

Uncle Tom's Cabin

From the novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Adapted by Dorothy Louise

© 2009 by Dorothy Louise

717 682 9916

dlouise@fandm.edu

CHARACTERS

Bm – Uncle Tom solo
Bm -- George Harris
Bm -- Sam, Sambo/Quimbo, Adolph, Harry
Bf -- Chloe, Mammy, Dinah
Bf -- Cassy, Eliza
Bf --Topsy, Emmeline
Wf -- Eva
Wf -- Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird, Rachel, Ophelia
Wf -- Marie, Legree's mother
Wm – Adams, Shelby, St. Clare, Buyer
Wm – Mullen, Wilson, Alfred, Legree
Wm – Young George, Simeon, Doctor, Buyer, Pastor

Events span five years on an open stage with spare settings.

Scene Synopsis

Act I

1 – Cassy tends to Tom's bruises after Legree's beating.
2 – Mullen removes George Harris from Adams' bag factory.
3 – Cassy tells Tom her story.
4 – George Harris visits Eliza to tell her he plans to escape.
5 – Shelby tells Emily he has to sell Eliza's baby and Tom. Eliza overhears this.
6 – Eliza says goodbye to Tom and Chloe. 7 – Sam reports on Eliza's escape.
8 – Tom takes his leave.
9 – George Harris, disguised, reveals himself to Wilson, and expresses his determination to escape or die.
10 – Little Eva returns home to her mother, bringing Tom. Ophelia and Marie discuss how to manage slaves.
11 – Mrs. Bird shelters Eliza.
12 – Marie and Ophelia return from church and again engage the subject of slavery with St. Clare
13 -- George and Eliza reunite.
14 – Tom reproaches St. Clare for his drinking, and the latter promises to reform.
15 – Ophelia tidies Dinah's kitchen.
16 – Eva helps Tom with his letter. St Clare volunteers to act as secretary.
17 – Emily and Shelby discuss their finances. Chloe, overhearing, gets permission to work in Louisville for a confectioner.
18 – George and Eliza – waiting, waiting
19 – Ophelia objects to Dinah's kitchen. St Clare argues for laissez-faire, and then reviews his own history re holding slaves.
20 – St Clare presents Topsy to Ophelia as an experiment.
21 – Eva reads to Tom. Ophelia worries about Eva's health, but both Marie and St Clare dismiss her opinion.
22 – Eva, in decline, tells Topsy that she loves her.
23 – Eva dies.

Act II

- 24 – St Clare promises Tom that he'll be freed. Ophelia gets a legal document transferring Topsy's ownership to her.
- 25 – George Harris and Eliza complete their disguises to escape.
- 26 – St Clare indulges himself with Tom.
- 27 – St Clare dead in a barroom brawl.
- 28 – At the slave auction, Legree buys Tom and Emmeline.
- 29 – Legree beats Tom. Sambo presents Tom's dollar and the lock of Eva's hair, which reminds Legree of his dead mother. Cassy takes note.
- 30 – Cassy creates a strategy of escape.
- 31 – George and Eliza are nearly unmasked.
- 32 -- Legree abuses Tom. Tom refuses to go with Cassy.
- 33 -- George Harris and Eliza land in Canada.
- 34 – Cassy spooks Legree with talk of ghosts in the garret.
- 35 – Legree's dream
- 36 – Cassy and Emmeline escape to the garret.
- 37 – Tom refuses to inform on Cassy, and Legree beats him.
- 38 -- Liberia – a rousing lecture/debate: American Colonization Society
- 39 -- Young Shelby comes to bring Tom home, but assists at his deathbed instead.
- 40 – Cassy as Creole lady on ship, George Shelby attending; meet Mme De Thoux, George Harris' sister.
- 41 – George Harris and Eliza in a cozy scene with their son, Harry. Cassy arrives and they have a tearful reunion.
- 42 – Emily and Chloe receives the news of Tom's death from Young Shelby
- 43 – George & family off to Liberia, but they are deterred

ACT I

[**Scene 1** – Sounds of LEGREE lashing UNCLE TOM, LEGREE frenzied, TOM trying and sometimes failing to suppress his own cries of pain. Maybe we see this, as in a shadow play.]

LEGREE

You always got your nose buried knee-deep in your bible, Tom. Remember what the good book says. “He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” That’s what it says, Tom. If you could read, you could check. “He that knoweth his master’s will ...”

Gradually, a bare slave cabin in Louisiana dimly emerges. Late at night. CASSY is tending to UNCLE TOM’s bruises and cuts suffered in LEGREE’s beating.]

CASSY

That’s the best I can do.

TOM

Oh, thank you, thank –

CASSY

And you’ve done your best. But Legree always wins. You must give up.

TOM

O Lord, Lord! I can’t give up!

CASSY

No use calling on the Lord – he never hears. He’s not there. Or if he is, he’s taken sides against us. Everything pushes us into hell – why not go?

TOM

Don’t, don’t –

CASSY

What do you know? You’re brand new. I’ve been here five years – an eternity! Body and soul, under his foot! And I hate him for the devil he is! You don’t know the half of it! No law, God’s or man’s, can touch him. We’re ten miles from the next place, and you need a white man to testify if Legree scalds you, burns you, hangs you up and whips you to death! No point in resisting – didn’t I try?!

TOM

Oh, Missis!

CASSY

Don’t call me Missis – I’m a miserable slave, same as you! Living with him these past five years, cursing every moment of my life! Now he’s got a new one, Emmeline, fifteen, reads her Bible – her Bible! (Laughs wildly) Oh, call on the Lord!

TOM

Jesus, Jesus – have you forgot us?

CASSY

And why try to protect the others? They're cruel to each other, and will be to you, too, first chance they get.

TOM

And what's made them cruel? If I give up, I'll get used to things, and little by little become like them. O, no, no, Missis – I've lost everything, wife, children, home, a kind master who died before he could set me free. Everything in this world is gone. I can't lose Heaven, too!

CASSY

The Lord won't charge the sin to us, but to the devils that drove us to it!

TOM

It don't matter how I get wicked, it's bein' so I'm dreadin'.

CASSY

Now there's truth!

TOM

Missis, they threw my coat in the corner, my Bible's in the pocket, please, if you'd –

[CASSY gets it, and HE opens it to a marked place, and hands it back to her.]

That one's better 'n' water. You can read?

CASSY

(Nods, takes the Bible) “Love one another as I have loved you. Do good to those that hurt you.”

TOM

An' the next one.

CASSY

(Turning to another marked place) “Father, forgive them, for – forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

TOM

It came natural to him, but we have to fight hard to forgive. Oh, Missis, suffering don't mean the Lord's turned against us. Suffering is what saves us!

CASSY

You'll see. Tomorrow they'll be at you again. They'll be at you and at you till you have to give up! Emmeline's trying, you're trying, but if you don't give up, you'll be killed by inches!

TOM

They can't help me dyin', some time! And after that, they can't do no more! The Lord'll help me! The Lord'll bring me through.

CASSY

Drink this. And rest. I'll come back later.

[Scene 2 – ADAMS, MULLEN and GEORGE in ADAMS' office at the bag factory.]

MULLEN

Let's just say I've been hearin' things.

ADAMS

Good things, I hope. George is my best worker, Mr. Mullen. Hands down.

MULLEN

Is that so.

ADAMS

Steady, hardworking. Everything a slave should be, and more.

MULLEN

You don't say.

ADAMS

We're successful because of his invention.

MULLEN

What's that?

ADAMS

A machine to clean the hemp, cuts the time in half. Next thing you know, you got a new burlap bag or gunny sack. Works so well, I took out a patent. Even so, we got more orders than we can fill.

MULLEN

A patent, eh? George is a regular genius.

ADAMS

Well, he can't take out a patent, so I did. Hired out to me, did the work on my time. You're well paid for it.

MULLEN

I don't know now. How do you calculate the wages of a genius?

ADAMS

Well, I'm open to raising his wages, if that's what you're getting at.

MULLEN

He's so great, maybe I should take him back to his old place diggin' and hoein'.

ADAMS

(Laughs) Oh, that would be a waste!

MULLEN

Would it now.

ADAMS

You see him on the factory floor, those bags pilin' up, you wouldn't want to waste that skill on cotton.

MULLEN

Wouldn't I now. How'd you know what I want?

ADAMS

I'm just saying ---

MULLEN

I hear you. This fella yours or mine?

ADAMS

Yours, of course. Hired out to me.

MULLEN

He's mine, I do what I want with him. I'd say he's getting a little beyond hisself. Do with a little curtailin'.

ADAMS

It's only right to raise his wage, he's contributed so much to --

MULLEN

I don't think so.

ADAMS

Watch him work, you'll see he's --

MULLEN

Nothin' to do with what I need 'im for.

ADAMS

But -- his machine!

MULLEN

Saves work, right? Never knew a nigger wouldn't shirk. Now you want to reward him for it. Thank God this is a free country. He's mine. He does what I say. Step lively, Harris. I'm puttin' you back in the field. (Leaves)

ADAMS

He's in no mood to hear me now, George. Go along -- I'll try again later.

[Scene 3 – UNCLE TOM finishes breakfast as CASSY tries to make him comfortable.]

CASSY

We live in filth, and grow loathsome until we loathe ourselves! We long to die, but don't dare kill ourselves! Oh, you say you've lost everything! I was brought up in my father's house, sent to a convent, learned French, music, embroidery, whatnot! When my father died of cholera, I was set down in the property inventory. He meant to set my mother free, but never got around to it.

Another man bought me for \$2000, said he loved me, put me into a beautiful house, gave me everything that money could buy. But I didn't set any value on that. I loved him as well, and wanted him to marry me. But he said if we were faithful it was marriage before God. And I was faithful for seven years. I nursed him through yellow fever, and bore him two beautiful children, Henry and Elise. But his cousin, Butler, got ahold of him, and got him to gambling, and introduced him to another lady, and I saw his heart was gone from me.

TOM

Oh, poor Missis.

CASSY

He sold us! Sold his wife before God and his two children to pay off his gambling debts to Butler, who wanted all along to get his hands on me. And when I tried to resist, he was harsh to the children. I tried to keep them apart, but he sold them – he sold my children! Oh, how I cursed, God and man! And for a while he was afraid of me. But then he told me if I wasn't quiet, I'd never see the children again. And if I was really peaceable, and – cooperative – he might buy them back. What could I do? Resist? Oh, I tried to hang on to goodness, Tom – I tried not to give up. But one day, I was out walking when I passed by the jail and saw a crowd and heard a child's voice.

HENRY

Mother! Mother!

CASSY

Oh, Henry!

HENRY

Mother! Take me home!

TRADER

You get in here, boy. You get in here, or I'll teach you a lesson you won't never forget!

CASSY

Oh, please! (Reaching into her pocket) It's all I have, but – please! My master will buy him back!

TRADER

(With a sharp laugh) An' I'm the Queen o' England!

HENRY
Mother!

TRADER
I'm gonna break this boy, las' thing I do!

[TRADER drags HENRY off as his cries of "Mother! Mother!" reverberate and finally fade.]

TOM
Lord help us. Lord save us.

CASSY
Well, the Lord was deaf as usual, Tom. I begged Butler to interfere, but he just laughed. Something in me snapped. I picked up the bowie knife on the table and flew at him. And everything went dark, and for days and days I was in a fever. And when I woke, I was in a nice room, an old black woman tending me, and a doctor.

TOM
You see, Missis? The Lord provides.

CASSY
They took such pains – because Butler wanted a good price for me! Oh, I longed to die. But I didn't. And they dressed me up and men came in and smoked their cigars and looked at me and debated my price. A Captain Stuart saw something weighed down my heart, and came alone many times, and finally persuaded me to tell him. He bought me, and tried to buy Henry, but he'd already been sold and sent off somewhere – the last I ever heard of Henry. And Captain Stuart offered an immense sum for Elise, but Butler got wind of it and stopped it. Captain Stuart was very kind to me, and took me to his plantation, and after a year we had a son born. A beautiful boy! Just like my poor Henry! How I loved him! But I had made up my mind, yes I had. And when he was two weeks old, I took him in my arms, and kissed him, and cried over him. And I gave him laudanum, and held him, close to my heart, while he slept to death. Oh, I mourned and cried over him! Everyone thought it was just a mistake. But I'm not sorry to this day. And then the cholera came and carried off Captain Stuart. Everyone who wanted to live, died. And I – who wanted desperately to die, who went down to death's door – I lived! And was sold from hand to hand until Legree brought me here five years ago. Talk of suffering! I've walked the streets when I had misery enough in my heart to sink the city! And on judgment day, I'll stand before God against those that have ruined me and my children! And before that, I'll do it! I'll send Legree where he belongs – he's already made a hell here, so he's not got far to go – even if they burn me for it!

TOM
Oh, Missis, Missis.

CASSY
I'll get you some water. (Doing so)

TOM

I wish you'd go to the Lord. He can give you living water.

CASSY

At the convent, there was a picture of him in the chapel. But he isn't here, Tom – he isn't here! It's all sin and long despair! There's no point in arguing.

[SHE adjust his coverings as the lights fade.]

[Scene 4 – Discover GEORGE and ELIZA.]

ELIZA

George! You startled me! But I'm so glad to see you. Missis is out visiting – Harry's just down for his nap.

GEORGE

Oh, Eliza!

ELIZA

What, George – what?!

GEORGE

Better he'd never been born! Better I never laid eyes on you!

ELIZA

What are you saying? Don't!

GEORGE

Harry is beautiful and you're the best woman I've ever known! Even so, I wish we'd never met!

ELIZA

Please stop saying such things!

GEORGE

What's the point of trying – to do, to know, to be – anything! What's the use of living?

ELIZA

You have a hard master, but you must be patient, and soon –

GEORGE

Wasn't I patient when Mullen took me from the factory?

ELIZA

He is your master.

GEORGE

Who made him so? What right has he to me?

ELIZA

George, hush, hush.

GEORGE

I'm a better man than he! A better manager. I read and write better – no thanks to him – what right has he to make me a workhorse? He gives me the meanest, dirtiest work to punish me for my achievements!

ELIZA

Please, George, for my sake – for Harry’s – be careful!

GEORGE

The more I do, the more he loads on.

ELIZA

What will we do?

GEORGE

Yesterday – because I asked the young master to stop frightening the horse with his whip – old master tied me to a tree. Cut switches for his son. “Whip him till you can’t no more!” And he did. How is he my master? Who made him so? I’m kicked and cuffed and sworn at – I won’t bear it! I won’t!

ELIZA

There’s nothing we can do, George, you know that.

GEORGE

He drowned my dog. Threw him in the pond and pelted him with stones. Then gave me a flogging because I wouldn’t do it myself.

ELIZA

Oh, no!

GEORGE

My day will come, if he don’t look out.

ELIZA

Oh, don’t do anything wicked, George. We must have faith that God does the very best.

GEORGE

There’s more. Master says he was a fool to let me marry off the place, hates Mr. Shelby and his hifalutin’ ways, says I get them from you. He won’t let me come here any more, says I’m to marry Mina on his place, or he’ll sell me down the river.

ELIZA

But you’re already married to me, by a minister – just like white folks!

GEORGE

A slave can’t be married. And all that’s happening to me can happen to Harry!

ELIZA

But Mr. Shelby is so kind.

GEORGE

He may die – anything can happen. And then what pleasure will it be that Harry’s handsome and smart? A sword will pierce your soul, Eliza, for every good thing he is. He will be worth too much to let you keep him!

ELIZA
Oh, don't say that!

GEORGE
Bear up now, dear, for I'm going.

ELIZA
Where?

GEORGE
To Canada. And once I'm settled, I'll buy you and Harry, and you'll join me.

ELIZA
Oh, you can't! You'll be taken.

GEORGE
I'll die first. Live free, or die!

ELIZA
Don't say that. You won't kill yourself, please, George!

GEORGE
Oh, I won't need to – they'll get me first.

ELIZA
Please don't go! Don't go!

GEORGE
I can't live like a dog, Eliza. This is our only chance.

ELIZA
Oh, my God! Do be careful!

GEORGE
You, too. And don't worry – imagine a future where we are together – and free!

ELIZA
I'll try.

GEORGE
I'm going home as if I accepted Mullen's plan. But I've got my own. In a week or so, I'll be among the missing. Pray for me, Eliza – maybe the good Lord will hear you.

ELIZA
Pray yourself. Trust in him.

GEORGE
Kiss Harry for me.

ELIZA
Oh, George!

[THEY embrace fiercely as the lights fade.]

[**Scene 5** – SHELBY reading his newspaper, EMILY in their drawing room. ELIZA eavesdropping.]

EMILY

Eliza has got the silliest notion in her head, dear.

SHELBY

Oh?

EMILY

She said she heard you make that trader Mr. Haley an offer for her boy – isn't that ridiculous?

SHELBY

She did, eh?

EMILY

You'd never sell any of our people – least of all to a low-bred fellow such as that!

SHELBY

The fact is I'll have to sell some of my hands.

EMILY

You can't be serious.

SHELBY

I've agreed to sell Tom.

EMILY

What! You've spoken to him a hundred times of setting him free! Well! If you can sell Tom, why not Eliza's child?

SHELBY

Eliza's child, too. Why do you rate me as a monster for doing what others do every day?

EMILY

But why these?

SHELBY

They bring the highest price. The low-bred fellow Haley made me a high bid on Eliza, if you must know.

EMILY

Not Eliza!

SHELBY

Knowing your feelings, I refused – give me some credit.

