

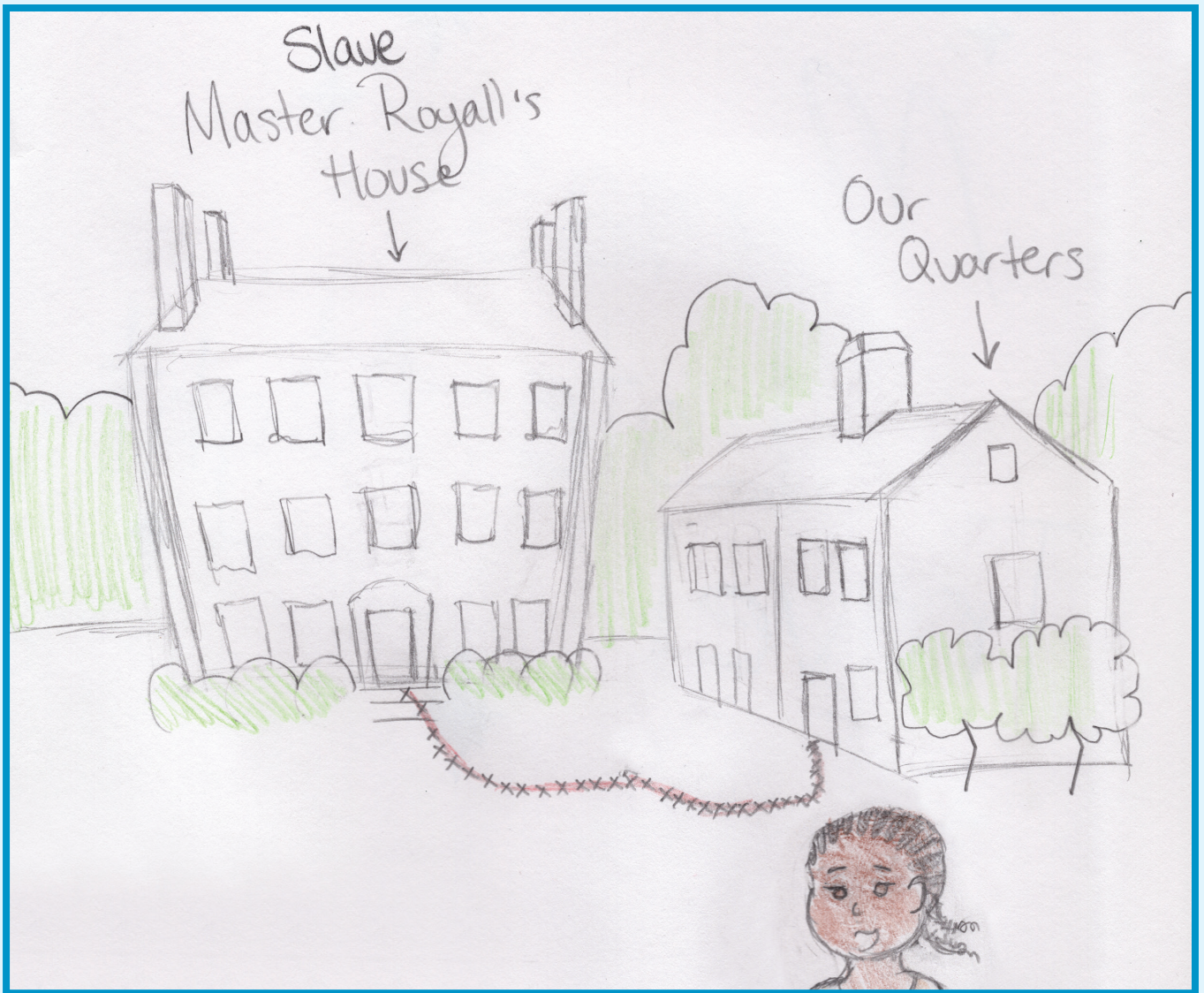


# Mama's Late-Night Travel



Written & Illustrated  
by August Etzel





My name is Betty. I live in a house only 40 steps away from the mansion of the family who enslaves me. The mansion is grand, with tall windows, fancy china, and shiny floors.

Our house is big but cramped with people. Many enslaved people live here with me. I'd guess 60! I do not know everyone. Our enslaver buys people and sells them often. Faces change and voices come and go. Some people speak words I do not understand.



Most people I live with are from Africa like my Mama. Mama used to live here with me but master sold her to a family across town.

Now, Auntie Abba takes care of me. Auntie was my mama's best friend before she left. She braids my hair and holds me tight when I can't sleep.

She shows me the best ways to care for the chickens and do my tasks. It is still hard. My hands are always rough from working.



