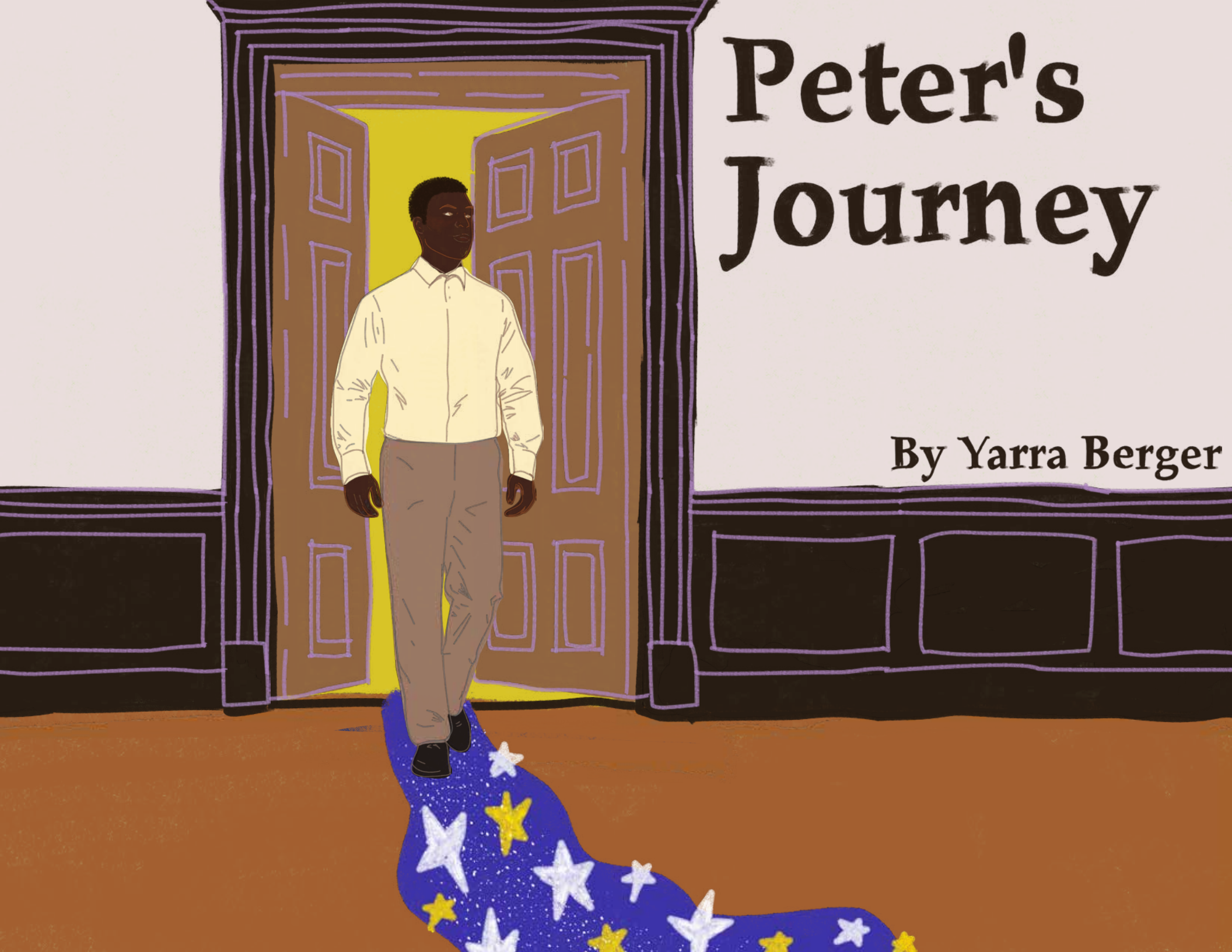


Peter's Journey

By Yarra Berger





What does freedom *look* like?
When you picture it,
What first comes to your mind?

Is it a wide-open field or
A night sky full of stars?

