

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

(Told to the Children)

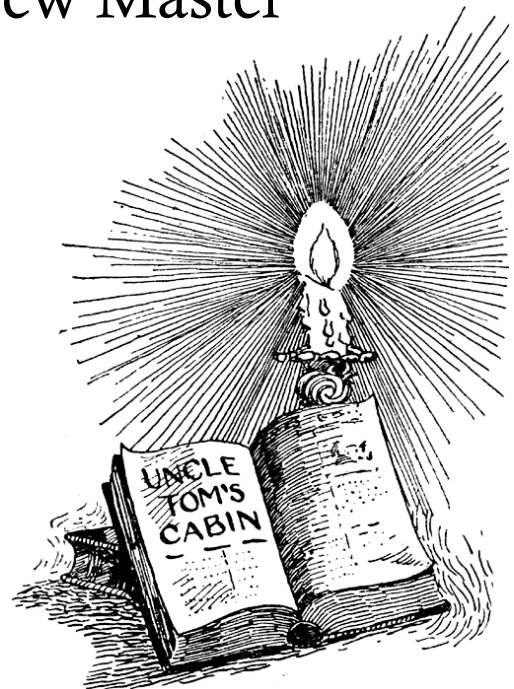
By

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Chapter 18

Uncle Tom's New Master



There had been great grief in the house when Eva died. Now there was not only sorrow, but gloom and fear.

The kind master was dead, and the poor slaves asked themselves in despair what would happen to them now.

They were not long left in doubt. One morning Mrs. St. Clare told them that they were all to be sold. She was going back to her father's house to live, and would not want them any more.

Poor Uncle Tom! The news was a dreadful blow to him. For a few days he had been so happy in the thought of going home. Once more, after all these years, he thought he would see his dear wife and little children. Now, at one stroke, he had lost both his kind master and his hope of freedom.

Instead of going home, he was to be sent farther away than ever from his dear ones. He could not bear it. He tried to say, 'Thy will be done,' but bitter tears almost choked the words.

He had one hope left. He would ask Miss Ophelia to speak to Mrs. St. Clare for him.

'Mas'r St. Clare promised me my freedom, Miss Feely,' he said. 'He told me that he had begun to take it out for me. And now, perhaps, if you would be good enough to speak about it to missis, she would feel like going on with it. Seeing it was Mas'r St. Clare's wish, she might.'

'I'll speak for you, Tom, and do my best,' said Miss Ophelia. 'I haven't much hope, but I will try.'

So Miss Ophelia asked Mrs. St. Clare to set Tom free.

'Indeed, I shall do no such thing,' she replied. 'Tom is worth more than any of the other slaves. I couldn't afford to lose so much money. Besides,

what does he want with his freedom? He is a great deal better off as he is.'

'But he does want it very much,' replied Miss Ophelia. 'And his master promised it to him.'

'I dare say he does want it,' replied Mrs. St. Clare. 'They all want it. Just because they are a discontented set, always wanting what they haven't got.'

'But Tom is so good and gentle, and such a splendid worker. If you sell him there is the chance of his getting a bad master.'

'Oh, I have no fear about that. Most masters are good, in spite of all the talk people make about it,' replied Mrs. St. Clare.

'Well,' said Miss Ophelia at last, 'I know it was one of the last wishes of your husband that Tom should have his freedom. He promised dear little Eva that he should have it. I think you ought to do it.'

Then Mrs. St. Clare began to cry, and say every one was unkind to her, and Miss Ophelia saw it was no use saying anything more. There was only one other thing she could do. She wrote to Mrs. Shelby, telling her that poor Uncle Tom was going to be sold again. She asked her to send money to buy him back, as soon as possible.

The next day, Uncle Tom and the other slaves belonging to Mr. St. Clare were sent to market to be sold.

As Uncle Tom stood in the market-place, waiting for some one to buy him, he looked anxiously round. In the crowd of faces, he was trying to find one kind, handsome one, like Mr. St. Clare's. But there was none.

Presently a short, broad man, with a coarse, ugly face and dirty hands, came up to Tom. He looked him all over, pulled his mouth open and

looked at his teeth, pinched his arms, made him walk and jump, and indeed treated him as he would a horse or cow he had wished to buy.

Tom knew from the way this man looked and spoke, that he must be bad and cruel. He prayed in his heart that this might not be his new master. But it was. His name was Legree. He bought Uncle Tom, several other men slaves, and two women. One of the women was a pretty young girl, who had never been away from her mother before, and who was very much afraid of her new master. The other was an old woman. The two women were chained together. The men, Uncle Tom among them, had heavy chains put on both hands and feet. Then Legree drove them all on to a boat which was going up the river to his plantation.

It was a sad journey. This time there was no pretty Eva, nor kind-hearted Mr. St. Clare, to bring any happiness to the poor slaves.

