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Uncle Tom's Cabin

by Mark Twain

(Adapted book. Beginner level)

Chapter 1. Slaves and Masters

In the early 1800's, black people were not free in America. They were slaves. Rich, white masters owned them. They used slaves to work on their farms.

Many masters were terrible to their slaves. But some were kind. Master Shelby was one of them. Recently, his farm's business was poor. He borrowed a lot of money from the bank. The only way to pay his debt was to sell some slaves. He hoped to sell his best slave, Tom, for a high price.

A slave trader named Mr. Haley came to buy Tom. Mr. Haley was a terrible man. He treated slaves like animals.

"Tom is the best slave I have," said Master Shelby. "He is a good man who believes in God."

"God does not care about blacks. They are not even men. I just want to buy Tom because he is a hard worker," said Mr. Haley.

"But you want too much money for one slave. I'll pay the money you need if you give me a slave child, too."

"Okay," agreed Master Shelby.

"I hate to do it, but I have to save our farm. I'll give you little Henry. He will grow up to be a good slave."

In the next room was a slave named Eliza. She was a beautiful woman with light skin. "Oh, my son, no!" she cried to herself.

She heard Master Shelby and Mr. Haley talking to each other through the wall. She knew it would be terrible to lose her son. This woman had been taken from her mother when she was a little girl.

Eliza's husband George ran away to Canada a few days ago. Blacks were free in Canada. George wanted to work and save money.

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Then he could buy Eliza and Henry from Master Shelby. But that would never happen if the bad man took Henry down south.

Eliza picked up her son and hugged him.

“Don’t worry,” she said softly.

“If we trust in God, He will show us the way to freedom.”

* * *

Behind Master Shelby’s large house was a small log cabin. This was a home for slaves. It was tiny, but the cabin was very warm inside.

The smell of a freshly baked cake was in the air. At the table sat Uncle Tom and Johnny. Johnny was Master Shelby’s son. He loved Uncle Tom and his wife Aunt Chloe very much. Now Johnny was teaching Uncle Tom how to read.

The cabin was suddenly filled with their many happy children. They ran into the cabin when they smelled the cake. Johnny was excited to eat the cake, too. Uncle Tom felt very happy. He held two of his children and sang a song.

While they were eating cake, Eliza came into Uncle Tom’s cabin. She had to tell him the terrible news.

With tears in her eyes, she said, “Master Shelby sold my son! We have to run away. We will try to reach Canada. Uncle Tom, Master Shelby sold you, too. Come away with us! God will show us the way!”

“No,” said Uncle Tom.

“I can’t run away with you. If I do, Chloe and my children will be in danger. It is better for me to go. I will pray that God protects me.”

Aunt Chloe and the children could not stop crying.

Eliza couldn’t wait.

She picked up Henry and held him tightly. Then she disappeared into the night.

Chapter 2. Leaving Home

The next morning, Mrs. Shelby knew that Eliza had run away with Henry. “Oh, dear,” thought Mrs. Shelby,

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“Mr. Haley will kill Eliza if he catches her.”

Mr. Haley was very angry when he heard Eliza had run away. Mrs. Shelby decided to slow Mr. Haley down. This would give Eliza a chance to escape. She had an idea.

One of her slaves put a small stone under the saddle on Mr. Haley’s horse. This made the horse very upset. Mr. Haley was unable to ride the horse for a long time. Finally, he got on his horse and went to look for Eliza.

Mr. Haley knew that runaway slaves always went to the Ohio River. If they could cross the river, people in Ohio would help them. Eliza was also desperate to get across the river. But when she reached the river, it was full of ice. No boats could cross the icy river. Eliza prayed to God to help her cross. Mr. Haley saw Eliza and Henry.

“Stop!” he yelled. “That boy is mine!”

Eliza was trapped between Mr. Haley and the icy river. So she jumped on a chunk of ice in the river. Then she jumped onto another piece of ice! She wasn’t wearing any shoes, and her feet were bleeding. But at last she crossed the river.

On the other side of the Ohio River, Eliza saw a man she knew. He was one of the Shelby’s friends, Mr. Simms.

“Mr. Simms, please, help me!” cried Eliza.

“I know a powerful man who hates slavery,” he said.

“He will help you. His name is Senator Bird.”

Mr. Simms pointed to a nice, big house across the street. Eliza went to the house and knocked on the door. Mrs. Bird let Eliza in. Senator and Mrs. Bird heard Eliza’s story. They agreed to help her reach Canada.

