was left for her was to bear it. They were to move right out; in two weeks more, those other children would be sleeping in her room. She packed her things carefully. Her garden

seeds she need not take. Even if they could have a garden in town where she would never make it. So she left them on her table till the last morning. Then she stifled an impulse to burn them. Those other children could have them. She put them down on the floor and let the hired man carry her table down to the wagon.

After the last load was gone, her father drove the buggy around to the front gate for Jose and her mother. The buggy was not theirs any more, nor Frank and Nig. This was the last ride behind farm horses. In town they would have a phaeton and other horses.

Jose let her mother go through the door first and turned to give a last look at the empty rooms. She saw the open stove pipe hole, the curtainless windows, the finger marked wall paper with the fern leaves on it, the bare floor, the

old door stone with the hole worn on it where she had cracked walnuts, the door, closing behind her, and the cracked white door knob.

Then she turned away toward an education.

ANNIE PREY.

Shade of Jonah—What are you crying about Willie?

Shade of Shakspeare—They are saying I didn't write plays.

Shade of Jonah—That's nothing. They are claiming that I did not go that whaling trip.

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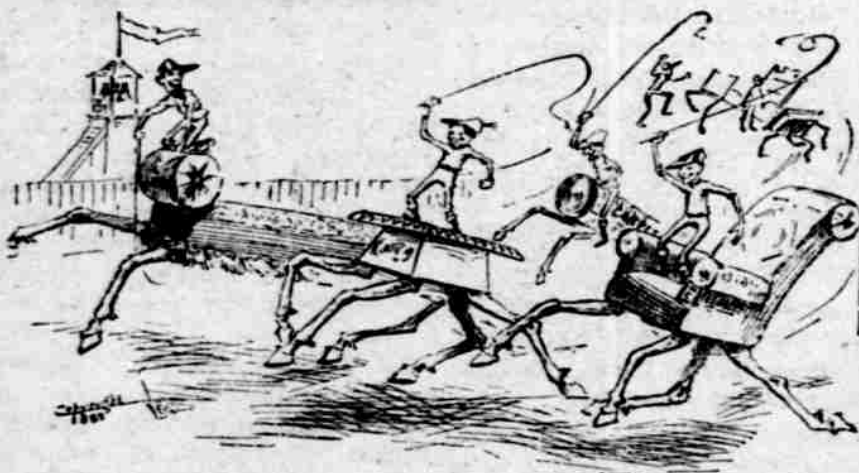
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