EMILY

Tom would lay down his life for you. Oh, how can I hold up my head if we sell such an excellent creature as Tom for money? I have taught Tom and Eliza the duties of family, parent and child, husband and wife. How can I justify this act – an act that says we have no regard for duty, or relation, however sacred, but only regard for money?

SHELBY

Emily, I'm sorry, it's no use. We sell these two, or we sell everything. Haley has a mortgage, and if I don't clear it with him, he'll take everything. I raked, scraped, borrowed, and all but begged – but the price of these two was needed to make up the balance. I had to do it. Would it be better to sell everyone?

EMILY

This is God's curse on slavery! A curse to the master, a curse to the slave! I was a fool to think I could make anything good out of such a deadly evil! I thought by kindness, care, instruction, I could make their condition better than freedom – what a fool!

SHELBY

I hope you see I've done my best, given the facts.

EMILY

I haven't any jewelry to speak of – but what about this watch? If I could only save Eliza's child, I would sacrifice anything I have!

SHELBY

It's too late, Emily. The bills of sale are signed, and he's off. We should be thankful – Haley is a man of leather, who could have ruined us. He'd sell his own mother for the right percentage. He wants to take possession tomorrow. You'd better arrange a drive with Eliza so it's done when she's away.

EMILY

No, no – I won't help in this cruel business. The Lord forgive us. What have we done?!

[SCENE 6 – ELIZA, holding her son, with UNCLE TOM and AUNT CHLOE.]

CHLOE

Are you sick? It's past midnight!

ELIZA

I'm running away – Master has sold my child! And you, Uncle Tom! And the man takes possession in the morning!

CHLOE

What has Uncle Tom done, that master should sell him?

ELIZA

Master's sorry, but he had to pay off clear, or sell the place and all the people.

CHLOE

Well, Tom, will you wait to be toted down the river where they kill niggers with hard work and starving? You take the terrapin route – just what you can carry on your back. Bustle up – I'll get your things together.

TOM

I ain't going. Let Eliza go – it ain't in nature for her to stay. But if Master has to sell me, or else all the people on the place and everything go to rack, why, I can bear it as well as any. (Controls himself) Master always found me on the spot. I never broke trust.

CHLOE

He's broke his with you!

TOM

Chloe, Chloe, hush, hush. What about George Harris?

ELIZA

He's going to run away in a few days.

CHLOE

Now there's a man with some sense.

TOM

Hush, Chloe.

ELIZA

Try to get word to him how and why I went, and tell him I'll try to find Canada.

TOM

Don't worry.

ELIZA

And give him my love, and tell him, if I never – if I never see him again, he must be as good as he can, and try and meet me ... in heaven.

CHLOE

Get on now, while you got the dark.

TOM

And try to send word back, Eliza, so Chloe knows.

ELIZA

Chloe! Tom! Goodbye! (Leaves)

TOM

Let's get down and pray, Chloe.

CHLOE

Oh, Tom! I can't live away from you!

TOM

You got the children here, Chloe. And maybe I won't go too far away. We'll trust in the Lord.

[THEY tearfully embrace. Music: "I got shoes, you got shoes, all God' children got shoes; When I get t' heaven, gonna put on my shoes, gonna walk all over God's heaven, heaven"]

[**Scene 7** -- Sound of horses arriving. EMILY runs in, SHELBY following. SAM appears, dusty, sweaty, but beaming.]

EMILY
Tell us.

SAM
Master Haley's restin' at the tavern, dreadful fatigued. And Eliza's clear 'cross the Jordan. In the land of Canaan.

SHELBY
What do you mean, Sam?

SAM
Lord preserves his own. Lizy's gone over the river into 'Hio, as if the Lord took her in a chariot of fire with two horses. Saw it with my own eyes, her crossin' on the floatin' ice, and a man helpin' her on the other side. Couldn't nobody done it without the Lord!

EMILY
God be praised, she isn't dead! But where is Eliza now, Sam?

SAM
The Lord will provide, as Missis always instructin' us. This here's a providence. And if it hadn't been for me, she'd been taken a dozen times. Didn't I start off the horses this mornin', and keep 'em chasin' till dinner time? And didn't I lead Master Haley a detour for five miles, or else he'd a come on Lizy easy as a dog after a coon? And when we got to the tavern by the river, didn't I see Lizy's face at the window, and lose my hat, an' sing out loud enough to raise the dead, so Lizy hears and clears out the side door, and down to the river, and we're right behind her when she screeches as I never heard, screechin' an' jumpin' on the floatin' ice, the ice crackin' and she boundin' like a buck! Lord, girl's got a spring in her ain't common! An' these're all providences.

SHELBY
Providences you'll have to be pretty sparing of, Master Sam.

SAM
(Feigning contrition) Quite right. But when fellers cut up such shines as Master Haley, he ain't no gentleman no way, I can't help seeing that. And I was fending for all our people. For him as tries to get one is as good as tryin' to get all, and these drivers come smellin' around after our people gonna find me in their way. I sticks up for consciences, I hold on to principles, what're principles good for if we ain't persistent?

EMILY
Well, Sam, that's enough now. Aunt Chloe has some cold ham left from dinner today.

SAM
I am wantin' some solids and some fluids.

EMILY

Go ahead, then. You've done well today. Yes you have.

[Scene 8 – CHLOE finishes packing a box, while TOM stands by.]

CHLOE

Your flannels for the rhumatiz is here, but be careful, you don' have no one t' make 'em for you any more. Old shirt on top, new ones on the bottom. I toed off your socks last night, an' darned the heels. Who'll ever mend 'em again? (Near tears) No one t' do for you, sick or well! Oh! There's somethin' wrong about this somewhere, I jus' can't make out what, but there's wrong somewhere, I'm clear about that!

TOM

Look to the Lord, Chloe – he don' let a sparrow fall without him.

CHLOE

That don' seem t' comfort me. No use talkin' – I jus' get your things all wet. An' I was cross with the boys an' the baby, Tom, I know – I'm so tossed about, makes me act ugly. And I don't really think I oughtta be good now!

TOM

Now, Chloe – things could be worse.

EMILY

(Entering) Oh, Tom! (Bursts into tears)

CHLOE

Oh, Missis, Missis, don't, don't, please don't.

EMILY

I'm all right now, Chloe. Tom, I won't give you money, because they won't let you keep it. But I give you my solemn promise that I'll keep track of you, and bring you back as soon as I have the money.

YOUNG SHELBY

(Dashing in) Oh, Tom! (Embracing him) I just heard, I rode as fast as I could! Oh, it's so mean! If I was a man, I 'd stop them!

TOM

Oh, Master James, does me good to see you! Real good.

YOUNG SHELBY

Look here, Uncle Tom – I've brought you my silver dollar.

TOM

Oh, I can't take that, Master James. The Missis said ---

EMILY

He's made a hole in it.

YOUNG SHELBY

You shall take it. And hang it around your neck out of sight. Oh, I wish I could blow up that trader Mr. Haley! Grab 'im by the throat, an' whip 'im hard! Do me good.

TOM

Won' do me no good, Master James. Or you – he's twice your size.

YOUNG SHELBY

(Tying the dollar around TOM's neck) Button your coat tight over it, and keep it safe.

TOM

Oh, I will, Master James.

YOUNG SHELBY

And every time you look at it, remember I'm coming down for you to bring you back.

CHLOE

Oh, Master James!

YOUNG SHELBY

I won't let Father forget, you can count on me.

TOM

Well, now, you be a comfort to your mother.

YOUNG SHELBY

I will, Uncle Tom. (Going to her) Aunt Chloe, I'm going to build this house all over, and put in a parlor with a carpet, when I'm grown up.

EMILY

Hush, now, James.

YOUNG SHELBY

But I will! And then I'll come down to get you!

EMILY

We should leave Tom and Chloe to say goodbye, James.

YOUNG SHELBY

Goodbye, Uncle Tom – keep a stiff upper lip!

TOM

Oh, I will do that, Master James, yes, I will.

[EMILY and YOUNG SHELBY leave.]

CHLOE

(Knotting the cord around the box) Nothin' undo that knot till you say so, Tom.

TOM

I do appreciate it, Chloe.

CHLOE

Oh, Tom! How come we ain't sparrows?

[THEY embrace as the lights fade.]

[**Scene 9** – GEORGE HARRIS and WILSON in GEORGE's room at the Inn. A couple of slaves have just set down luggage and are scurrying away. GEORGE locks the door.]

WILSON

George!

GEORGE

Yes, George!

WILSON

Who'd of thought it?

GEORGE

Blacked up like a minstrel darky! A little walnut bark, some hair dye. So I don't answer to the advertisement.

WILSON

I'm sorry to see you opposing the laws of your country.

GEORGE

My country! My only country's the grave, and I wish I lay there!

WILSON

You've got a hard master, George – reprehensible – I can't defend him. But remember how the angel commanded Hagar to return to her mistress, and submit –

GEORGE

Don't quote the Bible at me in my situation. It's enough to make me give it up altogether!

WILSON

“Let everyone abide in the condition in which he was called.”

GEORGE

I wonder, Mr. Wilson, if the Indians should keep you all your life hoeing corn, would you abide in the condition in which you were called? I'll bet you'd find a stray horse and call it Providence.

WILSON

It's a terrible risk. They'll abuse you, and half-kill you, and sell you down the river.

GEORGE

(Throwing open his coat to reveal two pistols and a bowie-knife) I'm ready. Before I go down South, I'll earn six feet of free soil here – the first and last I'll ever own.

WILSON

The law is against you.

GEORGE

Law! I've heard your fourth-of-July speeches! Every year, you tell us governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed! When did the law ever get my consent?! We can think! We can put things together and see what they come to.

WILSON

Now, George – these are dangerous notions for boys in your condition.

GEORGE

See here, Mr. Wilson. (Seating himself directly in front of WILSON) Aren't I as much of a man as you are? I had a father sold me with his dogs and horses when he died, put up my mother with her seven children at sheriff's sale.

Your laws give him the power to do this! I haven't got a country, but I'm going to. In Canada, the laws will protect me, and its laws I will obey. But if any man tries to stop me, let him take care. Your fathers fought for their liberty. If it was right for them, it is right for me, and I'll fight to my last breath!

WILSON

Well, George – be careful.

GEORGE

Oh, I will. But I've got nothing left to lose.

[Blackout.]

[**Scene 10** -- The veranda of the St Clare plantation, MARIE reclining decoratively on a wicker chaise. EVA runs in, ST CLARE, OPHELIA and TOM following.]

EVA

Mamma! Mamma! (Throwing herself upon MARIE) Oh, I wish you could have been with us, I missed you so!

MARIE

All right now, that's enough. (Setting her aside) I've a dreadful headache.

ST CLARE

(Dutifully kissing her brow) I'm sorry to hear it, Marie. But I hope it will lift under Cousin Ophelia's care. She brings us some much-needed Vermont efficiency.

MARIE

You are most welcome, Cousin Ophelia.

OPHELIA

Thank you, Madam. I've heard juniper berry tea does wonders for the sick headache.

ST CLARE

We'll have the first ripe ones brought in from the lake for that special purpose. But, see here, Marie (gesturing to TOM), I've brought a coachman, at last. To order: a regular hearse for blackness and sobriety, and will drive you like a funeral if you want. Come now, open your eyes, and look at him, and see that I do think about you when I'm gone.

MARIE

(Condescending to look at TOM) I know he'll get drunk.

EVA

Oh, no, Mamma, Uncle Tom doesn't drink.

MARIE

Well, he may turn out well. Though that's more than I expect.

ST CLARE

Little Eva fell from the second deck into the river.

MARIE

What are you saying?

EVA

Tom was on the first, and jumped into the water before Papa could get his coat off.

ST CLARE

So we owe him something, my dear.

MARIE

Well, I'm grateful, I'm sure.

ST CLARE

Tom, you can get settled in downstairs.

[TOM nods and leaves.]

And Eva, get Mammy to show our cousin to her apartment.

EVA

Oh, I'll show her, Papa!

ST CLARE

(To OPHELIA) You'll want to rest. We can send up some supper whenever you'd like.

OPHELIA

Thank you, Cousin. I'd just as soon get to the housekeeping business.

ST CLARE

Well, there's the spirit of the Green Mountains! Marie, our practical, businesslike New England cousin will take the cares off your shoulders.

MARIE

I'm afraid, Cousin, you'll find the mistresses are the slaves down here. People talk as if we keep slaves for our own convenience. If that were the reason, why we may as well let them all go.

EVA

Why do you keep them, Mamma?

MARIE

I don't know, I'm sure, except for a plague. And ours are the very worst that ever anybody was plagued with.

ST CLARE

Come now, Marie. What would you do without Mammy?

MARIE

She is the best I ever knew. But dreadfully selfish – a fault of the whole race.

ST CLARE

Selfishness is a dreadful fault.

MARIE

She sleeps sound at night even when she knows that's when I take my worst turns, and she's so hard to wake. Why do you think I'm so bad today?

EVA

But doesn't she sit up with you at night, Mamma?

MARIE

She's been complaining, I suppose.

EVA

She only said you were having bad nights.

MARIE

Well, if Mammy had the proper interest, she'd wake easier. I've heard of people with such devoted servants, but I've had no such luck. She's still sulking because when I got married and brought her here from Papa's house, he kept her husband and children behind. And even though she knows how much I need her, she'd go back to her husband tomorrow if she could. Now that is selfish!

EVA

Mamma, couldn't I take care of you – just one night?

MARIE

Oh, nonsense, child, nonsense! You are so strange.

EVA

But may I, Mamma? Mammy has headaches, too.

MARIE

Oh, that's just one of her fidgets! Eva, it's always proper to be kind to servants, but not proper to treat them as we would our own. If Mammy was sick, you wouldn't put her in your own bed.

EVA

Oh, but I would! It would be handier, and my bed is better than hers.

MARIE

What can I do to make this child understand?

OPHELIA

Nothing.

MARIE

Cousin, if you encourage them in their complaining, you'll have your hands full. St Clare will have high-life downstairs, so it's partly our fault they act like spoiled children. But I've talked to St Clare till I am tired.

ST CLARE

Tires me as well. Come along, Eva – let's see how our new coachman is settling in.

[THEY leave.]

MARIE

Eva is enough to spoil a whole houseful. She has no idea what a servant's place is! Taking care of me nights to let Mammy sleep!

OPHELIA

Well, I suppose you think your servants ought to rest when they are tired.

MARIE

Of course. Mammy has no trouble sleeping – sewing, standing, sitting, she'll sleep anywhere and everywhere. Oh, St Clare means well, but we don't agree. I brought my own servants when I married, and I am legally entitled to manage them my way. St Clare won't raise his hand, and they walk all over him. And I can't exert myself to do it, you know.

OPHELIA

I don't know anything about it, and thank the Lord I don't!

MARIE

St Clare says we wouldn't do any better in their place, as if you can reason from them to us!

OPHELIA

Don't you think they're one blood with us? Don't you think they've got immortal souls?

MARIE

No one doubts that. But as to any sort of equality with us! Why St Clare thinks it's my duty, with all I suffer, to let Mammy go back! It's so trying! So provoking! If he'd only do it as others do!

OPHELIA

And what's that?

MARIE

Why, send them to the jail to be flogged!

OPHELIA

And how does he manage?

MARIE

Well, men are more commanding. The servants mind. I do less with storming and scolding than St Clare does with a look. But you'll find, Cousin, when you manage, you'll have to be severe, because they are bad, deceitful and lazy.

ST CLARE

(Sauntering in) The old tune. You see, Cousin, this laziness is wholly inexcusable, given the example Marie and I set.

MARIE

St Clare, you are incorrigible!

ST CLARE

Am I? Oh, Marie – I try always to enforce your remarks. Laziness ruins more souls than you can shake a stick at.

OPHELIA

You've got an awful responsibility. You should educate your slaves, and treat them like reasonable creatures, immortal creatures that you've got to stand before God with. That's my mind.

ST CLARE

Oh, come, come – what do you know about it?

OPHELIA

What I've said.

ST CLARE

Well, you've done your duty.

MARIE

What's the use of such talk? You can't make anything of them. I've tried, Cousin Ophelia, and you haven't. I was born and bred among them, and I know.

[Silence. Then ST CLARE whistles a little tune.]

Please, St Clare – I wish you wouldn't whistle when I've a headache.

ST CLARE

My dear accusing angel!

MARIE

Oh, don't talk like that!

ST CLARE

And how should I talk? Any way you like – only to satisfy.

[Lights pick up EVA and TOM. SHE has put flowers in his buttonholes, and is crowning him with a wreath of roses. Her laugh draws ST CLARE to look upon the scene.]

EVA

Oh, Tom! You look so funny! (Laughs, sits on his lap)

OPHELIA

(Behind ST CLARE) Oh, Cousin, how can you let her? It seems so dreadful!

ST CLARE

No harm in a child's caressing a large dog, even a black one. But a creature that can think and feel! Custom does with us what Christianity should do – erases personal prejudice. In the north, you loathe them as you loathe snakes or toads, but you are mightily indignant at their wrongs. Ship them off to Africa, then send a missionary to

elevate them. Isn't that it?

OPHELIA

There's some truth in what you say, yes, Cousin.

[EVA now takes TOM's hand and skips off with him.]

ST CLARE

Tom is a hero to Eva. His stories are wonders, his songs and hymns better than an opera, the bits of trash from his pockets, jewels. And she is one of the roses of Eden that the Lord drops down for the lowly, who get few enough of any other kind.