What does freedom *feel* like?
When you imagine it,
What first comes to your mind?

Is it a warm bed at night or
A soft breeze on a sunny day?

Freedom is important to all of us
But for many it took a *journey*

Slavery in the United States meant that not everyone was free.

Enslaved Black Americans like Peter were forced to work for their enslavers.

These enslavers controlled everything about their lives.

Enslaved people were not paid for their work and could not live where they pleased.

Sometimes this meant leaving family behind.



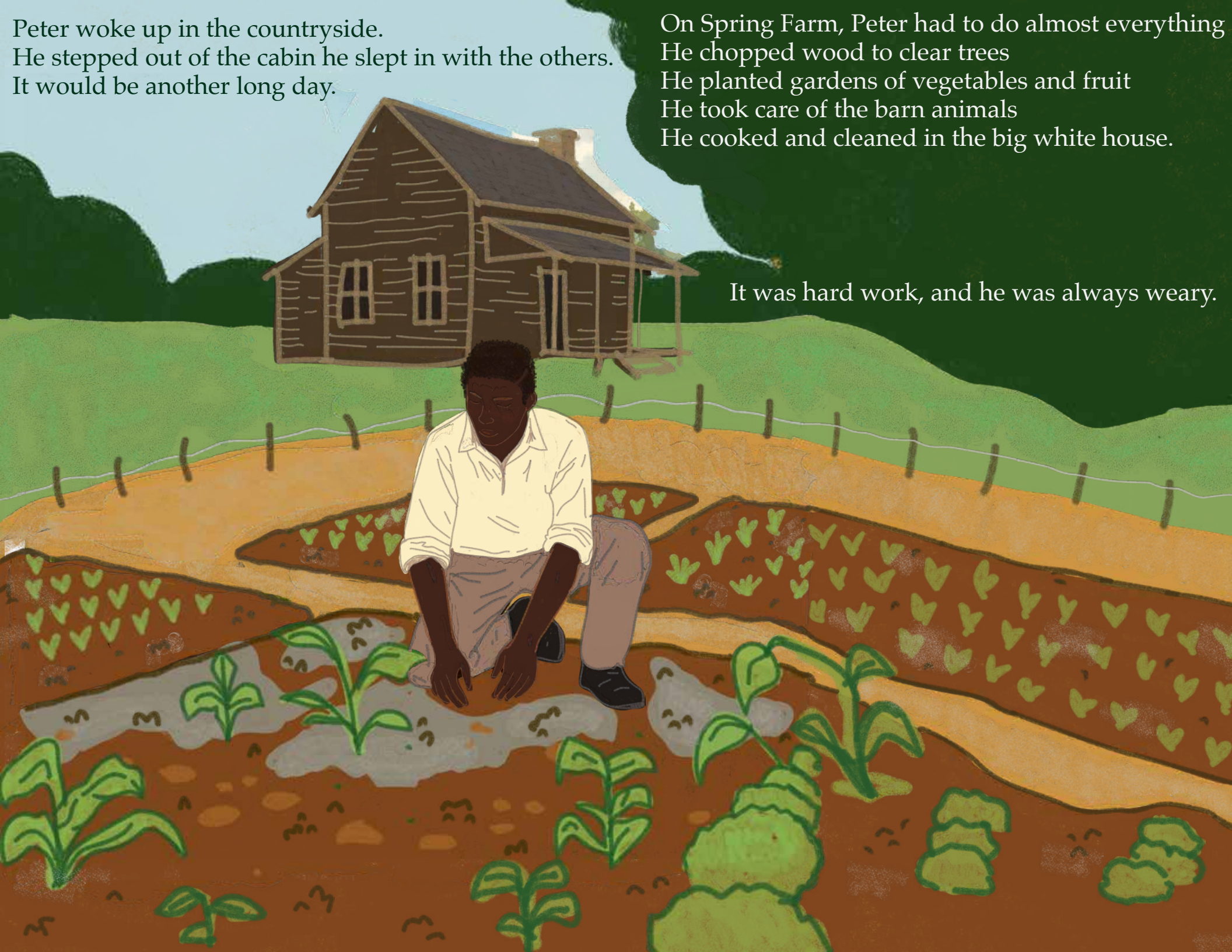



For Peter, freedom was a destination that required a journey.
The path to freedom was difficult and dangerous.
Many Americans did not want enslaved people to be free from their enslavers.
Americans who supported slavery saw enslaved people as property.
Under this system, enslaved people had to fight for their freedom and the right to choose their own destinies.
Unlike most of us, they had to imagine how freedom would look and feel.
Freedom was a gift they would claim for themselves.

Peter woke up in the countryside.
He stepped out of the cabin he slept in with the others.
