

HENRY BOX BROWN

I will tell you the story of Henry Box Brown. It is a strange tale, and it is all true. Henry was a slave in Richmond, Virginia, and then his name was Henry Brown. He had a wife and four little children whom he loved very much.

One night when he went home to his little hut, his children and their mother were gone, and poor Henry found they had been sold to a trader, and were taken away to Carolina. It made him almost crazy to hear this dreadful news. He felt sure he should never see them again, for he was a slave, and would not be allowed to go after them. He had to work away for his master, just as if nothing had happened.

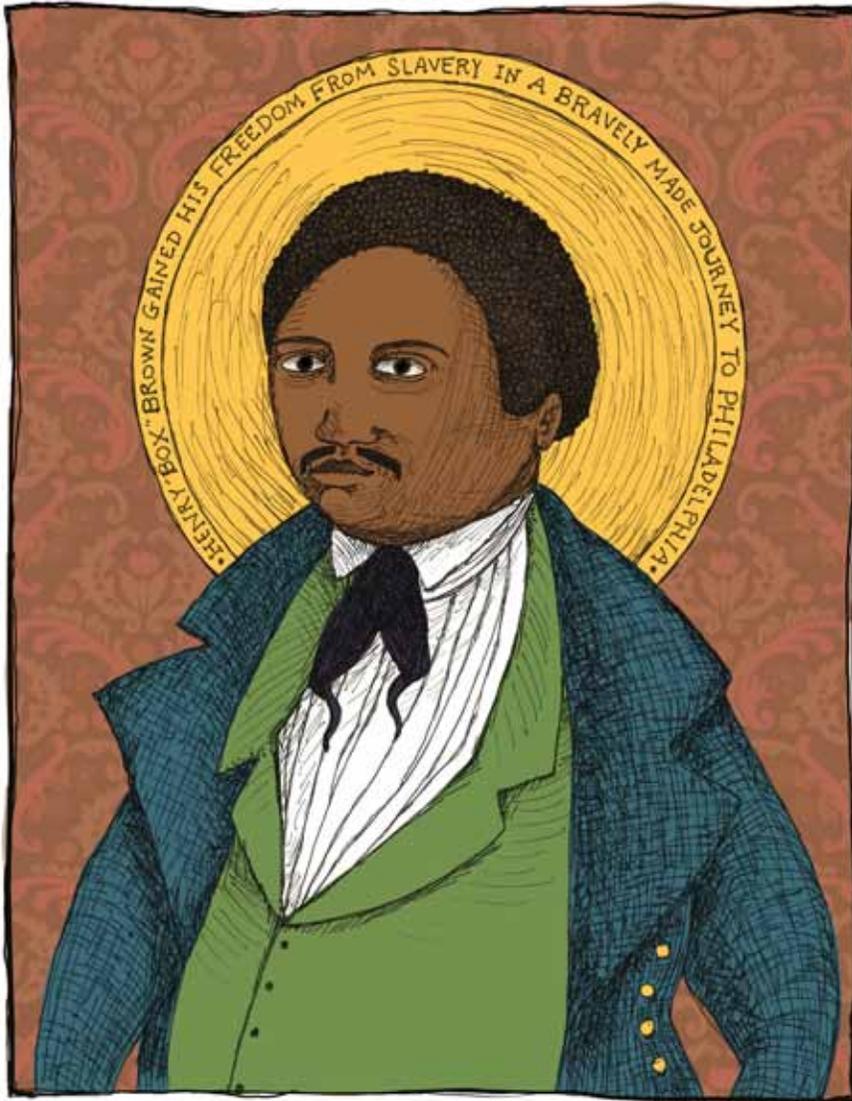
But he thought every day about his family, and he was very sad. He thought what hard times they would have when the overseer, with his whip, drove them to work in the cotton field. He feared they would have none to be kind to them, and love them; for the traders often sell the mother to one master, and the little children to others, and they never meet again. At last, Henry thought he would try to get to a free state. He resolved that, live or die, he would not be a slave much longer.

So he set to thinking how he should get off. He was afraid to run away, lest he should be caught and sent back. A slave is not allowed to travel without his master's leave. But he hit upon a lucky thought. He got a box just large enough to hold him when he was sitting down, with his head a little bent. The box was three feet long, two feet, eight inches deep, and twenty-three-and-a-half inches wide.

Then, he got a kind man to send word to a trusty friend in Philadelphia, that the box would be sent on the cars to Philadelphia, on a certain day. On the top of the box was written in large black letters, "this side up with care."

