

The Brave Voice

The Story of Lucy Terry



Zara Sharif

Disclaimer: Teaching Slavery with Care and Understanding

Teaching the history of slavery is challenging, especially when sharing it with children. However, it is an essential topic that must be acknowledged and understood. This book tells the true story of Lucy Terry Prince, to help young readers begin to grasp the realities of slavery and why it was wrong. Lucy’s experiences offer an opportunity to discuss not only the hardships and injustices of slavery but also the resilience of those who lived through it.

It is important to remember that this is not just a story- this was a real life, a real person, and a real experience. Lucy Terry was enslaved as a child and bought by Samuel Terry in Enfield, Connecticut. After Samuel Terry’s death, she was likely sold as part of his estate and brought to Deerfield, Massachusetts, where she became the property of Ebenezer Wells around 1733. Her poem, Bars Fight, remains one of the earliest recorded literary works by a Black poet in America, preserving history through the eyes of an enslaved Black person in a time when Black voices were often silenced.

While this book focuses on Lucy’s journey, she was not alone. Thousands of other Black women and men, and children in Massachusetts were enslaved, even if their names and stories are now lost. Enslaved people were considered chattel, moveable personal property, under the law. This allowed enslavers to be horribly abusive and cruel. Slavery affected countless lives, and many of those lives remain unknown to us. This book does not diminish their importance but instead serves as one window into a much larger history.

For those who want to learn more, Lucy Terry’s story is still connected to real places today. You can visit Historic Deerfield in Massachusetts, where she lived and worked, and where the staff is happy to provide resources about Lucy, the lives of other enslaved people, and the history of slavery in New England.

To ensure accessibility, this story has been made available in Braille, allowing children who are blind or visually impaired to engage with Lucy’s journey through touch. Just as her voice was preserved through oral storytelling, Braille ensures that stories continue to be shared beyond sight, making history available to every child, regardless of ability.

Discussions about slavery require care and thoughtfulness. We encourage parents, educators, and caregivers to approach these conversations with clarity, empathy, and responsibility, ensuring that children engage with these histories in a meaningful and respectful ways.

This book is dedicated to Lucy Terry Prince and the countless others whose stories deserve to be told.

Thank you,
Zara Sharif

Lucy Terry Prince was a Black woman who lived in the 18th century. She was born in 1723 in Enfield, Connecticut. She was enslaved as a child and bought by Samuel Terry. After Samuel Terry's death, she was likely sold as part of his estate and brought to Deerfield, Massachusetts, where she became the property of Ebenezer Wells around 1733. Her poem, Bars Fight, remains one of the earliest recorded literary works by a Black poet in America, preserving history through the eyes of an enslaved Black person in a time when Black voices were often silenced.

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Once upon a time, in a land of golden sunrises and endless skies, lived a little girl named Lucy. She was born in Africa, in a village filled with warmth and laughter. Tall trees stretched toward the heavens and rivers shimmered like silver ribbons under the sun. Birds with feathers as bright as jewels soared in the sky, singing songs that danced on the wind. Lucy loved to run barefoot through the soft earth, her feet kicking up warm dust as she chased her friends.

In the evenings, the sky burned with deep reds and purples as the sun dipped below the horizon. She would sit beneath the starry sky, listening to the elders tell stories of spirits in the trees, and of the river that whispered the names of those who came before.

“Someday, Lucy,” her mother would say, stroking her hair with nimble fingers, “you will have your own stories to tell.”

But one day, everything changed.

Lucy was born in a village where the sun was always smiling, and the rivers sang songs of joy. The trees were tall and old, their branches reaching toward the sky like giant hands. The air was warm and full of life, with birds of many colors flying everywhere. Lucy loved to run through the fields, her feet kicking up soft earth. She loved to listen to the elders tell stories of the past, of the people who had lived before her. She loved to watch the sun set over the horizon, painting the sky in shades of red and orange. She loved to feel the cool water of the river on her skin, and to hear the gentle rustle of the leaves as the wind blew through the trees. But one day, everything changed. The sun stopped smiling, and the rivers fell silent. The trees began to wither, and the birds disappeared. Lucy was alone in a world that had turned cold and dark. She searched for answers, but found only silence. She missed the warmth of her mother's hands, the sound of her voice, the love that had once filled her life. She missed the stories that had given her a sense of purpose and belonging. She missed the life she had once known, and she wondered if she would ever see it again.



