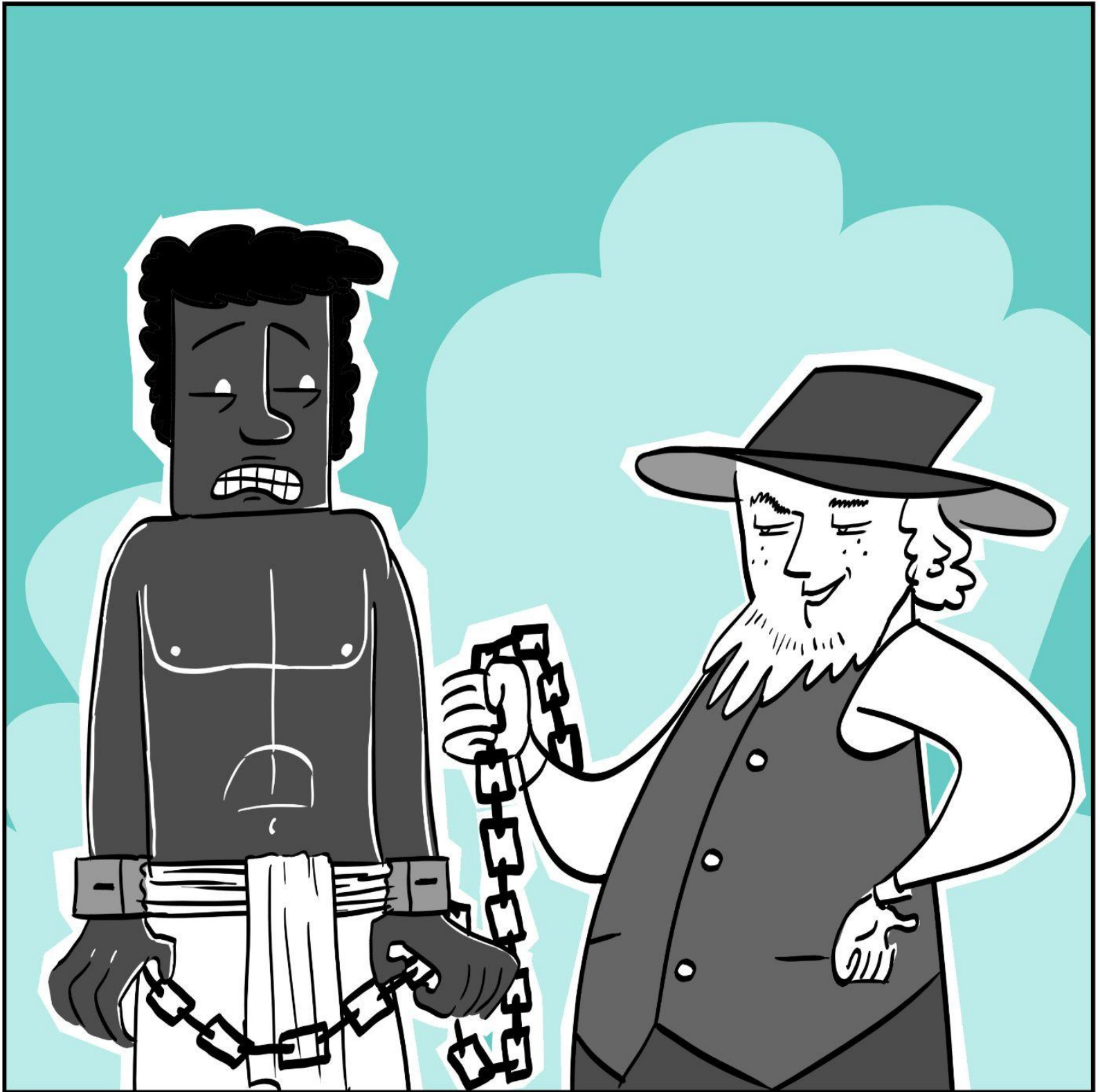


# THE FIRST SLAVE IN AMERICA: JOHN PUNCH 1605-1650



written & illustrated by desire grover

**JOHN PUNCH WAS AN AFRICAN MAN WHO WOULD EXPERIENCE THE MOST UNFORTUNATE SERIES OF EVENTS WHILE ENSLAVED IN THE COLONY OF VIRGINIA. HE ARRIVED AT THE SOUTHERN COLONY AROUND 1630 AS AN INDENTURED SERVANT.**





PUNCH'S STATUS AS AN **INDENTURED SERVANT** IS UNSURPRISING. BEFORE HIS CASE, THE BRITISH COLONIES HAD NOT MADE OWNING ANOTHER HUMAN BEING AS PROPERTY **OFFICIAL LAW**. PUNCH WOULD BECOME A SERVANT OF **HUGH GYWN**, A **WEALTHY LANDOWNER AND PUBLIC OFFICIAL**.



