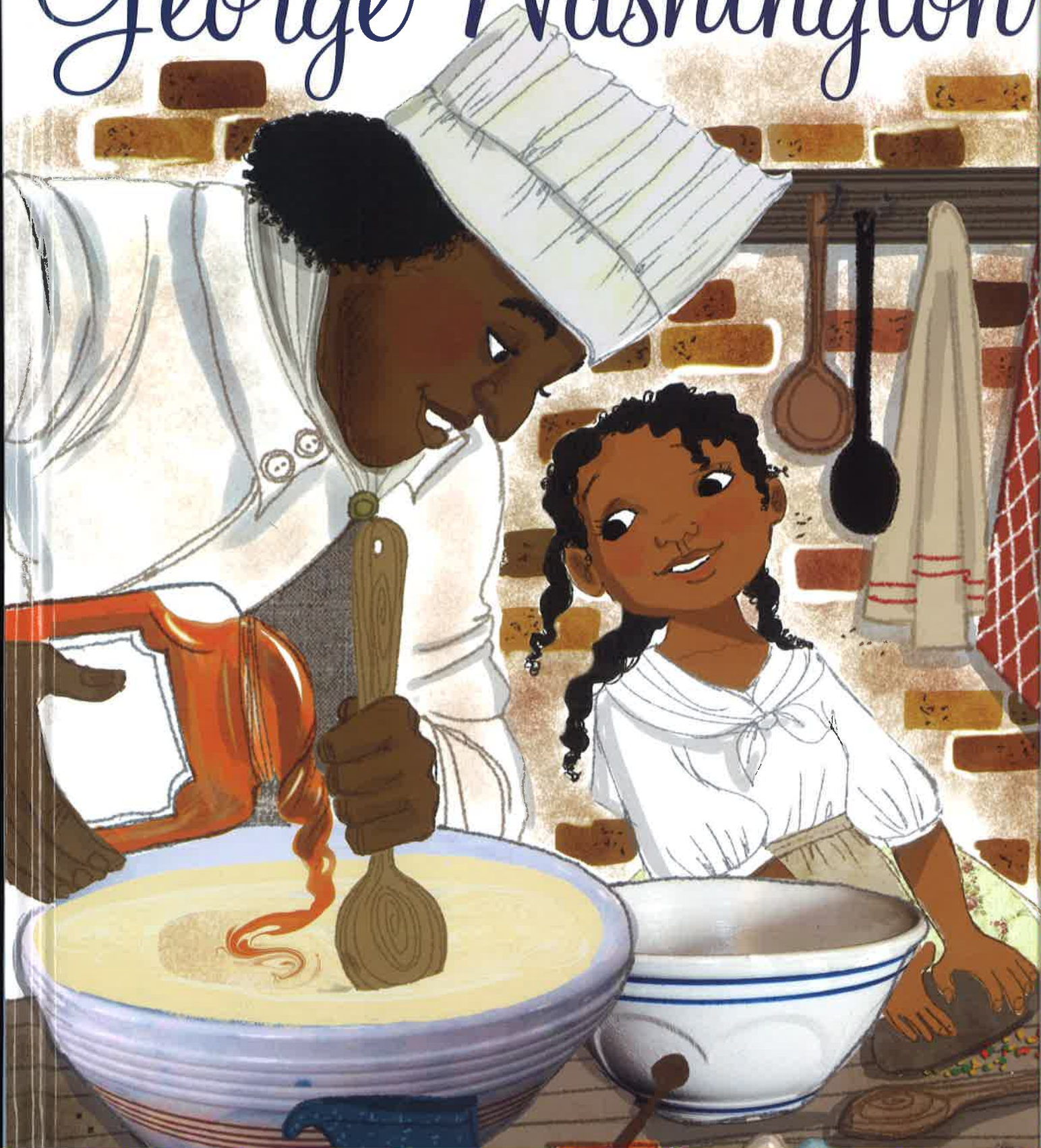


BY RAMIN GANESHAM ILLUSTRATIONS BY VANESSA BRANTLEY-NEWTON

# A BIRTHDAY CAKE FOR *George Washington*





**A BIRTHDAY CAKE FOR**

*George  
Washington*

BY RAMIN GANESHRAM

ILLUSTRATIONS BY VANESSA BRANTLEY-NEWTON



SCHOLASTIC PRESS • NEW YORK



13. Madame  
30 Sept  
18-2

Mr. and Mrs. Jones  
Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jones  
I have just received  
a box from  
the children  
I hope you will  
like it  
I shall  
write you again  
soon  
Yours truly  
C.E.W.

C.E.W.		Dover		C.E.W.		Do	
Name	Age	Name	Age	Name	Age	Name	Age
John	3	John	3	John	3	John	3
Mary	5	Mary	5	Mary	5	Mary	5
Tom	7	Tom	7	Tom	7	Tom	7
Sarah	9	Sarah	9	Sarah	9	Sarah	9
James	11	James	11	James	11	James	11
Elizabeth	13	Elizabeth	13	Elizabeth	13	Elizabeth	13
William	15	William	15	William	15	William	15
Ann	17	Ann	17	Ann	17	Ann	17
Robert	19	Robert	19	Robert	19	Robert	19
John	21	John	21	John	21	John	21
Mary	23	Mary	23	Mary	23	Mary	23
Thomas	25	Thomas	25	Thomas	25	Thomas	25
Elizabeth	27	Elizabeth	27	Elizabeth	27	Elizabeth	27
William	29	William	29	William	29	William	29
Ann	31	Ann	31	Ann	31	Ann	31
Robert	33	Robert	33	Robert	33	Robert	33
John	35	John	35	John	35	John	35
Mary	37	Mary	37	Mary	37	Mary	37
Thomas	39	Thomas	39	Thomas	39	Thomas	39
Elizabeth	41	Elizabeth	41	Elizabeth	41	Elizabeth	41
William	43	William	43	William	43	William	43
Ann	45	Ann	45	Ann	45	Ann	45
Robert	47	Robert	47	Robert	47	Robert	47
John	49	John	49	John	49	John	49
Mary	51	Mary	51	Mary	51	Mary	51
Thomas	53	Thomas	53	Thomas	53	Thomas	53
Elizabeth	55	Elizabeth	55	Elizabeth	55	Elizabeth	55
William	57	William	57	William	57	William	57
Ann	59	Ann	59	Ann	59	Ann	59
Robert	61	Robert	61	Robert	61	Robert	61
John	63	John	63	John	63	John	63
Mary	65	Mary	65	Mary	65	Mary	65
Thomas	67	Thomas	67	Thomas	67	Thomas	67
Elizabeth	69	Elizabeth	69	Elizabeth	69	Elizabeth	69
William	71	William	71	William	71	William	71
Ann	73	Ann	73	Ann	73	Ann	73
Robert	75	Robert	75	Robert	75	Robert	75
John	77	John	77	John	77	John	77
Mary	79	Mary	79	Mary	79	Mary	79
Thomas	81	Thomas	81	Thomas	81	Thomas	81
Elizabeth	83	Elizabeth	83	Elizabeth	83	Elizabeth	83
William	85	William	85	William	85	William	85
Ann	87	Ann	87	Ann	87	Ann	87
Robert	89	Robert	89	Robert	89	Robert	89
John	91	John	91	John	91	John	91
Mary	93	Mary	93	Mary	93	Mary	93
Thomas	95	Thomas	95	Thomas	95	Thomas	95
Elizabeth	97	Elizabeth	97	Elizabeth	97	Elizabeth	97
William	99	William	99	William	99	William	99
Ann	101	Ann	101	Ann	101	Ann	101