Shouts rang out. Strange men in heavy boots and big hats stormed into her village. Their skin was pale, and their voices were rough. Lucy had never seen people like this before and could not understand why they were so unkind and angry.

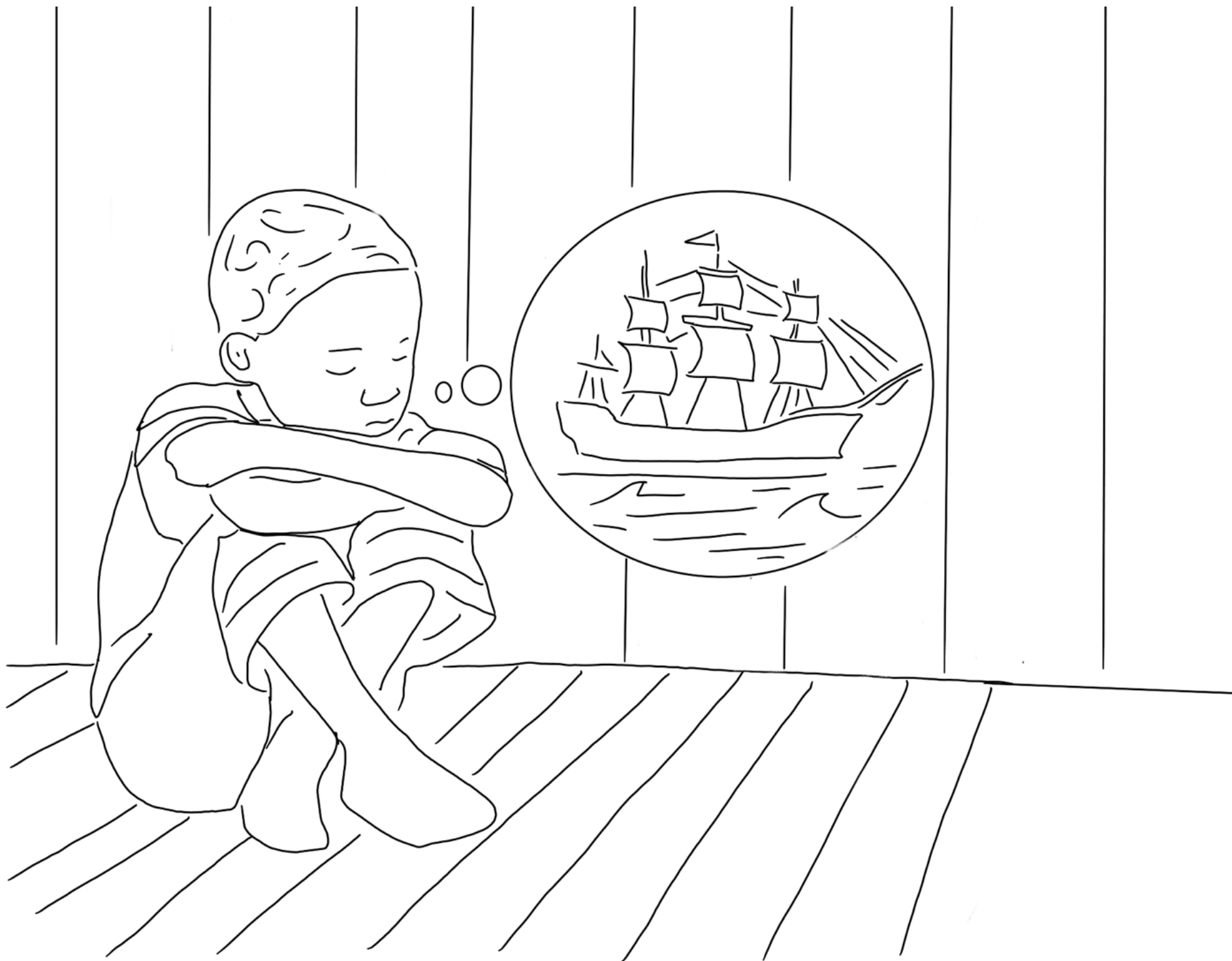
Before Lucy could run, strong hands grabbed her. She kicked and screamed, reaching for her mother, but their hands were torn apart. Her mother's cries filled the air as Lucy was dragged away.