HE WAS CONTRACTED TO SERVE **MASTER GYWN** FOR AT LEAST **SEVEN** YEARS. INDENTURED SERVANTS WERE OFTEN PROMISED "**FREEDOM DUES**" AFTER COMPLETING THEIR SERVITUDE. FREEDOM DUES INCLUDED RECEIVING MONEY, LAND, LIVESTOCK OR TOOLS TO CULTIVATE THEIR OWN STAKE IN THE COLONIES.

YOU'RE NOT A CHRISTIAN SO I DOUBT THESE FREEDOM DUES EVEN APPLY TO YOU BUT WE'LL SEE HOW IT SHAKES OUT.

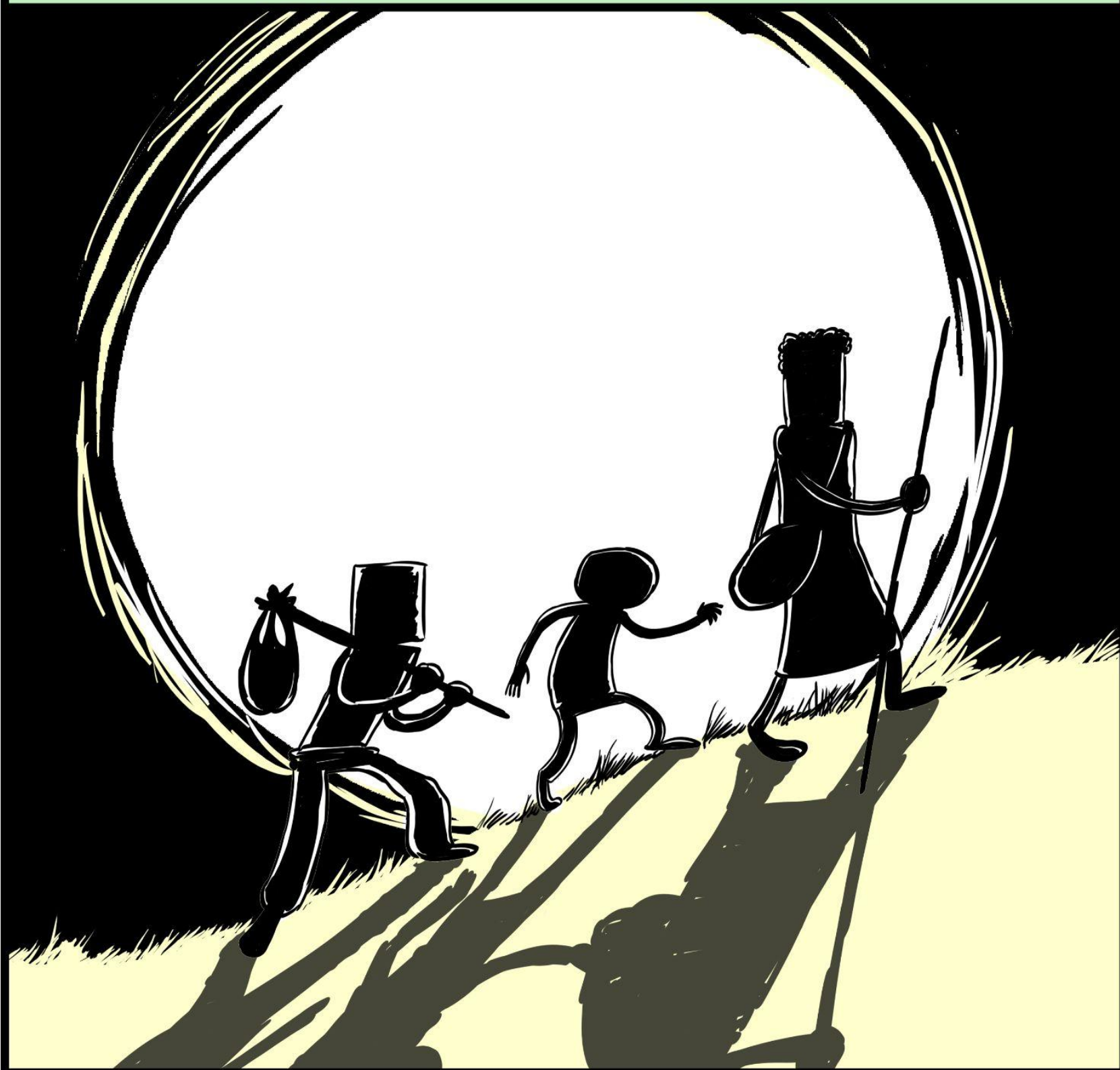




**PUNCH WORKED ALONGSIDE TWO OTHER INDENTURED SERVANTS,  
A SCOTCHMAN NAMED JAMES AND A DUTCHMAN NAMED VICTOR.**



IT'S NOT CLEAR WHY BUT THE THREE MEN WOULD RUN AWAY  
TOGETHER TO ESCAPE THEIR SERVITUDE UNDER GWYN.

