



Children's Stories That Never Grow Old.

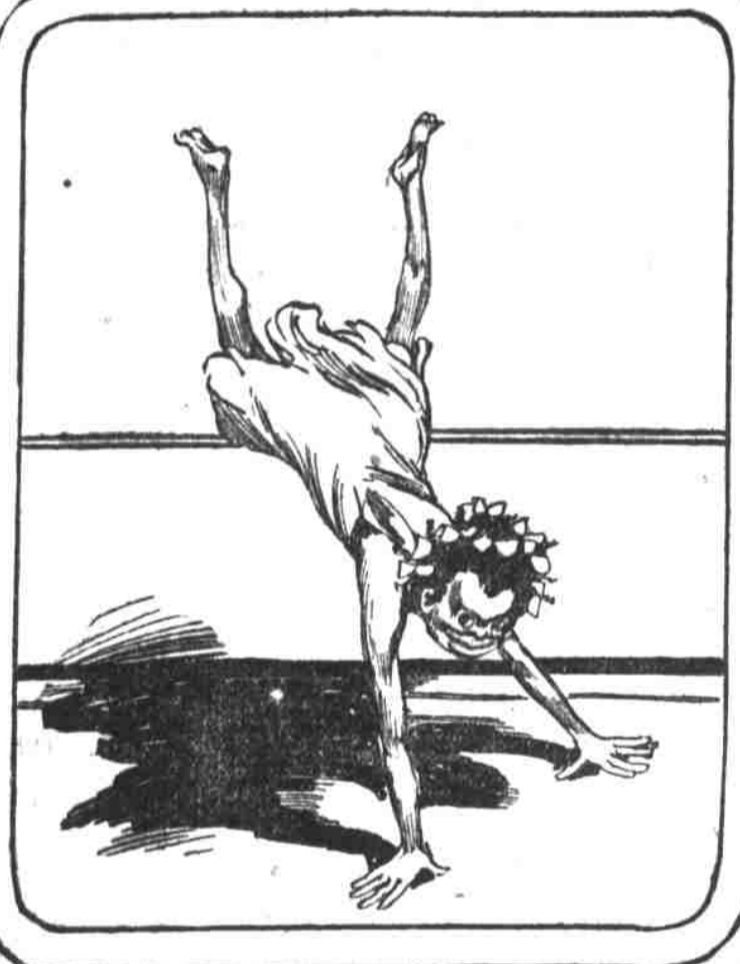
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TOPSY
ADAPTED FROM
"UNCLE TOM'S
CABIN"

1.
MANY years ago, when negroes were slaves and were bought and sold the same as horses, cows, chickens or ducks, Mr. Augustine St. Clare, while sauntering about the market place, came upon the blackest little pickaninny girl he had ever seen. She was eight or nine years old, and, besides being very black, had round shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, and woolly hair braided into little tails, which stuck out in every direction. She was dressed in a filthy, ragged garment and was quite the most woe-begone little darkey ever seen by Mr. St. Clare. Perhaps in a spirit of compassion and partly as a joke he bought her and took her home. Her name was Topsy, and when children are old enough they may read all about her in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a book that had much to do with freeing the slaves, a sad, sad story, indeed; as sad as Topsy, ignorant and care-free, was joyful and mischievous.



2.
THE very sight of the scrawny black girl caused Miss Ophelia, Mr. St. Clare's cousin, to throw up her hand in amazement.
"What is it!" she exclaimed.
"I've made a purchase for you," said he, with a grin, looking first at Topsy, whose eyes were bulging wide open at the sight of the fine furniture, and then at his cousin, who had folded her hands in despair.
"Augustine, what in the world did you bring her here for?" protested Miss Ophelia.
"For you to educate, to be sure," he replied, laughingly.
"I thought her a funny little Jim Crow and I bought her. Here, Topsy," he added, whistling as one would call the attention of a puppy dog, "give us a song and show Miss Ophelia how well you can dance."



3.
TOPSY'S eyes glittered with a kind of wicked drollery, and then, in a clear, shrill voice, struck up an old negro melody, to which she kept time with her hands and feet, spinning round, clapping her hands, knocking her knees together and shuffling her feet. Finally, she turned two somersaults in front of Miss Ophelia, so close that she almost took the good lady's breath away with amazement.
"Topsy, this is your new mistress," said Mr. St. Clare, solemnly.
"O yes, mas'r," replied Topsy, with another twinkle.
Poor Miss Ophelia, already burdened with the care of a lot of little blacks, it was hard for her to understand why fate had brought this imp of darkness into her life.



4.
BUT, being a good Christian woman, she bowed to the inevitable and promised to do her best with the child.
"How old are you, Topsy?" she asked, kindly.
"Dunno, missis," said Topsy, showing all her white teeth.
"Didn't anybody ever tell you? Who was your mother?"
"Nevah had none!" answered the child with another grin.
"Never had a mother? Why, Topsy, what do you mean? Where were you born?"
"Nevah was born!" replied the little imp, still grinning, and all the questions Miss Ophelia could bring to bear failed to make the child own that she ever had a mother or had ever been born.

5.
"HAVE you ever heard about God, Topsy?" asked Miss Ophelia, but the child had no answer. She didn't know what the good lady meant.
"Do you know who made you?"
"Nobody, as I know on," replied the child; "I 'spect I jest growed."
The poor child knew nothing but how to "fetch" water, wash dishes and rub knives, so she told Miss Ophelia, and afterward, when caught stealing, she didn't even know it was wrong to steal. When compelled to confess, she told of stealing things that she never stole at all, explaining that "Missis told me to 'fess and I couldn't think o' nothin' else to 'fess"; so she told of stealing earrings and burning them up, when, as a matter of fact, little Eva St. Clare had them in her ears at the time.



6.
THERE was something in the black child that touched the kindly heart of little Eva, who, though but a child herself, had, by reason of long illness, grown old beyond her years.
"Poor Topsy," she said kindly, "you need never steal again. You are to be taken care of now. I'd give you anything of mine rather than have you steal it."
It almost seemed as though the black child understood the bond of sympathy held out to her, but she could only blink and rub her eyes. It was the first kindly word she had ever understood and it caused a queer feeling in her heart. Being pure and gentle herself, Eva soon exercised an influence on little black Topsy that changed her into a rare jewel.



7.
BEING smart and active, she soon learned the ways of negroes of the better class. Of course, she would have to play at times and did some very silly things, like pulling off the pillow-cases and butting at the pillows with her woolly head, and sometimes feathers would creep through and stick in her crinkled hair. And she would dress the bolster up in Miss Ophelia's night clothes and, when scolded, would ask to be "whipped like old missis allers whipped me," a thing Miss Ophelia could not bring herself to do.
As in all cases where once a person has been caught stealing, there is a lurking suspicion against them. So it was with Topsy, who, when little Eva was slowly passing from this world, used to pick flowers and take them to Eva's bedside.



8.
ONE day she was caught, and not until she had told Topsy to pick the flowers and bring them to her was the black girl released. The next time suspicion fell on the child was after Eva's sad end, and the little darkey was seen to hide something quickly in the bosom of her dress as some one approached. What do you suppose was hidden? A curl from little Eva's hair and a tiny Bible—both had been given Topsy by the white child before her death. After this episode Topsy became the special favorite of Mr. St. Clare, who declared that the child must never again be molested. Strange to say, when Topsy grew up she became a teacher in far-away Africa, among people of her own kind and color.