It would be another long day.

On Spring Farm, Peter had to do almost everything
He chopped wood to clear trees
He planted gardens of vegetables and fruit
He took care of the barn animals
He cooked and cleaned in the big white house.

It was hard work, and he was always weary.



A person is sitting on a dark, silhouetted hill, looking up at a night sky. The sky is dark blue and filled with numerous yellow and white stars of various sizes. Some stars are grouped together in larger, irregular yellow shapes. The overall mood is contemplative and lonely.

Peter was young but he was feeling worn out
He was tired of working for somebody else
He missed his family left behind in Virginia
Even though the others slept near him
The nights were lonely in the countryside.

Years ago, Peter walked across the country
With Ezekiel, Fanny, and Maria
From Virginia to New York State
Where their enslavers decided to start a new farm



Peter knew that not everyone was enslaved

He had heard of free Black Americans living in the city nearby

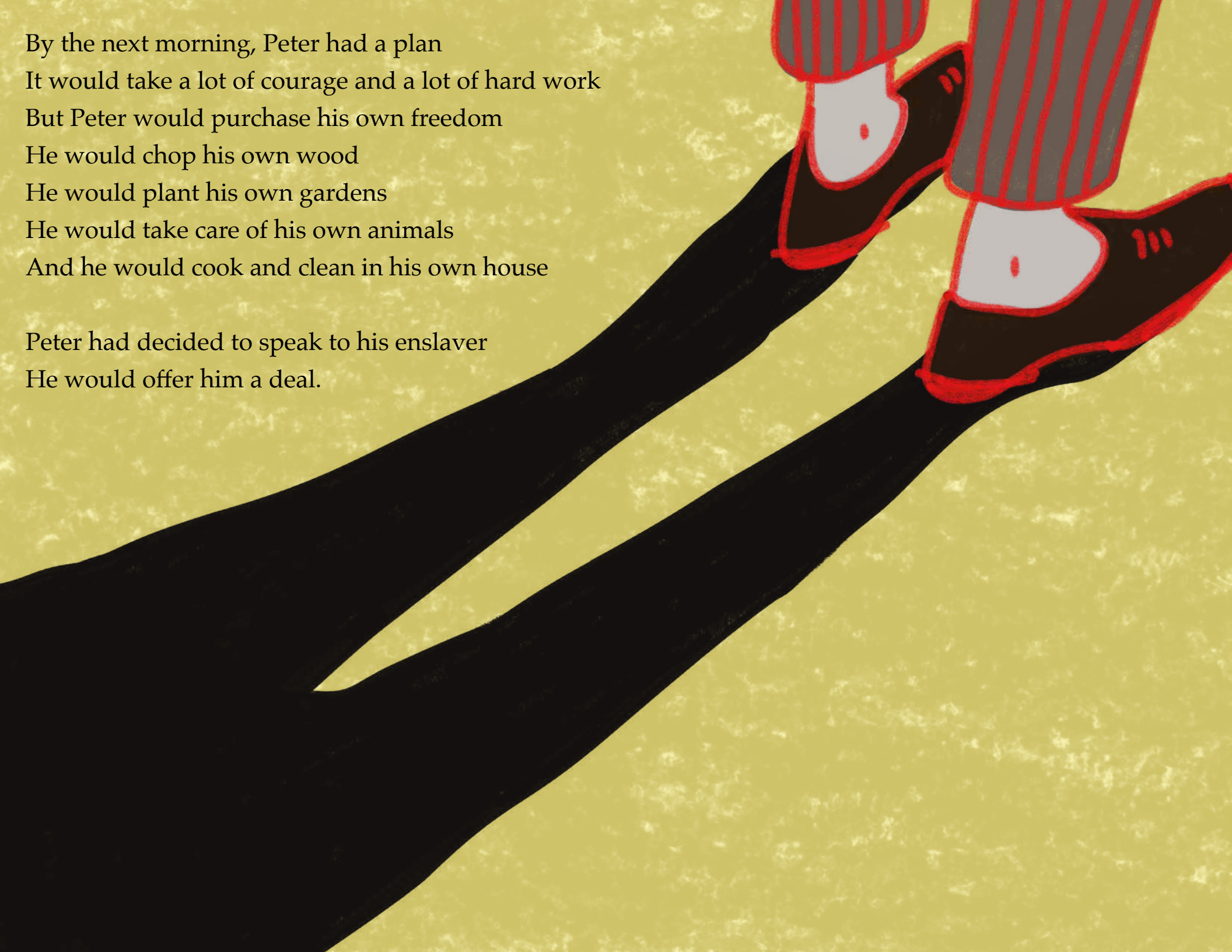
People who had escaped their enslavers in different ways