She was not alone. Many others from her village were taken too- children, adults, elders, and friends. The men who took them were slave traders. They travelled from across the ocean on big ships to steal people and sell them in faraway lands away, treating them like objects instead of human beings. Lucy did not know where they were taking her, only that she was leaving home forever.

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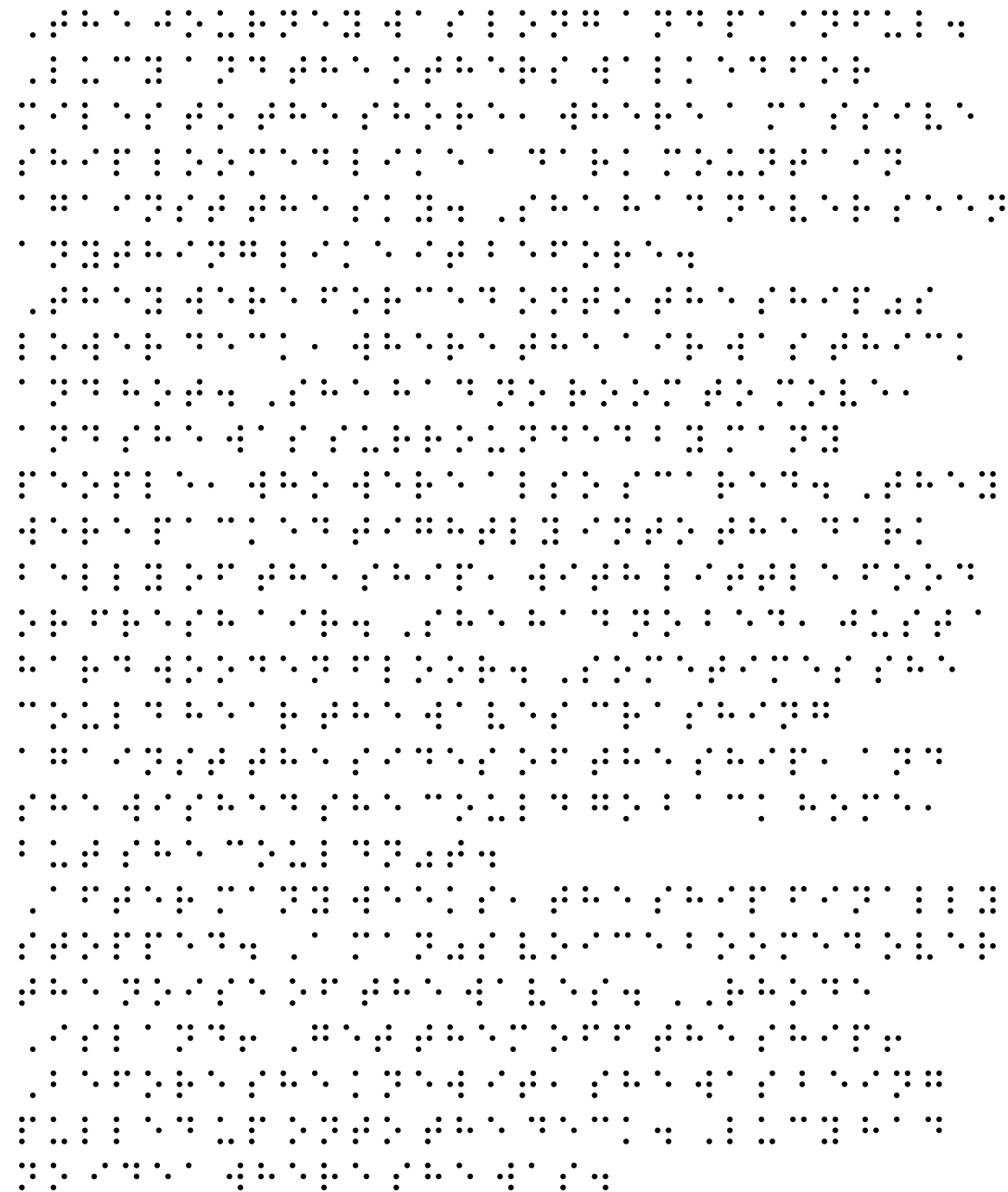


The journey was long and painful. Lucy and the others walked for miles to the shore, where a massive ship loomed like a dark mountain against the sky. She had never seen anything like it before.

