

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

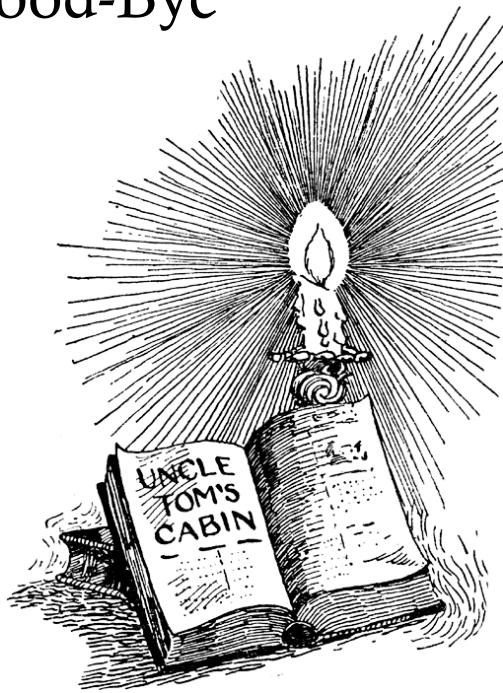
(Told to the Children)

By

Harriet Beecher Stowe
H. E. Marshall ed.

Chapter 17

Eva's Last Good-Bye



It soon became quite plain to everybody that Eva was very ill indeed. She never ran about and played now, but spent most of the day lying on the sofa in her own pretty room.

Every one loved her, and tried to do things for her. Even naughty little Topsy used to bring her flowers, and try to be good for her sake.

Uncle Tom was a great deal in Eva's room. She used to get very restless, and then she liked to be carried about. He was so big and strong that he could do it very easily. He would walk about with her under the orange-trees in the garden, or sitting down on some of their old seats, would sing their favorite hymns.

He loved to do it, and could not bear to be long away from his little mistress. He gave up sleeping in his bed, and lay all night on the mat outside her door.

One day Eva made her aunt cut off a lot of her beautiful hair. Then she called all the slaves together, said good-bye to them, and gave them each a curl of her hair as a keepsake. They all cried very much and said they would never forget her, and would try to be good for her sake.

A few nights later Miss Ophelia came quickly to Tom, as he lay on the mat outside Eva's door. 'Go, Tom,' she said, 'go as fast as you can for the doctor.'

Tom ran. But in the morning little Eva lay on her bed, cold and white, with closed eyes and folded hands.

She had gone to God.

Mr. St. Clare was very, very unhappy for a long time after Eva died. He had loved her so much, that now his life seemed quite empty without her.

He did not forget his promise to her about Tom. He went to his lawyer, and told him to begin writing out the papers that would make Tom free. It took some time to make a slave free.

'Well, Tom,' said Mr. St. Clare the day after he had spoken to his lawyer, 'I'm going to make a free man of you. So have your trunk packed and get ready to set out for home.'

Joy shone in Uncle Tom's face. 'Bless the Lord,' he said, raising his hands to heaven.

Mr. St. Clare felt rather hurt. He did not like Tom to be so glad to leave him.

'You haven't had such a very bad time here that you need be such rapture, Tom,' he said.

'No, no, mas'r! tan't that. It's bein' a free man! That's what I'm joyin' for.'

'Why, Tom, don't you think that you are really better off as you are?'

'No, indeed, Mas'r St. Clare,' said Tom, very decidedly; 'no, indeed.'

'But, Tom, you couldn't possibly have earned by your work such clothes and such nice, comfortable rooms and good food as I have given you.'

'I knows all that, Mas'r St. Clare. Mas'r has been too good. But, mas'r, I'd rather have poor clothes, poor house, poor everything, and have 'em mine than have the best, and have 'em any man's else. I had so, mas'r. I thinks it's nature, mas'r.'

'I suppose so, Tom. You will be going off and leaving me, in a month or two,' he said, rather discontentedly. 'Though why you shouldn't, I don't know,' he added, in a gayer voice.

'Not while mas'r is in trouble,' said Tom. 'I'll stay with mas'r as long as he wants me—so as I can be of any use.'

'Not while I am in trouble, Tom?' said Mr. St. Clare, looking sadly out of the window. 'And when will my trouble be over?' Then half-smiling he turned from the window, and laid his hand on Tom's shoulder. 'Ah, Tom, you soft, silly boy,' he said. 'I won't keep you. Go home to your wife and children, and give them all my love!'

'Cousin,' said Miss Ophelia, coming into the room, 'I want to speak to you about Topsy!'

'What has she been doing now?'

'Nothing; she is a much better girl than she used to be. But I want to ask you, whose is she—yours or mine?'

'Why yours, of course; I gave her to you,' said Mr. St. Clare.

'But not by law. There is no use my trying to make this child a Christian, unless I can be quite sure that she will not be sold as a slave again. If you are really willing I should have her, I want you to give me a paper saying she is mine.'

'But you think it is wicked to keep slaves. Now you want to have one of your own. Oh! shocking, cousin,' said Mr. St. Clare, who loved to tease.

'Nonsense! I only want to have her, so that I can set her free!'

'Very well,' said Mr. St. Clare, 'I will write the paper for you.' Then he sat down and began to read.

'But I want it done now,' said Miss Ophelia.

'Why are you in such a hurry?'

'Because now is the only time there ever is to do a thing in,' said Miss Ophelia. 'I want to make sure of it. You may die or lose all your money. Then Topsy would be taken away and sold, in spite of anything I could say.'

Mr. St. Clare hated being made to do things when he didn't want to. However, after teasing his cousin a little more, he wrote out the paper, and Topsy belonged to Miss Ophelia. That evening Mr. St. Clare went out for a walk.

Tom saw him go, and asked if he should come too. 'No, my boy,' said Mr. St. Clare, 'I shall be back in an hour.'

Tom sat down on the verandah to wait till his master came home. While he waited, he fell asleep.

Presently he was awakened by loud knocking, and the sound of voices at the gate.

He ran to open it.

Several men were there carrying a load. It was Mr. St. Clare. He had been hurt in an accident, and was dying.

Very gently they laid him on a sofa. Nothing could be done.

In a short time he had gone to join his little Eva.