These stories gave him hope

and taught him that he too could find freedom

By the next morning, Peter had a plan
It would take a lot of courage and a lot of hard work
But Peter would purchase his own freedom
He would chop his own wood
He would plant his own gardens
He would take care of his own animals
And he would cook and clean in his own house

Peter had decided to speak to his enslaver
He would offer him a deal.





“I will stay here for two more years.
But you must let me work to purchase my own freedom.
Once I have paid you, I will be free.”

This is not what an enslaver wanted to hear
The conversation was difficult and took a long time
But Peter stayed strong and never backed down
Eventually, his enslaver agreed

“Very well. But you must pay me a large sum of money.
It will take you years. The longer you take to pay me, the more money you will need.”



This was not fair. None of it was.

Peter's enslaver hoped that he would give up.
But Peter never did.

For seven years, Peter worked the hardest that he ever had

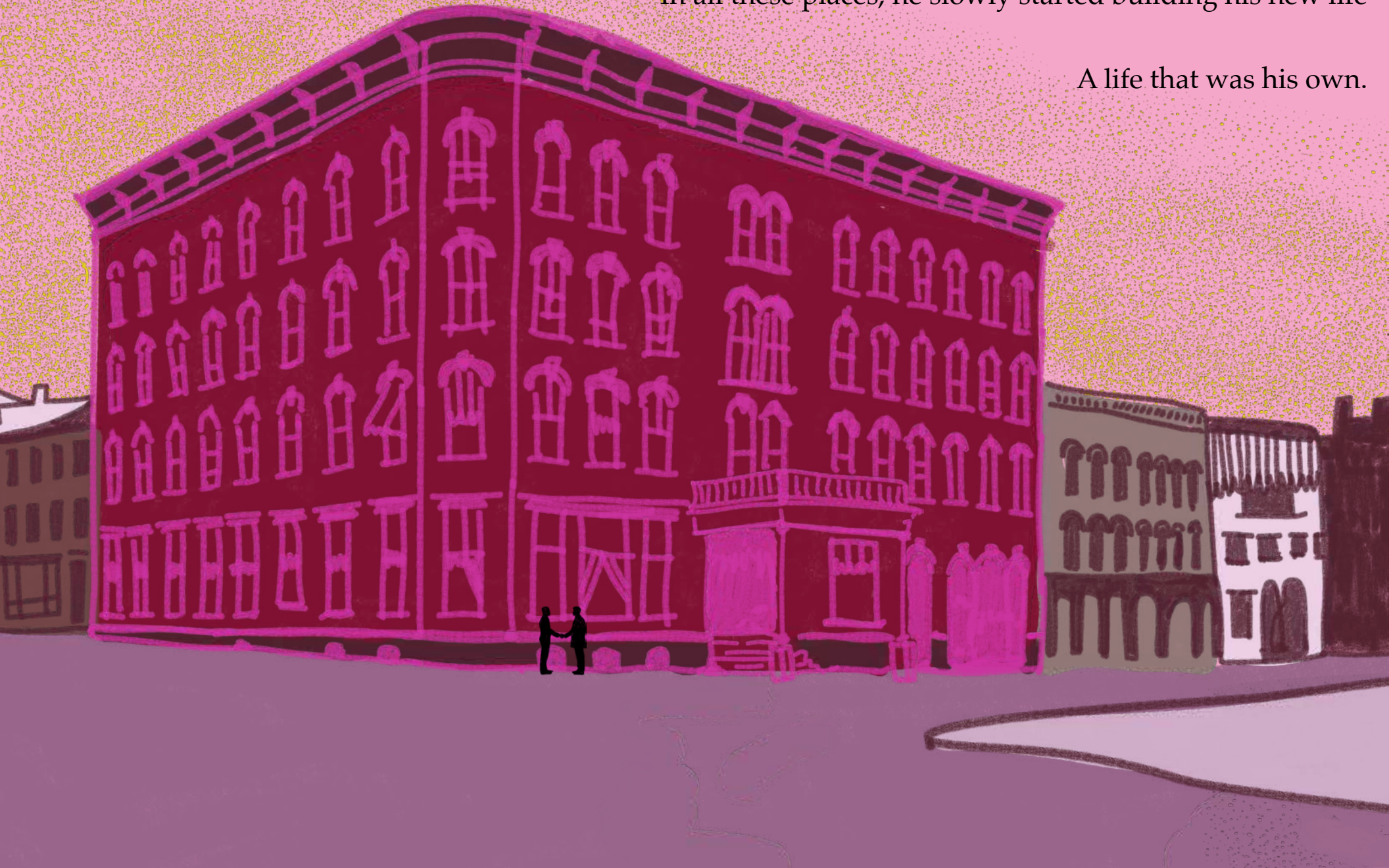
He met new people and worked new jobs

He worked in a mill

He worked in a hotel

In all these places, he slowly started building his new life

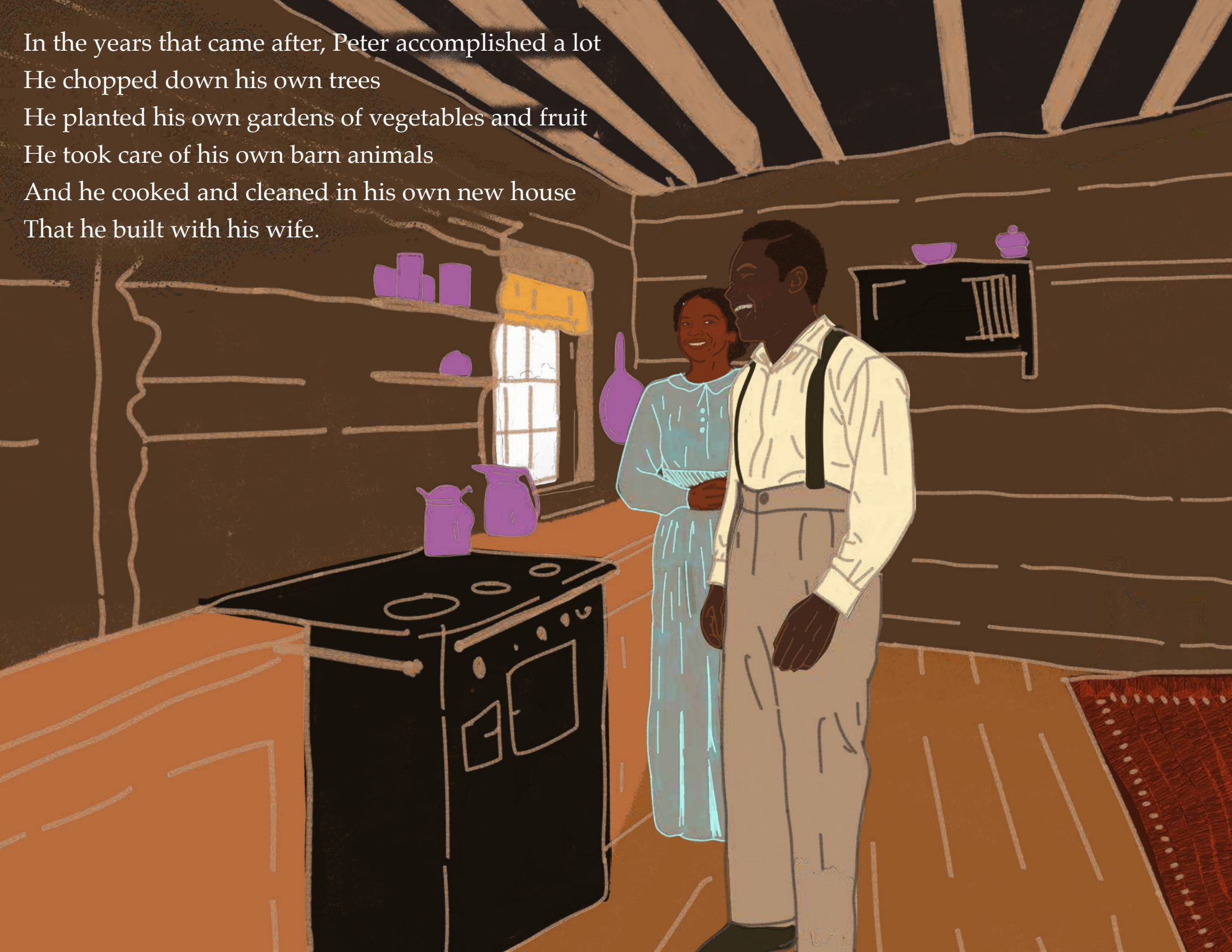
A life that was his own.



The day that Peter got his freedom papers
His heart swelled with pride
"I have accomplished the impossible!" Peter cheered
But Peter always knew he could do it.



In the years that came after, Peter accomplished a lot
He chopped down his own trees
He planted his own gardens of vegetables and fruit
He took care of his own barn animals
And he cooked and cleaned in his own new house
That he built with his wife.



They achieved what many thought was impossible
rejoicing in their newfound freedom
in their new home
on their new farm
with their family
which they had created, together



Now wise and gray
Peter reads to his grandchildren who live in a big white house
He tells them about his long journey
the endless hours and days of work
the plan to buy his freedom
the years of praying, wishing, hoping
"This is my story!" he tells them
And he asks,

"Now, what does freedom look like?"





Peter and Phyliss Webb, circa 1840s.