OPHELIA

You sound like a professor of religion.

ST CLARE

Oh, no – nor a practiser either.

OPHELIA

Then what makes you talk so?

ST CLARE

Nothing easier. My forte lies in talking. And yours, Cousin, in doing.

[Scene 11 –MRS. BIRD watches anxiously as ELIZA comes out of a swoon and sits up suddenly from her cot.]

ELIZA
Harry!

MRS. BIRD
Fed and sleeping by the fire.

ELIZA
Thank the Lord! The Lord has been merciful!

MRS. BIRD
Were you a slave?

ELIZA
I belonged to a man in Kentuck. He was good to me – my mistress, too.

MRS. BIRD
Then why run away?

ELIZA
Ma'am – have you ever lost a child?

MRS. BIRD
(Moving away) Why do you ask? I have – a month ago. He was three.

ELIZA
I've lost two, buried in Kentuck, and I had this one left. He was all I had. My comfort and pride, day and night. And, ma'am – they were going to sell him – sell him down south, to go all alone, a baby never been away from me his whole life! I couldn't stand it, ma'am. I'd never be good for anything if we were parted. So after the papers were signed, and he was sold, I took him off in the night, and they chased me, and I jumped right on to the ice, and somehow got across, how, I don't know, except a man helped me up the bank on the other side.

MRS. BIRD
But – how was your master kind, if he could do such a thing?

ELIZA
He owed money, and was obliged to the man who bought Harry. Mistress begged, but Master couldn't help it.

MRS. BIRD
Have you a husband?

ELIZA
He belongs to another master, a hard one, who's threatening to sell him down south. I don't think I'll ever see him again.

MRS. BIRD

And where are you headed?

ELIZA

Canada – is it far, do you know?

MRS. BIRD

Farther than you think. My husband will drive you at midnight to a Quaker settlement, where you'll be safe until you can cross. Rest now. (Leaves)

[ELIZA stands shakily and checks on Harry.]

ELIZA

If we're caught, I won't die like a dog. I'll smother you, my darling, and I have Mrs. Shelby's pills for myself. Death will be our deliverance out of bondage, God forgive me, for I am being stretched beyond my endurance. We're a little closer, dear Harry. Sleep sound. Oh, Lord – watch over us, protect us! Let us live in freedom, let me see George once more! (With a sob, SHE collapses on the cot.)

MRS. BIRD

(Entering, carrying a drawer) Eliza?

ELIZA

I'm awake.

MRS. BIRD

I pulled this drawer for you. It's like opening a grave. My boy's clothes will fit Harry. And his toys.... I could not find it in my heart to give these away to just anybody. But to give them to you, a mother who is more heartbroken and sorrowful than I am – I do it gladly, and hope God will send blessings with them.

ELIZA

With all my heart, ma'am –

MRS. BIRD

That's enough now. Rest. I have some things for you as well, but I need to let out the hems. If Harry wakes, I'll get you. Just rest.

[**Scene 12** -- The veranda at Ponchartrain, ST CLARE perusing the Picayune. MARIE and OPHELIA returning from Sunday sermon, removing their bonnets and capes.]

ST CLARE

(Setting his paper aside) Well, ladies – and what was the bill of fare at church today?

MARIE

A splendid sermon. All my views exactly!

ST CLARE

That must have been extensive!

MARIE

Oh, I mean about society only. All the orders come from God, and some are high and some are low, some serve and some rule. To everything its season. All this ridiculous fuss about slavery! I wish you could have heard it!

ST CLARE

Oh, I get as good as that from the Picayune, any time, and smoke my cigar besides.

OPHELIA

You don't agree?

[DINAH enters, and serves coffee.]

ST CLARE

Sister, on slavery I'd say fair and square, we've got 'em, and mean to keep 'em – for our convenience, and our interest, and that's the long and short of it! The preachers should carry their explanations farther, and show the beauty, in its season, of taking a glass too much, or staying at cards too long, and various other providential arrangements – we'd like to hear that those are right and godly too!

OPHELIA

Do you think slavery right or wrong?

ST CLARE

None of your New England directness, cousin. I throw stones at others' glass houses. I won't put up one of my own for others to stone.

MARIE

He won't give satisfaction. He hates religion.

ST CLARE

Religion! Religion! Is what bends and turns to fit every crooked phase of selfish society religion? Less scrupulous, less generous, less just, less considerate than my own ungodly blinded nature? When I look for religion, I look for something above, not something beneath!

MARIE

Well, I'm thankful I'm born where slavery exists, and I know I couldn't get along without it.

ST CLARE

(To EVA) What do you think, Pussy? Is it better to live as they do at your uncle's in Vermont, or to have a houseful of servants, as we do here in Louisiana?

EVA

Oh, as we do, Papa.

MARIE

The girl's getting sense.

EVA

There are so many more people around you to love.

MARIE

Eva – you say such – odd things.

ST CLARE

As this world goes, perhaps. But, say, Pussy, tell Papa what you've been doing.

EVA

In Tom's room, hearing him sing about the new Jerusalem. And I read him my Bible. He can't read. But he explains it to me.

MARIE

(Laughing) The best joke of the season!

EVA

Tom believes it's all true. It has to be – or how would he live?

ST CLARE

Early this morning at the stables I overheard Tom praying for me with an apostolic zeal.

MARIE

He knew you were listening.

ST CLARE

If so, he wasn't very politic. He told the Lord I needed major improvement, and was very much in earnest that I should be converted.

OPHELIA

Lay that to heart.

ST CLARE

We shall see. Come now, Marie, be gracious and say something pretty to a fellow.

MARIE

There's such a tumult since you came. I am half dead.

[Scene 13 – The Quaker settlement. ELIZA and RACHEL.]

RACHEL

Thee still thinks of going to Canada, Eliza?

ELIZA

As soon as it's safe.

RACHEL

And what'll thee do when thee gets there?

ELIZA

Dress-making, perhaps. I can do fine washing and ironing. I'll do anything – I hope I can find something.

RACHEL

Thee can stay here as long as thee pleases.

ELIZA

Oh, thank you. But – I can't sleep, I keep seeing that trader, Mr. Haley, coming after me.

RACHEL

A fugitive has never been stolen from our village. Thee cannot be the first. Besides, I have some news.

ELIZA

What?

RACHEL

Good news. Thy husband has escaped from the house of bondage.

ELIZA

Oh, thank God!

[GEORGE bursts in. THEY embrace fiercely. RACHEL leaves.]

GEORGE

Eliza, Eliza!

ELIZA

Oh, my dear! I don't believe it! I don't believe it!

GEORGE

Oh, Eliza! Is it a dream?

ELIZA

Real as anything! I'm here with you and Harry! Just as we'd hoped! Safe with these good people.

GEORGE

Eliza, I'm glad we're not like other people who have friends, and houses, and lands, and money. They cannot love as you and I do, who have only one another. Till I knew you, no one ever loved me but my mother and sister, whose kind words the morning the trader carried her off were the last I heard for ten years. My heart withered, dry as ashes. And your loving me is like being raised from the dead! I'll give my last drop of blood. They take you from me over my dead body.

ELIZA

If only the Lord will let us get to Canada!

GEORGE

They buy us and sell us, make trade of our hearts' blood and groans and tears – and God lets them do it! So why should God let us get to Canada? We'll get to Canada on our own! I feel rich and strong, though we have nothing but our bare hands. I can scarcely ask God for any more. I haven't one cent, no roof, nor even a spot of land. But if they'll just let me alone, I'll be satisfied, and work, and buy you back from Mr. Shelby. I smell the free air, and it makes me strong!

RACHEL

(Bursting) Oh, Eliza! Phineas brings bad news. Those men are on thy trail – and thine, Mr. Harris. Come in to supper. You'll leave when it's good and dark. Simeon and Phineas will go with thee. (Leaves)

ELIZA

What's to be done?

GEORGE

(Pulling out a pistol) I'll attack no one. But I had a sister sold in New Orleans. I won't stand by and see you sold. I'll fight to my last breath!

[Scene 14 – ST CLARE and TOM]

ST CLARE

Well that's the end of the list, Tom. What are you waiting for? Something wrong?

TOM

I'm afraid so, Master.

ST CLARE

Out with it. You're as solemn as a coffin.

TOM

I feel very bad, Master. I always thought you be good to everybody.

ST CLARE

I do try, Tom. Tell me what you want.

TOM

Oh, you always been good to me. I got no complaint.

ST CLARE

What then?

TOM

Someone else you aren't good to.

ST CLARE

Speak up, Tom. Who?

TOM

This morning, between one and two, when we helped you to bed. You weren't good to yourself.

ST CLARE

(With an awkward laugh) Is that all?

TOM

All? It could be losing all -- your body and soul, Master. The good book says wine bites like a serpent and stings like an adder! Oh, Master, please!

ST CLARE

All right, Tom. I won't go out with them any more. I've meant to stop for a while now. I've always despised it, and despised myself for indulging. Come now, Tom, time's awasting!

TOM

Bless you, Master.

ST CLARE

No blessings now. Just get along on your errands. On my honor, you won't see me again as you saw me this morning.

[**Scene 15** – DINAH in the kitchen, apparently daydreaming. OPHELIA enters, but DINAH does not acknowledge her. OPHELIA opens a drawer.]

OPHELIA

What's this drawer for, Dinah?

DINAH

Oh, just about anythin'.

OPHELIA

(Pulling out a bloodstained tablecloth) Dinah! You wrap meat in your mistress' best tablecloth?

DINAH

O Lord, Missis, no. The towels was all missin', I didn't have nothin' else. I laid it out to wash, that's why it's there.

[OPHELIA continues checking and rummaging, growing increasingly disapproving.]

OPHELIA

(Holding up a saucer) What's this?

DINAH

Oh, Lord, that's my hair grease – t' have handy.

OPHELIA

In a china saucer?

DINAH

Oh, I was in such a hurry – I was just about to change it.

OPHELIA

And two table napkins?

DINAH

They need t' be washed.

OPHELIA

Don't you have a place to keep the laundry?

DINAH

Well, Master St. Clare got that chest for that, but I like to mix up biscuits and have my things on it, and then it ain't handy for liftin' the lid.

OPHELIA

Why not use the pastry table?

DINAH

Well, Missis, that table's handy for puttin' things on, dishes and such, and then there ain't no room for mixin' biscuits.

OPHELIA

You should wash the dishes, and put them away.

DINAH

Wash the dishes! What do ladies know about work, I want to know. If I'm washin' dishes, when would Master get his dinner? Miss Marie never told me so, nohow.

OPHELIA

Well, I'm in charge of the housekeeping now, Dinah. It's too much for Mrs. St Clare.

DINAH

Why, she never once set foot in my kitchen, nohow.

OPHELIA

Well, that may be part of the problem, Dinah. (Picking up some papers filled with herbs)

DINAH

I wish you wouldn't touch those – I like to keep things so I know where to find them.

OPHELIA

But Dinah, these papers are full of holes.

DINAH

Yes, Missis, that's for siftin' them out.

OPHELIA

But they're spilling all over the drawer.

DINAH

Well, that's because Missis is tumblin' things up. If you'll go upstairs till I get time to clear up, you'll see I'll have everythin' right. But when ladies is around, hinderin', I can't do nothin'.

OPHELIA

I'll go through everything, Dinah, and put it all in order, just once. And then I expect you to keep it that way.

[Going to work, consolidating and sorting.]

DINAH

O, Lord, Miss Phelia! Ladies don't do that! My old Missis, or Miss Marie never did. And I don't see no need for it. I have things straight as anybody when it's time to clear up.

OPHELIA

You get on with dinner, Dinah. And afterwards, I'll sort things out. Just once. (Leaves)

DINAH

O, Lord! If that's how northern ladies do, they ain't no ladies nohow!

[Scene 16 – TOM working at his slate, EVA peering over his shoulder.]

EVA

(Laughing) Oh, Tom! What funny things are you making?

TOM

I'm trying to write to my poor old woman, Miss Eva, and my children. Only I don't remember my letters.

EVA

I wish I could help you. Last year I could do them, but I forget by now. It's a shame you had to go away from your family. I'm going to ask Papa to let you go back some time.

TOM

Mrs. Shelby said she'd send down money, soon as they could get it together. Young Master George said he'd come for me, and he gave me this dollar. (Drawing it from his pocket)

EVA

That's wonderful.

TOM

But I wanted to send a letter, to tell them where I am, and tell Chloe – that's my old woman – tell her I'm well off, because she was so dreadful worried.

ST CLARE

(Entering) I say, Tom, what's going on?

EVA

Tom is trying to write a letter, and I'm helping.

ST CLARE

(Looking at the slate) Well, I don't want to discourage either of you, but it might be better to have me write it, Tom.

EVA

His other mistress is going to send money to redeem him, Papa. She said so. So he must write to let her know where he is.

ST CLARE

Yes, well ... Tell me what you want to say, Tom, and we'll put it directly on paper.

[Scene 17 – EMILY and SHELBY, CHLOE eavesdropping.]

EMILY

Chloe has had a letter from Tom.

SHELBY

Really? How is the old boy?

EMILY

He's well treated. And hasn't much to do.

SHELBY

Tom won't want to come up here again.

EMILY

On the contrary, he's anxious to know when we can raise the money to redeem him.

SHELBY

Oh, Emily – I wish I knew. Once you get business wrong, there's no end to it. It's like jumping from one log to another, and getting deeper into the swamp. Borrow here to pay back there, and so on. And the confounded notes fall due before you get a chance to smoke a cigar and turn around! Dunning letters!

EMILY

Suppose we sell the horses, and one of your farms, and pay up fair and square.

SHELBY

Ridiculous, Emily. You're the finest woman in Kentucky, but you don't understand business. Women never do, and never can.

EMILY

If you could let me share the burden somehow, dear. Give me a list of your debts, and let me try to help you economize.

SHELBY

Don't plague me, Emily. I can't tell you exactly. I just know roughly what's likely. I can't trim and square my affairs, like Chloe, trimming her pies.

EMILY

There must be some way to raise the money. Chloe has her heart set on it!

SHELBY

I'm afraid I was premature in promising. Chloe may have to make up her mind to that. Tom will find another wife in a year or two, and she'd do well to take up with someone else, too.

EMILY

Mr. Shelby, I've taught our people their marriages are as sacred as ours. I'd never say such a thing to Chloe.

SHELBY

You've burdened them with a morality above their station and prospects.

EMILY

I cannot absolve myself from the promises I make to these helpless creatures. If you can't get the money, I'll take on some music students, and earn the money myself.

SHELBY

Emily! Degrade yourself like that?! I won't consent.

EMILY

It is degrading to break our promise.

SHELBY

Well, you are heroic, But you may want to think further about it.

CHLOE

(Entering) I'm sorry, Missis, I couldn't help hearin'. I don' want you troublin' about the money, when you can use what's right here in your hands. Other folks hires us out, an' make money on us.

EMILY

Well, who would we hire out?

CHLOE

Sam heard there's a baker in Louisville, wants a good hand at cake and pastry, give four dollars a week to one. And I'm thinkin', Sally's about ready to be doin' something, she does almost as well as me. An if Missis would let me go, I'd help fetch up the money. I ain't afraid to put my cake and pies long side any perfectioner's.

EMILY

Confectioner's, Chloe.

CHLOE

Words is so curis, can't never get 'em right.

EMILY

But you'd have to leave your children.

CHLOE

Laws, Missis, the boys is big enough to do a day's work. And Sally can take the baby.

SHELBY

Louisville's rather far.

CHLOE

It's down river, closer to my old man, maybe?

EMILY

But still several hundred miles away, Chloe. Mr. Shelby?

SHELBY

If you can manage without Chloe, I'll allow it. (Leaves)

EMILY

And every cent will be put aside for Tom's redemption, Chloe.

CHLOE

I was thinkin' it could, cause I won't need no clothes or shoes or nothin'. How many weeks in a year, Missis?

EMILY

Fifty-two.

CHLOE

Is that so? And four dollars for each of 'em?

EMILY

Two hundred and eight dollars, Chloe.

CHLOE

An' how many years'd it take to earn enough?

EMILY

Four or five.

CHLOE

Master's right, you shouldn't be givin' lessons, no ways. Not while I got hands.

EMILY

I'll take care of the honor of the family, Chloe.

CHLOE

Sam's goin' to the river tomorrow, and if Missis is willin', I can go, if you write my pass, an' a commendation. An' I'll ask Master James t' write to my old man about it. Oh, thank you Missis, thank you!

[Scene 18 – GEORGE and ELIZA. GEORGE suddenly pulls his pistol and checks the door.]

GEORGE

Damn! False alarm. I can't stand much more of this, Eliza.

ELIZA

We've no choice.

GEORGE

I thought staying ahead of the slave catchers was hell. But it's waiting that's the real hell.

ELIZA

It can't be long now.

GEORGE

It's been an eternity already!

ELIZA

I know, dear, but there's nothing to be done.

GEORGE

Don't I know it! But I hate it nonetheless! To be so helpless so soon after getting away! Finally to shape one's ends, and then to be put back at the mercy of insidious powers!

ELIZA

I feel the same, dear.

GEORGE

Then why don't you complain? Show a little human impatience?

ELIZA

You're doing well enough for both of us.

GEORGE

Oh, Eliza! (Laughs) Dear Eliza!

[Scene 19 – OPHELIA and ST CLARE]

OPHELIA

I've never seen anything like it! There's no system!

ST CLARE

No, there isn't.

OPHELIA

Such waste and confusion I never saw!

ST CLARE

No doubt that's true.