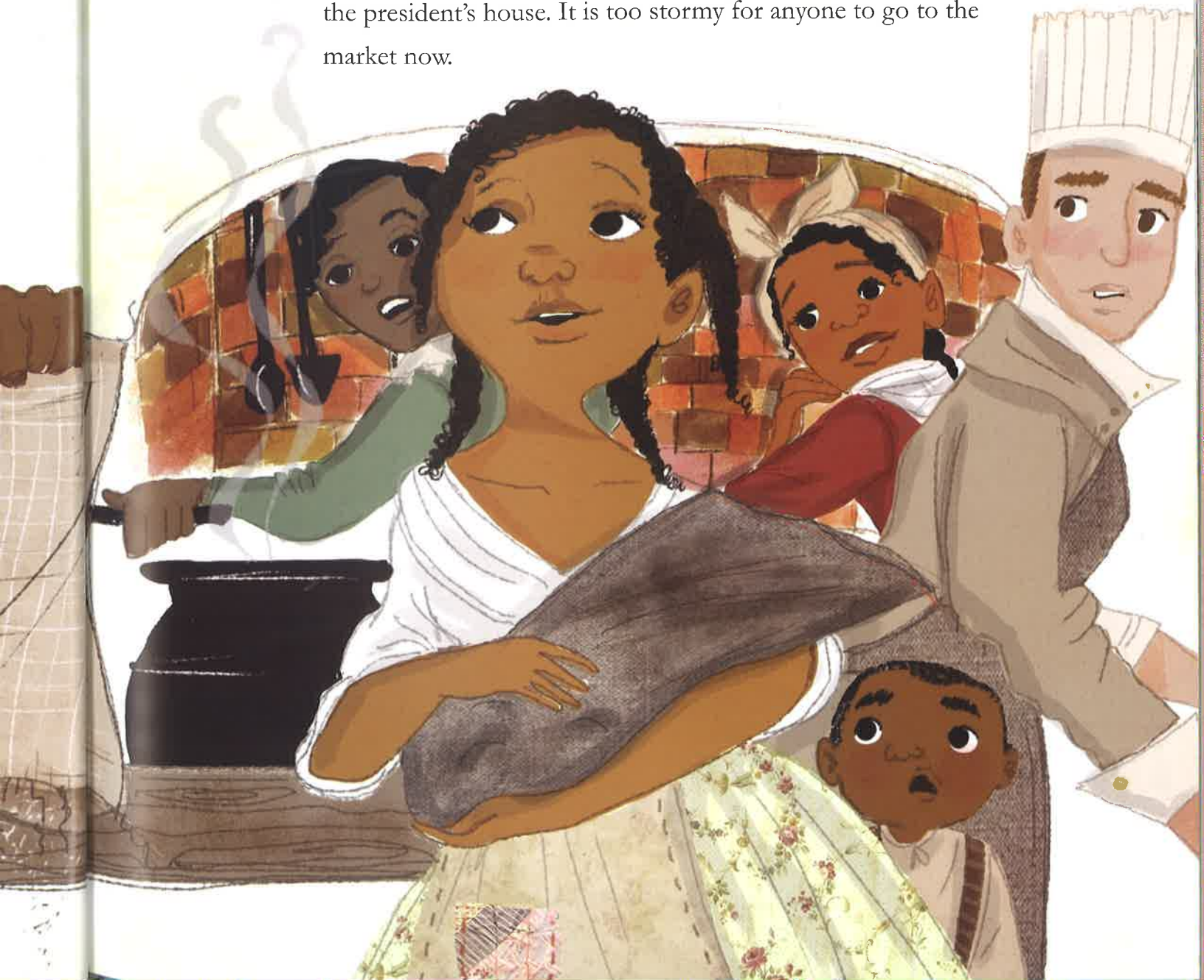


**ALL OVER THE STREETS OF PHILADELPHIA,** folks are talking about celebrating President Washington's birthday. In the kitchen, my papa, Hercules, is baking an amazing cake. But there is one problem: We are out of sugar.