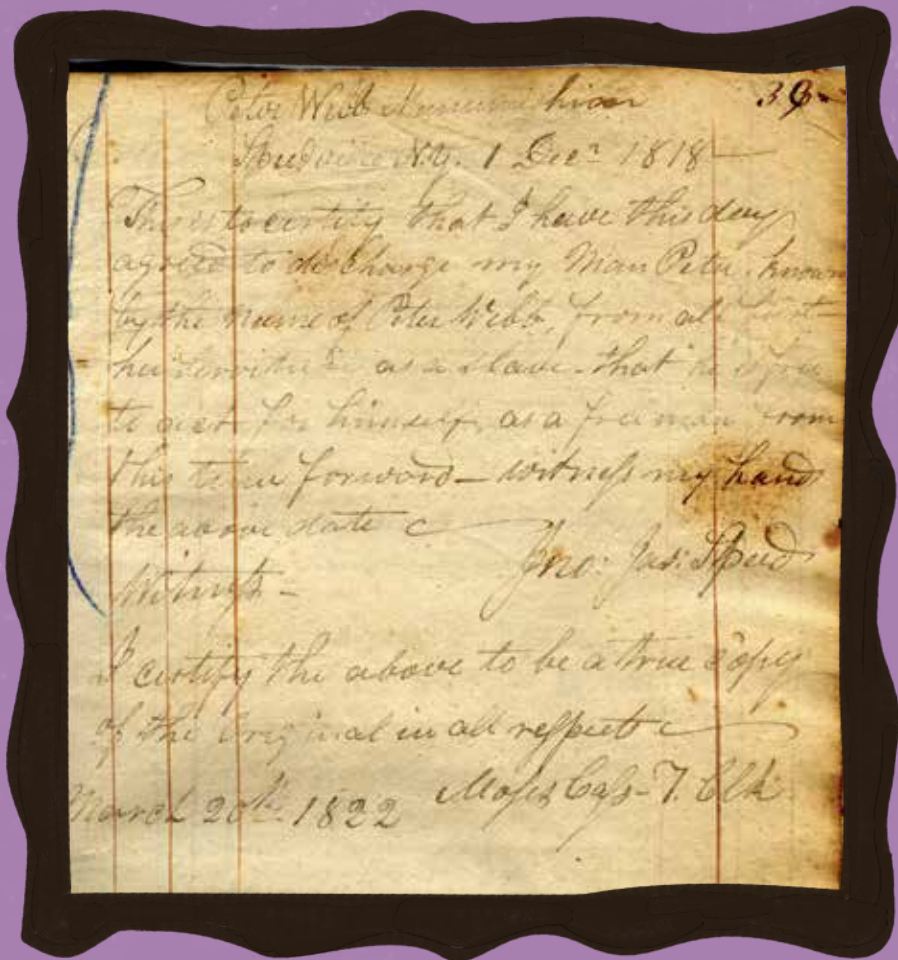
Peter Webb's extended family, Webb-Bailor picnic, circa 1890

Peter Webb was born in 1792 in Virginia. He was forcibly separated from his mother at a young age when she was sold to an enslaver in Georgia. Peter was purchased by John James Speed, an enslaver based in Virginia, for \$90.00. In 1805, the Speed family relocated to upstate New York and brought the individuals they enslaved. Peter, then 13, was forcibly moved across the country with four other enslaved children and adults. After several years of enslavement on a farm in Caroline, New York, Peter approached his enslaver in an effort to purchase his own freedom. After making an arrangement with Mr. Speed, Peter was able to work outside of his enslaver's farm to earn his own money to eventually purchase his freedom. While his enslaver agreed to this proposition, he charged Peter \$350.00 plus interest. Peter worked for the next seven years at Harford Mills, a lumbering mill, and at the Ithaca Hotel as a hostler. He was finally able to purchase his freedom in 1818 for \$384.00, nine years before the abolition of slavery in New York State. Peter married his wife, Phyliss, in 1819 and the two had 11 children. His son, Frederick Webb, eventually purchased the farm of Peter's enslaver. This included the original white homestead where Peter had worked while enslaved by John James Speed.

What are Freedom Papers?

Freedom papers, or Certificates of Freedom, were legal documents issued during Transatlantic Slavery to free Black Americans who had managed to escape enslavement. While not everyone secured these documents, and some were strategically forged for those traveling along the Underground Railroad, legally free Black Americans were required to register with county courts to obtain these documents.

For free Black Americans like Peter, these documents were essential evidence of their legal status that protected them against being labeled as a fugitive. During the abolition of slavery in the United States, many free Black Americans were forcibly captured and sold into slavery in states where slavery was still practiced. Consequently, freedom papers like these could help Black Americans prove their freedom in a court of law.