Mr. Haley was on the other side of the river. He was very angry. He hired a slave catcher to chase Eliza. Then he went back to the Shelby’s farm to get Tom.

Back at the Shelby’s farm, Uncle Tom sat in his cabin. He was reading the Bible.

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Aunt Chloe cried, "If only they weren't selling you down south. Nobody comes back from there. They kill slaves down there!"

"It's in God's hands now," said Uncle Tom. "I'm thankful that they sold me and not the little ones."

He looked lovingly at his sleeping children. There was a knock on the door of the cabin. It was Mrs. Shelby. Mrs. Shelby stood there crying.

"It's time to go, my dear man," she said. "But I promise to find out where you are. We will get the money and buy you back."

Suddenly, Mr. Haley burst into the room. He said to Tom, "It's time for you to go!"

He put Uncle Tom in heavy chains. Then they drove away in a wagon.

On the way out of town, Mr. Haley stopped at a store. Tom waited outside in the wagon. Young Johnny Shelby followed them on his horse. He jumped in the wagon and hugged Tom.

"I hate slavery, Uncle Tom!" cried Johnny.

Uncle Tom hugged the boy and said, "Now Master Johnny, you be good to your mother. God only gives you one mother."

"I will, Uncle Tom," promised Johnny.

He also promised to come down south and buy Uncle Tom. Then they said goodbye.

Chapter 3. North to Freedom

Eliza's husband George had escaped from his master, too. George's skin was very lightly colored. So he was able to look like a white man. He did this by coloring his hair yellow. He also put on some rich-looking clothes. Then no one knew he was a runaway slave.

George walked into a restaurant. He saw his old friend he was looking for. The friend was Mr. Wilson.

George's old master had sometimes made him work for Mr. Wilson.

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“George, what are you doing here?” Mr. Wilson whispered.

“It’s very dangerous for you right now!” George showed two guns and a knife to his friend. “No one is going to catch me without a fight,” he said seriously.

Mr. Wilson took George to a room where they could talk safely.

“What about your wife and son?” asked Mr. Wilson.

George’s face looked worried.

“I heard that they escaped a few days ago,” he said. “It’s up to God now.”

“I want to help you,” said Mr. Wilson. “Here, take this money.”

He pushed a lot of money into George’s hand. “Thank you,” said George. “I promise to repay this money one day.”

Then Mr. Wilson gave George some advice.

“When you get to the other side of the Ohio River, find the Quaker church. They will help you reach Canada.”

At the same time, the Bird family brought Eliza and Henry to another family who would also help them. These people were Quakers.

This Quaker family was very kind. The father’s name was Simeon, and the mother was Rachel. They had five children.

One day, Simeon said to Eliza and Rachel, “Friend David is coming over tonight. He is bringing someone special.”

Eliza was happy to hear good news.

“Friend Eliza, the Lord has blessed you,” Simeon said very slowly.

“He has kept your husband safe.”

Eliza was shocked.

She fell down when she heard this. The last words she heard were, “You’ll see him tonight.”

When Eliza woke up, she saw George. He was in her room, hugging her. Henry was next to them, still sleeping. Everyone was very happy.

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Eliza, George, and Henry felt very comfortable in the Quaker's home. One day, George told Simeon that he was worried about him and Rachel.

"I hope you will not be punished for helping runaway slaves."

"Friend George, if I have to go to jail, it's okay," replied Simeon.

"We do it for God and man."

Suddenly, David burst into the house. "We need to leave now! The slave catchers are coming!"

They got in the wagon and drove very quickly. They could hear the sound of horses following them. David stopped the wagon in front of a cliff.

"Quick, get out!" yelled David. "Climb up to the top of the cliff. It will be hard for them to catch us up there!"

They climbed the cliff and waited very quietly.

The slave catchers were climbing up behind them. Then one of them appeared! George pulled out his gun and shot the slave catcher. Then David pushed the man off the cliff. The slave catcher fell down a very long way. He lay there badly injured.

"Help me! Don't go away!" the man called out to the other slave catchers.

George pulled out his gun and shot the slave catcher. Then David pushed the man off the cliff.

The slave catcher fell down a very long way. He lay there badly injured. "Help me! Don't go away!" the man called out to the other slave catchers.

But they rode away on their horses.

"We will help him," said David.

"He can't hurt anyone now."

