

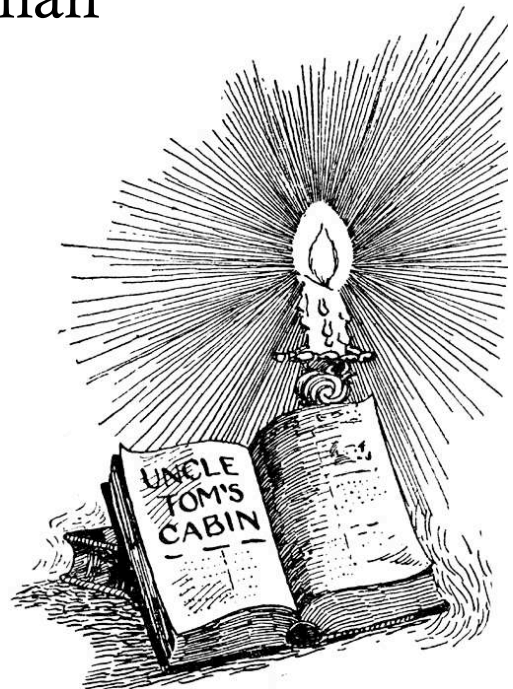
UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

(Told to the Children)

By

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H. E. Marshall ed.

Chapter 14
Aunt Dinah



Miss Ophelia found that it was no easy matter to bring anything like order into the St Clare household. The slaves had been left to themselves so long, and had grown so untidy, that they were not at all pleased with Miss Feely, as they called her, for trying to make them be tidy. However, she had quite made up her mind that order there must be. She got up at four o'clock in the morning, much to the surprise of the housemaids. All day long she was busy dusting and tidying, till Mrs. St. Clare said it made her tired to see cousin Ophelia so busy.

Things soon began to be more orderly, all except the kitchen; that seemed hopeless.

The cook was called Aunt Dinah. She cooked well, but was a dreadfully untidy old woman.

'What is this drawer for?' asked Miss Ophelia, the first morning she went into the kitchen.

'It's handy for most anything, missis,' said Aunt Dinah.

So it seemed. Miss Ophelia tumbled the drawer out. There she found a nutmeg-grater and two or three nutmegs, a hymn-book, two handkerchiefs, some wool and knitting, a paper of tobacco and a pipe, a few biscuits, one or two china saucers with some pomade in them, one or two old shoes, a piece of flannel wrapping up some small white onions, several table-napkins, some coarse towels, some string and darning needles, and several broken papers of sweet herbs, which were spilling all over the drawer.

'Where do you keep your nutmegs, Dinah?' asked Miss Ophelia.

'Most anywhere, missis. There's some in that cracked teacup up there, and there's some over in that cupboard.'

'Here are some in the grater,' said Miss Ophelia, holding them up.

'Laws, yes. I put 'em there this mornin'. I likes to keep my things handy.'

'What is this?' said Miss Ophelia, holding up a saucer with pomade.

'It's my hair-grease. I put it there to have it handy.'

'Do you use your mistress's best saucers for that?'

'Law! It was cause I was driv and in such a hurry. I was going to change it this very day.'

'Here are two table-napkins.'

'Them table-napkins I put there to get 'em washed out some day.'

'Don't you have some place here, on purpose for things to be washed?'

'Well, Mas'r St. Clare got dat chest, he said, for dat. But I likes to mix up biscuit, and have my things on it some days. Then it an't handy a-liftin' up the lid.'

'Why don't you mix your biscuits on the pastry table?'

'Law, missis, it gets so full of dishes, and one thing and another, der an't no room.'

'But you should wash your dishes, and clear them away.'

'Wash my dishes I' said Dinah, growing very angry. 'What does ladies know 'bout work, I want to know? When would mas'r ever get his dinner if I was to spend all my time awashin' and a-puttin' away dishes?'

'Well, here are these onions,' said Miss Ophelia patiently.

'Laws, yes!' said Dinah, 'that is where I put 'em, now. I couldn't 'member. Them's particular onions I was a-savin' for dis very stew. I'd forgot dey was in that old flannel.'

Miss Ophelia next lifted up the papers of sweet herbs.

'I wish missis wouldn't touch dem things. I likes to keep my things handy,' said Dinah.

'But you don't want holes in the papers.'

'Them's handy for sifting them out.'

'But you see, it spills all over the drawer.'

'Laws, yes ! If missis will go a-tumblin' things all up so, it will,' said Dinah, coming uneasily to the drawers. 'If missis only will go upstairs till my clearin'-up time comes, I'll have everything right. But I can't do nothin' when ladies is round.'

'I'm going through the kitchen, and going to put everything in order once, Dinah. Then I expect you to keep it so.'

'Oh, now, Miss Feely, dat an't no way for ladies to do. I never did see ladies doing no such thing. I don't see no kind of need of it.' And Dinah stalked about indignantly, while Miss Ophelia tidied up. 'I has things as straight as anybody when my clearin'-up time comes,' she grumbled. 'But I don't want ladies round, a-hinderin', and gettin' my things all where I can't find 'em.'

Miss Ophelia soon saw that Dinah was indeed hopeless. One day in despair she spoke to Mr. St. Clare about it.

Oh, you must let Dinah go her own way,' said he. 'She is a splendid cook, but if we saw how she did it, I expect we should never eat any

more. You can't make her any better, so just leave her alone. She is too old to mend her ways.'

So Aunt Dinah was left alone to rule the kitchen as she liked.