OPHELIA

If you were housekeeper, you wouldn't take it so coolly.

ST CLARE

My dear cousin, we masters are divided into two classes: I stand among the good-natured who hate severity. As a result, we suffer the consequences. Some rare persons can produce order without severity – but I am not one of them. I won't have the poor devils thrashed and cut to pieces, and they know it.

OPHELIA

But – no time, no place, no order – everything going on in this shiftless way!

ST CLARE

My dear Vermont, what on earth is the use of time to a fellow who has twice as much as he knows what to do with? I've nothing to do but lounge on the sofa and read -- what does it matter if dinner is a little late? And what a dinner! Soup, ragout, roast fowl, dessert – which Dinah creates out of chaos and old night down there in that kitchen. It's sublime, how she manages. But don't go down there, dear cousin – absolve yourself from that. You'll only lose your temper, and confound Dinah into the bargain. Let her go her own way.

OPHELIA

You don't know how I found things.

ST CLARE

Don't I? The rolling pin's under the bed, the nutmeg grater is buried in her pocket next to her tobacco, and she washes dishes one day with a napkin, the next with a rag from an old petticoat. But! She gets up glorious dinners and makes superb coffee. Judge her as warriors and statesmen are judged, by her success.

OPHELIA

The waste! The expense!

ST CLARE

You can lock up everything, and give it out in dribs and drabs, but I wouldn't.

OPHELIA

I can't help feeling the servants aren't strictly honest.

ST CLARE

(With a laugh) Honest! Of course they aren't! Why would they be? What on earth would make them so?

OPHELIA

They need instruction.

ST CLARE

Fiddlesticks! Marie, to be sure, has spirit enough to kill off the whole plantation, if I'd let her manage, but she wouldn't stop the cheating. From the mother's breast, the colored child sees no choice but to be underhanded. Cunning and deception are necessary. We keep slaves in that childish state, feeling their masters' goods are their own. How can they be honest! Tom, now – Tom is a moral miracle!

OPHELIA

But what about their souls?

ST CLARE

We've turned over the whole race to the devil for our own benefit in this world, never mind some other.

OPHELIA

You should be ashamed.

ST CLARE

I'm not sure I should. I've got plenty of company, all over the world, all the same story. Use up the lower class, body, soul and spirit, for the benefit of the upper. And yet all Christendom stands aghast, quivering with virtuous indignation, because we do things a little differently.

OPHELIA

It isn't so in Vermont.

ST CLARE

I concede that.

OPHELIA

It's abominable, defending such a system!

ST CLARE

When did I defend it?

OPHELIA

What do you have slaves for, if you don't?

ST CLARE

Have you never done anything wrong?

OPHELIA

When I have, I repent.

ST CLARE

So do I. All the time.

OPHELIA

And I resolve to do better.

ST CLARE

I, too – these ten years. But I haven't got clear of my sins.

OPHELIA

Oh, Augustine! I'm full of shortcomings. No one feels them more than I do.

ST CLARE

I love to see you get so earnest. Ophelia, you are desperately good. It tires me to death to think of it.

OPHELIA

This is serious.

ST CLARE

It's too hot to be serious.

OPHELIA

Augustine, you are such a rattle-brain.

ST CLARE

I suppose I am. But this once I will be serious. "When in the course of human events, a fellow has to hold two or three dozen of his fellows in captivity –"

OPHELIA

Be serious!

ST CLARE

I'm coming to it, Cousin. About slavery, there is only one opinion. Planters who make money by it, clergymen who must please the planters, and politicians who rule by it warp language and ethics with ingenuity. They press nature and the Bible into service, but even so, no one can believe their arguments. Slavery comes from the devil, that's the short of it. Talk of the abuses of slavery! The thing itself is the essence of all abuse. We should sink under it, like Sodom and Gomorrah! And the only reason we don't is that some of us scorn to use the full power that our savage laws put into our hands. Oh, Cousin! How many disgusting, mean, low fellows have I met ruling as despots over as many men, women and children as they can cheat, steal or buy! It makes me ready to curse my country! To curse the human race!

OPHELIA

Augustine! I've never heard the like, even in the North!

ST CLARE

The North! Oh, they are cool in the North! You can't begin to curse up hill and down as we can when we get at it.

OPHELIA

But the question is –

ST CLARE

How have I come to this state of sin and misery? My servants were my father's, and my mother's, and now they are mine, they and their considerable increase. Your father settled in New England to rule over rocks and stones, and mine settled in Louisiana, to rule over men and women and force existence out of them. My father was an aristocrat bred in the bone, although he was born poor and in no way noble. But as an aristocrat, he had no human sympathies past a certain line. His line was color. Among his equals, you'd never find a man more just and generous. But he considered the negro an intermediate link between man and animals. Oh, if you pressed him on their immortal souls, he might have hemmed and hawed and finally said yes. But he wasn't troubled over religion, beyond venerating God as decidedly the head of the upper classes. Father had an overseer – from Vermont, as it happens – schooled in brutality. Mother and I formed a committee between us for redress of grievances, and we congratulated ourselves on doing good, until this overseer complained that he couldn't manage the hands properly. Then Father told Mother that she was mistress over the house-servants, but must not interfere with the field hands. He would have said the same to the virgin Mary herself if she had interfered with his system. Mother eventually gave up, but she burnt into me one truth: the meanest soul has dignity and worth.

OPHELIA

I thought you approved of these things, thought them right according to Scripture.

ST CLARE

Humbug! Even my brother Alfred, who managed the plantation when I decided I couldn't, who is an aristocrat as our father was, doesn't pretend to that kind of a defense. He argues the right of the strongest, and believes that the American planter is only doing what the English do to the lower classes.

OPHELIA

The English laborer isn't sold, traded, parted from his family, whipped.

ST CLARE

He can still starve to death, and his children with him.

OPHELIA

So slavery is no worse than another abomination. That's an argument?

ST CLARE

Of course not. Our infringement of human rights is bolder, more tangible. But both systems appropriate one set of human beings for the use of another.

OPHELIA

And how is it you gave up your plantation life?

ST CLARE

Alfred accommodated my notions, but I still remained unsatisfied. I hated the thing itself – perpetuating ignorance, brutality, and vice, just to make money for me! Alfred advised me to take the bank stock and the New Orleans family mansion, and leave the plantation to him. And so I came here.

OPHELIA

But why didn't you free your slaves?

ST CLARE

I wasn't quite up to that. I couldn't hold them as tools to make money. But I could have them to help spend money – that didn't seem so ugly. Some were house-servants I was attached to. And there were children. Oh, Cousin! I once hoped of doing something in this world, something to free my country of this stain.

OPHELIA

Put your hand to the plow. Don't look back.

ST CLARE

Somehow I became a piece of driftwood. Alfred's life reflects his opinions, but mine is a contemptible non sequitur.

OPHELIA

Does this satisfy you?

ST CLARE

Satisfy? What did I just say?

OPHELIA

But how will it end?

ST CLARE

I don't know. If our laws allowed education Educate one generation, and the whole thing will be blown sky high. If we did not give them liberty, they would take it.

[A bell rings.]

I do believe, dear cousin, that's the signal for a glorious dinner direct from the chaos of Dinah's kitchen. Shall we go in?

[Scene 20 – ST CLARE, OPHELIA and TOPSY]

ST CLARE

Cousin Vermont! An experiment for your New England orthodoxy. (Gently pushes TOPSY forward)

OPHELIA

Augustine! What are you up to?

ST CLARE

For you to educate and train. Although she comes an expert dancer. There she can train the rest of us. Topsy?

[TOPSY does a quick breakdown, then stops, assuming an angelic expression.]

OPHELIA

What on earth?!

ST CLARE

Now Topsy, this is your new mistress. And you're going to be good.

TOPSY

Yes, Master.

OPHELIA

I don't want her. I've more now than I know what to do with.

ST CLARE

Christians! You get up a society to send a missionary to the heathen. But take one into your own house? No, they are dirty and disagreeable, it's too much, and so on!

OPHELIA

All right, Augustine, you have a point. But why add to the household?

ST CLARE

Topsy belonged to a couple of drunken louts whose restaurant I pass every day. I got tired of hearing her screams and their swearing. And she seems bright, and funny – promising. I haven't any knack, but I'd like you to try.

OPHELIA

How old are you, Topsy?

TOPSY

Dun know, Missis.

OPHELIA

No one told you?

TOPSY

I been aroun' a while, but I don' know when I got here.

OPHELIA

Who was your mother?

TOPSY

Never had none.

OPHELIA

Where were you born?

TOPSY

Never was born.

OPHELIA

Now, Topsy, I'm not playing.

TOPSY

Never was born, never had no father nor mother, nor nothin'. I was raised by a speculator, with lots of others. Old Aunt Sue used to take care of us.

OPHELIA

Have you heard anything about God, Topsy?

TOPSY

Missis?

OPHELIA

Do you know who made you?

TOPSY

Nobody, as I knows on. I 'spect I just grow'd.

OPHELIA

What did you do for your master?

TOPSY

Fetch water. Wash dishes, rub knives an' wait on folks.

OPHELIA

I don't suppose you can read.

TOPSY

No, Missis. But they learned us to count. "Ought is an ought, an' a figger is a figger. All for de white man an' nothin' fer de nigger."

ST CLARE

Virgin soil, Cousin. Plant your own ideas – you won't find many to pull up.

[**Scene 21** – Veranda, at sunset, EVA reading from the Bible to TOM, a little apart. ST CLARE lounges; MARIE reclines.]

EVA

(Reading) “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, ... stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.”

TOM

Can’t you see it, Miss Eva?

EVA

It’s right there. The sun setting on the lake. Fire on a sea of glass.

TOM

True enough, Miss Eva. (Singing)
“O, had I the wings of the morning,
I’d fly away to Canaan’s shore;
Bright angels should convey me home,
To the new Jerusalem.”

EVA

Where is the New Jerusalem?

TOM

Way up in the sky, Miss Eva.

EVA

Why, there it is as well, Tom! See those clouds of pearl? And the golden sky beyond. Tom, sing about the spirits bright.

TOM

(Singing)
“I see a band of spirits bright
That taste the glories there;”

EVA

I’ve seen them sometimes, Uncle Tom, in my sleep.

TOM

(Singing)
“They are all robed in spotless white
And conquering palms they bear.”

EVA

I’m going there, Uncle Tom.

TOM

Where, Miss Eva?

EVA
Where the bright spirits are.

TOM
Hope we all goin' there.

EVA
I'm going soon, Tom.

[OPHELIA enters, TOPSY trailing behind.]

OPHELIA
Eva! Come up to the porch now, the dew is falling. (To ST CLARE) That cough is still hanging on.

ST CLARE
Oh, nonsense. It's just a little cold.

OPHELIA
I don't like it. And the night air coming on.

MARIE
When I was Eva's age, I had a cough – they thought I was in consumption. I've always been subject to a cough. She shouldn't play too hard.

EVA
(Embracing MARIE) Oh, Mamma! Tom and I have been reading Revelations. I mean, I have been reading to Tom. Why don't we teach our servants to read?

MARIE
People never do.

EVA
But why?

MARIE
It doesn't help them to work any better.

EVA
But they should read the Bible, Mamma.

MARIE
Someone can read to them all they need.

EVA
Plenty of times there's no one to read to them.

MARIE

I did it myself, when I had health. And time. Eva, you are an odd child. Sometimes I don't know where you came from.

EVA

Miss Ophelia taught Topsy to read.

MARIE

Really? That's enough now, Eva. I've a headache coming on.

OPHELIA

That child will be the death of me, but she is very quick.

TOPSY

An' I c'n say my catechism, too!

ST CLARE

What good does that do?

OPHELIA

You may not understand it all as a child, but when you grow up, it comes back, it does you good.

ST CLARE

Mine hasn't come back yet, though you did put it into me pretty thoroughly. Come, Topsy – recite some of your catechism for our edification.

OPHELIA

“Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?”

TOPSY

“Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state wherein they were created.”

ST CLARE

Brava, Topsy, brava.

TOPSY

Please, Missis, was that there state Kentuck'?

OPHELIA

What state, Topsy?

TOPSY

The state they fell out of. Master used to tell how we came down from Kentuck'.

ST CLARE

(Laughing) Well! Adam and Eve as the first immigrants!

OPHELIA
Augustine!

[EVA has been staring at MARIE's necklace.]

MARIE
How sober you seem, child.

EVA
Is this worth a lot of money, Mamma?

MARIE
Not really. The valuable jewelry is all locked up. You'll have it when you come out.

EVA
I wish I had it now.

MARIE
Whatever for?

EVA
I'd sell it, and buy a place in the free states, and take our people there, and hire teachers, and they'd all learn to read and write.

MARIE
(Laughing) Oh, Eva! You are so strange!

EVA
It's very hard on Tom and Mammy they can't do these things. (Coughing)

OPHELIA
Time for you to get to bed, Eva.

MARIE
You mustn't coddle her, Ophelia.

ST CLARE
She'll do well enough.

OPHELIA
Even so.

[EVA goes in as Tom picks up his hymn.]

TOM
(Singing)
"O, had I the wings of the morning,
I'd fly away to Canaan's shore;
Bright angels should convey me home,

To the new Jerusalem.”

[Scene 22 – MARIE and ST CLARE apart; EVA resting on the veranda.]

MARIE

I knew it! I always had a feeling. My only darling child!

ST CLARE

Don't talk so! We can't give up the case.

MARIE

You can't have a mother's feeling, St Clare. You've never understood me, and you don't now!

ST CLARE

Eva is delicate. But just now she is worn out with the heat. The doctor says there is room for hope.

MARIE

I wish I could be as easy as the rest of you.

EVA

Papa, I have some things I must say to you, before I get weaker. I am going, and I won't come back.

ST CLARE

You must put away such gloomy thoughts.

EVA

If it weren't for you, Papa, and my friends, I would be happy. I want to go – I long to go. But I don't want to leave you. And our poor people are all good and kind to me. I wish they were all free. Isn't there any way?

ST CLARE

I wish with all my heart there were no slaves. But I don't know what's to be done.

EVA

When I am dead, Papa, you'll think of me and do it for my sake.

ST CLARE

Oh, child, don't talk so. You are all I have on earth.

EVA

They love their children as much as you do me, Papa. Mammy, and Tom – it's dreadful.

OPHELIA (OS)

Come out here now! I will tell your master! (Entering) Augustine! I don't know what to do! I've talked and I've taugh, and she's still the same.

ST CLARE

Come, Tops, you monkey!

[TOPSY reluctantly enters.]

What makes you act so?

TOPSY

My wicked heart, Miss Feely says.

OPHELIA

She took my gloves. She took Rosa's earrings. She took Eva's – Eva! Where did you get your necklace?

EVA

Get it? I've had it on all day. And what's funny, I forgot to take it off when I went to bed, so I had it on all night.

OPHELIA

Oh, Topsy! Why did you tell me you took it!?

TOPSY

You said I had to 'fess, and I couldn't think of nothin' else to 'fess.

OPHELIA

But that's a lie.

TOPSY

Laws, now, is it?

EVA

Oh, Topsy, come sit next to me. You don't need to steal. I'd rather give you anything I have. Why won't you try and be good? Don't you love anybody, Topsy?

TOPSY

Don' know nothin' 'bout love.

EVA

If you'd only try to be good –

TOPSY

Still be a nigger. If I could be skinned and come white, I'd try then.

EVA

People can love you if you're black, Topsy. Miss Ophelia would love you if you were good.

TOPSY

Oh, Miss! She can't bear me, she'd soon have a toad touch her. I don't care! (Whistles)

EVA

Oh, Topsy – I love you! I love you, because you've no mother or father or friends. Because you've been a poor abused child. I love you and I want you to be good, for my sake. I'm not well, I won't be here long. Please try to be good while I'm still here.

TOPSY

Oh, dear Miss Eva! I will try, I never did care nothin' about it before.

OPHELIA

I never could bear to have that child touch me. I didn't think she knew.

ST CLARE

Children know that kind of thing. And as long as it's true, no matter what you do for her, she'll never feel grateful.

OPHELIA

I don't know how I can help it.

[**Scene 23** – EVA’s room, after midnight, OPHELIA and ST CLARE at her bedside. TOM enters with the DOCTOR, who checks the sleeping child.]

DOCTOR

When did this change occur?

OPHELIA

In the last half-hour.

MARIE

(Rushing in) Augustine! Cousin! Oh!

ST CLARE

Hush! She is dying. If only she would wake, and speak once more!

EVA

Oh, Papa

ST CLARE

Do you know me, Eva?

EVA

Dear Papa.

ST CLARE

Oh, God – this is dreadful. On, Tom, my boy, this is killing me.

TOM

Bless the Lord, it’s over, dear Master. Look at her.

ST CLARE

Oh, Eva, tell us what you see. What –

EVA

Love – joy – peace! (Dies)

ST CLARE

Oh! This wrings my heart.

MARIE

She’s gone! My mother’s heart is broken! (Rushes out)

TOPSY

Oh, Miss Eva! I wish I’s dead, too.

OPHELIA

Hush, child, hush.

TOPSY

She loved me! Ain't nobody left!

OPHELIA

I can love you, Topsy, I do love you. And I'll try to help you grow up to be good.

ST CLARE

The whole world is empty as an eggshell.

TOM

Look up, dear Master, look up where our dear Miss Eva is.

ST CLARE

I can't look up, Tom. I need to be alone, please.

[The others leaving as the lights fade and TOM sings of bright spirits.]