They picked up the injured man and put him in the wagon. They took him to a Quaker home for care.

Then David took Eliza's family to the border. It was the border between America and Canada. They were on their way north to freedom!

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Chapter 4. Uncle Tom Meets an Angel

While Eliza and George traveled north, Mr. Haley took Uncle Tom deeper south. For the last part of the trip, they took a boat. On the boat, Tom met a sweet little girl named Eva.

She was a beautiful girl and made people smile. Eva liked Uncle Tom very much. She liked him so much that she asked her father to buy Tom.

“But Eva, why do you want to own him?” her father asked.

“Because I want to make him happy!” she said.

Eva’s father was Mr. St. Clare. He was very rich. He loved his daughter more than anything. So he bought Tom for her.

Eva was not a strong girl.

She and her father were returning from a trip to get Mr. St. Clare’s cousin, Ophelia. Ophelia was going to take care of Eva.

Eva’s mother, Marie, couldn’t take care of her. She was a very sick and unhappy woman. She stayed in bed most of the time.

The St. Clare’s home was large and wonderful. It was like a castle from a fairy tale.

Tom thanked God for sending him to such a nice place. It was Ophelia and Tom’s job to take care of Eva. She needed a lot of help because she was so weak.

As the months passed, Eva and Tom became great friends. Sometimes Eva and Tom talked about slavery. Eva thought that slavery was good because it brought Tom into her life.

One day, Mr. St. Clare helped Tom write a letter. He wrote to Tom’s wife Chloe and their children. Tom wanted to tell them where he was. He also wanted them to know that he was healthy.

A few months later, a letter came for Tom. It was from Johnny Shelby. It said that Uncle Tom's kids were doing very well. Chloe was working in a bakery and saving money. In five years, she would have

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enough money to buy Tom back. This letter filled Tom's heart with joy and hope.

As the months became years, Eva got weaker. Soon she had to stay in bed all the time. One day, she called her father to her bedside.

"I am going to see the angels soon," she said. "Promise me you'll free Tom after I die. He needs to go home to his family."

Mr. St. Clare could not say no.

"Okay, my dear. I promise I will."

Finally, Eva died.

* * *

After Eva's death, Mr. St. Clare called Tom into his office.

"Tom," he said with a smile,

"I'm going to make you a free man."

Tom was the happiest he'd ever been in his life. "Oh, thank you so much! Praise the Lord!" Then Mr. St. Clare went for a walk.

Some hours later, there was a knock at the door. Tom opened it, and a group of men rushed in. They were carrying the body of a man. It was Mr. St. Clare.

"Oh no!" cried Tom. "What happened?"

One of the men answered, "Mr. St. Clare was at the local tavern. Two drunken men began to fight. Mr. St. Clare tried to push them apart. But he was stabbed with a knife."

Moments later, Mr. St. Clare died. He had died before finishing Tom's freedom papers.

Mrs. St. Clare sold Tom to a mean farmer named Simon Legree. Legree would take him deeper into the south. He feared he would never see his family again.

When it was time to leave, Tom managed to hide his Bible. He thought he was going to need it.

Chapter 5. The Deep South

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Master Legree's farm was a terrible, dirty place. Tom had to wake up before sunrise. All the slaves had to pick cotton in the fields. They worked under the hot sun all day.

Sometimes at night, Tom told the other slaves about Jesus. But they didn't believe Tom. Their lives were just too terrible.

One morning, Tom noticed an old woman working next to him. She looked very weak. She couldn't pick cotton very well. Tom put some cotton in her basket. Legree's men would beat her if she didn't pick enough cotton.

"Don't do that," said the old woman. "They'll whip you for that."

However, the man in charge of the slaves saw them. He was a slave named Sambo. Sambo told Master Legree that Tom was helping the old woman.

This made Legree angry. He said, "Sambo, take him to the shed and teach him a lesson."

Sambo took Tom there and beat him very badly.

That night, Tom lay in the shed. He was badly injured. He couldn't move at all.

"Please," he cried out, "somebody give me some water!"

A woman came to the shed with some water. Her name was Cassy. She was kind to Tom. She cleaned his wounds.

Cassy told Tom her story.

A long time ago, her father was a rich man. But her mother was a slave. When her father died, she was sold as a slave. Later, a young man bought her. They fell in love. Cassy and the man had a daughter together. They were very happy. But the man's cousin found out he loved a slave. The cousin took Cassy's daughter away from her.

