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DIRECT FROM THE LOOM TO THE CONSUMER

Uncle Pete's Possum.



ANY one may be lost in New York.

A step from accustomed haunts and a person is seen no more, thought of never again.

When Mrs. General Hugh Jones ap Jones closed the outer door of the office of the Polypolitan, the great magazine upon which she had held a humble position for thirteen years, she was as lost to her old associates and co-workers as if she had been swallowed up in the sands of the dessert or in the waves of the sea.

All those years of labor her meager salary had but met her meager expenses. She must now begin the search for work, so difficult for the despairing heart and shabby-genteel person to bring to successful issue.

Any one may be found in New York. At the most unexpected moment the friend not seen in many years may suddenly accost one.

Some six months after losing her position on the Polypolitan, Mrs. Jones was on Twenty-third Street nearing Sixth Avenue, where the crowd is thickest and where the lavender perfumes are sweetest as the street vendors sift the odorous seed through brown fingers to attract attention of probable buyers. Mrs. Jones was suddenly confronted by a little old negro with a board on his back.

That board bore the letterings urging all to go to Marion's for a table d'hôte dinner at twenty-five cents.

"Mistis!" ejaculated the old negro. "Oh, my Mistis!" with fuller assurance. "Why, Pete!" Out went the little gloved hand with reblackened glove tips.

There was in that offer of the mistress's hand all the almost regal patronage that is the heritage of the Southern slave holder; none other can acquire it, none having had can lose it. "I fear, Pete, that times are hard with you," suggested the mistress, glancing at the board projecting above the old man's head.

"Not so hard, Mistis, not so hard. I does dis mostly for exercise." Pete had noted at a glance that these shabby blacks were not as was the garb wont to adorn the former mistress of Fairmont Hall. He did not wish to burden her with relations of troubles that were his own.

"Whar you livin', Mistis?" "Quite near here, Pete. I have a nice, sunny room."

There is usually sun through a skylight. "Can I come dar and talk 'bout de good ole times when I gets through wid dis job?" pleaded the old man.

This was the beginning of many interviews.

A little inquiry among the servants of the rooming house informed Pete of his old mistress's way of living—of the six-by-eight skylight room four flights up, of the meager meals cooked over the gas ring, of the weary all-day journeys to sell for small pay papers written deep in the night.

He saw how as weeks dragged on, the fine profile grew clearer and sharper.

He realized also that the little old aristocrat was utterly alone, more alone amid the million souls of the city than Crusoe on his island, for there Mother Nature stretched enfolding arms and here city walls repelled.

If Pete had known of that classic, he might have come to liken himself to Man Friday. But he did not know the story, and just now his old brain was busy trying to devise ways and means of bringing a bit of luxury into the starved life once ministered to so lavishly.

The push-cart of an Italian suddenly gave him the long-sought idea. The cart was heaped with luscious rose-gold pears, reminding Pete of the fruitage of Fairmont orchard. Cards bearing the legends "3 for 10" and "16 for 25" stuck like standards in the assorted heap.

A dozen pears cost all Pete's earn-

ings for the day. The old negro's rearing among the most punctilious people of earth had given him some appreciation of the instincts and scrupulosity of the class. He realized that to render a gift to a superior acceptable it must not smack of lucre. It must seem to grow a part of Nature, as a bird's nest or a bunch of pine cones.

He bethought himself of an old bow-basket made of white-oak splints by his own hands away down in old Virginia. The basket was at his poor lodgings twenty blocks away. But away he trudged, drew the old basket from his carpet sack, and, begging some half withered ferns from a florist, he gave his pears quite a home-grown appearance.

Nor did his inventiveness stop there. He acquired, in imagination, a little farm in Jersey whence he came daily to the city on errands of business or pleasure.

The Jersey farm proved a master stroke, for now at least once a week he brought to his old mistress some growth from that wonderfully productive little farm.

"I wish I could see your little farm," Mrs. Jones had said one day, and Pete's knees shook with fright at the thought. "But I could not spare the time, or"—Mrs. Jones stopped as the word "fare" was on her lips. Only by its fruits was she to know the little Jersey farm.

When Pete recovered from his fright lest his mistress discover the deception he practiced, he asked a question he had long desired to voice: "Mistis, don't you never study 'bout gwine home?"

"Think of it! Pete, I think of no-

thing else."

"Den, Mistis, why'n you go?"

"I can never hope to make the money."

Then, more to herself than to the old

servant of her days of luxury, she re-

cited something of her struggles.

She made just enough week by week,

with utmost output of brain, will, body,

to pay for the skylight room and meager

subsistence.

"Why'n de chillen send you de money?"

Pete's soft question scarcely interrupted

the self-communing monologue.

"They haven't it. My daughters are

both widows. There is food in plenty

there, as on your Jersey farm, you

know—"

Yes, Pete knew.

"But never a cent of money to spare.

Ah! if I could only get there—there is

home and space"—she threw up her old

arms—"space—they do not know, they

must not know. There are grandchil-

dren, you know, Pete, and they have

many needs—"

"Hit take a heap er money to git

to ole Ferginny?"

"More than I shall ever see again at

one time."

Pete went soon after this to the old

Dominion dock. He learned that to go

to Fairmont Landing in Virginia would

cost fifteen dollars—an impossible sum

to one whose earnings were but a few

pennies a day.

There were but two days to Christmas

when Pete was sent on an errand far out

in the Bronx.

His errand accomplished, he sat down

against a fence decorated with the leg-

end, "Post No Bills," to enjoy the open.

Behind him all the city pulsed with

glad preparations for the joyous season.

The winter had been wondrously mild,

Pete knew, however, that the good days

could not last. He knew that when the

long-delayed bitter white winter set in

there would be an awful, still cold in

the skylight room. He knew that the

crevices of the stone buildings which

were his only lodgings now would be

deep in drifted snow.

He had for a long time been able to

pay for a bed only once in a while. His

carpet-sack was now empty; all his poor

belongings had gone into pawn. Yet

he still managed to carry each week to

his mistress the fruits of the Jersey

farm.

As he sat now where the winter snow

fell on him, he revolved over and over

the question that absorbed all his

thoughts: How could old Mistis get

back to Virginia?

As he sat and pondered, suddenly—