They were forced onto the ship's lower deck, where the air was thick and hot. She had no room to move, and she was surrounded by many people, who were also scared. They were packed tightly into the dark belly of the ship, with little food or fresh air. She had no bed, just a hard wooden floor. Sometimes she could hear the waves crashing against the sides of the ship, and she wished she could go back home, but she couldn't. Below deck was so dark, and the jostling of the waves made her ill. How would her mother ever find her if these horrible people sailed her far, far away? After many weeks, the ship finally stopped. A man's voice boomed over the noise of the waves.

“Rhode Island! Get them off the ship!”

Before she knew it, she was being pulled up onto the deck. Lucy was confused and weak from the journey, “What was this terrible new place and where was Rhode Island?”





Strong hands gripped her arms as she and the others were led down a long wooden ramp onto dry land. The air smelled different here. The people looked different too. Her legs felt wobbly beneath her, but she had no choice but to move forward.

Everything around her was loud, there were men shouting, horses neighing, and wheels creaking against the ground. “Stand straight! Don’t dawdle!” barked a man. Lucy flinched but did as she was told. She was scared of what would happen if she didn’t.

She was taken to a market, but not the kind she knew from home. Instead, this market sold people. They were lined up in rows. Some were children. Others were grown-ups. They all looked afraid. Some held each other’s hands tightly. Others stood alone, too afraid to move. Lucy didn’t understand why these strangers thought they could buy her, it wasn’t right.

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Lucy's heart pounded. A man climbed onto a wooden platform and started shouting. "Strong hands for the fields!" he called. "Healthy girls for housework! Who will make the first bid?" One by one, the people around her were taken away. The pale men and women in fine clothes pointed at them, whispered, and handed over coins. A boy beside Lucy whimpered. "Shh," she whispered, even though she wanted to cry, too. Then, a woman in a bonnet and a tall man with sharp eyes stopped in front of her. The man stroked his chin. "She looks young," he said. "She'll grow," the woman replied. Before Lucy could say anything, the man handed over coins, and she was led away. She wanted to run but there was no one here to help her.

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Lucy was put into a wagon with wooden wheels that creaked and groaned as it rolled over the bumpy road. The town faded behind them, replaced by endless trees and fields. She had never seen anything like it before. Lucy whimpered, holding back tears. “Keep quiet,” he commanded. Of course she could not yet understand their language, but the man’s gestures were crude and fast and the woman’s face was pinched and unkind. Lucy pressed her lips together and hugged her knees to her chest. After what felt like forever, the wagon finally stopped in front of a big wooden house. Lucy’s stomach twisted into knots. The house was tall with small windows, and the wooden shutters banged in the wind. The smell of hay and smoke filled the air. The man, Ebenezer Wells, climbed down from the wagon and held out a hand to his wife. Then, he turned to Lucy. “This is your new home,” he said gesturing to the wooden building. But it did not feel like home at all.

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Lucy hesitated before stepping down onto the packed dirt. The house loomed over her, casting a long shadow in the late afternoon sun. She wrapped her arms around herself. She wished she could make herself smaller, invisible. Although they stood right beside her, their cruelty made her feel alone. The door creaked open, and a boy, older than Lucy, stepped out. His hands were rough and dusted with dirt, and his eyes, dark like hers, studied her carefully. “This is Caesar,” Reverend Wells said briskly. “He’ll show you how things work around here.” Lucy looked up at the boy, unsure of what to say. Caesar didn’t speak at first, just stared at her. Then, with a small nod, he motioned for her to follow him around the house.