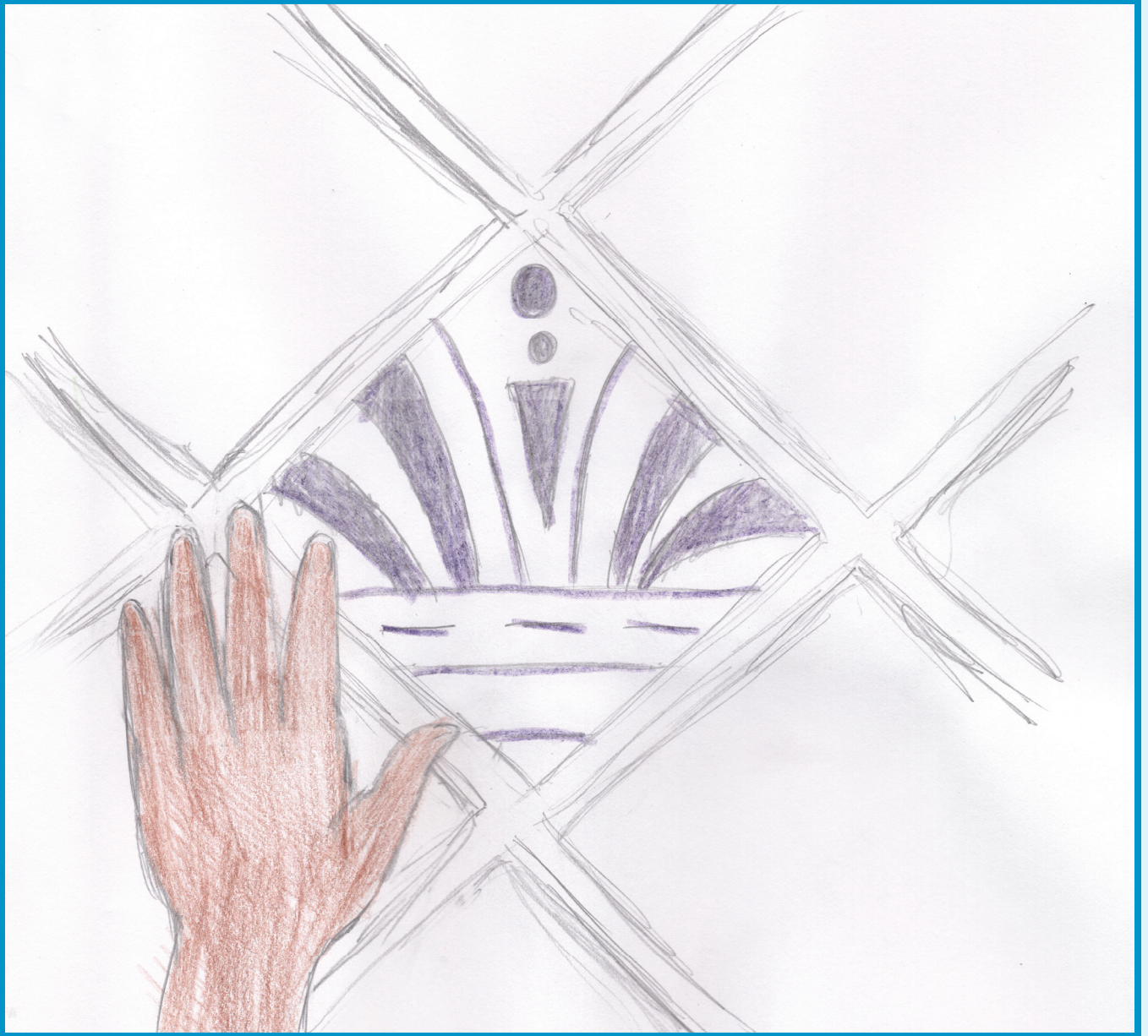


Auntie Abba is nice but she is not my Mama. I love my Mama and she loves me. I miss her so much.

Mama tells me I am Ewe like her. Our people live on the west coast of Africa. She was stolen away so I was born here in Medford, Massachusetts.

Someday, I want to find Mama. I want to hold her hand and walk far away from here. But for now, I have to work hard in the yards. I wake up early, I do what I am told, and I dream.