Soon, Tom was feeling better enough to work in the fields. But his injuries were not healed completely. The daily work was very hard for him.

A few nights later, Cassy came to Tom. "Tom, Legree is sleeping," she said,

"Let's take an ax and kill him. Then we can escape!"

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“No,” said Tom.

“The Bible says it’s always wrong to kill. You have to find another way to escape. I’ll pray for you.”

Just then, Cassy had an idea.

“You are right,” she said. “I’ll think of another way.”

The next day, Cassy told a lie to Legree that she had seen a ghost in his attic. He was very afraid of ghosts. She knew he would never go up there now.

Later, Cassy took some food and clothes. She put them in her bag and ran away. She planned to let him know about her running away.

She ran into the swamp and made sure that he saw her.

Legree immediately called Sambo.

“That crazy slave Cassy ran away into the swamp. Take the dogs, and find her. Just kill her, and let the dogs eat her body!”

They looked around the swamp for three days. But they couldn’t find Cassy.

She was back in the house and was hiding in the attic. She was safe because Legree was afraid to go into the attic. She would wait until he gave up searching. Then she would really run away.

Legree was angrier than ever before. He went to Tom and shouted, “Tell me where Cassy is hiding!”

Tom knew where Cassy was. But he would never tell Legree.

“I have nothing to tell you, Master,” said Tom. Then Legree beat Tom all night.

When Tom woke up, Sambo was washing his wounds.

“Tom, who is this Jesus?” Sambo asked.

“How can he make you so strong? Legree beat you all night, but you never screamed.”

Tom told Sambo about Jesus.

Sambo cried when he heard the story. “I can’t help but believe it,” cried Sambo.

Tom prayed for Sambo, but his pain was terrible.

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Chapter 6. Free at Last

Tom lay in the shed for three days. A stranger came to the Legree's farm. The stranger was a young white man.

He asked Legree, "Do you have a slave named Tom?"

Legree lied, "No, there's no one here named Tom."

Just then, a little slave boy pointed to the shed and said, "Tom is in there!"

The stranger walked into the shed. Tom looked up and saw the stranger. Tom knew it was young Johnny Shelby!

"Master Johnny," Tom said, "what a fine young man you've grown to be! Praise the Lord. Now I can die happy."

Johnny saw that Tom was hurt badly.

"Oh, Tom, you can't die now! I've come to buy you back. We saved enough money, just as I promised years ago."

"Master, you're too late," Tom said weakly. "The Lord is taking me home with him. Please tell Chloe I'm sorry I couldn't see her. Tell her and my children to follow me to Heaven!"

Then Tom died. Johnny sat there for a moment, holding Tom. This place seemed special. Johnny felt like God was in the room with him.

That night, Cassy took a lot of money from Legree's desk. Then she put a white sheet over her body. She ran out of the house.

Legree didn't follow her because he thought she was a ghost.

Cassy went to the nearest town. She bought some fine clothes and an expensive bag. Then she went to a nice hotel. No one thought she was a runaway slave.

Cassy saw Johnny in the hotel restaurant. She knew he was a friend of Tom's. When Johnny saw her, he thought she looked like someone he knew. But he couldn't think of who it was.

Cassy told Johnny her story. She also told him that she was a runaway slave. He agreed to help her reach freedom in Canada.

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Johnny thought about Cassy's story. She said she'd lost her daughter. He realized who she looked like.

"Eliza!" he said.

"Who is Eliza?" Cassy asked.

Johnny explained how Eliza had grown up as his family's slave.

"I must get to Canada!" said Cassy.

"I must find my family!"

Two months later, Cassy was in Canada. A Quaker leader brought her to Eliza's house. Eliza and George had been in Canada for five years. Henry was a big boy now, and they had a new daughter.

The door opened. Cassy and Eliza saw each other. They hugged and cried. Now they were all together.

Johnny traveled back home. Some years earlier, Mr. Shelby had gotten sick and died. So only Mrs. Shelby and Aunt Chloe were waiting for them. They looked everywhere for Uncle Tom.

"I'm so sorry," said Johnny. "I wanted to bring Uncle Tom back. But he's gone to live with God now."

Mrs. Shelby began to cry, and Aunt Chloe said nothing. He passed Tom's last messages of love to Aunt Chloe.

A month later, Johnny let all of the slaves on the farm go free. "Don't thank me for your freedom," he said. "Thank Uncle Tom."

- THE END -

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