

Mose

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UNCLE MOSE—A TRUE STORY

The early spring sunshine sifted through the honey-suckle vines clustering around the cabin door, and made a network of dancing light upon the floor. A little Negro boy sat on the steps gazing silently up the dusty road and idly listening to the insistent buzzing of insects hovering about the honey-suckle blooms.

"Don't yer see nothin' of her yet, Jerry?" came in a querulous voice from a bed in a corner of the cabin.

"Naw, Unc' Mose. She ain't in sight yit, but it's mos' time fer 'er."

"Hit 'pear lak dis mis'ry is er gittin' wus all de time," the voice went on.

"Miss Sally say dat limerumunt gwine he'p it," essayed Jerry consolingly.

"It don' do no good 'cep'in jess whilst Aun' Judy is er rubbin'. De rubbin' does mo' good dan de limerumunt."

"Dar she is, rat now!" exclaimed Jerry presently.

"Praise de Lawd! fer de ole man sho is hongry en' got de mis'ry from his haid to his heels."

"Dar's ernudder lady wid Miss Sally. Sarter looks lak er gal."

"Mus' be some er ole master's gran'dahters come on er visit. Whyn't yer come an' sit some cheers out an' dus' em' an' straighten dis quilt 'stead er settin' dar lak er black patch on de sunshine? Don' yer know how ter ack when de quality is comin'?" By the time the chairs had been arranged to his notion the visitors were at the door.

"Good morning, Uncle Mose," said the older woman brightly, as she put a covered basket down on a table by the bed.

She had a strong, sweet face and smooth white hair, and the gracious dignity of a queen. "I hope you rested well last night and are feeling very much better. I have brought some one to see you. Now guess who she is," and she placed the girl where the sunshine fell across her face.

Uncle Mose turned his head on the pillow, and gazed eagerly at his visitor. Then his old black face wrinkled into a smile. "Lawd, honey, you sho' mus' be one er Mars' Eddard's dahters, frum de favor!"

"You are right, Uncle Mose. It's Miss Caroline."

"I'm so sorry to find you in bed, Uncle Mose," said the girl, coming closer, while Miss Sally began taking an appetizing breakfast from the basket and putting it on the table.

"Father told me not to come home without seeing Uncle Mose. He talks of you so often."

The old man beamed with pleasure. "Den Mr. Eddard's done fergive me for not choosing him dat time," he said with a chuckle. "Did you ebber h'yar 'bout dat time I choosed mah master?"

"Now, Uncle Mose, none of your reminiscence until Jerry has given you your breakfast. Then I know that Caroline will be delighted to hear all about it," and Miss Sally smiled indulgently. "Here, Caroline, put these flowers in water where Uncle Mose can see them, while I measure some medicine for him."

"Dat sho was er good breakfus', Miss Sally," said the old negro with a sigh of content, as Jerry gave him the last bit of waffle. "Ole Aun' Jincy allers was er good cook, en her ma befo' 'er. Couldn't nobody beat Aun' Lucy cookin' in dem days. Ginger cakes? She made de bes' ginger cakes! Miss Sally, you 'member dat time Ole Marster give me an Mars' Wat er whole silver dollar en we walked two miles to Mars' Walter's sto' en spent ev'ry bit er it fer ginger cakes? Er whole dollar's wuth er ginger cakes, an' Aunt Lucy rat dar at home er cookin' de bes' ones in de country! Mars' Wat sho was er sight!" and Mose lay looking with dim eyes into a happy, long-vanished past.

"Now tell me about when you chose your master," said Caroline, drawing a chair closer to the bed.

"O, dat time; I 'members dat mornin' jess lak it was yistiddy. Hit was in the spring-time lak dis, en ole Mose was er lil' black rascal lak Jerry dar. I was playin' roun' de cabin do' en h'yer come Jim de ke'ge driver, en say ole Marster wanted me rat erway. I sho was skeered! But I couldn't think o' no meanness I had done so I jess helt up mah haid en marched up de road ter de Big House. En dar I foun' Ole Marster standin' on de steps, en in er row on de po'ch was Mars' Eddard, en Mars' Ted, an Mars' Wat, en Mars' Tom. 'Come h'yer Mose,' say Ole Marster in dat big way er his'n. 'Come h'yer en choose yer marster. I'm gwine to give yer ter de one you picks out.' I 'gan at Mars' Eddard. He was older 'en me an' sorter se'rus lak so I passed him by. I looked at Mars' Ted er long time sorter hes'tatin', but den I jess chanced ter look at Mars' Wat, en dem blue eyes er his'n was fa'rly dancin' wid sump'n sorter lak ole Nick, en I say ter mahself, 'dat's de marster fer Mose,' so I say out loud, 'I chooses Mars' Wat,' en bress yer heart, honey, I ain' nebber been sorry er minute sence. But de res' er Ole Marsters' boys nebber did fergive Mose fer dat," and he chuckled at the remembrance.

Caroline laughed. "Thank you, Uncle Mose, I've enjoyed hearing about it. I must go and see Mammy now. Next time I come I hope you will be better."

"De ole man ain' had his foots ter de flo' in five weeks dis comin' Sadd'y Miss Ca'line. Good bye, Miss Ca'line honey, come ergin."

"And now, Jerry, you run tell Aunt Judy to come up at once and rub Uncle Mose's ankles," said 'Miss' Sally as Caroline left the cabin. "I'll warm this liniment and have it all ready." She stopped before the open fireplace and raked up the embers into a little blazing fire, and putting the saucer of turpentine on the floor at some distance, she stood up and turned toward the bed. Just then a spark from the fire fell into the saucer, and the turpentine blazed up. 'Miss' Sally, startled, sprang back, but in so doing, her light cotton morning gown came in contact with the blazing turpentine and was quickly ignited. She

caught up her skirts and tried to put it out with her hands, but could not. For several seconds 'Miss' Sally stood face to face with an awful death.

"My God-er-Mighty!" cried Uncle Mose, and with the agility of youth and health he sprang from the bed dragging a blanket with him, and throwing it around her, wrapped it close, extinguishing the flames just as Aunt Judy and Jerry appeared in the door.

"De Lawd in Hebben!" cried fat Judy, her swift glance taking in Miss Sally's white face, burned garments and helpless hands, and 'Uncle' Mose tottering back to his bed.

"Po' lamb! now jess look at dem han's! Lemme tie 'em up in wet sody this minute! You sho 'mos' got burned up, honey."

"I would have, but for Uncle Mose," said 'Miss' Sally faintly, as she sank into a chair.

Aunt Judy turned stormy eyes upon the poor groaning old man. "I'd lak ter know how cum Unc' Mose jess foun' out he kin walk?" she inquired belligerently. "I 'lowed some time ergo dat Mose was possumin'. I sho ain' gwine to waste mo' elbo' grease on dat old hyp'crite."

"Hush, Judy," said her mistress sternly, "Uncle Mose is no hypocrite. He has inflammatory rheumatism. It was a miracle," she added reverently.

"Dat's hit!" exclaimed Mose, eagerly. "Er miracle! Hit was de Lawd-er-Mighty let Mose git up den. Fer how you reckon I'd eber face Mars' Wat ergin' ef I had to tell him I jess lay in de baid en let my lil' mistress burn up? Mose done promus Mars' Wat ter tekkeer er Miss Sally, an' ole man done de bes' he could."