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“You’ll sleep inside, near the fire,” he said in a low voice, pointing at the hearth. “I sleep in the attic. But it gets cold up there in the winter.” He pretended to shiver. Lucy swallowed hard. Her heart ached. She missed her mom and dad, aunts and uncles, grandparents, all of her friends back in Africa. She gestured around herself and raised her shoulders. Caesar saw the questions in her eyes and sighed. “Your work? More than you think.” He said earnestly, “cleaning, spinning, cooking.” He gestured with his hands. “You must keep the fire going, too. If it goes out in the night, they will be very angry.” Lucy looked down at her hands. She had never done those kinds of chores before.. Pointing at him, she raised her shoulders again. “Me? What do I do?” Caesar understood her. Letting out a breath, he glanced toward the barn, where firewood was piled high against the wall. “Well, I do the outside work. Splitting wood,” he put his hands together and swung them up and down like an axe, “harvesting,” he pretended to pick carrots, “take care of their animals,” he made the sound of a cow and Lucy laughed for the first time since she’d been put into the bowels of the slave ship. Caesar laughed too. “It’s not easy.” He shook his head. “But we don’t have a choice. We both answer to them.” He frowned. Then he glanced at her, lowering his voice. “Just do your chores and don’t ask too many questions, or else.”

Lucy didn't understand the words he spoke, but Caesar's worried expression made it clear. Their enslavers were not kind people, and they would get angry if her work was not done properly. She nodded, but inside she had a hundred more questions.