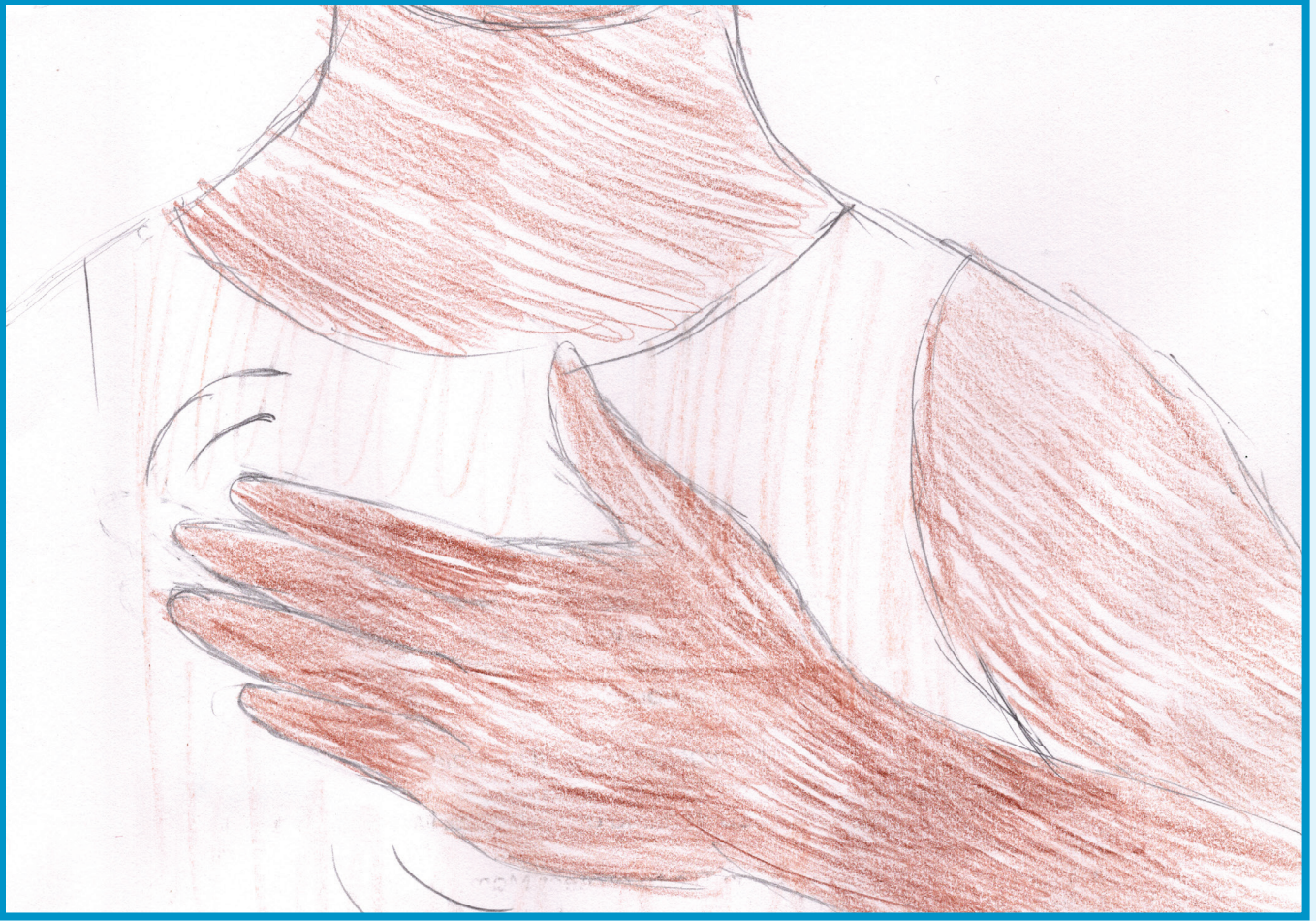




Mama taught me about ancestral and natural forces she calls Tro. They followed her across the sea to protect us.

She made a home for an ancestral Tro in one of the tiles in the kitchen.





Recently, our mistress sent one of the men in the house to deliver a message to the mistress of the house where my Mama is enslaved. He told Auntie that Mama is going to sneak out and return to our house.

*Is tonight the night Mama will visit me?*

I lay in bed next to Auntie Abba thinking of my mama. Mama showed me how to sing, dance pat softly on my chest to drum for our Tro. I gently pat my chest to encourage the Tro to protect Mama tonight. I do it just loud enough for them to hear. I shouldn't wake anyone in the room with us.



I imagine Mama sneaking out to see me as I fall asleep. I picture her leaving her master's house and setting off into the night. She moves quickly and carefully. She has to go fast so no one sees her.

She wears the night itself like a cloak over her simple cotton dress, blending into the shadows of the trees along the roads.





Mama needs to be quiet. She controls her breathing to blend in with the breeze.