One of the first things Legree did was to take away all Tom's nice clothes which Mr. St. Clare had given him.

He made him put on his oldest clothes, then he sold all the others to the sailors.

Legree made his slaves unhappy in every way he could think of. Then he would come up to them and say, 'Come, come, I don't allow any sulky looks. Be cheerful, now, or—' and he would crack his whip in a way to make them tremble.

At last the weary journey was over. Legree and his slaves landed. His house was a long way from the river. The men slaves walked, while Legree and the two women drove in a cart.

Mile after mile they trudged along, over the rough road through wild and dreary country, till, hungry, thirsty, and tired, they arrived at the farm, or plantation as it was called.

Legree was not a gentleman like Mr. Shelby or Mr. St. Clare. He was a very rough kind of farmer. On his farm he grew cotton. The cotton had to be gathered and tied into bundles. Then he sold it to people who made it into calico, muslin, and other things, which we need to use and wear. Gathering cotton is very hard work.

The house Legree lived in had once been a very fine one, and had belonged to a rich gentleman. Now, it was old, neglected, and almost in ruins.

The house was bad enough, but the cabins where the slaves lived were far worse. They were roughly built of wood. The wind and the rain came through the chinks between the planks. There were no windows. The floors were nothing but the bare earth. There was no furniture of any kind in them, only heaps of dirty straw to sleep upon.

Uncle Tom felt more unhappy than ever. He had hoped at least to have a little room which he could keep clean and tidy. But this hole he did not even have to himself. He had to share it with five or six others.

Now began the saddest time of Uncle Tom's life. Every morning very early the slaves were driven out into the fields like cattle. All day long they worked hard. The burning sun blazed down upon them, making them hot and tired. Legree and his two chief slaves, called Quimbo and Sambo, marched about all the time with whips in their hands. At night they drove the slaves back again to their miserable huts.

But before they could rest, they had to grind and cook the corn for their supper. When at last they did go to sleep, they had to lie on the heaps of dirty straw instead of in comfortable beds.

Day after day passed in the same way. One morning Uncle Tom noticed a woman walking next him whom he had never seen before. She was tall and slender, her face was almost beautiful, and she looked like a lady. Tom did not know who she was, nor where she came from. But he had

always lived among ladies and gentlemen, and knew whenever he saw her that this was one.

Tom was soon busy at his work. But as the strange woman was near him he could watch her.

She picked the cotton very fast, and with an air of scorn, as if she despised both the work and the disgrace of it.

The old woman who had been bought at the same time as Tom was working near him too. He saw she looked very ill. She often prayed aloud, and trembled as if she would fall. As Tom came near her he took several handfuls of cotton from his own sack and dropped them into hers.

'Oh, don't, don't,' said the woman, 'it will get you into trouble.'

For each night the cotton was weighed. Any slave who had not gathered enough was beaten terribly.

In a few minutes Tom again took several handfuls of cotton from his own sack and dropped them into that of the old woman.

'Oh, you mustn't. You don't know what they'll do to you,' said the poor old woman.

'I can bear it better than you,' said Tom.

The tall woman heard him. She took a great handful from her basket and put it into Tom's. 'You know nothing about this place,' she said, 'or you would not have done that. When you have been here a little longer you won't be so ready to help others. It will take you all your time to take care of yourself.'

As the day went on they both helped the old woman. At last her basket was full, and they thought for this time at least she was safe.

But Sambo had seen what had happened. He told Legree, who hated a kind action; he was such a cruel man.

One would have thought that Sambo and Quimbo, being slaves themselves, would have been kind to the other slaves. But they were not. They were wicked men. Legree had chosen them to watch the others just because they were cruel and wicked. He had bought Uncle Tom because he was so big and strong. He thought that if Tom were only as cruel as he was strong, he would make a fine overseer. But when he found out that Tom was kind and gentle instead of wicked and cruel as he had hoped, Legree was very angry.

This night, although the poor old woman's basket was as full as any of the others, Legree pretended that it was not. He told Tom to beat her for being so lazy.

'I beg mas'r's pardon,' said Tom. 'I hopes mas'r won't set me to that. It's what I an't used to, never did—and can't do.'

'What?' said Legree, seizing a whip and striking Tom again and again with it. 'Will you tell me now you can't do it?'

'Yes, mas'r,' said Tom. 'I'm willing to work night and day. I'll work while there's life and breath left in me. But this thing I can't feel it right to do. And, mas'r, I never shall do it, never.'

Tom had a quiet, soft voice, and a very respectful manner. Legree had thought from that, that he would be cowardly. Now he was so angry and surprised that he could hardly speak. 'You dare to tell me that you think it is wrong!' he roared at last, crimson with passion.

'I think so, mas'r,' replied Tom. 'The poor creature is sick and feeble. It would be downright cruel. And it's what I will never do. Mas'r, if you mean to kill me, kill me. But as to raising my hand agin any one here, I never shall—I'll die first.'