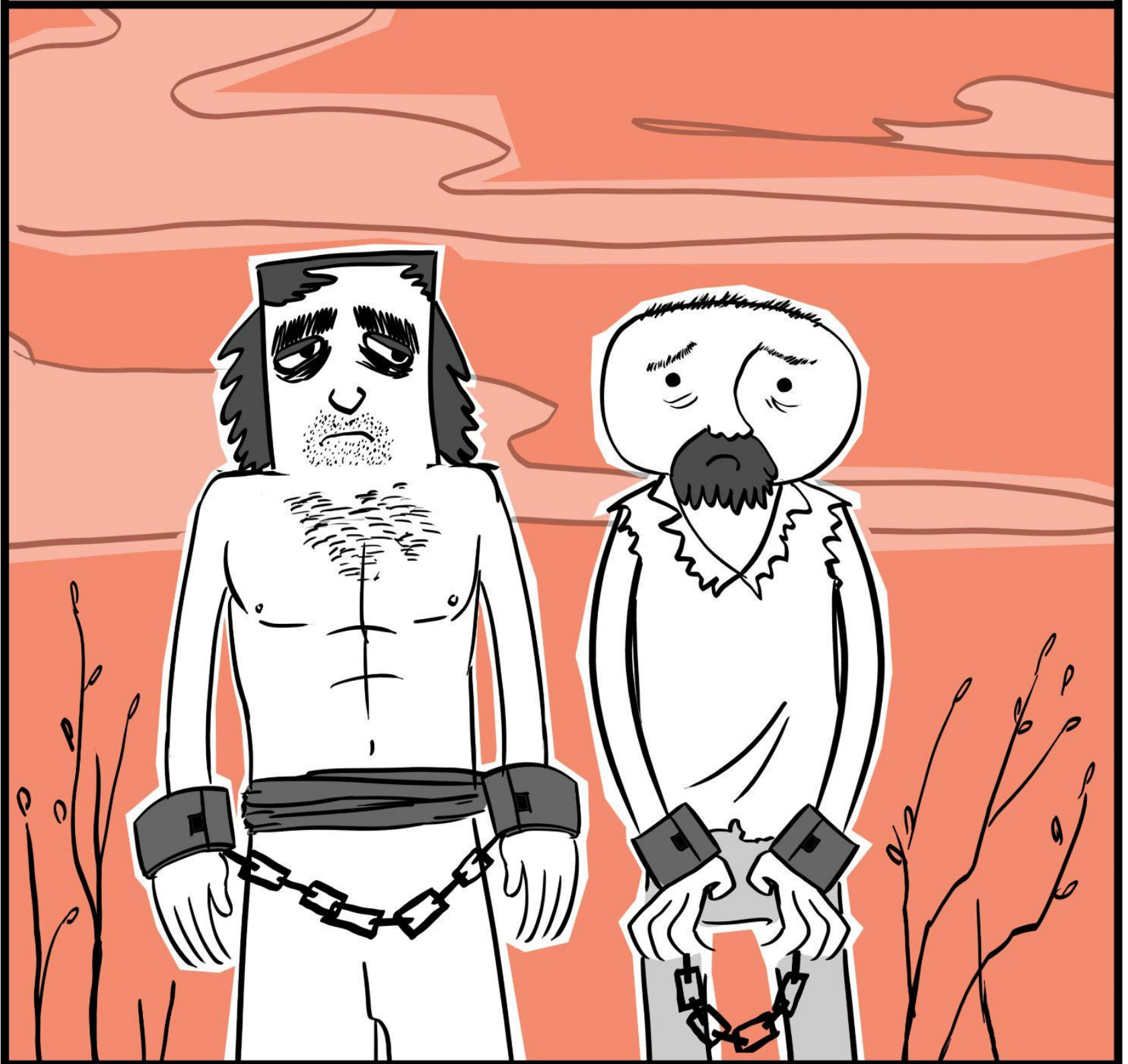




THEY HID IN **MARYLAND** BUT WERE CAUGHT AND BROUGHT BACK TO **VIRGINIA** TO FACE TRIAL FOR BREAKING THEIR CONTRACTED SERVITUDE. ON **JULY 9, 1640**, THE GENERAL COURT RULED AGAINST THEM. THEY WERE ALL **WHIPPED AND GIVEN THIRTY LASHES**.