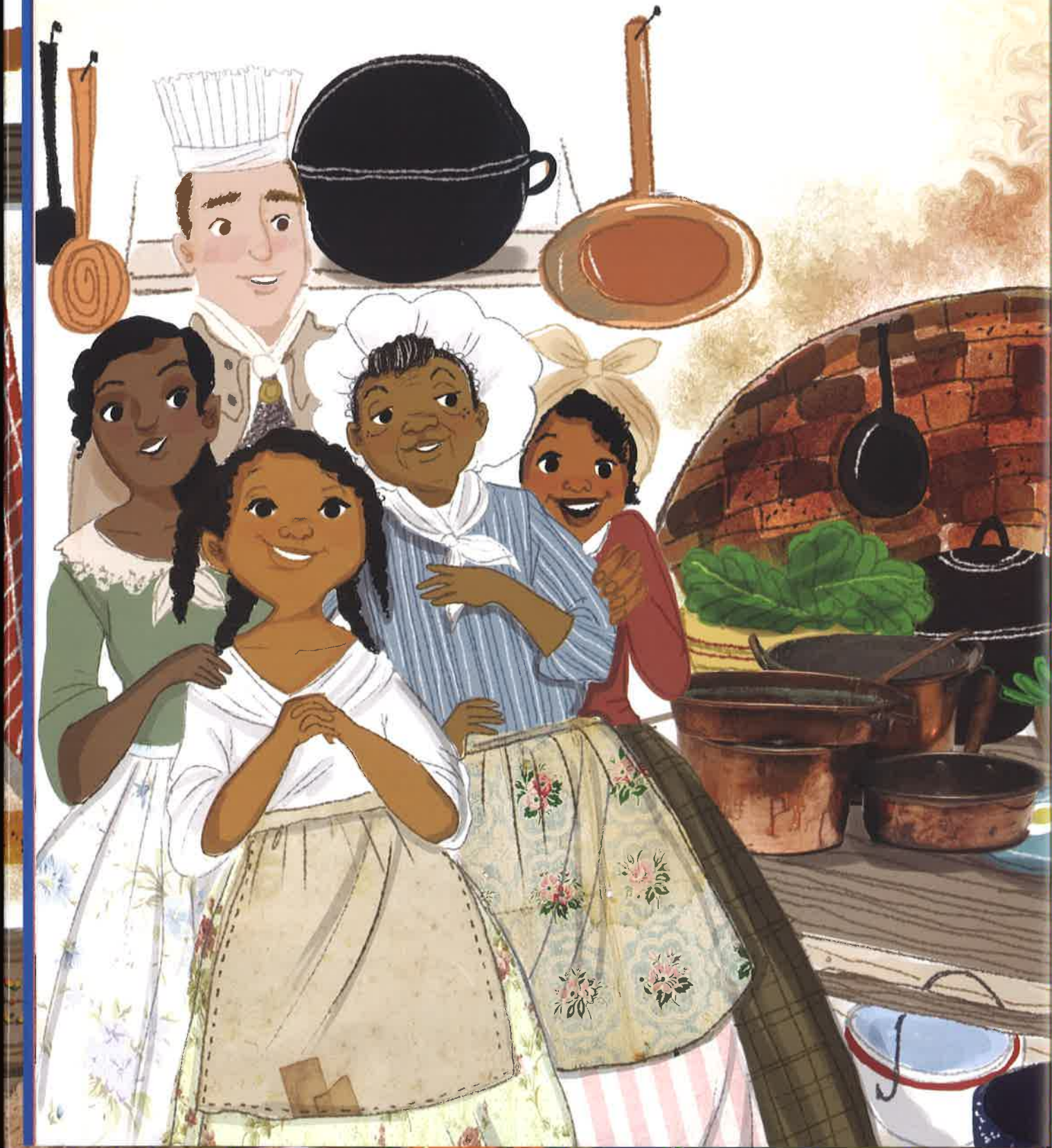


Today, he is very upset. This cake has to be special. President Washington is the most famous person in all of America. Papa is the general of the president's kitchen. He has looked in every cupboard and every crock, but there is no sugar left. Not brown, not white, not cake nor fine.

Papa roared at the kitchen maids—*Where has the sugar gone?!* He growled at Chef Julien, who came all the way from France to work here. How could all the sugar be used up? He scowled at the swirling, whirling snow covering the cobblestoned streets outside the president's house. It is too stormy for anyone to go to the market now.



Only when Mrs. Washington comes into the kitchen does Papa turn his scowl into an easy smile. “Not to worry, Lady Washington,” he says in his voice that is smooth and sweet like molasses. “Leave it all to me.” I quickly glance up.

