

# Harriet Jacobs, 1813 - 1897



Harriet Jacobs, 1894

**\$100 REWARD**  
WILL be given for the apprehension and delivery of my Servant Girl **HARRIET**. She is a light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, of a thick and corpulent habit, having on her head a thick covering of black hair that curls naturally, but which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address. Being a good seamstress, she has been accustomed to dress well, has a variety of very fine clothes, made in the prevailing fashion, and will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery. As this girl absconded from the plantation of my son without any known cause or provocation, it is probable she designs to transport herself to the North.  
The above reward, with all reasonable charges, will be given for apprehending her, or securing her in any prison or jail within the U. States.  
All persons are hereby forewarned against harboring or entertaining her, or being in any way instrumental in her escape, under the most rigorous penalties of the law.  
**JAMES NORCOM.**  
Edenton, N. C. June 30

Advert posted in *The American Beacon*, July 1835

- 1835 Goes into hiding
- 1842 Escapes North
- 1850 Fugitive Slave Act
- 1861 Civil War begins
- 1861 Publishes *Incidents in the Life*

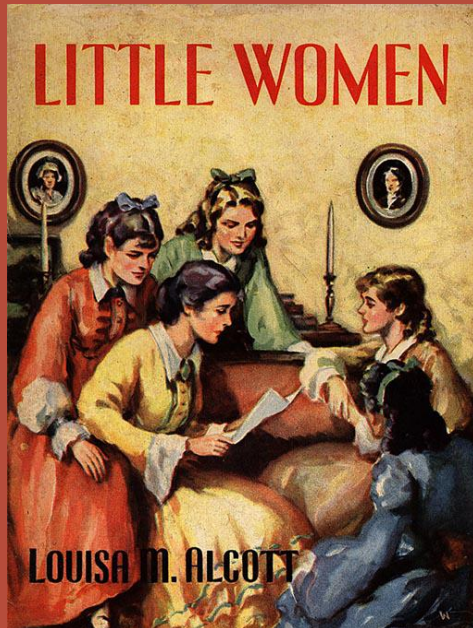
“I was born a slave; but never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away. My father was a carpenter, and considered so intelligent and skillful in his trade, that, when buildings out of the common line were to be erected, he was sent for from long distances, to be head workman. On condition of paying his mistress two hundred dollars a year, and supporting himself, he was allowed to work at his trade, and manage his own affairs. [...My parents] lived together in a comfortable home; and, though we were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment. I had one brother, William, who was two years younger than myself – a bright, affectionate child. I had also a great treasure in my maternal grandmother, who was a remarkable woman in many respects”

# Sentimentalism



“I feel sad for our poor people; they love me dearly, and they are all good and kind to me. I wish, papa, they were all free [...] You want me to live so happy, and never to have any pain, - never suffer anything, - not even hear a sad story, when other poor creatures have nothing but pain and sorrow, all their lives; - it seems selfish. I ought to know such things, I ought to feel about them! [...] Papa, isn't there any way to have all slaves made free?”

(Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*)



“I'm sure I shall be your Beth still, to love you more than ever. You must take my place, Jo, and be everything to Father and Mother when I'm gone. They will turn to you, don't fail them; and if it's hard to work alone, remember that I don't forget you, and you'll be happier doing that than writing splendid books or seeing all the world” (Alcott, *Little Women*)

“If it were *your* Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, tomorrow morning,—if you had seen the man, and heard that the papers were signed and delivered, and you had only from twelve o’clock till morning to make good your escape,—how fast could *you* walk? How many miles could you make in those few brief hours, with the darling at your bosom,—the little sleepy head on your shoulder,—the small, soft arms trustingly holding on to your neck?” (105)



“oh! Mother that reads this, has there never been in your life a drawer, or a closet the opening of which has been to you like the opening of a little grave? Ah! happy mother that you are, if it has not been so.” (116)

“ ‘You ought to be ashamed, John! Poor, homeless, houseless creatures! [The Fugitive Slave Act] is a shameful, wicked, abominable law, and I’ll break it, for one, the first time I get a chance; and I hope I *shall* have a chance, I do! Things have got to a pretty pass, if a woman can’t give a warm supper and a bed to poor, starving creatures, just because they are slaves and have been abused and oppressed all their lives, poor things!’” (144)



# *Cult of True Womanhood*

1. A woman is pious, pure, submissive, and domestic.
2. A woman helps, she doesn't work.
3. A woman is the angel of the house – providing safety and security from the outside world.
4. A woman is other-focused, self-denying, nurturing



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# UNCLE TOM'S CABIN



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*"So, you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war." –Abraham Lincoln to Harriet Beecher Stowe*

“There stood the two children representatives of the two extremes of society. The fair, high-bred child, with her golden head, her deep eyes, her spiritual, noble brow, and prince-like movements; and her black, keen, subtle, cringing, yet acute neighbour. They stood the representatives of their races. The Saxon, born of ages of cultivation, command, education, physical and moral eminence; the Africa, born of ages of oppression, submission, ignorance, toil and vice!” (362)



### **Ethics of resistance:**

Eva: “promise me, dear father, that Tom shall have his freedom as soon as’ – she stopped, and said, in a hesitating tone- ‘I am gone!’” (404)

Topsy: “Topsy was at first despised and contemned by the upper servants. They soon found reason to alter their opinion. It was very soon discovered that whoever cast indignity on Topsy was sure to meet with some inconvenient accident shortly after” (365)



Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

-Sojourner Truth





“So much attention from a superior person was, of course, flattering; for human nature is the same in all. [...] to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any pride or sentiment. It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. **There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment.**

Revenge, and calculations of interest, were added to flattered vanity and sincere gratitude for kindness. I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I favored another; and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in that small way. I thought he would revenge himself by selling me, and I was sure my friend, Mr. Sands, would buy me. He was a man of more generosity and feeling than my master, and I thought my freedom could be easily obtained from him. The crisis of my fate now came so near that I was desperate. I shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by my old tyrant. I knew that as soon as a new fancy took him, his victims were sold far off to get rid of them; especially if they had children. I had seen several women sold, with his babies at the breast. He never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself and his wife. Of a man who was not my master I could ask to have my children well supported; and in this case, I felt confident I should obtain the boon. I also felt quite sure that they would be made free. With all these thoughts revolving in my mind, and seeing no other way of escaping the doom I so much dreaded, I made a headlong plunge.”

“With all these thoughts resolving in my mind, and seeing no other way of escaping the doom I so much dreaded I made a **headlong plunge. Pity me, and pardon me O virtuous reader!** You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the **laws** reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another. You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares, and eluding the power of a hated tyrant; you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps, and trembled within hearing of his voice. I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in looking back, calmly on the events of my life, **I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others**” (49)