

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

(Told to the Children)

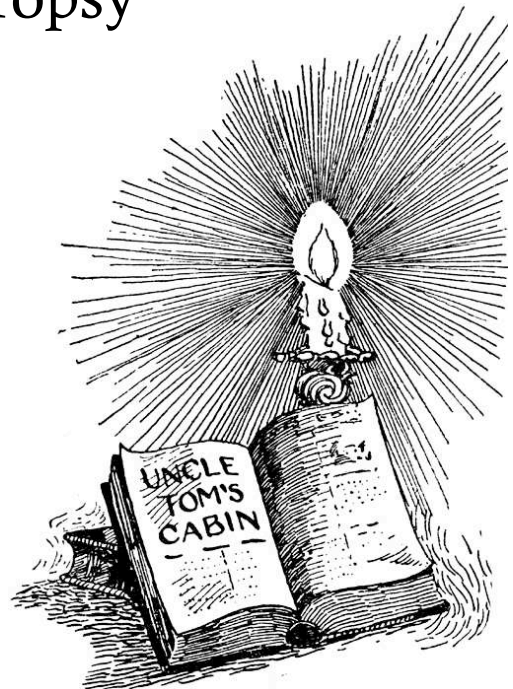
By

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Chapter 16

Eva and Topsy



Two or three years passed. Uncle Tom was still with Mr. St. Clare, far away from his home. He was not really unhappy. But always in his heart was the aching longing to see his dear ones again.

Now he began to have a new sorrow. He loved his little mistress Eva very tenderly, and she was ill.

He saw that she was growing white and thin. She no longer ran and played in the garden for hours together as she used to do. She was always tired now.

Miss Ophelia noticed it too, and tried to make Mr. St. Clare see it. But he would not. He loved his little Eva so much, that he did not want to believe that anything could be the matter with her.

Mrs. St. Clare never thought that any one, except herself, could be ill. So Eva grew daily thinner and weaker, and Uncle Tom and Aunt Ophelia more and more sad and anxious.

But at last she became so unwell, that even Mr. St. Clare had to own that something was wrong, and the doctor was sent for.

In a week or two she was very much better. Once more she ran about playing and laughing, and her father was delighted. Only Miss Ophelia and the doctor sighed and shook their heads. And little Eva herself knew; but she was not troubled. She knew she was going to God.

'Papa,' she said one day, 'there are some things I want to say to you. I want to say them now while I am able.'

She seated herself on his knee, and laid her head on his shoulder.

'It is all no use, papa, to keep it to myself any longer. The time is coming when I am going to leave you. I am going, never to come back,' and Eva sobbed.

'Eva, darling, don't say such things; you are better you know.'

'No, papa, I am not any better. I know it quite well, and I am going soon.'

'And I want to go,' she went on, 'only I don't want to leave you—it almost breaks my heart.'

'Don't, Eva, don't talk so. What makes you so sad?'

'I feel sad for our poor people. I wish, papa, they were all free. Isn't there any way to have all slaves made free?'

'That is a difficult question, dearest. There is no doubt that this way is a very bad one. A great many people think so. I do myself. I wish there was not a slave in the land. But then, I don't know what is to be done about it.'

'Papa, you are such a good man, and so noble and kind. Couldn't you go all around and try and persuade people to do right about this? When I am dead, papa, then you will think of me; and do it for my sake.'

'When you are dead, Eva! Oh, child, don't talk to me so.'

'Promise me at least, father, that Tom shall have his freedom, as soon as I am gone.'

'Yes, dear, I will do anything you wish. Only don't talk so.'

Miss Ophelia and Eva had been to church together. Miss Ophelia had gone to her room to take off her bonnet, while Eva talked to her father.

Suddenly Mr. St. Clare and his little girl heard a great noise coming from Miss Ophelia's room. A minute later she appeared, dragging Topsy behind her.

'Come out here,' she was saying. 'I will tell your master.'

'What is the matter now?' asked Mr. St. Clare.

'The matter is that I cannot be plagued with this child any longer' said Miss Ophelia. 'It is past all bearing. Here, I locked her up, and gave her a hymn to learn. What does she do, but spy out where I put my key. She has gone to my wardrobe, taken a bonnet-trimming, and cut it all to pieces to make dolls' jackets! I never saw anything like it in my life.'

'I don't know what to do,' she went on; 'I have taught and taught. I have talked till I'm tired. I've whipped her. I've punished her in every way I can think of, and still she is as naughty as she was at first.'

'Come here, Topsy, you monkey,' said Mr. St. Clare.

Topsy came, her hard, round eyes glittering and blinking, half in fear, half in mischief.

'What makes you behave so?' said Mr. St. Clare, who could not help being amused at her funny expression.

'Spects it's my wicked heart; Miss Feely says so.'

'Don't you see how much Miss Ophelia has done for you? She says she has done everything she can think of.'

'Lor', yes, mas'r! Old missis used to say so, too. She whipped me a heap harder, and used to pull my hair and knock my head agin the door. But it didn't do me no good. I 'specs if they is to pull every hair out o' my head it wouldn't do no good neither. I's so wicked. Laws! I's nothin' but a nigger noways.'

'I shall have to give her up,' said Miss Ophelia. 'I can't have that trouble any longer.'

Eva had stood silent, listening. Now she took Topsy by the hand, and led her into a little room close by.

'What makes you so naughty, Topsy?' she said, with tears in her eyes. 'Why don't you try to be good? Don't you love anybody, Topsy?'

'Dunno nothin' 'bout love. I love candy, that's all.'

'But you love your father and mother?'

'Never had none, ye know. I telled ye that, Miss Eva.'

'Oh, I forgot,' said Eva sadly. 'But hadn't you any brother, or sister, or aunt, or—'

'No, none on 'em. Never had nothin' nor nobody.'

'But, Topsy, if you would only try to be good you might—'

'Couldn't never be nothin' but a nigger, if I was ever so good,' said Topsy. 'If I could be skinned, and come white, I'd try then.'

'But people can love you, if you are black, Topsy. Miss Ophelia would love you if you were good.'

Topsy laughed scornfully.

'Don't you think so?' said Eva.

'No. She can't bear me. 'cause I'm a nigger. She'd as soon have a toad touch her. There can't nobody love niggers, and niggers can't do nothin'. I don't care,' and Topsy began whistling to show that she didn't.

'Oh, Topsy! I love you,' said Eva, laying her little, thin hand on Topsy's shoulder. 'I love you, because you haven't had any mother, or father, or friends; because you have been a poor, ill-used child. I love you, and I

want you to be good. It makes me sorry to have you so naughty. I wish you would try to be good for my sake, because I'm going to die soon. I shan't be here very long.'

Topsy's round, bright eyes grew suddenly dim with tears. She did believe at last that it was possible for some one to love her. She laid her head down between her knees and wept and sobbed.

'Poor Topsy, said Eva gently.

'Oh, Miss Eva, dear Miss Eva,' cried the poor little black child, 'I will try, I will try. I never did care nothin' about it before.'