End ACT I

Uncle Tom's Cabin

From the novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Adapted by Dorothy Louise

© 2009 by Dorothy Louise

717 682 9916

dlouise@fandm.edu

CHARACTERS

Bm – Uncle Tom solo
Bm -- George Harris
Bm -- Sam, Sambo/Quimbo, Adolph, Harry
Bf -- Chloe, Mammy, Dinah
Bf -- Cassy, Eliza
Bf --Topsy, Emmeline
Wf -- Eva
Wf -- Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird, Rachel, Ophelia
Wf -- Marie, Legree's mother
Wm – Adams, Shelby, St. Clare, Buyer
Wm – Mullen, Wilson, Alfred, Legree
Wm – Young George, Simeon, Doctor, Buyer, Pastor

Events span five years on an open stage with spare settings.

Scene Synopsis

Act I

1 – Cassy tends to Tom's bruises after Legree's beating.
2 – Mullen removes George Harris from Adams' bag factory.
3 – Cassy tells Tom her story.
4 – George Harris visits Eliza to tell her he plans to escape.
5 – Shelby tells Emily he has to sell Eliza's baby and Tom. Eliza overhears this.
6 – Eliza says goodbye to Tom and Chloe. 7 – Sam reports on Eliza's escape.
8 – Tom takes his leave.
9 – George Harris, disguised, reveals himself to Wilson, and expresses his determination to escape or die.
10 – Little Eva returns home to her mother, bringing Tom. Ophelia and Marie discuss how to manage slaves.
11 – Mrs. Bird shelters Eliza.
12 – Marie and Ophelia return from church and again engage the subject of slavery with St. Clare
13 -- George and Eliza reunite.
14 – Tom reproaches St. Clare for his drinking, and the latter promises to reform.
15 – Ophelia tidies Dinah's kitchen.
16 – Eva helps Tom with his letter. St Clare volunteers to act as secretary.
17 – Emily and Shelby discuss their finances. Chloe, overhearing, gets permission to work in Louisville for a confectioner.
18 – George and Eliza – waiting, waiting
19 – Ophelia objects to Dinah's kitchen. St Clare argues for laissez-faire, and then reviews his own history re holding slaves.
20 – St Clare presents Topsy to Ophelia as an experiment.
21 – Eva reads to Tom. Ophelia worries about Eva's health, but both Marie and St Clare dismiss her opinion.
22 – Eva, in decline, tells Topsy that she loves her.
23 – Eva dies.

Act II

- 24 – St Clare promises Tom that he'll be freed. Ophelia gets a legal document transferring Topsy's ownership to her.
- 25 – George Harris and Eliza complete their disguises to escape.
- 26 – St Clare indulges himself with Tom.
- 27 – St Clare dead in a barroom brawl.
- 28 – At the slave auction, Legree buys Tom and Emmeline.
- 29 – Legree beats Tom. Sambo presents Tom's dollar and the lock of Eva's hair, which reminds Legree of his dead mother. Cassy takes note.
- 30 – Cassy creates a strategy of escape.
- 31 – George and Eliza are nearly unmasked.
- 32 -- Legree abuses Tom. Tom refuses to go with Cassy.
- 33 -- George Harris and Eliza land in Canada.
- 34 – Cassy spooks Legree with talk of ghosts in the garret.
- 35 – Legree's dream
- 36 – Cassy and Emmeline escape to the garret.
- 37 – Tom refuses to inform on Cassy, and Legree beats him.
- 38 -- Liberia – a rousing lecture/debate: American Colonization Society
- 39 -- Young Shelby comes to bring Tom home, but assists at his deathbed instead.
- 40 – Cassy as Creole lady on ship, George Shelby attending; meet Mme De Thoux, George Harris' sister.
- 41 – George Harris and Eliza in a cozy scene with their son, Harry. Cassy arrives and they have a tearful reunion.
- 42 – Emily and Chloe receives the news of Tom's death from Young Shelby
- 43 – George & family off to Liberia, but they are deterred

ACT I

[**Scene 1** – Sounds of LEGREE lashing UNCLE TOM, LEGREE frenzied, TOM trying and sometimes failing to suppress his own cries of pain. Maybe we see this, as in a shadow play.]

LEGREE

You always got your nose buried knee-deep in your bible, Tom. Remember what the good book says. “He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” That’s what it says, Tom. If you could read, you could check. “He that knoweth his master’s will ...”

Gradually, a bare slave cabin in Louisiana dimly emerges. Late at night. CASSY is tending to UNCLE TOM’s bruises and cuts suffered in LEGREE’s beating.]

CASSY

That’s the best I can do.

TOM

Oh, thank you, thank –

CASSY

And you’ve done your best. But Legree always wins. You must give up.

TOM

O Lord, Lord! I can’t give up!

CASSY

No use calling on the Lord – he never hears. He’s not there. Or if he is, he’s taken sides against us. Everything pushes us into hell – why not go?

TOM

Don’t, don’t –

CASSY

What do you know? You’re brand new. I’ve been here five years – an eternity! Body and soul, under his foot! And I hate him for the devil he is! You don’t know the half of it! No law, God’s or man’s, can touch him. We’re ten miles from the next place, and you need a white man to testify if Legree scalds you, burns you, hangs you up and whips you to death! No point in resisting – didn’t I try?!

TOM

Oh, Missis!

CASSY

Don’t call me Missis – I’m a miserable slave, same as you! Living with him these past five years, cursing every moment of my life! Now he’s got a new one, Emmeline, fifteen, reads her Bible – her Bible! (Laughs wildly) Oh, call on the Lord!

TOM

Jesus, Jesus – have you forgot us?

CASSY

And why try to protect the others? They're cruel to each other, and will be to you, too, first chance they get.

TOM

And what's made them cruel? If I give up, I'll get used to things, and little by little become like them. O, no, no, Missis – I've lost everything, wife, children, home, a kind master who died before he could set me free. Everything in this world is gone. I can't lose Heaven, too!

CASSY

The Lord won't charge the sin to us, but to the devils that drove us to it!

TOM

It don't matter how I get wicked, it's bein' so I'm dreadin'.

CASSY

Now there's truth!

TOM

Missis, they threw my coat in the corner, my Bible's in the pocket, please, if you'd –

[CASSY gets it, and HE opens it to a marked place, and hands it back to her.]

That one's better 'n' water. You can read?

CASSY

(Nods, takes the Bible) “Love one another as I have loved you. Do good to those that hurt you.”

TOM

An' the next one.

CASSY

(Turning to another marked place) “Father, forgive them, for – forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

TOM

It came natural to him, but we have to fight hard to forgive. Oh, Missis, suffering don't mean the Lord's turned against us. Suffering is what saves us!

CASSY

You'll see. Tomorrow they'll be at you again. They'll be at you and at you till you have to give up! Emmeline's trying, you're trying, but if you don't give up, you'll be killed by inches!

TOM

They can't help me dyin', some time! And after that, they can't do no more! The Lord'll help me! The Lord'll bring me through.

CASSY

Drink this. And rest. I'll come back later.

[Scene 2 – ADAMS, MULLEN and GEORGE in ADAMS' office at the bag factory.]

MULLEN

Let's just say I've been hearin' things.

ADAMS

Good things, I hope. George is my best worker, Mr. Mullen. Hands down.

MULLEN

Is that so.

ADAMS

Steady, hardworking. Everything a slave should be, and more.

MULLEN

You don't say.

ADAMS

We're successful because of his invention.

MULLEN

What's that?

ADAMS

A machine to clean the hemp, cuts the time in half. Next thing you know, you got a new burlap bag or gunny sack. Works so well, I took out a patent. Even so, we got more orders than we can fill.

MULLEN

A patent, eh? George is a regular genius.

ADAMS

Well, he can't take out a patent, so I did. Hired out to me, did the work on my time. You're well paid for it.

MULLEN

I don't know now. How do you calculate the wages of a genius?

ADAMS

Well, I'm open to raising his wages, if that's what you're getting at.

MULLEN

He's so great, maybe I should take him back to his old place diggin' and hoein'.

ADAMS

(Laughs) Oh, that would be a waste!

MULLEN

Would it now.

ADAMS

You see him on the factory floor, those bags pilin' up, you wouldn't want to waste that skill on cotton.

MULLEN

Wouldn't I now. How'd you know what I want?

ADAMS

I'm just saying ---

MULLEN

I hear you. This fella yours or mine?

ADAMS

Yours, of course. Hired out to me.

MULLEN

He's mine, I do what I want with him. I'd say he's getting a little beyond hisself. Do with a little curtailin'.

ADAMS

It's only right to raise his wage, he's contributed so much to --

MULLEN

I don't think so.

ADAMS

Watch him work, you'll see he's --

MULLEN

Nothin' to do with what I need 'im for.

ADAMS

But -- his machine!

MULLEN

Saves work, right? Never knew a nigger wouldn't shirk. Now you want to reward him for it. Thank God this is a free country. He's mine. He does what I say. Step lively, Harris. I'm puttin' you back in the field. (Leaves)

ADAMS

He's in no mood to hear me now, George. Go along -- I'll try again later.

[Scene 3 – UNCLE TOM finishes breakfast as CASSY tries to make him comfortable.]

CASSY

We live in filth, and grow loathsome until we loathe ourselves! We long to die, but don't dare kill ourselves! Oh, you say you've lost everything! I was brought up in my father's house, sent to a convent, learned French, music, embroidery, whatnot! When my father died of cholera, I was set down in the property inventory. He meant to set my mother free, but never got around to it.

Another man bought me for \$2000, said he loved me, put me into a beautiful house, gave me everything that money could buy. But I didn't set any value on that. I loved him as well, and wanted him to marry me. But he said if we were faithful it was marriage before God. And I was faithful for seven years. I nursed him through yellow fever, and bore him two beautiful children, Henry and Elise. But his cousin, Butler, got ahold of him, and got him to gambling, and introduced him to another lady, and I saw his heart was gone from me.

TOM

Oh, poor Missis.

CASSY

He sold us! Sold his wife before God and his two children to pay off his gambling debts to Butler, who wanted all along to get his hands on me. And when I tried to resist, he was harsh to the children. I tried to keep them apart, but he sold them – he sold my children! Oh, how I cursed, God and man! And for a while he was afraid of me. But then he told me if I wasn't quiet, I'd never see the children again. And if I was really peaceable, and – cooperative – he might buy them back. What could I do? Resist? Oh, I tried to hang on to goodness, Tom – I tried not to give up. But one day, I was out walking when I passed by the jail and saw a crowd and heard a child's voice.

HENRY

Mother! Mother!

CASSY

Oh, Henry!

HENRY

Mother! Take me home!

TRADER

You get in here, boy. You get in here, or I'll teach you a lesson you won't never forget!

CASSY

Oh, please! (Reaching into her pocket) It's all I have, but – please! My master will buy him back!

TRADER

(With a sharp laugh) An' I'm the Queen o' England!

HENRY
Mother!

TRADER
I'm gonna break this boy, las' thing I do!

[TRADER drags HENRY off as his cries of "Mother! Mother!" reverberate and finally fade.]

TOM
Lord help us. Lord save us.

CASSY
Well, the Lord was deaf as usual, Tom. I begged Butler to interfere, but he just laughed. Something in me snapped. I picked up the bowie knife on the table and flew at him. And everything went dark, and for days and days I was in a fever. And when I woke, I was in a nice room, an old black woman tending me, and a doctor.

TOM
You see, Missis? The Lord provides.

CASSY
They took such pains – because Butler wanted a good price for me! Oh, I longed to die. But I didn't. And they dressed me up and men came in and smoked their cigars and looked at me and debated my price. A Captain Stuart saw something weighed down my heart, and came alone many times, and finally persuaded me to tell him. He bought me, and tried to buy Henry, but he'd already been sold and sent off somewhere – the last I ever heard of Henry. And Captain Stuart offered an immense sum for Elise, but Butler got wind of it and stopped it. Captain Stuart was very kind to me, and took me to his plantation, and after a year we had a son born. A beautiful boy! Just like my poor Henry! How I loved him! But I had made up my mind, yes I had. And when he was two weeks old, I took him in my arms, and kissed him, and cried over him. And I gave him laudanum, and held him, close to my heart, while he slept to death. Oh, I mourned and cried over him! Everyone thought it was just a mistake. But I'm not sorry to this day. And then the cholera came and carried off Captain Stuart. Everyone who wanted to live, died. And I – who wanted desperately to die, who went down to death's door – I lived! And was sold from hand to hand until Legree brought me here five years ago. Talk of suffering! I've walked the streets when I had misery enough in my heart to sink the city! And on judgment day, I'll stand before God against those that have ruined me and my children! And before that, I'll do it! I'll send Legree where he belongs – he's already made a hell here, so he's not got far to go – even if they burn me for it!

TOM
Oh, Missis, Missis.

CASSY
I'll get you some water. (Doing so)

TOM

I wish you'd go to the Lord. He can give you living water.

CASSY

At the convent, there was a picture of him in the chapel. But he isn't here, Tom – he isn't here! It's all sin and long despair! There's no point in arguing.

[SHE adjust his coverings as the lights fade.]

[Scene 4 – Discover GEORGE and ELIZA.]

ELIZA

George! You startled me! But I'm so glad to see you. Missis is out visiting – Harry's just down for his nap.

GEORGE

Oh, Eliza!

ELIZA

What, George – what?!

GEORGE

Better he'd never been born! Better I never laid eyes on you!

ELIZA

What are you saying? Don't!

GEORGE

Harry is beautiful and you're the best woman I've ever known! Even so, I wish we'd never met!

ELIZA

Please stop saying such things!

GEORGE

What's the point of trying – to do, to know, to be – anything! What's the use of living?

ELIZA

You have a hard master, but you must be patient, and soon –

GEORGE

Wasn't I patient when Mullen took me from the factory?

ELIZA

He is your master.

GEORGE

Who made him so? What right has he to me?

ELIZA

George, hush, hush.

GEORGE

I'm a better man than he! A better manager. I read and write better – no thanks to him – what right has he to make me a workhorse? He gives me the meanest, dirtiest work to punish me for my achievements!

ELIZA

Please, George, for my sake – for Harry’s – be careful!

GEORGE

The more I do, the more he loads on.

ELIZA

What will we do?

GEORGE

Yesterday – because I asked the young master to stop frightening the horse with his whip – old master tied me to a tree. Cut switches for his son. “Whip him till you can’t no more!” And he did. How is he my master? Who made him so? I’m kicked and cuffed and sworn at – I won’t bear it! I won’t!

ELIZA

There’s nothing we can do, George, you know that.

GEORGE

He drowned my dog. Threw him in the pond and pelted him with stones. Then gave me a flogging because I wouldn’t do it myself.

ELIZA

Oh, no!

GEORGE

My day will come, if he don’t look out.

ELIZA

Oh, don’t do anything wicked, George. We must have faith that God does the very best.

GEORGE

There’s more. Master says he was a fool to let me marry off the place, hates Mr. Shelby and his hifalutin’ ways, says I get them from you. He won’t let me come here any more, says I’m to marry Mina on his place, or he’ll sell me down the river.

ELIZA

But you’re already married to me, by a minister – just like white folks!

GEORGE

A slave can’t be married. And all that’s happening to me can happen to Harry!

ELIZA

But Mr. Shelby is so kind.

GEORGE

He may die – anything can happen. And then what pleasure will it be that Harry’s handsome and smart? A sword will pierce your soul, Eliza, for every good thing he is. He will be worth too much to let you keep him!

ELIZA
Oh, don't say that!

GEORGE
Bear up now, dear, for I'm going.

ELIZA
Where?

GEORGE
To Canada. And once I'm settled, I'll buy you and Harry, and you'll join me.

ELIZA
Oh, you can't! You'll be taken.

GEORGE
I'll die first. Live free, or die!

ELIZA
Don't say that. You won't kill yourself, please, George!

GEORGE
Oh, I won't need to – they'll get me first.

ELIZA
Please don't go! Don't go!

GEORGE
I can't live like a dog, Eliza. This is our only chance.

ELIZA
Oh, my God! Do be careful!

GEORGE
You, too. And don't worry – imagine a future where we are together – and free!

ELIZA
I'll try.

GEORGE
I'm going home as if I accepted Mullen's plan. But I've got my own. In a week or so, I'll be among the missing. Pray for me, Eliza – maybe the good Lord will hear you.

ELIZA
Pray yourself. Trust in him.

GEORGE
Kiss Harry for me.

ELIZA
Oh, George!

[THEY embrace fiercely as the lights fade.]

[Scene 5 – SHELBY reading his newspaper, EMILY in their drawing room. ELIZA eavesdropping.]

EMILY

Eliza has got the silliest notion in her head, dear.

SHELBY

Oh?

EMILY

She said she heard you make that trader Mr. Haley an offer for her boy – isn't that ridiculous?

SHELBY

She did, eh?

EMILY

You'd never sell any of our people – least of all to a low-bred fellow such as that!

SHELBY

The fact is I'll have to sell some of my hands.

EMILY

You can't be serious.

SHELBY

I've agreed to sell Tom.

EMILY

What! You've spoken to him a hundred times of setting him free! Well! If you can sell Tom, why not Eliza's child?

SHELBY

Eliza's child, too. Why do you rate me as a monster for doing what others do every day?

EMILY

But why these?

SHELBY

They bring the highest price. The low-bred fellow Haley made me a high bid on Eliza, if you must know.

EMILY

Not Eliza!

SHELBY

Knowing your feelings, I refused – give me some credit.