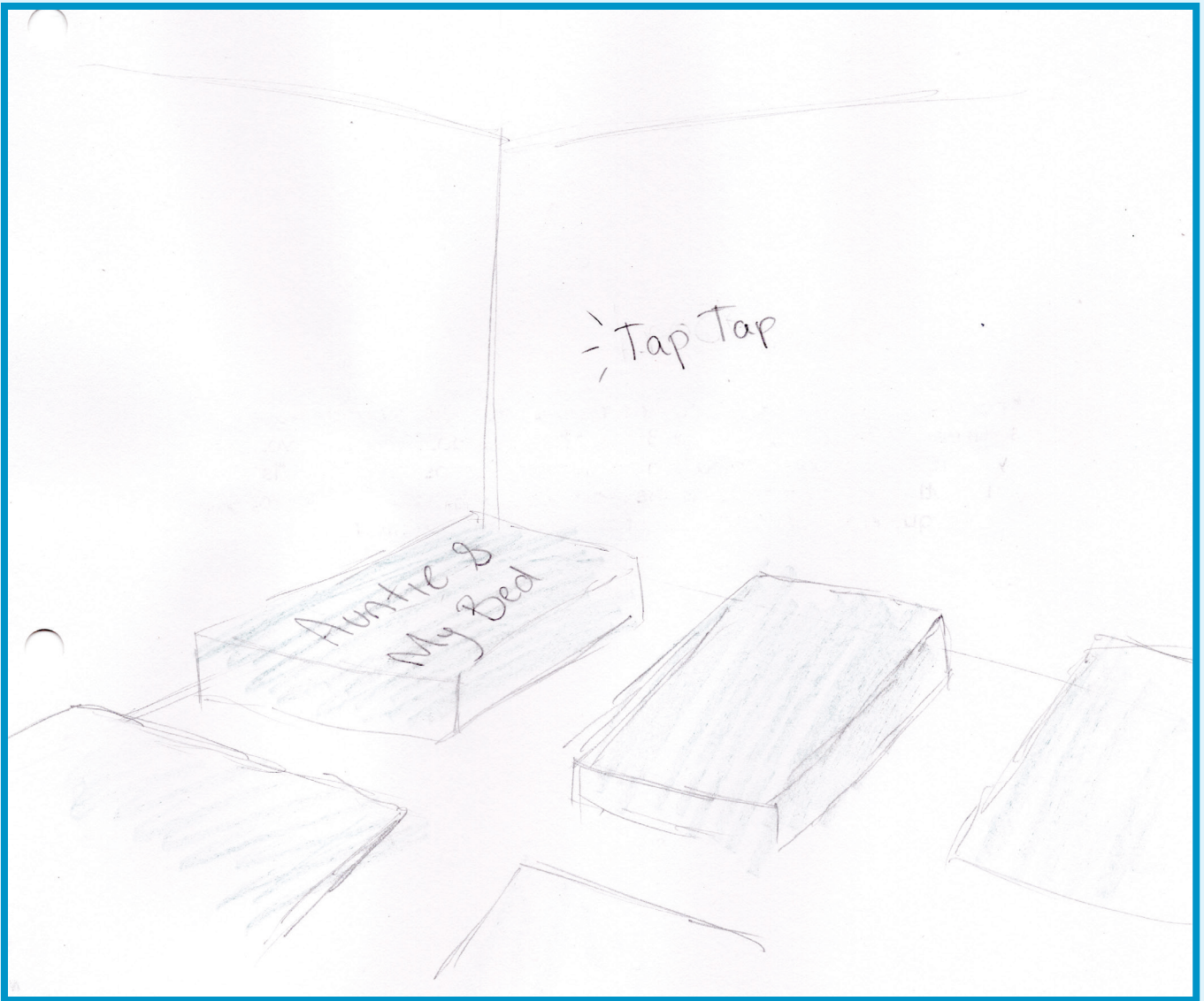
When she steps on a sharp rock Tro heal her.





Mama warned me about Adze, pretty, glowing bugs. She says they are vampires.

But tonight, I imagine Adze flying with Mama. If someone looks they will distract them with their shine so they don't see Mama. They will go after anyone who tries to stop her.



I hear tapping on the wall. It startles me but I don't wake Auntie Abba. She is so tired from laboring so hard. But she hears it too.

She turns over to me, eyes wide. The tap is coming in a pattern. She jumps out of bed. "Is that your mother?" she whispers as she starts to the stairs.

She asked me the question but didn't wait for the answer. I rush after her.





Auntie stops in front of the back door, the one that faces away from the master's mansion. I stand behind Abba as she creaks it open.

*Who is it?*

Auntie grabs her arm pulling her inside.





“Mama!”

In this picture book, four-year-old Betty imagines the journey her mother takes to visit her. This is a historical fiction story. Real women/girls named Betty and Abba were enslaved by the Royall family in 1739 but any other aspects of their identities are unknown.

The Royall family enslaved the most people in all of Massachusetts. Families in New England made the people they enslaved live in their own houses. The Royall family was the exception. They enslaved so many people they converted a house on their property to house enslaved people.

Leading up to the beginning of our story, Betty's mother gave birth to her while enslaved by the Royalls. This means that, like her mother, Betty was automatically the legal property of the Royalls. The Royalls sold Betty's mother to another family in Medford, Massachusetts.

Many enslaved women practiced truancy. They temporarily escaped their enslaver's property to have time to themselves or visit family. Truancy was a form of resistance against slavery rather than an attempt at freedom.