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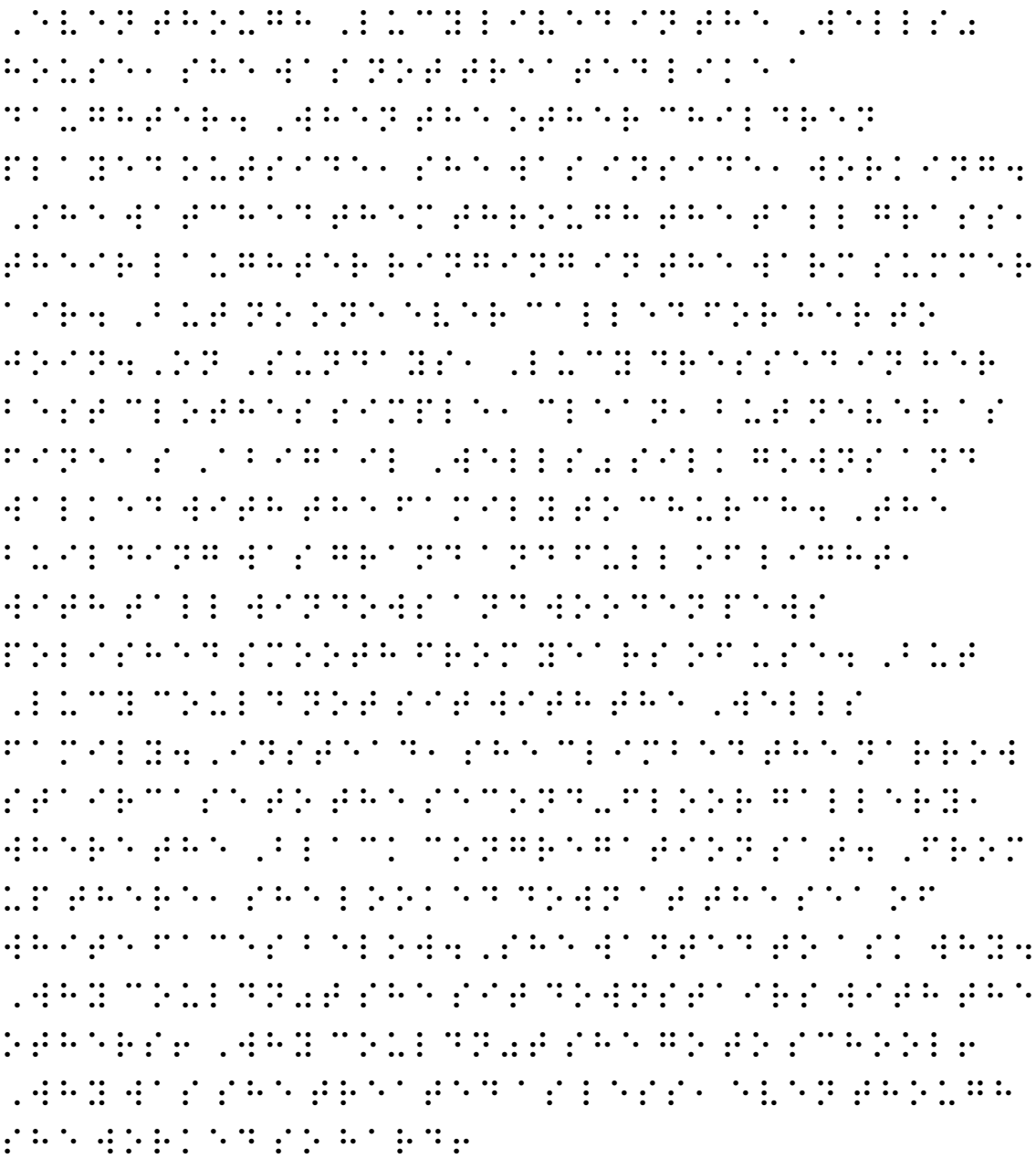
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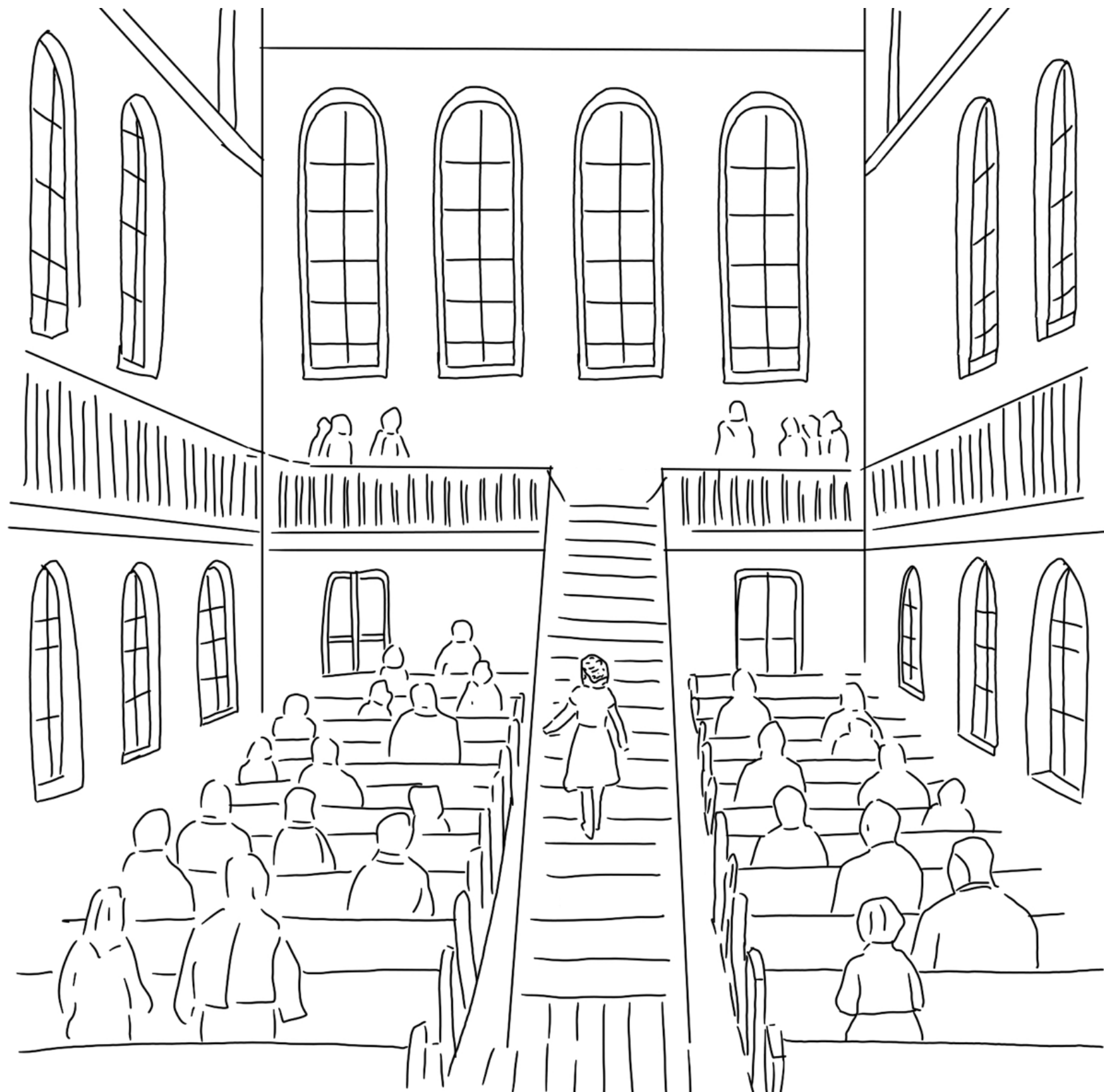