EMILY

Tom would lay down his life for you. Oh, how can I hold up my head if we sell such an excellent creature as Tom for money? I have taught Tom and Eliza the duties of family, parent and child, husband and wife. How can I justify this act – an act that says we have no regard for duty, or relation, however sacred, but only regard for money?

SHELBY

Emily, I'm sorry, it's no use. We sell these two, or we sell everything. Haley has a mortgage, and if I don't clear it with him, he'll take everything. I raked, scraped, borrowed, and all but begged – but the price of these two was needed to make up the balance. I had to do it. Would it be better to sell everyone?

EMILY

This is God's curse on slavery! A curse to the master, a curse to the slave! I was a fool to think I could make anything good out of such a deadly evil! I thought by kindness, care, instruction, I could make their condition better than freedom – what a fool!

SHELBY

I hope you see I've done my best, given the facts.

EMILY

I haven't any jewelry to speak of – but what about this watch? If I could only save Eliza's child, I would sacrifice anything I have!

SHELBY

It's too late, Emily. The bills of sale are signed, and he's off. We should be thankful – Haley is a man of leather, who could have ruined us. He'd sell his own mother for the right percentage. He wants to take possession tomorrow. You'd better arrange a drive with Eliza so it's done when she's away.

EMILY

No, no – I won't help in this cruel business. The Lord forgive us. What have we done?!

[SCENE 6 – ELIZA, holding her son, with UNCLE TOM and AUNT CHLOE.]

CHLOE

Are you sick? It's past midnight!

ELIZA

I'm running away – Master has sold my child! And you, Uncle Tom! And the man takes possession in the morning!

CHLOE

What has Uncle Tom done, that master should sell him?

ELIZA

Master's sorry, but he had to pay off clear, or sell the place and all the people.

CHLOE

Well, Tom, will you wait to be toted down the river where they kill niggers with hard work and starving? You take the terrapin route – just what you can carry on your back. Bustle up – I'll get your things together.

TOM

I ain't going. Let Eliza go – it ain't in nature for her to stay. But if Master has to sell me, or else all the people on the place and everything go to rack, why, I can bear it as well as any. (Controls himself) Master always found me on the spot. I never broke trust.

CHLOE

He's broke his with you!

TOM

Chloe, Chloe, hush, hush. What about George Harris?

ELIZA

He's going to run away in a few days.

CHLOE

Now there's a man with some sense.

TOM

Hush, Chloe.

ELIZA

Try to get word to him how and why I went, and tell him I'll try to find Canada.

TOM

Don't worry.

ELIZA

And give him my love, and tell him, if I never – if I never see him again, he must be as good as he can, and try and meet me ... in heaven.

CHLOE

Get on now, while you got the dark.

TOM

And try to send word back, Eliza, so Chloe knows.

ELIZA

Chloe! Tom! Goodbye! (Leaves)

TOM

Let's get down and pray, Chloe.

CHLOE

Oh, Tom! I can't live away from you!

TOM

You got the children here, Chloe. And maybe I won't go too far away. We'll trust in the Lord.

[THEY tearfully embrace. Music: "I got shoes, you got shoes, all God' children got shoes; When I get t' heaven, gonna put on my shoes, gonna walk all over God's heaven, heaven"]

[**Scene 7** -- Sound of horses arriving. EMILY runs in, SHELBY following. SAM appears, dusty, sweaty, but beaming.]

EMILY
Tell us.

SAM
Master Haley's restin' at the tavern, dreadful fatigued. And Eliza's clear 'cross the Jordan. In the land of Canaan.

SHELBY
What do you mean, Sam?

SAM
Lord preserves his own. Lizy's gone over the river into 'Hio, as if the Lord took her in a chariot of fire with two horses. Saw it with my own eyes, her crossin' on the floatin' ice, and a man helpin' her on the other side. Couldn't nobody done it without the Lord!

EMILY
God be praised, she isn't dead! But where is Eliza now, Sam?

SAM
The Lord will provide, as Missis always instructin' us. This here's a providence. And if it hadn't been for me, she'd been taken a dozen times. Didn't I start off the horses this mornin', and keep 'em chasin' till dinner time? And didn't I lead Master Haley a detour for five miles, or else he'd a come on Lizy easy as a dog after a coon? And when we got to the tavern by the river, didn't I see Lizy's face at the window, and lose my hat, an' sing out loud enough to raise the dead, so Lizy hears and clears out the side door, and down to the river, and we're right behind her when she screeches as I never heard, screechin' an' jumpin' on the floatin' ice, the ice crackin' and she boundin' like a buck! Lord, girl's got a spring in her ain't common! An' these're all providences.

SHELBY
Providences you'll have to be pretty sparing of, Master Sam.

SAM
(Feigning contrition) Quite right. But when fellers cut up such shines as Master Haley, he ain't no gentleman no way, I can't help seeing that. And I was fending for all our people. For him as tries to get one is as good as tryin' to get all, and these drivers come smellin' around after our people gonna find me in their way. I sticks up for consciences, I hold on to principles, what're principles good for if we ain't persistent?

EMILY
Well, Sam, that's enough now. Aunt Chloe has some cold ham left from dinner today.

SAM
I am wantin' some solids and some fluids.

EMILY

Go ahead, then. You've done well today. Yes you have.

[Scene 8 – CHLOE finishes packing a box, while TOM stands by.]

CHLOE

Your flannels for the rhumatiz is here, but be careful, you don' have no one t' make 'em for you any more. Old shirt on top, new ones on the bottom. I toed off your socks last night, an' darned the heels. Who'll ever mend 'em again? (Near tears) No one t' do for you, sick or well! Oh! There's somethin' wrong about this somewhere, I jus' can't make out what, but there's wrong somewhere, I'm clear about that!

TOM

Look to the Lord, Chloe – he don' let a sparrow fall without him.

CHLOE

That don' seem t' comfort me. No use talkin' – I jus' get your things all wet. An' I was cross with the boys an' the baby, Tom, I know – I'm so tossed about, makes me act ugly. And I don't really think I oughtta be good now!

TOM

Now, Chloe – things could be worse.

EMILY

(Entering) Oh, Tom! (Bursts into tears)

CHLOE

Oh, Missis, Missis, don't, don't, please don't.

EMILY

I'm all right now, Chloe. Tom, I won't give you money, because they won't let you keep it. But I give you my solemn promise that I'll keep track of you, and bring you back as soon as I have the money.

YOUNG SHELBY

(Dashing in) Oh, Tom! (Embracing him) I just heard, I rode as fast as I could! Oh, it's so mean! If I was a man, I 'd stop them!

TOM

Oh, Master James, does me good to see you! Real good.

YOUNG SHELBY

Look here, Uncle Tom – I've brought you my silver dollar.

TOM

Oh, I can't take that, Master James. The Missis said ---

EMILY

He's made a hole in it.

YOUNG SHELBY

You shall take it. And hang it around your neck out of sight. Oh, I wish I could blow up that trader Mr. Haley! Grab 'im by the throat, an' whip 'im hard! Do me good.

TOM

Won' do me no good, Master James. Or you – he's twice your size.

YOUNG SHELBY

(Tying the dollar around TOM's neck) Button your coat tight over it, and keep it safe.

TOM

Oh, I will, Master James.

YOUNG SHELBY

And every time you look at it, remember I'm coming down for you to bring you back.

CHLOE

Oh, Master James!

YOUNG SHELBY

I won't let Father forget, you can count on me.

TOM

Well, now, you be a comfort to your mother.

YOUNG SHELBY

I will, Uncle Tom. (Going to her) Aunt Chloe, I'm going to build this house all over, and put in a parlor with a carpet, when I'm grown up.

EMILY

Hush, now, James.

YOUNG SHELBY

But I will! And then I'll come down to get you!

EMILY

We should leave Tom and Chloe to say goodbye, James.

YOUNG SHELBY

Goodbye, Uncle Tom – keep a stiff upper lip!

TOM

Oh, I will do that, Master James, yes, I will.

[EMILY and YOUNG SHELBY leave.]

CHLOE

(Knotting the cord around the box) Nothin' undo that knot till you say so, Tom.

TOM

I do appreciate it, Chloe.

CHLOE

Oh, Tom! How come we ain't sparrows?

[THEY embrace as the lights fade.]

[**Scene 9** – GEORGE HARRIS and WILSON in GEORGE's room at the Inn. A couple of slaves have just set down luggage and are scurrying away. GEORGE locks the door.]

WILSON

George!

GEORGE

Yes, George!

WILSON

Who'd of thought it?

GEORGE

Blacked up like a minstrel darky! A little walnut bark, some hair dye. So I don't answer to the advertisement.

WILSON

I'm sorry to see you opposing the laws of your country.

GEORGE

My country! My only country's the grave, and I wish I lay there!

WILSON

You've got a hard master, George – reprehensible – I can't defend him. But remember how the angel commanded Hagar to return to her mistress, and submit –

GEORGE

Don't quote the Bible at me in my situation. It's enough to make me give it up altogether!

WILSON

“Let everyone abide in the condition in which he was called.”

GEORGE

I wonder, Mr. Wilson, if the Indians should keep you all your life hoeing corn, would you abide in the condition in which you were called? I'll bet you'd find a stray horse and call it Providence.

WILSON

It's a terrible risk. They'll abuse you, and half-kill you, and sell you down the river.

GEORGE

(Throwing open his coat to reveal two pistols and a bowie-knife) I'm ready. Before I go down South, I'll earn six feet of free soil here – the first and last I'll ever own.

WILSON

The law is against you.

GEORGE

Law! I've heard your fourth-of-July speeches! Every year, you tell us governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed! When did the law ever get my consent?! We can think! We can put things together and see what they come to.

WILSON

Now, George – these are dangerous notions for boys in your condition.

GEORGE

See here, Mr. Wilson. (Seating himself directly in front of WILSON) Aren't I as much of a man as you are? I had a father sold me with his dogs and horses when he died, put up my mother with her seven children at sheriff's sale.

Your laws give him the power to do this! I haven't got a country, but I'm going to. In Canada, the laws will protect me, and its laws I will obey. But if any man tries to stop me, let him take care. Your fathers fought for their liberty. If it was right for them, it is right for me, and I'll fight to my last breath!

WILSON

Well, George – be careful.

GEORGE

Oh, I will. But I've got nothing left to lose.

[Blackout.]

[**Scene 10** -- The veranda of the St Clare plantation, MARIE reclining decoratively on a wicker chaise. EVA runs in, ST CLARE, OPHELIA and TOM following.]

EVA

Mamma! Mamma! (Throwing herself upon MARIE) Oh, I wish you could have been with us, I missed you so!

MARIE

All right now, that's enough. (Setting her aside) I've a dreadful headache.

ST CLARE

(Dutifully kissing her brow) I'm sorry to hear it, Marie. But I hope it will lift under Cousin Ophelia's care. She brings us some much-needed Vermont efficiency.

MARIE

You are most welcome, Cousin Ophelia.

OPHELIA

Thank you, Madam. I've heard juniper berry tea does wonders for the sick headache.

ST CLARE

We'll have the first ripe ones brought in from the lake for that special purpose. But, see here, Marie (gesturing to TOM), I've brought a coachman, at last. To order: a regular hearse for blackness and sobriety, and will drive you like a funeral if you want. Come now, open your eyes, and look at him, and see that I do think about you when I'm gone.

MARIE

(Condescending to look at TOM) I know he'll get drunk.

EVA

Oh, no, Mamma, Uncle Tom doesn't drink.

MARIE

Well, he may turn out well. Though that's more than I expect.

ST CLARE

Little Eva fell from the second deck into the river.

MARIE

What are you saying?

EVA

Tom was on the first, and jumped into the water before Papa could get his coat off.

ST CLARE

So we owe him something, my dear.

MARIE

Well, I'm grateful, I'm sure.

ST CLARE

Tom, you can get settled in downstairs.

[TOM nods and leaves.]

And Eva, get Mammy to show our cousin to her apartment.

EVA

Oh, I'll show her, Papa!

ST CLARE

(To OPHELIA) You'll want to rest. We can send up some supper whenever you'd like.

OPHELIA

Thank you, Cousin. I'd just as soon get to the housekeeping business.

ST CLARE

Well, there's the spirit of the Green Mountains! Marie, our practical, businesslike New England cousin will take the cares off your shoulders.

MARIE

I'm afraid, Cousin, you'll find the mistresses are the slaves down here. People talk as if we keep slaves for our own convenience. If that were the reason, why we may as well let them all go.

EVA

Why do you keep them, Mamma?

MARIE

I don't know, I'm sure, except for a plague. And ours are the very worst that ever anybody was plagued with.

ST CLARE

Come now, Marie. What would you do without Mammy?

MARIE

She is the best I ever knew. But dreadfully selfish – a fault of the whole race.

ST CLARE

Selfishness is a dreadful fault.

MARIE

She sleeps sound at night even when she knows that's when I take my worst turns, and she's so hard to wake. Why do you think I'm so bad today?

EVA

But doesn't she sit up with you at night, Mamma?

MARIE

She's been complaining, I suppose.

EVA

She only said you were having bad nights.

MARIE

Well, if Mammy had the proper interest, she'd wake easier. I've heard of people with such devoted servants, but I've had no such luck. She's still sulking because when I got married and brought her here from Papa's house, he kept her husband and children behind. And even though she knows how much I need her, she'd go back to her husband tomorrow if she could. Now that is selfish!

EVA

Mamma, couldn't I take care of you – just one night?

MARIE

Oh, nonsense, child, nonsense! You are so strange.

EVA

But may I, Mamma? Mammy has headaches, too.

MARIE

Oh, that's just one of her fidgets! Eva, it's always proper to be kind to servants, but not proper to treat them as we would our own. If Mammy was sick, you wouldn't put her in your own bed.

EVA

Oh, but I would! It would be handier, and my bed is better than hers.

MARIE

What can I do to make this child understand?

OPHELIA

Nothing.

MARIE

Cousin, if you encourage them in their complaining, you'll have your hands full. St Clare will have high-life downstairs, so it's partly our fault they act like spoiled children. But I've talked to St Clare till I am tired.

ST CLARE

Tires me as well. Come along, Eva – let's see how our new coachman is settling in.

[THEY leave.]

MARIE

Eva is enough to spoil a whole houseful. She has no idea what a servant's place is! Taking care of me nights to let Mammy sleep!

OPHELIA

Well, I suppose you think your servants ought to rest when they are tired.

MARIE

Of course. Mammy has no trouble sleeping – sewing, standing, sitting, she'll sleep anywhere and everywhere. Oh, St Clare means well, but we don't agree. I brought my own servants when I married, and I am legally entitled to manage them my way. St Clare won't raise his hand, and they walk all over him. And I can't exert myself to do it, you know.

OPHELIA

I don't know anything about it, and thank the Lord I don't!

MARIE

St Clare says we wouldn't do any better in their place, as if you can reason from them to us!

OPHELIA

Don't you think they're one blood with us? Don't you think they've got immortal souls?

MARIE

No one doubts that. But as to any sort of equality with us! Why St Clare thinks it's my duty, with all I suffer, to let Mammy go back! It's so trying! So provoking! If he'd only do it as others do!

OPHELIA

And what's that?

MARIE

Why, send them to the jail to be flogged!

OPHELIA

And how does he manage?

MARIE

Well, men are more commanding. The servants mind. I do less with storming and scolding than St Clare does with a look. But you'll find, Cousin, when you manage, you'll have to be severe, because they are bad, deceitful and lazy.

ST CLARE

(Sauntering in) The old tune. You see, Cousin, this laziness is wholly inexcusable, given the example Marie and I set.

MARIE

St Clare, you are incorrigible!

ST CLARE

Am I? Oh, Marie – I try always to enforce your remarks. Laziness ruins more souls than you can shake a stick at.

OPHELIA

You've got an awful responsibility. You should educate your slaves, and treat them like reasonable creatures, immortal creatures that you've got to stand before God with. That's my mind.

ST CLARE

Oh, come, come – what do you know about it?

OPHELIA

What I've said.

ST CLARE

Well, you've done your duty.

MARIE

What's the use of such talk? You can't make anything of them. I've tried, Cousin Ophelia, and you haven't. I was born and bred among them, and I know.

[Silence. Then ST CLARE whistles a little tune.]

Please, St Clare – I wish you wouldn't whistle when I've a headache.

ST CLARE

My dear accusing angel!

MARIE

Oh, don't talk like that!

ST CLARE

And how should I talk? Any way you like – only to satisfy.

[Lights pick up EVA and TOM. SHE has put flowers in his buttonholes, and is crowning him with a wreath of roses. Her laugh draws ST CLARE to look upon the scene.]

EVA

Oh, Tom! You look so funny! (Laughs, sits on his lap)

OPHELIA

(Behind ST CLARE) Oh, Cousin, how can you let her? It seems so dreadful!

ST CLARE

No harm in a child's caressing a large dog, even a black one. But a creature that can think and feel! Custom does with us what Christianity should do – erases personal prejudice. In the north, you loathe them as you loathe snakes or toads, but you are mightily indignant at their wrongs. Ship them off to Africa, then send a missionary to

elevate them. Isn't that it?

OPHELIA

There's some truth in what you say, yes, Cousin.

[EVA now takes TOM's hand and skips off with him.]

ST CLARE

Tom is a hero to Eva. His stories are wonders, his songs and hymns better than an opera, the bits of trash from his pockets, jewels. And she is one of the roses of Eden that the Lord drops down for the lowly, who get few enough of any other kind.

