

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

(Told to the Children)

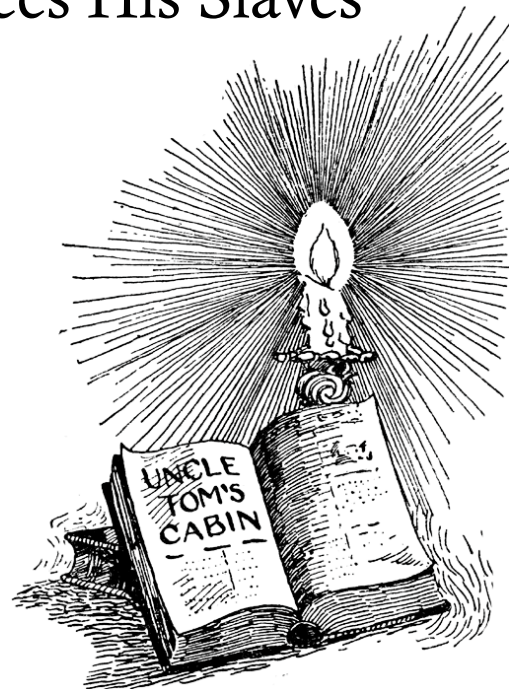
By

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Chapter 21

George Shelby Frees His Slaves



George Shelby wrote a little note to his mother, telling her that he was coming home. He tried to write about Uncle Tom, but he could not; tears blinded him, and sobs choked him.

On the day he was expected every one was in a state of bustle and excitement. Aunt Chloe in a new print dress, and clean white apron walked round the supper-table, making sure that everything was right. Her black face shone with joy at the thought of seeing Uncle Tom again.

'I'm thinking my old man won't know the boys and the baby,' she said.

Mrs. Shelby sighed. Ever since the letter had come from George she had had a very sad heart. She felt sure something must be wrong.

'He won't know the baby, my old man won't,' said Chloe again. 'Why, it's five years since they took him.'

Just then the sound of wheels was heard.

'It's Mas'r George,' cried Aunt Chloe, running to the window in great excitement.

Mrs. Shelby ran to the door. As George met her he put his arms around her, and kissed her tenderly.

Aunt Chloe stood behind anxiously looking out into the darkness.

'Oh, poor Aunt Chloe,' said George, gently taking her hard, black hand between both his own. 'I'd have given all my fortune to have brought Uncle Tom home with me; but he has gone to a better country.'

Mrs. Shelby cried out as if she had been hurt, but Aunt Chloe did not make a sound.

In silence they went into the supper-room.

'There,' said Aunt Chloe, holding out her trembling hands to her mistress, 'it's just as I knew it would be. He's been sold and murdered on dem old plantations.'

Then she turned and walked proudly out of the room. Mrs. Shelby followed her softly, took one of her hands, drew her down into a chair, and sat down beside her.

'My poor, good Chloe,' she said gently.

Chloe leaned her head on her mistress's shoulder, and sobbed out, 'Oh, missis, 'scuse me, my heart's broke—dat's all.'

'I know it is,' said Mrs. Shelby, as her tears fell fast, 'and I cannot heal it.'

There was silence for a little as they wept together. Then George sat down beside Aunt Chloe, and took her hand. He talked gently to her, telling her of Uncle Tom's last loving messages. So she was comforted a little.

One morning, about a month after this, George Shelby called all his servants together, telling them he had something to say to them.

They wondered what it could be, and were very much surprised when he appeared, carrying a bundle of papers in his hand.

They were still more astonished when he gave a paper to each one, and told them all that they were free.

With sobs and tears and shouts they pressed round him, thanking and blessing him. But some of them came with anxious faces, begging him to take their free papers back again, and not to send them away.

'We don't want to be any freer than we are,' they said.

'We have always had all we wanted.'

'We don't want to leave the old place, and young mas'r and missis, and the rest.'

'My good friends,' said George, when he could get silence, 'there will be no need for you to leave me. We want quite as many servants as we did before. But now you are free men and free women. I shall pay you wages for your work, and if I die, or get into debt, you can't be taken away to be sold. That is all the difference. I want you all to stay with me, for I want to teach you how to live as free men and women ought.'

'One thing more,' added George, when the cheering and rejoicing had died away a little. 'You all remember our good old Uncle Tom. You have heard how he died, and how he sent his love to you all. It was on his grave, my friends, that I made up my mind, with God's help, never to own another slave, if it were possible to free him. I resolved that nobody, through my fault, should ever run the risk of being parted from his dear ones, and of dying far from them, as he died.'

'So, when you rejoice in your freedom, remember that you owe it to dear old Uncle Tom, and pay it back in kindness to his wife and children. Think of your freedom every time you see Uncle Tom's Cabin; and let it help you to try to live as he did, and be as honest and faithful and Christian as he was.'