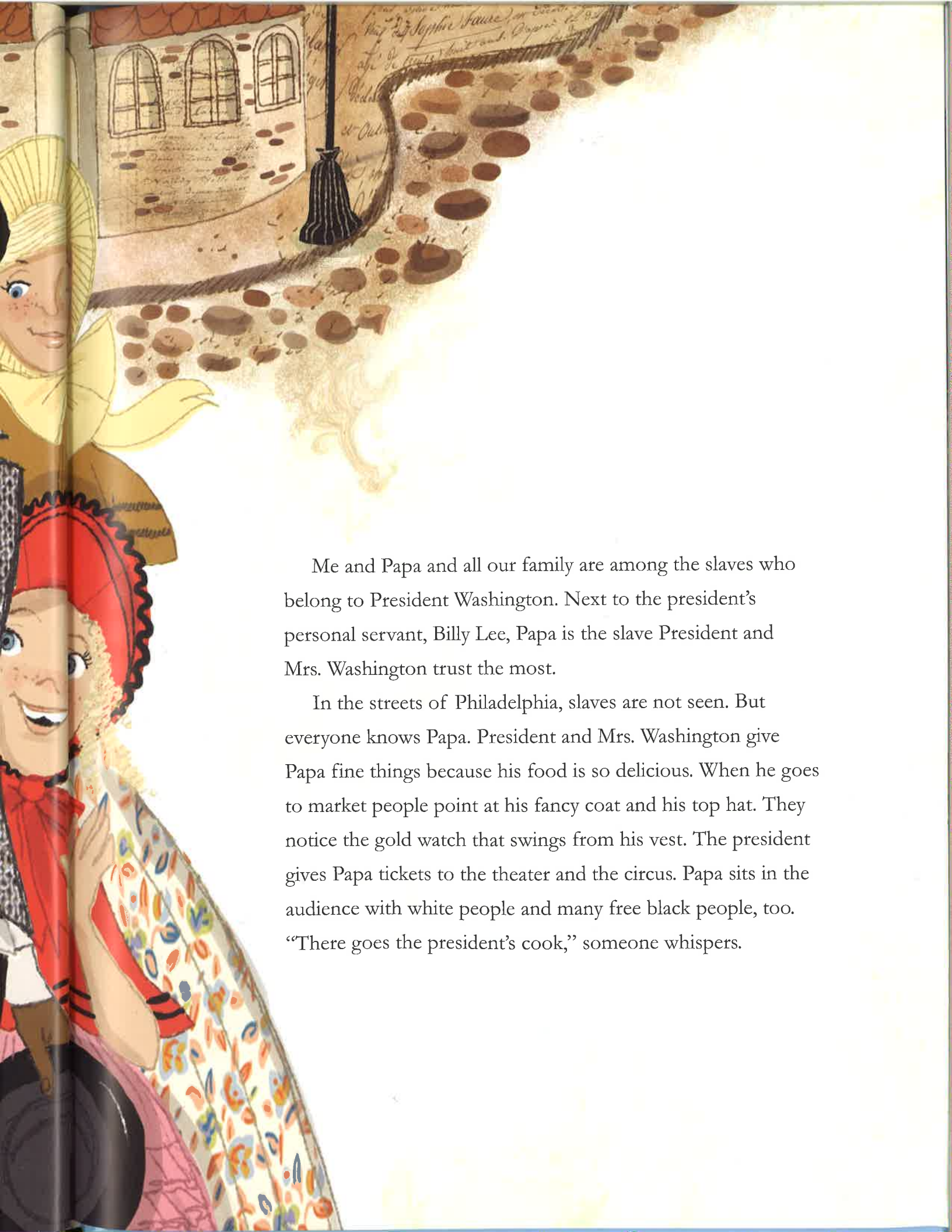


I get a peek at the great lady. When Papa speaks to her, her fluttering hands calm down by her sides. “I will leave it to you, Hercules,” she says with a sigh of relief. Papa bows as she leaves the kitchen.





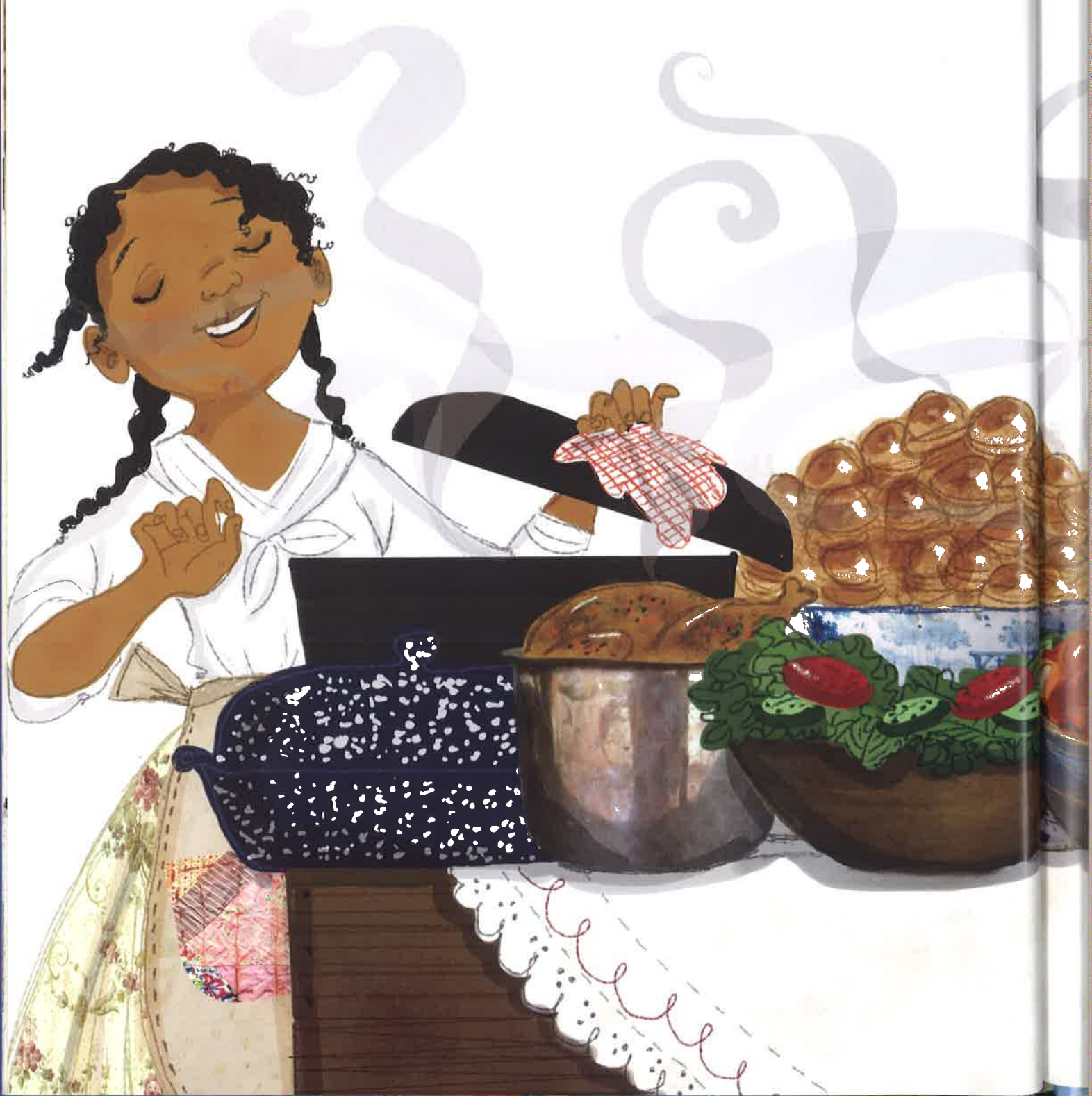




Me and Papa and all our family are among the slaves who belong to President Washington. Next to the president's personal servant, Billy Lee, Papa is the slave President and Mrs. Washington trust the most.

In the streets of Philadelphia, slaves are not seen. But everyone knows Papa. President and Mrs. Washington give Papa fine things because his food is so delicious. When he goes to market people point at his fancy coat and his top hat. They notice the gold watch that swings from his vest. The president gives Papa tickets to the theater and the circus. Papa sits in the audience with white people and many free black people, too. "There goes the president's cook," someone whispers.