OPHELIA

You sound like a professor of religion.

ST CLARE

Oh, no – nor a practiser either.

OPHELIA

Then what makes you talk so?

ST CLARE

Nothing easier. My forte lies in talking. And yours, Cousin, in doing.

[Scene 11 –MRS. BIRD watches anxiously as ELIZA comes out of a swoon and sits up suddenly from her cot.]

ELIZA
Harry!

MRS. BIRD
Fed and sleeping by the fire.

ELIZA
Thank the Lord! The Lord has been merciful!

MRS. BIRD
Were you a slave?

ELIZA
I belonged to a man in Kentuck. He was good to me – my mistress, too.

MRS. BIRD
Then why run away?

ELIZA
Ma'am – have you ever lost a child?

MRS. BIRD
(Moving away) Why do you ask? I have – a month ago. He was three.

ELIZA
I've lost two, buried in Kentuck, and I had this one left. He was all I had. My comfort and pride, day and night. And, ma'am – they were going to sell him – sell him down south, to go all alone, a baby never been away from me his whole life! I couldn't stand it, ma'am. I'd never be good for anything if we were parted. So after the papers were signed, and he was sold, I took him off in the night, and they chased me, and I jumped right on to the ice, and somehow got across, how, I don't know, except a man helped me up the bank on the other side.

MRS. BIRD
But – how was your master kind, if he could do such a thing?

ELIZA
He owed money, and was obliged to the man who bought Harry. Mistress begged, but Master couldn't help it.

MRS. BIRD
Have you a husband?

ELIZA
He belongs to another master, a hard one, who's threatening to sell him down south. I don't think I'll ever see him again.

MRS. BIRD

And where are you headed?

ELIZA

Canada – is it far, do you know?

MRS. BIRD

Farther than you think. My husband will drive you at midnight to a Quaker settlement, where you'll be safe until you can cross. Rest now. (Leaves)

[ELIZA stands shakily and checks on Harry.]

ELIZA

If we're caught, I won't die like a dog. I'll smother you, my darling, and I have Mrs. Shelby's pills for myself. Death will be our deliverance out of bondage, God forgive me, for I am being stretched beyond my endurance. We're a little closer, dear Harry. Sleep sound. Oh, Lord – watch over us, protect us! Let us live in freedom, let me see George once more! (With a sob, SHE collapses on the cot.)

MRS. BIRD

(Entering, carrying a drawer) Eliza?

ELIZA

I'm awake.

MRS. BIRD

I pulled this drawer for you. It's like opening a grave. My boy's clothes will fit Harry. And his toys.... I could not find it in my heart to give these away to just anybody. But to give them to you, a mother who is more heartbroken and sorrowful than I am – I do it gladly, and hope God will send blessings with them.

ELIZA

With all my heart, ma'am –

MRS. BIRD

That's enough now. Rest. I have some things for you as well, but I need to let out the hems. If Harry wakes, I'll get you. Just rest.

[**Scene 12** -- The veranda at Ponchartrain, ST CLARE perusing the Picayune. MARIE and OPHELIA returning from Sunday sermon, removing their bonnets and capes.]

ST CLARE

(Setting his paper aside) Well, ladies – and what was the bill of fare at church today?

MARIE

A splendid sermon. All my views exactly!

ST CLARE

That must have been extensive!

MARIE

Oh, I mean about society only. All the orders come from God, and some are high and some are low, some serve and some rule. To everything its season. All this ridiculous fuss about slavery! I wish you could have heard it!

ST CLARE

Oh, I get as good as that from the Picayune, any time, and smoke my cigar besides.

OPHELIA

You don't agree?

[DINAH enters, and serves coffee.]

ST CLARE

Sister, on slavery I'd say fair and square, we've got 'em, and mean to keep 'em – for our convenience, and our interest, and that's the long and short of it! The preachers should carry their explanations farther, and show the beauty, in its season, of taking a glass too much, or staying at cards too long, and various other providential arrangements – we'd like to hear that those are right and godly too!

OPHELIA

Do you think slavery right or wrong?

ST CLARE

None of your New England directness, cousin. I throw stones at others' glass houses. I won't put up one of my own for others to stone.

MARIE

He won't give satisfaction. He hates religion.

ST CLARE

Religion! Religion! Is what bends and turns to fit every crooked phase of selfish society religion? Less scrupulous, less generous, less just, less considerate than my own ungodly blinded nature? When I look for religion, I look for something above, not something beneath!

MARIE

Well, I'm thankful I'm born where slavery exists, and I know I couldn't get along without it.

ST CLARE

(To EVA) What do you think, Pussy? Is it better to live as they do at your uncle's in Vermont, or to have a houseful of servants, as we do here in Louisiana?

EVA

Oh, as we do, Papa.

MARIE

The girl's getting sense.

EVA

There are so many more people around you to love.

MARIE

Eva – you say such – odd things.

ST CLARE

As this world goes, perhaps. But, say, Pussy, tell Papa what you've been doing.

EVA

In Tom's room, hearing him sing about the new Jerusalem. And I read him my Bible. He can't read. But he explains it to me.

MARIE

(Laughing) The best joke of the season!

EVA

Tom believes it's all true. It has to be – or how would he live?

ST CLARE

Early this morning at the stables I overheard Tom praying for me with an apostolic zeal.

MARIE

He knew you were listening.

ST CLARE

If so, he wasn't very politic. He told the Lord I needed major improvement, and was very much in earnest that I should be converted.

OPHELIA

Lay that to heart.

ST CLARE

We shall see. Come now, Marie, be gracious and say something pretty to a fellow.

MARIE

There's such a tumult since you came. I am half dead.

[Scene 13 – The Quaker settlement. ELIZA and RACHEL.]

RACHEL

Thee still thinks of going to Canada, Eliza?

ELIZA

As soon as it's safe.

RACHEL

And what'll thee do when thee gets there?

ELIZA

Dress-making, perhaps. I can do fine washing and ironing. I'll do anything – I hope I can find something.

RACHEL

Thee can stay here as long as thee pleases.

ELIZA

Oh, thank you. But – I can't sleep, I keep seeing that trader, Mr. Haley, coming after me.

RACHEL

A fugitive has never been stolen from our village. Thee cannot be the first. Besides, I have some news.

ELIZA

What?

RACHEL

Good news. Thy husband has escaped from the house of bondage.

ELIZA

Oh, thank God!

[GEORGE bursts in. THEY embrace fiercely. RACHEL leaves.]

GEORGE

Eliza, Eliza!

ELIZA

Oh, my dear! I don't believe it! I don't believe it!

GEORGE

Oh, Eliza! Is it a dream?

ELIZA

Real as anything! I'm here with you and Harry! Just as we'd hoped! Safe with these good people.

GEORGE

Eliza, I'm glad we're not like other people who have friends, and houses, and lands, and money. They cannot love as you and I do, who have only one another. Till I knew you, no one ever loved me but my mother and sister, whose kind words the morning the trader carried her off were the last I heard for ten years. My heart withered, dry as ashes. And your loving me is like being raised from the dead! I'll give my last drop of blood. They take you from me over my dead body.

ELIZA

If only the Lord will let us get to Canada!

GEORGE

They buy us and sell us, make trade of our hearts' blood and groans and tears – and God lets them do it! So why should God let us get to Canada? We'll get to Canada on our own! I feel rich and strong, though we have nothing but our bare hands. I can scarcely ask God for any more. I haven't one cent, no roof, nor even a spot of land. But if they'll just let me alone, I'll be satisfied, and work, and buy you back from Mr. Shelby. I smell the free air, and it makes me strong!

RACHEL

(Bursting) Oh, Eliza! Phineas brings bad news. Those men are on thy trail – and thine, Mr. Harris. Come in to supper. You'll leave when it's good and dark. Simeon and Phineas will go with thee. (Leaves)

ELIZA

What's to be done?

GEORGE

(Pulling out a pistol) I'll attack no one. But I had a sister sold in New Orleans. I won't stand by and see you sold. I'll fight to my last breath!

[Scene 14 – ST CLARE and TOM]

ST CLARE

Well that's the end of the list, Tom. What are you waiting for? Something wrong?

TOM

I'm afraid so, Master.

ST CLARE

Out with it. You're as solemn as a coffin.

TOM

I feel very bad, Master. I always thought you be good to everybody.

ST CLARE

I do try, Tom. Tell me what you want.

TOM

Oh, you always been good to me. I got no complaint.

ST CLARE

What then?

TOM

Someone else you aren't good to.

ST CLARE

Speak up, Tom. Who?

TOM

This morning, between one and two, when we helped you to bed. You weren't good to yourself.

ST CLARE

(With an awkward laugh) Is that all?

TOM

All? It could be losing all -- your body and soul, Master. The good book says wine bites like a serpent and stings like an adder! Oh, Master, please!

ST CLARE

All right, Tom. I won't go out with them any more. I've meant to stop for a while now. I've always despised it, and despised myself for indulging. Come now, Tom, time's awasting!

TOM

Bless you, Master.

ST CLARE

No blessings now. Just get along on your errands. On my honor, you won't see me again as you saw me this morning.

[**Scene 15** – DINAH in the kitchen, apparently daydreaming. OPHELIA enters, but DINAH does not acknowledge her. OPHELIA opens a drawer.]

OPHELIA

What's this drawer for, Dinah?

DINAH

Oh, just about anythin'.

OPHELIA

(Pulling out a bloodstained tablecloth) Dinah! You wrap meat in your mistress' best tablecloth?

DINAH

O Lord, Missis, no. The towels was all missin', I didn't have nothin' else. I laid it out to wash, that's why it's there.

[OPHELIA continues checking and rummaging, growing increasingly disapproving.]

OPHELIA

(Holding up a saucer) What's this?

DINAH

Oh, Lord, that's my hair grease – t' have handy.

OPHELIA

In a china saucer?

DINAH

Oh, I was in such a hurry – I was just about to change it.

OPHELIA

And two table napkins?

DINAH

They need t' be washed.

OPHELIA

Don't you have a place to keep the laundry?

DINAH

Well, Master St. Clare got that chest for that, but I like to mix up biscuits and have my things on it, and then it ain't handy for liftin' the lid.

OPHELIA

Why not use the pastry table?

DINAH

Well, Missis, that table's handy for puttin' things on, dishes and such, and then there ain't no room for mixin' biscuits.

OPHELIA

You should wash the dishes, and put them away.

DINAH

Wash the dishes! What do ladies know about work, I want to know. If I'm washin' dishes, when would Master get his dinner? Miss Marie never told me so, nohow.

OPHELIA

Well, I'm in charge of the housekeeping now, Dinah. It's too much for Mrs. St Clare.

DINAH

Why, she never once set foot in my kitchen, nohow.

OPHELIA

Well, that may be part of the problem, Dinah. (Picking up some papers filled with herbs)

DINAH

I wish you wouldn't touch those – I like to keep things so I know where to find them.

OPHELIA

But Dinah, these papers are full of holes.

DINAH

Yes, Missis, that's for siftin' them out.

OPHELIA

But they're spilling all over the drawer.

DINAH

Well, that's because Missis is tumblin' things up. If you'll go upstairs till I get time to clear up, you'll see I'll have everythin' right. But when ladies is around, hinderin', I can't do nothin'.

OPHELIA

I'll go through everything, Dinah, and put it all in order, just once. And then I expect you to keep it that way.

[Going to work, consolidating and sorting.]

DINAH

O, Lord, Miss Phelia! Ladies don't do that! My old Missis, or Miss Marie never did. And I don't see no need for it. I have things straight as anybody when it's time to clear up.

OPHELIA

You get on with dinner, Dinah. And afterwards, I'll sort things out. Just once. (Leaves)

DINAH

O, Lord! If that's how northern ladies do, they ain't no ladies nohow!

[Scene 16 – TOM working at his slate, EVA peering over his shoulder.]

EVA

(Laughing) Oh, Tom! What funny things are you making?

TOM

I'm trying to write to my poor old woman, Miss Eva, and my children. Only I don't remember my letters.

EVA

I wish I could help you. Last year I could do them, but I forget by now. It's a shame you had to go away from your family. I'm going to ask Papa to let you go back some time.

TOM

Mrs. Shelby said she'd send down money, soon as they could get it together. Young Master George said he'd come for me, and he gave me this dollar. (Drawing it from his pocket)

EVA

That's wonderful.

TOM

But I wanted to send a letter, to tell them where I am, and tell Chloe – that's my old woman – tell her I'm well off, because she was so dreadful worried.

ST CLARE

(Entering) I say, Tom, what's going on?

EVA

Tom is trying to write a letter, and I'm helping.

ST CLARE

(Looking at the slate) Well, I don't want to discourage either of you, but it might be better to have me write it, Tom.

EVA

His other mistress is going to send money to redeem him, Papa. She said so. So he must write to let her know where he is.

ST CLARE

Yes, well ... Tell me what you want to say, Tom, and we'll put it directly on paper.

[Scene 17 – EMILY and SHELBY, CHLOE eavesdropping.]

EMILY

Chloe has had a letter from Tom.

SHELBY

Really? How is the old boy?

EMILY

He's well treated. And hasn't much to do.

SHELBY

Tom won't want to come up here again.

EMILY

On the contrary, he's anxious to know when we can raise the money to redeem him.

SHELBY

Oh, Emily – I wish I knew. Once you get business wrong, there's no end to it. It's like jumping from one log to another, and getting deeper into the swamp. Borrow here to pay back there, and so on. And the confounded notes fall due before you get a chance to smoke a cigar and turn around! Dunning letters!

EMILY

Suppose we sell the horses, and one of your farms, and pay up fair and square.

SHELBY

Ridiculous, Emily. You're the finest woman in Kentucky, but you don't understand business. Women never do, and never can.

EMILY

If you could let me share the burden somehow, dear. Give me a list of your debts, and let me try to help you economize.

SHELBY

Don't plague me, Emily. I can't tell you exactly. I just know roughly what's likely. I can't trim and square my affairs, like Chloe, trimming her pies.

EMILY

There must be some way to raise the money. Chloe has her heart set on it!

SHELBY

I'm afraid I was premature in promising. Chloe may have to make up her mind to that. Tom will find another wife in a year or two, and she'd do well to take up with someone else, too.

EMILY

Mr. Shelby, I've taught our people their marriages are as sacred as ours. I'd never say such a thing to Chloe.

SHELBY

You've burdened them with a morality above their station and prospects.

EMILY

I cannot absolve myself from the promises I make to these helpless creatures. If you can't get the money, I'll take on some music students, and earn the money myself.

SHELBY

Emily! Degrade yourself like that?! I won't consent.

EMILY

It is degrading to break our promise.

SHELBY

Well, you are heroic, But you may want to think further about it.

CHLOE

(Entering) I'm sorry, Missis, I couldn't help hearin'. I don' want you troublin' about the money, when you can use what's right here in your hands. Other folks hires us out, an' make money on us.

EMILY

Well, who would we hire out?

CHLOE

Sam heard there's a baker in Louisville, wants a good hand at cake and pastry, give four dollars a week to one. And I'm thinkin', Sally's about ready to be doin' something, she does almost as well as me. An if Missis would let me go, I'd help fetch up the money. I ain't afraid to put my cake and pies long side any perfectioner's.

EMILY

Confectioner's, Chloe.

CHLOE

Words is so curis, can't never get 'em right.

EMILY

But you'd have to leave your children.

CHLOE

Laws, Missis, the boys is big enough to do a day's work. And Sally can take the baby.

SHELBY

Louisville's rather far.

CHLOE

It's down river, closer to my old man, maybe?

EMILY

But still several hundred miles away, Chloe. Mr. Shelby?

SHELBY

If you can manage without Chloe, I'll allow it. (Leaves)

EMILY

And every cent will be put aside for Tom's redemption, Chloe.

CHLOE

I was thinkin' it could, cause I won't need no clothes or shoes or nothin'. How many weeks in a year, Missis?

EMILY

Fifty-two.

CHLOE

Is that so? And four dollars for each of 'em?

EMILY

Two hundred and eight dollars, Chloe.

CHLOE

An' how many years'd it take to earn enough?

EMILY

Four or five.

CHLOE

Master's right, you shouldn't be givin' lessons, no ways. Not while I got hands.

EMILY

I'll take care of the honor of the family, Chloe.

CHLOE

Sam's goin' to the river tomorrow, and if Missis is willin', I can go, if you write my pass, an' a commendation. An' I'll ask Master James t' write to my old man about it. Oh, thank you Missis, thank you!

[**Scene 18** – GEORGE and ELIZA. GEORGE suddenly pulls his pistol and checks the door.]

GEORGE

Damn! False alarm. I can't stand much more of this, Eliza.

ELIZA

We've no choice.

GEORGE

I thought staying ahead of the slave catchers was hell. But it's waiting that's the real hell.

ELIZA

It can't be long now.

GEORGE

It's been an eternity already!

ELIZA

I know, dear, but there's nothing to be done.

GEORGE

Don't I know it! But I hate it nonetheless! To be so helpless so soon after getting away! Finally to shape one's ends, and then to be put back at the mercy of insidious powers!

ELIZA

I feel the same, dear.

GEORGE

Then why don't you complain? Show a little human impatience?

ELIZA

You're doing well enough for both of us.

GEORGE

Oh, Eliza! (Laughs) Dear Eliza!

[Scene 19 – OPHELIA and ST CLARE]

OPHELIA

I've never seen anything like it! There's no system!

ST CLARE

No, there isn't.

OPHELIA

Such waste and confusion I never saw!

ST CLARE

No doubt that's true.