Lucy learned quickly. Every morning, before the sun rose, she pulled herself up from the floor and got to work. She stirred big pots over the fire, swept the wooden floors until they shone, and spent long hours spinning thread. When the cows were milked, she carefully poured the milk into pans and churned the cream into butter. She worked silently and quietly. That is how the madam liked it. Although her hands were always busy, no matter how much she did, she was never finished. She also learned new English words every day and slowly she began to speak in whole sentences. At night when her work was done, she curled up near the fire, too tired to move. The house was silent except for the wind rattling the shutters. Somewhere above, Cesar shifted in the attic, trying to get comfortable on the wooden boards where he slept. She watched the flames flicker and dance, sending strange shadows across the walls. Some nights, if she wasn't too tired, she whispered stories to herself, just like her mother used to do. Even though she had lost everything, even though she was in a strange place with strange people, she still had her mind and her thoughts. She had her ability to think and learn. And one day, she would make sure that the people of Deerfield listened to her stories.

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Even though Lucy lived in the Wells' house, she was not treated like a daughter or even like a person. When the white children played outside, she was inside, working. She watched them through the tall grass, their laughter ringing in the warm summer air. But no one ever called for her to join. When they spoke to her it was to ask or command like their parents. On Sundays, Lucy dressed in her best clothes, simple, clean, but never as fine as Abigail Wells' silk gowns. Then she walked behind the family to church. The building was grand and full of light, with tall windows and wooden pews polished smooth from years of use. But Lucy could not sit with the Wells family. Instead, she climbed the narrow staircase to the second-floor gallery, where the Black congregation sat. The separation was the white people's way to pretend they were better, the one's with the money and power, who bought things and people, who hit and cursed and waved their bibles. Their God confused Lucy. What kind of God divided his children and allowed one group to hurt another? But every week they sang and prayed to him and spoke of his wrath and mercy. Lucy preferred to go up the stairs. It was there she saw her new friends and community, shared secret glances and news, embraced and sometimes cried. From up there, they looked down at the sea of white faces below. She wanted to ask why, but the white people's ways did not make sense. Why couldn't they sit downstairs with the others? Why couldn't they go to school? Why were they treated as less than human, even though they worked so hard?





Still, Lucy had things no one could take from her - her mind and her voice. She had a gift for words. She listened carefully to the stories people told, the songs they sang, and the whispers of the wind in the trees. She tucked them all away in her mind. When she spoke, her stories painted pictures so vivid, it felt like stepping into another world.

Then, one day in 1746, news spread through Deerfield, that there had been a violent attack. It was a brutal fight, and several people were killed. Lucy did not see the attack herself, but she heard the stories. People in the town spoke in hushed, frightened voices about what had happened. She listened as names were whispered of the men and women who had fought, those who had fallen. She watched as families mourned, as the fear settled deep into the bones of the town.

She knew she had to remember it.

So, she wrote a poem called Bars Fight, a story of what had happened. She held the words in her mind, reciting them again and again until others learned them too.

"August 'twas the twenty-fifth,
Seventeen hundred forty-six,
The Indians did in ambush lay,
Some very valiant men to slay..."

Lucy could not let the story of that terrible day be forgotten. She shaped the memories into lines of verse, holding them in her mind like a treasured secret. In the years that followed, her poem lived not in books, but in voices. Families repeated it to their children, who repeated it to theirs. Her story became one of the first known poems in American history written by a Black woman, though it would not be published until over a hundred years later.

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As Lucy grew older she married a kind man named Abijah Prince. They both worked tirelessly until they gained their freedom. No longer bound to anyone else, they built a new life in Vermont, where they could make their own choices at last.

One evening, as the sky deepened into shades of indigo and violet, Lucy sat outside her home, listening to the quiet hum of the land. She closed her eyes for a moment, remembering the warmth of the African sun, the voices of her people and everything she had been through. A small hand tugged at her sleeve, pulling her back to the present. One of her six children looked up at her, eyes full of curiosity.

“Tell me a story,” the child said.

Lucy smiled. And so, she began...

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Published by Black Maple Magazine, Amherst, MA, USA
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Edited by Charmaine A. Nelson