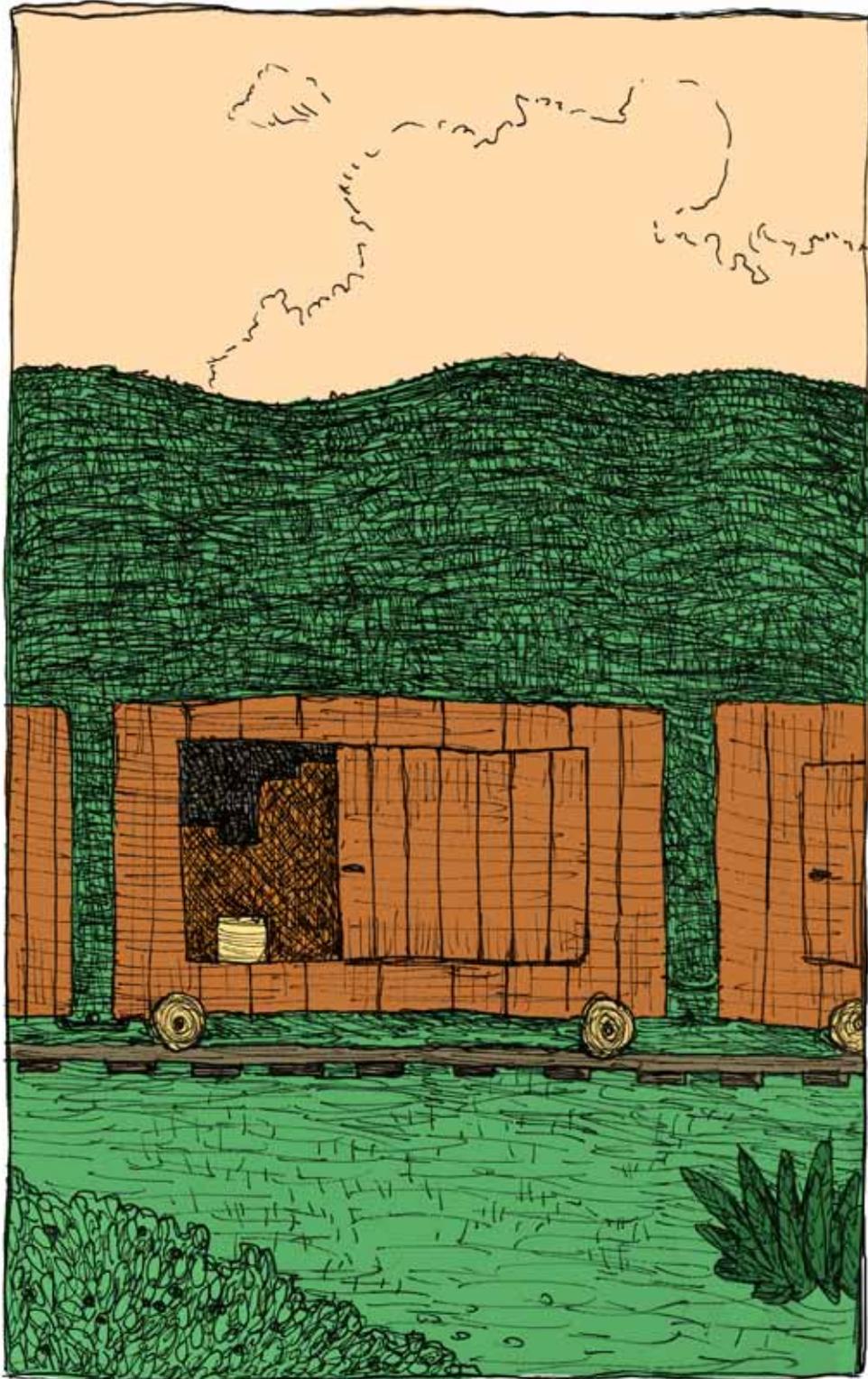
When it was nearly time for the cars to start, Henry took a bladder of water, some biscuit, and a large gimlet, and got into his box. Then a man nailed down the top, and porters took the box to the cars, thinking, I suppose, that it was a box of goods. It was very hot in the box, and Henry could hardly breathe, there was so little air. But he had made up his mind to die rather than make a noise, for then he would be found out, and sent back into slavery.

Part of the way, he travelled by water, and when the box was put on the steamboat, it was placed so that Henry's head and back were down; but he heard people moving about, and he feared they would hear him



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if he turned; so he kept quite still. He lay in this way, while the boat went twenty miles, and it nearly killed him; he said the veins in his temples were great ridges that felt as big as his finger.

While Henry was lying with his head down, some men came and sat on the box, and he thought he heard one of them wonder what was in it.

He staid in his little box-house twenty-six hours; but he could not eat any of his biscuit, and instead of drinking the water, he used it to bathe his hot face. Most likely, he would have died if he had not bathed his face with the water. There he sat in the dark, sometimes fanning himself with his hat; and four times he bored a hole with the gimlet, to let in a little fresh air.

At last, on nearly the last day of March, 1849, the cars stopped in Philadelphia, and soon Henry felt the porters carrying him to the house of the kind man who was to receive him. The man shut the street door when the porters were gone, but he was afraid Henry was smothered, so he tapped with his fingers on the top of the box and asked, "all right?"

"All right, sir," said a voice in the box. Quickly the top of the box was knocked off, and Henry stood up. He shook hands with his new friend, and he was so happy that he hardly knew what to do.

After he had bathed himself and ate breakfast, he sang a hymn of praise, which he had kept in his mind to sing if he should ever get to a land of freedom in safety. The first lines were,

*"I waited patiently for the Lord
And He inclined and heard me."*

Henry was a strong, fine looking man. He was named Henry Box Brown, because he came nearly three hundred miles in a box. We call people heroes who do something that is brave and great, and Henry is a hero. Every body but the slaveholders seems glad of his escape from slavery. Henry will be well off in the free states, but his heart will always ache when he thinks of his wife and dear children. No one in Carolina is allowed to teach a slave to read or write; so he will never get a letter from any of his family, and it is not likely they will hear from him, or ever know that he is free.