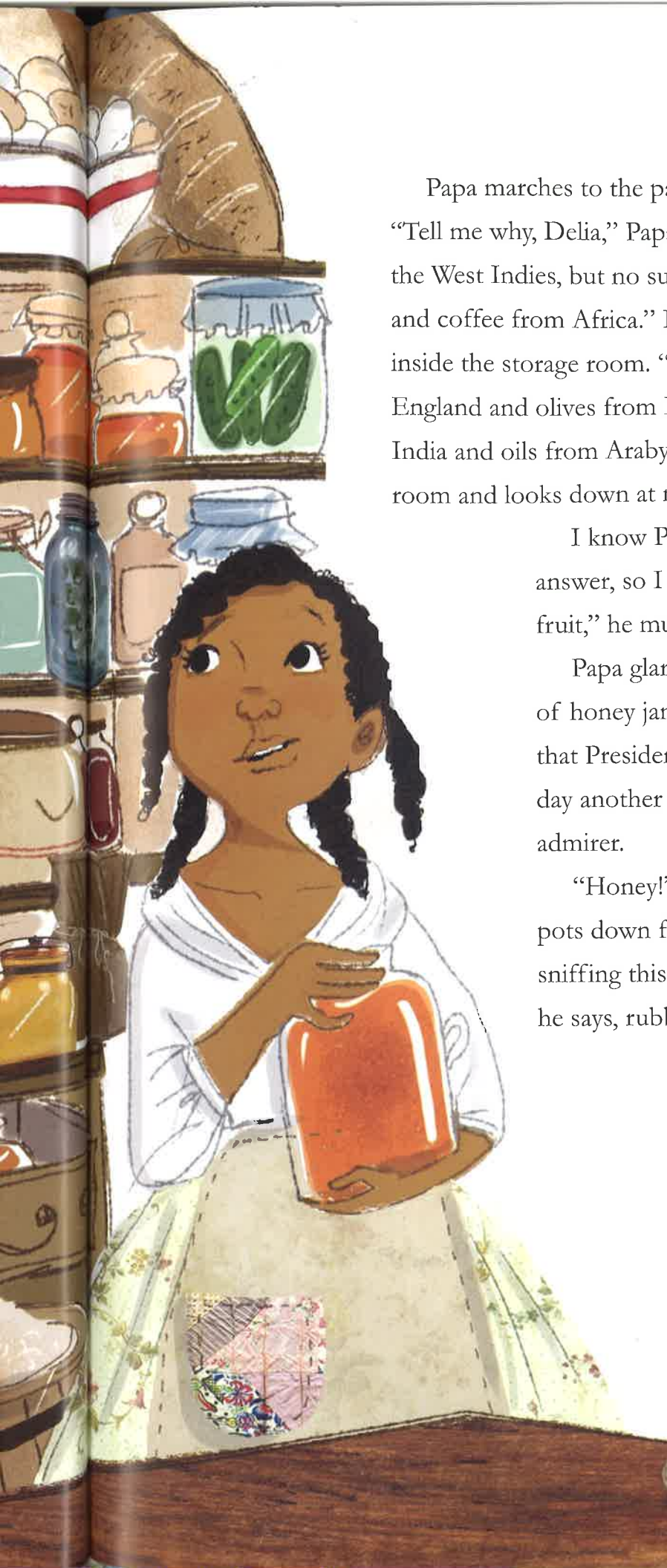
All the important people who come to see President Washington say that Papa's cooking is the best in America. The French ambassador is partial to Papa's chicken fricassee. The senator from Connecticut loves Papa's buttery mashed potatoes.



The wife of the governor of Pennsylvania says Papa's beef stew is the most delicious thing she has ever tasted. The president himself loves fish most of all—any way that Papa makes it. But even Papa cannot make a cake without sugar.







Papa marches to the pantry and flings open the door. “Tell me why, Delia,” Papa says to me. “We have nutmeg from the West Indies, but no sugar. There is chocolate from Mexico and coffee from Africa.” I hear Papa’s voice boom from deep inside the storage room. “Delia! We have cheddar cheese from England and olives from Italy! There are pickled mangoes from India and oils from Araby!” Papa comes out of the storage room and looks down at me. “But there is no sugar.”

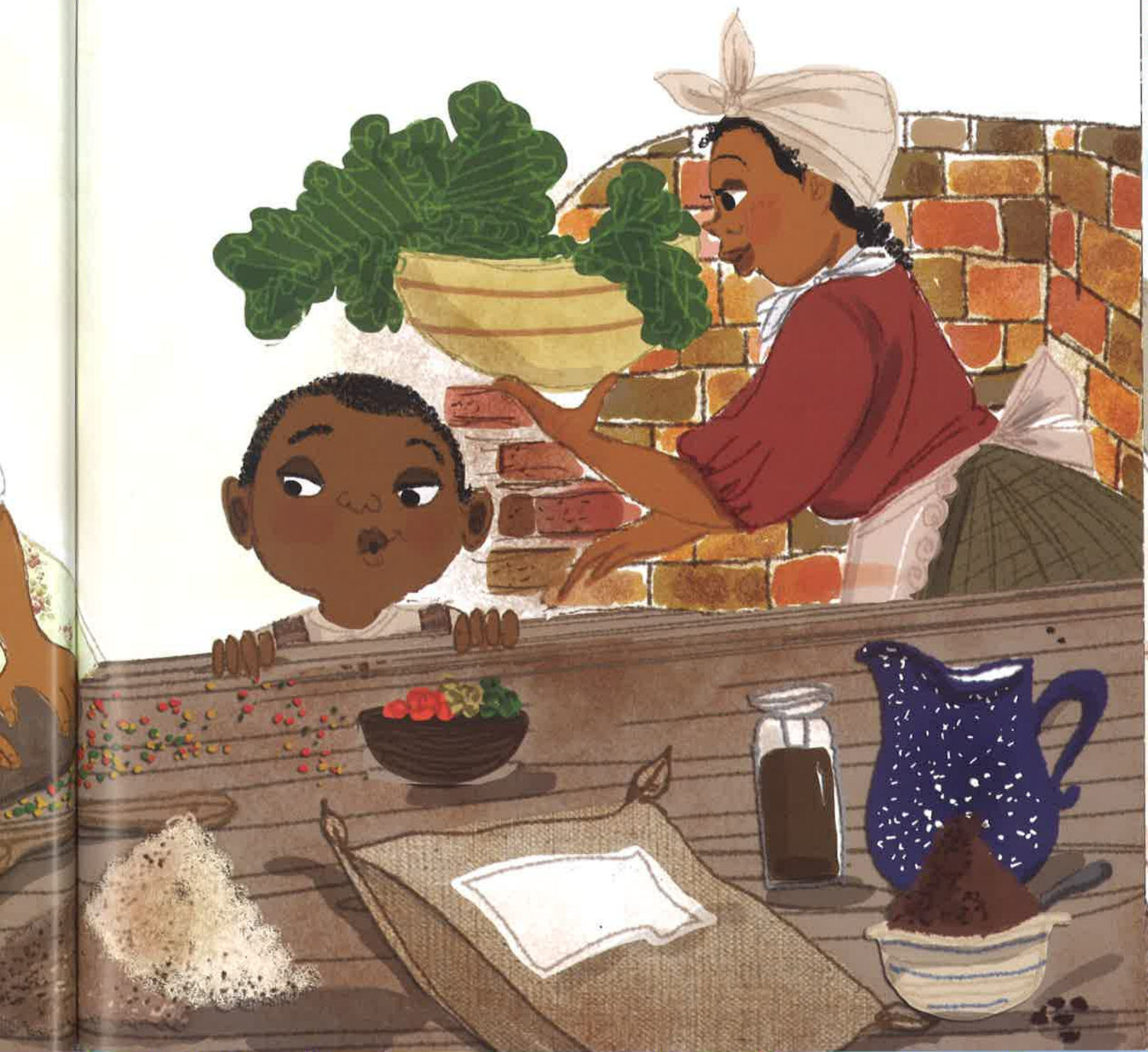
I know Papa does not really expect me to answer, so I do not speak. “Pickles, teas, candied fruit,” he mumbles. “And all this honey.”