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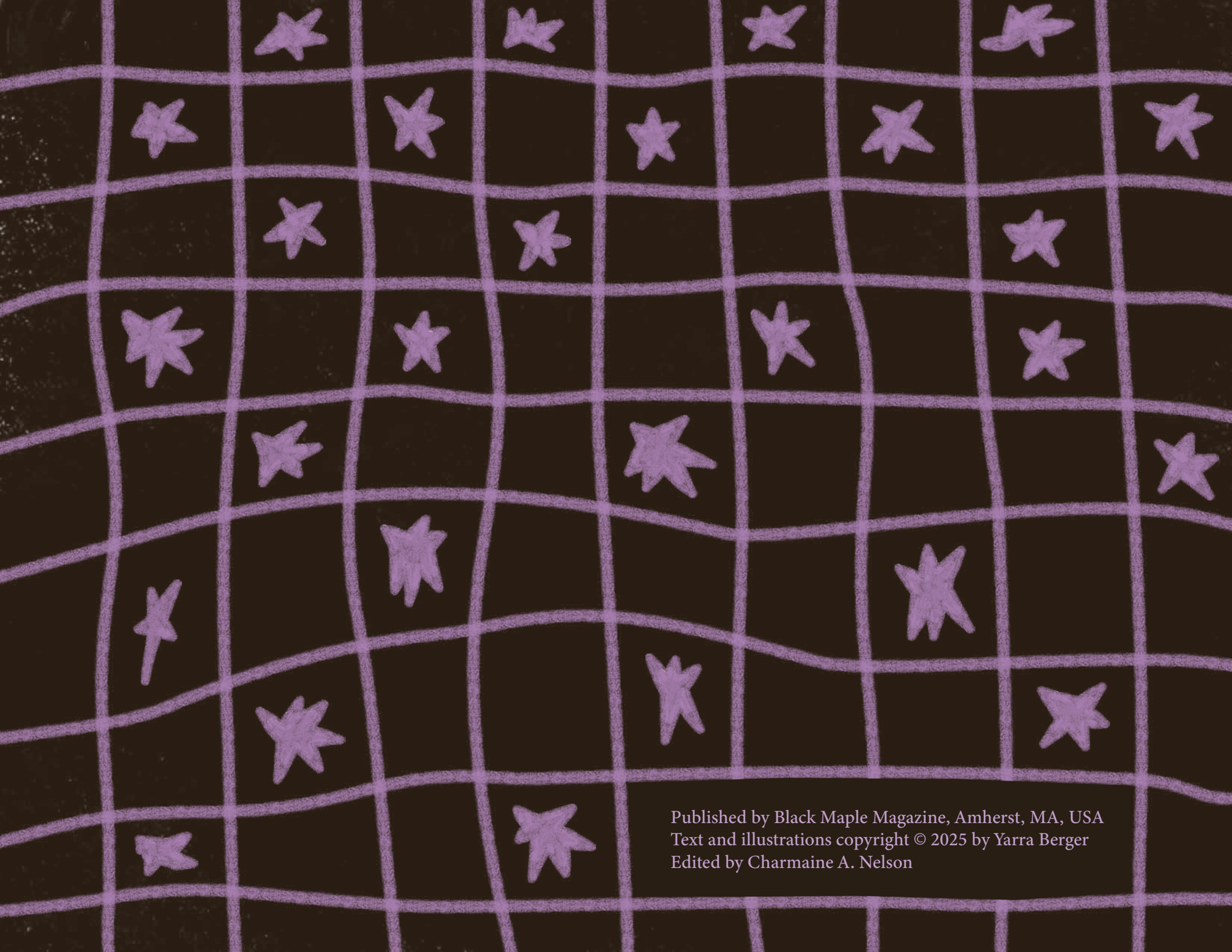
"This is to certify that I have this day agreed to discharge my Man Peter, known by the name of Peter Webb, from all further servitude as a slave, that he is free to act for himself as a free man from this time forward - witness my hand the above date - Jno. Jas. Speed

Witness -

I certify the above to be a true copy of the original in all respects

- Moses Cass, T. Clerk

March 20th 1822"



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