

The Husband and Father

by Harriet Beecher Stowe *from Uncle Tom's Cabin*

This passage is about Eliza, an enslaved woman owned by the Shelby family. Her husband George is owned by a neighboring family. Eliza and George have one child, a small boy named Harry. Harry is charming, smart, and handsome. Earlier Eliza had overheard a slave trader speaking with her owner about buying Harry. Now her husband has come to say goodbye to her. George is speaking at the beginning of the passage.

“Well, lately Mas'r has been saying that he was a fool to let me marry off the place; that he hates Mr. Shelby and all his tribe, because they are proud, and hold their heads up above him, and that I've got proud notions from you; and he says he won't let me come here any more, and that I shall take a wife and settle down on his place. At first he only scolded and grumbled these things; but yesterday he told me that I should take Mina for a wife, and settle down in a cabin with her, or he would sell me down river.”

“Why—but you were married to me, by the minister, as much as if you'd been a white man!” said Eliza, simply.

“Don't you know a slave can't be married? There is no law in this country for that; I can't hold you for my wife, if he chooses to part us. That's why I wish I'd never seen you,—why I wish I'd never been born; it would have been better for us both,—it would have been better for this poor child if he had never been born. All this may happen to him yet!”

“O, but master is so kind!”

“Yes, but who knows?—he may die—and then he may be sold to nobody knows who. What pleasure is it that he is handsome, and smart, and bright? I tell you, Eliza, that a sword will pierce through your soul for every good and pleasant thing your child is or has; it will make him worth too much for you to keep.”

The words smote heavily on Eliza's heart; the vision of the trader came before her eyes, and, as if some one had struck her a deadly blow, she turned pale and gasped for breath. She looked nervously out on the verandah, where the boy, tired of the grave conversation, had retired, and where he was riding triumphantly up and down on Mr. Shelby's walking-stick. She would have spoken to tell her husband her fears, but checked herself.

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. notions
2. smote
3. verandah
4. retired
5. checked

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “that I’ve got proud **notions** from you”

- a. buttons and thread b. views or ideas c. children; offspring d. furnishings

2) “The words **smote** heavily on Eliza’s heart”

- a. hit; struck b. leaned or sloped c. occupied; retained d. carved; sculpted

3) “She looked nervously out on the **verandah**”

- a. forest or woodland b. field; pasture c. pond or lake d. porch; patio

4) “the boy, tired of the grave conversation, had **retired**”

- a. gone to sleep b. rebelled or revolted c. retreated; withdrew d. run wild

5) “She would have spoken to tell her husband her fears, but **checked** herself”

- a. stopped; controlled b. doubted or questioned c. admired; examined d. removed