Papa glares at the ceramic pots and stone jars of honey jamming the shelves. Everyone knows that President Washington loves honey, and every day another jar is brought to the house by an admirer.

“Honey!” Papa shouts. “That’s it!” He grabs pots down from the shelves and opens their lids, sniffing this one, tasting from another. “Now!” he says, rubbing his hands together. “To work!”



Papa takes out several large bowls and races around the kitchen gathering the ingredients he will need: a half-dozen eggs, fine white flour, cinnamon and nutmeg, dried sugared fruits, a crock of smooth white butter, some salt, and the jugs of honey. Papa hands me the fruits and a large grinding stone. "Grind them until they are fine like powder," he tells me. And I set to work pushing the grinding rock against the stone as if I were grinding corn for our hoecakes at home.





“You! Separate these eggs and whip the whites until they are like clouds,” he says to Monsieur Julien. “And you! Mix the flour and spices together in this bowl with the salt,” he tells one of the scullery maids. Then Papa puts butter into another bowl. He takes up a large fork and begins to whip the butter until it is fluffy and light. He picks up the jug of honey and drizzles it in, whipping all the while.

Papa then calls for the fruits I am grinding. I bring them. “Pour them in, girl,” he says, still whipping the butter. “Bring the flour!” he yells at the kitchen maid.



“Now gently, gently add one spoonful at a time.” She does it, trembling the whole while, and still Papa whips up the batter.

“And now, Julien, the egg yolks.” The chef runs forward with the bowl of egg yolks. “One at a time, now,” says Papa. “Gently.”

“Now the whites!” he says after the yolks have disappeared into the batter. Monsieur Julien runs forward again with the bowl of egg whites.

Papa calls for a cake mold and tells the kitchen maid to smear it with butter and a bit of flour. Papa puts the cake mold into a big iron pot and covers it, then places the whole thing into the beehive oven.



While we are waiting for the cake to bake, Papa whips some more butter and honey to make a frosting. Mrs. Washington pokes her head around the kitchen door. "Hercules?" she says, her eyebrows raised high.

"Ma'am?" answers Papa.

"Is all well?" she asks.

"All is well, Lady Washington."









When it is finally time to take the cake out of the oven, Papa will not allow anyone else to do it.

The kitchen boy slowly pokes his finger forward to touch the cake. Papa slaps his hand hard. "Never," he growls, "touch a risen cake!" We all must wait for the cake to cool. While we do, we scrub the kitchen, peel vegetables, and tend the stews for supper.



Soon it is time to decorate the cake. Papa gently lifts the cake pan and turns it over on a large, round platter. It comes out with a *plop!* It is round and perfect. He takes a flat knife and spreads the frosting on the cake so fast that we almost do not see his



hands move. When it is done, he takes sugared cherries that came last summer from the trees at Mount Vernon and sprinkles them over the top. He puts the cake away in the cool larder until it is time to serve.