OPHELIA

If you were housekeeper, you wouldn't take it so coolly.

ST CLARE

My dear cousin, we masters are divided into two classes: I stand among the good-natured who hate severity. As a result, we suffer the consequences. Some rare persons can produce order without severity – but I am not one of them. I won't have the poor devils thrashed and cut to pieces, and they know it.

OPHELIA

But – no time, no place, no order – everything going on in this shiftless way!

ST CLARE

My dear Vermont, what on earth is the use of time to a fellow who has twice as much as he knows what to do with? I've nothing to do but lounge on the sofa and read -- what does it matter if dinner is a little late? And what a dinner! Soup, ragout, roast fowl, dessert – which Dinah creates out of chaos and old night down there in that kitchen. It's sublime, how she manages. But don't go down there, dear cousin – absolve yourself from that. You'll only lose your temper, and confound Dinah into the bargain. Let her go her own way.

OPHELIA

You don't know how I found things.

ST CLARE

Don't I? The rolling pin's under the bed, the nutmeg grater is buried in her pocket next to her tobacco, and she washes dishes one day with a napkin, the next with a rag from an old petticoat. But! She gets up glorious dinners and makes superb coffee. Judge her as warriors and statesmen are judged, by her success.

OPHELIA

The waste! The expense!

ST CLARE

You can lock up everything, and give it out in dribs and drabs, but I wouldn't.

OPHELIA

I can't help feeling the servants aren't strictly honest.

ST CLARE

(With a laugh) Honest! Of course they aren't! Why would they be? What on earth would make them so?

OPHELIA

They need instruction.

ST CLARE

Fiddlesticks! Marie, to be sure, has spirit enough to kill off the whole plantation, if I'd let her manage, but she wouldn't stop the cheating. From the mother's breast, the colored child sees no choice but to be underhanded. Cunning and deception are necessary. We keep slaves in that childish state, feeling their masters' goods are their own. How can they be honest! Tom, now – Tom is a moral miracle!

OPHELIA

But what about their souls?

ST CLARE

We've turned over the whole race to the devil for our own benefit in this world, never mind some other.

OPHELIA

You should be ashamed.

ST CLARE

I'm not sure I should. I've got plenty of company, all over the world, all the same story. Use up the lower class, body, soul and spirit, for the benefit of the upper. And yet all Christendom stands aghast, quivering with virtuous indignation, because we do things a little differently.

OPHELIA

It isn't so in Vermont.

ST CLARE

I concede that.

OPHELIA

It's abominable, defending such a system!

ST CLARE

When did I defend it?

OPHELIA

What do you have slaves for, if you don't?

ST CLARE

Have you never done anything wrong?

OPHELIA

When I have, I repent.

ST CLARE

So do I. All the time.

OPHELIA

And I resolve to do better.

ST CLARE

I, too – these ten years. But I haven't got clear of my sins.

OPHELIA

Oh, Augustine! I'm full of shortcomings. No one feels them more than I do.

ST CLARE

I love to see you get so earnest. Ophelia, you are desperately good. It tires me to death to think of it.

OPHELIA

This is serious.

ST CLARE

It's too hot to be serious.

OPHELIA

Augustine, you are such a rattle-brain.

ST CLARE

I suppose I am. But this once I will be serious. "When in the course of human events, a fellow has to hold two or three dozen of his fellows in captivity –"

OPHELIA

Be serious!

ST CLARE

I'm coming to it, Cousin. About slavery, there is only one opinion. Planters who make money by it, clergymen who must please the planters, and politicians who rule by it warp language and ethics with ingenuity. They press nature and the Bible into service, but even so, no one can believe their arguments. Slavery comes from the devil, that's the short of it. Talk of the abuses of slavery! The thing itself is the essence of all abuse. We should sink under it, like Sodom and Gomorrah! And the only reason we don't is that some of us scorn to use the full power that our savage laws put into our hands. Oh, Cousin! How many disgusting, mean, low fellows have I met ruling as despots over as many men, women and children as they can cheat, steal or buy! It makes me ready to curse my country! To curse the human race!

OPHELIA

Augustine! I've never heard the like, even in the North!

ST CLARE

The North! Oh, they are cool in the North! You can't begin to curse up hill and down as we can when we get at it.

OPHELIA

But the question is –

ST CLARE

How have I come to this state of sin and misery? My servants were my father's, and my mother's, and now they are mine, they and their considerable increase. Your father settled in New England to rule over rocks and stones, and mine settled in Louisiana, to rule over men and women and force existence out of them. My father was an aristocrat bred in the bone, although he was born poor and in no way noble. But as an aristocrat, he had no human sympathies past a certain line. His line was color. Among his equals, you'd never find a man more just and generous. But he considered the negro an intermediate link between man and animals. Oh, if you pressed him on their immortal souls, he might have hemmed and hawed and finally said yes. But he wasn't troubled over religion, beyond venerating God as decidedly the head of the upper classes. Father had an overseer – from Vermont, as it happens – schooled in brutality. Mother and I formed a committee between us for redress of grievances, and we congratulated ourselves on doing good, until this overseer complained that he couldn't manage the hands properly. Then Father told Mother that she was mistress over the house-servants, but must not interfere with the field hands. He would have said the same to the virgin Mary herself if she had interfered with his system. Mother eventually gave up, but she burnt into me one truth: the meanest soul has dignity and worth.

OPHELIA

I thought you approved of these things, thought them right according to Scripture.

ST CLARE

Humbug! Even my brother Alfred, who managed the plantation when I decided I couldn't, who is an aristocrat as our father was, doesn't pretend to that kind of a defense. He argues the right of the strongest, and believes that the American planter is only doing what the English do to the lower classes.

OPHELIA

The English laborer isn't sold, traded, parted from his family, whipped.

ST CLARE

He can still starve to death, and his children with him.

OPHELIA

So slavery is no worse than another abomination. That's an argument?

ST CLARE

Of course not. Our infringement of human rights is bolder, more tangible. But both systems appropriate one set of human beings for the use of another.

OPHELIA

And how is it you gave up your plantation life?

ST CLARE

Alfred accommodated my notions, but I still remained unsatisfied. I hated the thing itself – perpetuating ignorance, brutality, and vice, just to make money for me! Alfred advised me to take the bank stock and the New Orleans family mansion, and leave the plantation to him. And so I came here.

OPHELIA

But why didn't you free your slaves?

ST CLARE

I wasn't quite up to that. I couldn't hold them as tools to make money. But I could have them to help spend money – that didn't seem so ugly. Some were house-servants I was attached to. And there were children. Oh, Cousin! I once hoped of doing something in this world, something to free my country of this stain.

OPHELIA

Put your hand to the plow. Don't look back.

ST CLARE

Somehow I became a piece of driftwood. Alfred's life reflects his opinions, but mine is a contemptible non sequitur.

OPHELIA

Does this satisfy you?

ST CLARE

Satisfy? What did I just say?

OPHELIA

But how will it end?

ST CLARE

I don't know. If our laws allowed education Educate one generation, and the whole thing will be blown sky high. If we did not give them liberty, they would take it.

[A bell rings.]

I do believe, dear cousin, that's the signal for a glorious dinner direct from the chaos of Dinah's kitchen. Shall we go in?

[Scene 20 – ST CLARE, OPHELIA and TOPSY]

ST CLARE

Cousin Vermont! An experiment for your New England orthodoxy. (Gently pushes TOPSY forward)

OPHELIA

Augustine! What are you up to?

ST CLARE

For you to educate and train. Although she comes an expert dancer. There she can train the rest of us. Topsy?

[TOPSY does a quick breakdown, then stops, assuming an angelic expression.]

OPHELIA

What on earth?!

ST CLARE

Now Topsy, this is your new mistress. And you're going to be good.

TOPSY

Yes, Master.

OPHELIA

I don't want her. I've more now than I know what to do with.

ST CLARE

Christians! You get up a society to send a missionary to the heathen. But take one into your own house? No, they are dirty and disagreeable, it's too much, and so on!

OPHELIA

All right, Augustine, you have a point. But why add to the household?

ST CLARE

Topsy belonged to a couple of drunken louts whose restaurant I pass every day. I got tired of hearing her screams and their swearing. And she seems bright, and funny – promising. I haven't any knack, but I'd like you to try.

OPHELIA

How old are you, Topsy?

TOPSY

Dun know, Missis.

OPHELIA

No one told you?

TOPSY

I been aroun' a while, but I don' know when I got here.

OPHELIA

Who was your mother?

TOPSY

Never had none.

OPHELIA

Where were you born?

TOPSY

Never was born.

OPHELIA

Now, Topsy, I'm not playing.

TOPSY

Never was born, never had no father nor mother, nor nothin'. I was raised by a speculator, with lots of others. Old Aunt Sue used to take care of us.

OPHELIA

Have you heard anything about God, Topsy?

TOPSY

Missis?

OPHELIA

Do you know who made you?

TOPSY

Nobody, as I knows on. I 'spect I just grow'd.

OPHELIA

What did you do for your master?

TOPSY

Fetch water. Wash dishes, rub knives an' wait on folks.

OPHELIA

I don't suppose you can read.

TOPSY

No, Missis. But they learned us to count. "Ought is an ought, an' a figger is a figger. All for de white man an' nothin' fer de nigger."

ST CLARE

Virgin soil, Cousin. Plant your own ideas – you won't find many to pull up.

[**Scene 21** – Veranda, at sunset, EVA reading from the Bible to TOM, a little apart. ST CLARE lounges; MARIE reclines.]

EVA

(Reading) “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, ... stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.”

TOM

Can't you see it, Miss Eva?

EVA

It's right there. The sun setting on the lake. Fire on a sea of glass.

TOM

True enough, Miss Eva. (Singing)
“O, had I the wings of the morning,
I'd fly away to Canaan's shore;
Bright angels should convey me home,
To the new Jerusalem.”

EVA

Where is the New Jerusalem?

TOM

Way up in the sky, Miss Eva.

EVA

Why, there it is as well, Tom! See those clouds of pearl? And the golden sky beyond. Tom, sing about the spirits bright.

TOM

(Singing)
“I see a band of spirits bright
That taste the glories there;”

EVA

I've seen them sometimes, Uncle Tom, in my sleep.

TOM

(Singing)
“They are all robed in spotless white
And conquering palms they bear.”

EVA

I'm going there, Uncle Tom.

TOM

Where, Miss Eva?

EVA
Where the bright spirits are.

TOM
Hope we all goin' there.

EVA
I'm going soon, Tom.

[OPHELIA enters, TOPSY trailing behind.]

OPHELIA
Eva! Come up to the porch now, the dew is falling. (To ST CLARE) That cough is still hanging on.

ST CLARE
Oh, nonsense. It's just a little cold.

OPHELIA
I don't like it. And the night air coming on.

MARIE
When I was Eva's age, I had a cough – they thought I was in consumption. I've always been subject to a cough. She shouldn't play too hard.

EVA
(Embracing MARIE) Oh, Mamma! Tom and I have been reading Revelations. I mean, I have been reading to Tom. Why don't we teach our servants to read?

MARIE
People never do.

EVA
But why?

MARIE
It doesn't help them to work any better.

EVA
But they should read the Bible, Mamma.

MARIE
Someone can read to them all they need.

EVA
Plenty of times there's no one to read to them.

MARIE

I did it myself, when I had health. And time. Eva, you are an odd child. Sometimes I don't know where you came from.

EVA

Miss Ophelia taught Topsy to read.

MARIE

Really? That's enough now, Eva. I've a headache coming on.

OPHELIA

That child will be the death of me, but she is very quick.

TOPSY

An' I c'n say my catechism, too!

ST CLARE

What good does that do?

OPHELIA

You may not understand it all as a child, but when you grow up, it comes back, it does you good.

ST CLARE

Mine hasn't come back yet, though you did put it into me pretty thoroughly. Come, Topsy – recite some of your catechism for our edification.

OPHELIA

“Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?”

TOPSY

“Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state wherein they were created.”

ST CLARE

Brava, Topsy, brava.

TOPSY

Please, Missis, was that there state Kentuck'?

OPHELIA

What state, Topsy?

TOPSY

The state they fell out of. Master used to tell how we came down from Kentuck'.

ST CLARE

(Laughing) Well! Adam and Eve as the first immigrants!

OPHELIA
Augustine!

[EVA has been staring at MARIE's necklace.]

MARIE
How sober you seem, child.

EVA
Is this worth a lot of money, Mamma?

MARIE
Not really. The valuable jewelry is all locked up. You'll have it when you come out.

EVA
I wish I had it now.

MARIE
Whatever for?

EVA
I'd sell it, and buy a place in the free states, and take our people there, and hire teachers, and they'd all learn to read and write.

MARIE
(Laughing) Oh, Eva! You are so strange!

EVA
It's very hard on Tom and Mammy they can't do these things. (Coughing)

OPHELIA
Time for you to get to bed, Eva.

MARIE
You mustn't coddle her, Ophelia.

ST CLARE
She'll do well enough.

OPHELIA
Even so.

[EVA goes in as Tom picks up his hymn.]

TOM
(Singing)
"O, had I the wings of the morning,
I'd fly away to Canaan's shore;
Bright angels should convey me home,

To the new Jerusalem.”

[Scene 22 – MARIE and ST CLARE apart; EVA resting on the veranda.]

MARIE

I knew it! I always had a feeling. My only darling child!

ST CLARE

Don't talk so! We can't give up the case.

MARIE

You can't have a mother's feeling, St Clare. You've never understood me, and you don't now!

ST CLARE

Eva is delicate. But just now she is worn out with the heat. The doctor says there is room for hope.

MARIE

I wish I could be as easy as the rest of you.

EVA

Papa, I have some things I must say to you, before I get weaker. I am going, and I won't come back.

ST CLARE

You must put away such gloomy thoughts.

EVA

If it weren't for you, Papa, and my friends, I would be happy. I want to go – I long to go. But I don't want to leave you. And our poor people are all good and kind to me. I wish they were all free. Isn't there any way?

ST CLARE

I wish with all my heart there were no slaves. But I don't know what's to be done.

EVA

When I am dead, Papa, you'll think of me and do it for my sake.

ST CLARE

Oh, child, don't talk so. You are all I have on earth.

EVA

They love their children as much as you do me, Papa. Mammy, and Tom – it's dreadful.

OPHELIA (OS)

Come out here now! I will tell your master! (Entering) Augustine! I don't know what to do! I've talked and I've taugh, and she's still the same.

ST CLARE

Come, Tops, you monkey!

[TOPSY reluctantly enters.]

What makes you act so?

TOPSY

My wicked heart, Miss Feely says.

OPHELIA

She took my gloves. She took Rosa's earrings. She took Eva's – Eva! Where did you get your necklace?

EVA

Get it? I've had it on all day. And what's funny, I forgot to take it off when I went to bed, so I had it on all night.

OPHELIA

Oh, Topsy! Why did you tell me you took it!?

TOPSY

You said I had to 'fess, and I couldn't think of nothin' else to 'fess.

OPHELIA

But that's a lie.

TOPSY

Laws, now, is it?

EVA

Oh, Topsy, come sit next to me. You don't need to steal. I'd rather give you anything I have. Why won't you try and be good? Don't you love anybody, Topsy?

TOPSY

Don' know nothin' 'bout love.

EVA

If you'd only try to be good –

TOPSY

Still be a nigger. If I could be skinned and come white, I'd try then.

EVA

People can love you if you're black, Topsy. Miss Ophelia would love you if you were good.

TOPSY

Oh, Miss! She can't bear me, she'd soon have a toad touch her. I don't care! (Whistles)

EVA

Oh, Topsy – I love you! I love you, because you've no mother or father or friends. Because you've been a poor abused child. I love you and I want you to be good, for my sake. I'm not well, I won't be here long. Please try to be good while I'm still here.

TOPSY

Oh, dear Miss Eva! I will try, I never did care nothin' about it before.

OPHELIA

I never could bear to have that child touch me. I didn't think she knew.

ST CLARE

Children know that kind of thing. And as long as it's true, no matter what you do for her, she'll never feel grateful.

OPHELIA

I don't know how I can help it.

[**Scene 23** – EVA’s room, after midnight, OPHELIA and ST CLARE at her bedside. TOM enters with the DOCTOR, who checks the sleeping child.]

DOCTOR

When did this change occur?

OPHELIA

In the last half-hour.

MARIE

(Rushing in) Augustine! Cousin! Oh!

ST CLARE

Hush! She is dying. If only she would wake, and speak once more!

EVA

Oh, Papa

ST CLARE

Do you know me, Eva?

EVA

Dear Papa.

ST CLARE

Oh, God – this is dreadful. On, Tom, my boy, this is killing me.

TOM

Bless the Lord, it’s over, dear Master. Look at her.

ST CLARE

Oh, Eva, tell us what you see. What –

EVA

Love – joy – peace! (Dies)

ST CLARE

Oh! This wrings my heart.

MARIE

She’s gone! My mother’s heart is broken! (Rushes out)

TOPSY

Oh, Miss Eva! I wish I’s dead, too.

OPHELIA

Hush, child, hush.

TOPSY

She loved me! Ain't nobody left!

OPHELIA

I can love you, Topsy, I do love you. And I'll try to help you grow up to be good.

ST CLARE

The whole world is empty as an eggshell.

TOM

Look up, dear Master, look up where our dear Miss Eva is.

ST CLARE

I can't look up, Tom. I need to be alone, please.

[The others leaving as the lights fade and TOM sings of bright spirits.]

End ACT I