'How dare you !' roared Legree. 'You pre-tend to be good. Have you never read in your Bible, "Servants obey your masters"? Am I not your master? Are you not mine, body and soul?'

'No, no, no! my soul an't yours,' said Tom, looking calmly, almost joyfully, at him. 'You haven't bought it—you can't buy it. It's been bought and paid for by One that's able to keep it. You can't harm me.'

'I can't?' roared Legree. 'We will see. Here, Sambo! Quimbo! give him such a breaking-in that he won't forget it for a month.'

The poor old woman screamed. Sambo and Quimbo dragged Tom away.

Cassy was the name of the strange woman Uncle Tom had noticed in the field. Her father had been a gentleman, though her mother was a slave. She had been brought up like a lady. But her father had died suddenly, and she had been sold along with the rest of his goods.

Though Legree had bought her, and was her master, he was rather afraid of her. He could not help feeling that she was a lady. He had never made her work in the fields. She had only done it for one day, just to show what she could do.

Late at night Tom lay alone in an old shed, groaning and in pain.

The door opened and some one came in.

'Who's there?' said Uncle Tom. 'Oh, for the Lord's mercy, please give me some water.'

It was Cassy. She gave him a drink, and then made him as comfortable as she could.

'Thank you, missis,' said Tom.

'Don't call me missis. I'm a miserable slave, like yourself,' she said bitterly. 'You are a brave fellow,' she went on, after a pause. 'But it is no use, it's no use. Legree is strongest. You must give up.'

'O Lord! O Lord!' groaned Tom, 'how can I give up?'

Cassy sat beside Tom for a long time. She told him about her own life, and how miserable she was. She told him of Legree's cruelties, and how she hated him.

Tom almost forgot his own pain in trying to comfort her. When at last she went away, his heart was warm and grateful. He felt that, even in this dark place, God had not left him altogether without a friend.

After this Cassy was always kind to Tom. She stood between him and Legree's fury as much as she could. She was very kind to Emmeline too, the pretty girl Legree had bought at the same time as Tom. Emmeline and Cassy lived in the great house, and not in the huts among the other slaves.

One night Uncle Tom woke to find Cassy standing beside him.

'Come, Uncle Tom,' she whispered. 'Come. Legree is drunk and asleep. He will not wake. You can easily kill him. Then we shall all be free.'

'No!' said Tom. 'No! Good never comes from doing wicked things. I can't do it.'

'Then I shall do it,' said Cassy, turning to go.

But Uncle Tom took hold of her. He would not let her go until she promised not to do it. 'It is a terribly wicked thing to kill any one, Miss Cassy,' he said. 'Even if Mas'r Legree is wicked, we needn't be wicked too.'

So at last Cassy promised that she would not kill Legree.

'If you could only run away—if it was only possible—I would advise you and Emmeline to do it,' said Uncle Tom, 'but only if you could do it without killing any one—not otherwise.'

'Would you come with us, Uncle Tom?'

'No,' said he, shaking his head. 'But it's different for you. You had better go if you can.'

'I'll try it, Uncle Tom.'

'Amen,' said he. 'The Lord help ye.'

No slave had ever escaped from Legree's plantation. A few had run away, but they had always been caught again, and punished dreadfully.

But Cassy was very clever. She laid her plans so well, that she and Emmeline got right away to a safe place, where Legree could not find them.

When he learned that they had escaped he was terribly angry, but he was sure he could catch them in the swamps which surrounded the house.

Quickly gathering a great number of men and savage dogs, Legree set out to hunt them. It was a far fiercer hunt than the one for Eliza. There was a great band of men, all with blazing torches. The air was full of whooping and shouting, and the savage yells of men and beasts.

But Emmeline and Cassy had got safely away. The men hunted and hunted in vain, and at last gave it up.

Legree had been angry when he started out. When he came back his passion was furious.

He was sure Uncle Tom knew where the two women were, and he determined to make him tell.

Legree was quite right in one thing. Tom knew. But he was wrong in the other. Tom would not tell.

'Do you know, I have made up my mind to kill you?' he said to Tom.

'It's very likely, mas'r,' said Tom calmly.

'I have,' said Legree, 'unless you tell me where these two women, who have run away, are.'

Tom stood silent.

'Do you hear?' shouted Legree. 'Speak!'

'I've nothing to tell, mas'r,' said Tom, speaking slowly and firmly.

'Do you dare tell me ye don't know?'

Again Tom was silent.

'Speak!' yelled Legree. 'Do you know anything?'

'I know, mas'r. But I can't tell.'

For a moment there was silence, such a silence, that the tick of the old clock on the wall could be heard.

Then Legree, foaming with rage, struck Uncle Tom a terrible blow, so that he fell to the ground senseless.