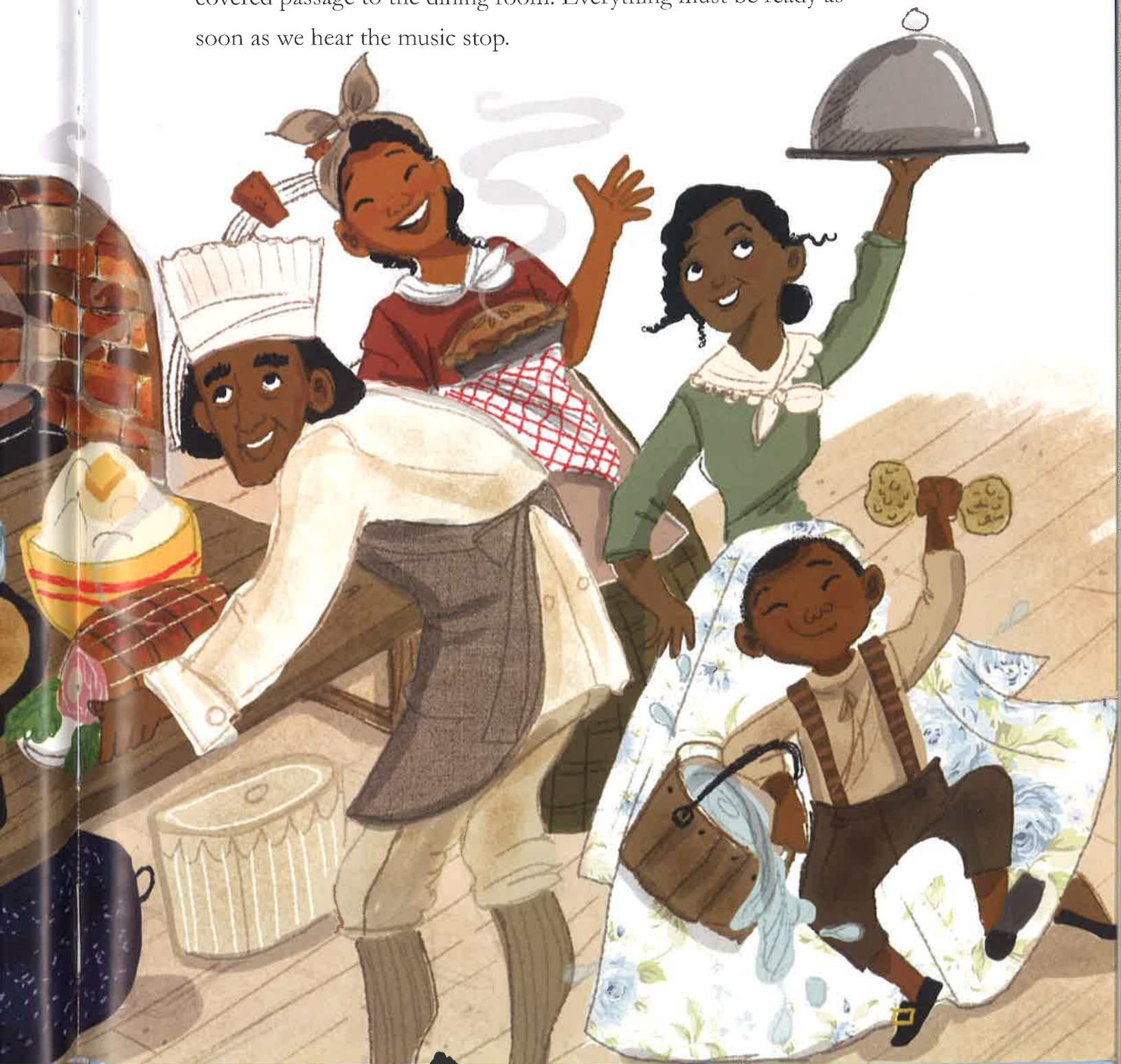


And now we all must move quickly. We hear music upstairs as people begin to arrive. The kitchen buzzes like a hive, and everyone has his or her task. There is the swishing of skirts and aprons as we all move as fast as





we can to get the platters ready for the servers to take through the covered passage to the dining room. Everything must be ready as soon as we hear the music stop.





Papa brings the cake from the larder. We are all quiet waiting for the server to come take it.





No one seems to breathe until the cake platter comes back. There is not a crumb left.

Then we hear a heavier step in the hall. It is slow and even. All at once, filling the doorway, there is President Washington. He has to stoop a little because he is so tall.

“Hercules,” the president says in his soft voice that is like a whisper. My heart is pounding so hard in my ears I can barely hear him. “You are a magician, a master chef. You have outdone yourself again. Good man!”

“An honor and a privilege, sir,” Papa says. “Happy birthday, Mr. President.”



## HERCULES AND PRESIDENT WASHINGTON

We all know George Washington as the “Father of Our Country” and the first president of the United States. In his own lifetime, Washington was the most famous American alive. All over the world he was the face of the new nation, the “hero of the republic.”

Because George Washington was so well loved, his birthday was celebrated by Americans even while he was still leading patriot troops in the War for Independence. By the time Washington became president, Americans were celebrating his birthday with balls, parties, fireworks, and parades.

The president’s cook, Hercules, was also a real person who was famous in his own right. It is true that he was well known throughout Philadelphia for his love of nice clothes and how well respected he was by the Washingtons. He wore a fancy waistcoat and had a gold watch. He also wore a top hat and was generally known for being very fashionable. He insisted on perfection in the kitchen and was known to have a temper with those who did not obey.

George and Martha Washington gave Hercules these gifts because he was such a great chef. Hercules was quite proud of his status in the Washington home, and he lived a life of near-freedom. But as the Founding Fathers knew, being almost free is not the same as being free, and he dreamed of his own liberty.

Hercules is often thought of by culinary historians as the first celebrity chef in America. The cake he makes for the president in this book is based on a cake that was often made in the Washington home: Martha Washington’s Great Cake.

George and Martha Washington owned more than three hundred slaves, who worked both at Mount Vernon—their Virginia home—and at the President’s House in Philadelphia. While Hercules did have a daughter named Delia, who would have been roughly twelve years old at the time of this story, around 1796, she does not seem to have ever worked at the President’s House in Philadelphia. However, Hercules’s son, Richmond, who was a teenager, did work as a “scullion,” or kitchen servant, with his father. This was a favor that President Washington granted to Hercules because of his esteem for the cook—not because, according to the president, Richmond seemed particularly good for the job.

Whether or not slavery was wrong was a question that Washington could not easily answer for himself. He needed slave labor to run his plantation—the source of his income and rich lifestyle. But as the years went on, he began to see more and more that it was evil to keep fellow human beings in bondage, and he became more and more lenient with his slaves. Eventually, he granted freedom to his slaves in his will.

Still, while they lived in Philadelphia, both President and Mrs. Washington were very worried about their slaves taking advantage of a Pennsylvania law that gave slaves their freedom if they remained in the state for longer than six months. The Washingtons often took their slaves—including Hercules—with them on trips out of the state to “reset” their time in Pennsylvania—keeping them enslaved.

At the end of 1796, Hercules and Richmond were sent back to Mount Vernon after Richmond was caught stealing money from a white servant. Washington assumed that the money was being stolen in order to help Richmond and Hercules escape. The president sent father and son back to Mount Vernon for “safekeeping.”

A few months later, Hercules did escape from Mount Vernon—in the early morning hours of February 22, 1797. It was President Washington’s sixty-fifth birthday. Delia, the narrator of this book, remained enslaved even after President Washington died, because she was owned by Martha Washington, who did not free her slaves. We do not know of her fate in the years following, but as of the death of Martha Washington in 1802, Delia and her siblings remained enslaved. —RAMIN GANESHARAM

# MARTHA WASHINGTON'S Great Cake

~ RECIPE ADAPTED FROM MARTHA WASHINGTON'S BOOK OF COOKERY ~

*Hercules based his cake for President Washington on this recipe. The original was part of a recipe kept by Martha Washington in a family cookbook she inherited from her first husband's mother. Many of the recipes in the book were even written in Mrs. Washington's own handwriting. Years later, her granddaughter Eleanor "Nelly" Parke Custis wrote that this cake was a family favorite—which is why we know it was very likely often eaten by President Washington himself.*

## ~ FOR THE FRUITS

- 1 ½ cups golden raisins
- 1 cup currants
- 1 cup water
- 4 ounces candied orange peel
- 4 ounces candied lemon peel
- 4 ounces candied citron
- 3 ½ ounces candied red and/or green cherries
- ½ cup brandy or apple juice

## ~ FOR THE CAKE

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 5 eggs, separated
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 2 ¼ cups sifted unbleached flour
- ½ teaspoon ground mace
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- powdered sugar, as needed
- candied or sugared cherries for garnish, optional
- cheesecloth to wrap cake completely if storing
- sherry as needed, about ½ cup

## ~ PREPARATION

1. Soak the raisins and currants overnight in brandy or water in a small bowl. Combine the orange peel, lemon peel, citron, and cherries in a medium-size bowl; sprinkle with brandy or apple juice, and marinate overnight.
2. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Beat the butter, three-quarters of a cup of the sugar, the egg yolks, and lemon juice at high speed with an electric mixer until the mixture is light and fluffy, about five minutes.
3. Sift the flour, mace, and nutmeg into a medium bowl. Stir into the batter, blending well.
4. Drain the raisins and currants. Add them to the batter with the candied fruits, and mix well.
5. Beat the egg whites until they are foamy. Beat in the remaining one-quarter cup of sugar slowly until stiff peaks form. Fold into the batter.
6. Grease a large Bundt pan. Spoon the batter into the pan. Place a large pan filled halfway with boiling water on the lowest oven rack. Place the cake on the middle oven rack.
7. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes; reduce heat to 325 degrees and bake 55 minutes longer or until the cake springs back when lightly touched and a cake tester inserted into the middle of the cake comes out clean. Cool the cake on a wire rack for 15 minutes. Remove from pan and allow to cool completely.
8. Dust the top of the cake with powdered sugar, and garnish with candied cherries, if desired.
9. To store the cake: Wrap the cooled cake in sherry- or brandy-soaked cheesecloth. Place in a tightly covered container or wrap in heavy-duty aluminum foil. Check the cheesecloth occasionally. If it dries out, add more sherry or brandy. (For a nonalcoholic version, soak the cheesecloth in apple juice before wrapping the cake. If the cheesecloth dries out, add more apple juice.)



## ARTIST'S NOTE

I've always been fascinated with history, especially as it relates to people of color and their contributions to the lives of American leaders. As an artist, I enjoy mixing media to tell a story. In the case of *A Birthday Cake for George Washington*, I conducted research on the clothing, furniture, and kitchen items of the time period. While my illustrations reflect this research in the setting, I deliberately chose to render certain aspects of Delia and Hercules's world with a mix of historical artifacts and modern references. To engage young readers, some items—bowls, pitchers, jars, pots—are depicted through the use of contemporary photographic images placed among my historically themed drawings. This was intentional, to serve as a means for making the setting come alive for today's children. As for the food depictions, these were also researched. Leafy greens would not have been in abundant supply in the colder months, but they were among the crop selections during that time period. While slavery in America was a vast injustice, my research indicates that Hercules and the other servants in George Washington's kitchen took great pride in their ability to cook for a man of such stature. That is why I have depicted them as happy people. There is joy in what they have created through their intelligence and culinary talent. —VANESSA BRANTLEY-NEWTON

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a good deal of thanks to the many folks who cheered this book on from the time it was merely a germ of an idea. First on that list is my editor, Andrea Pinkney, who has the magic gifts of a creative mind married to clarity of vision—thank you. No amount of thanks is too great for Anna Coxey “Coxey” Toogood, one of the National Park Service historians at Philadelphia's Independence National Historical Park, which includes the site of the President's House, where this book is set. Ms. Toogood is a passionate champion of Hercules and the enslaved African Americans who lived in the President's House. Thank you, Coxey, for helping me get part of their story told with your willingness to answer my constant questions and by helping me with the considerable archives that the NPS has to offer. Thanks, as well, to culinary historian Mary Thompson at George Washington's Mount Vernon, who has always been enthusiastic and helpful in every way. Most of all, thanks to my husband, Jean-Paul Vellotti, and our daughter, Sophia, who have allowed Hercules into their hearts as much as I have and have rooted for him every day since. —RAMIN GANESHARAM

*For William and Zachary, and for Sophie Lollie — always. — R.G.*

*For Mama Shirley and my sister, Coy.*

*When sugar is not available, use honey instead. — V.B.-N.*

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# Happy Birthday, MR. PRESIDENT!



## Everyone's buzzing about the president's birthday!

Especially George Washington's servants, who scurry around the kitchen preparing to make this the best celebration ever. Oh, how George Washington loves his cake! And, oh, how he depends on Hercules, his head chef, to make it for him. Hercules, a slave, takes great pride in baking the president's cake. But this year there is one problem—they're out of sugar.

This story, told in the voice of Delia, Hercules's young daughter, underscores the loving exchange between a very determined father and his eager daughter, who are faced with an unspoken, bittersweet reality. No matter how delicious the president's cake turns out to be, Delia and Papa don't have the sweetness of freedom.

Award-winning journalist Ramin Ganeshram and acclaimed illustrator Vanessa Brantley-Newton serve up a slice of history that will surely satisfy. A cake recipe adds to the sweetness of this very special book.



**RAMIN GANESHARAM** is a veteran journalist who has written for many prestigious publications, such as the *New York Times*, *Newsday*, *National Geographic Traveler*, and *Saveur*, among others. She is also the author of *Stir It Up: A Novel*; *Sweet Hands: Island Cooking from Trinidad and Tobago*; and *FutureChefs: Recipes by Tomorrow's Cooks Across the Nation and the World*, which won a Cookbook Award from the International Association of Culinary Professionals. Additionally, Ramin is a food writer and professional chef, and holds a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. To write this book, she conducted extensive research on the history of George Washington's chef and cake. She lives in Westport, Connecticut.

**VANESSA BRANTLEY-NEWTON** trained at the Fashion Institute of Technology and the School of Visual Arts. She has illustrated many books for children, including *We Shall Overcome: The Story of a Song*, a Jane Addams Children's Book Award Honor Book; *Mister and Lady Day*; *One Love*; and *Let Freedom Sing*. She and her husband live in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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