**VICTOR AND JAMES** WERE SENTENCED TO COMPLETE THEIR LABOR CONTRACT UNDER MASTER GWYN WITH AN **ADDED FOUR YEARS** TO THEIR SERVICE...

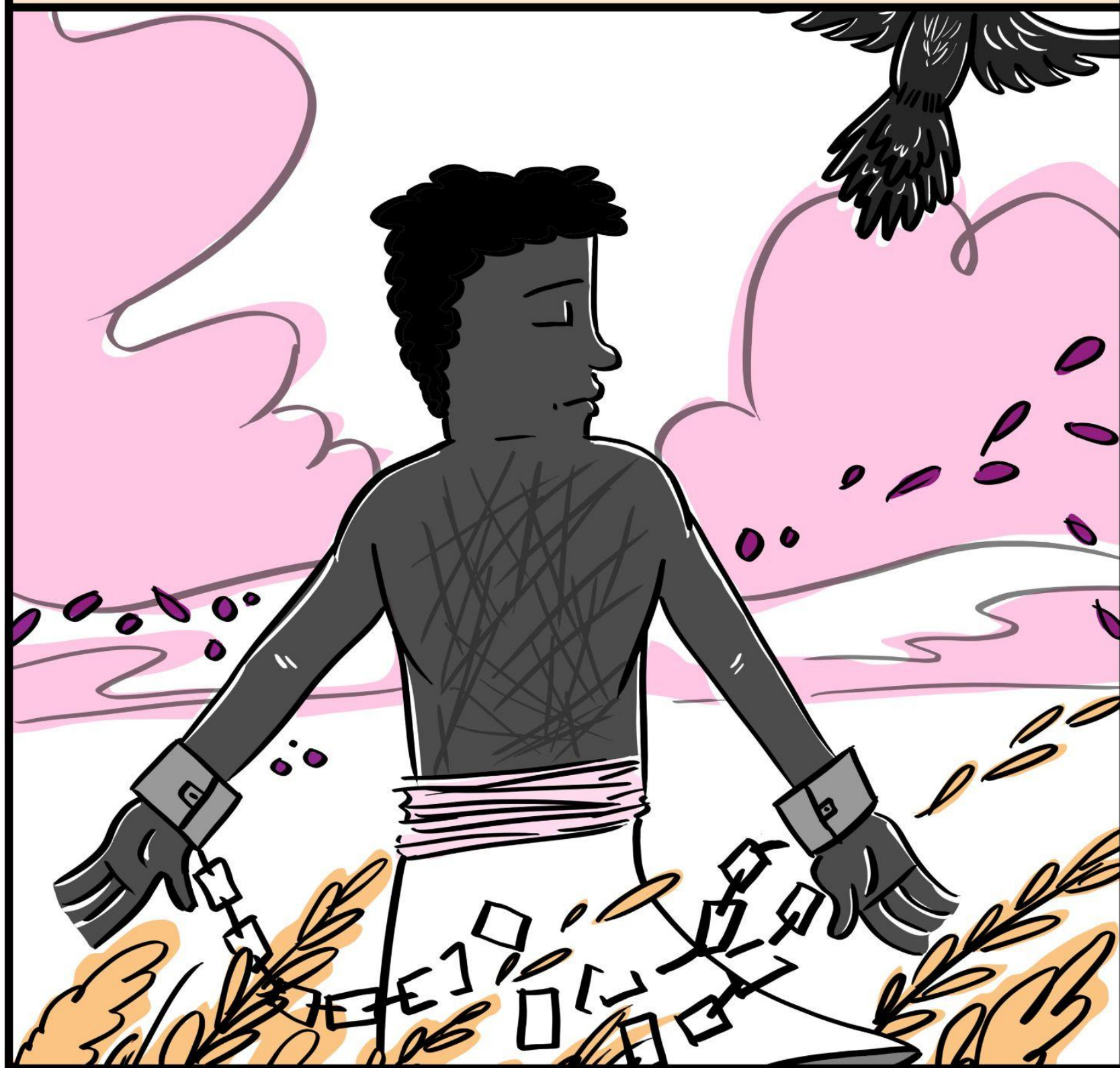




...BUT PUNCH "BEING A NEGRO" WAS SENTENCED TO "SERVE HIS SAID MASTER OR HIS ASSIGNS FOR THE TIME OF HIS NATURAL LIFE HERE OR ELSEWHERE." MEANING, HE WAS TO SERVE MASTER GYWN FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE.



PUNCH'S SENTENCE IS THE **FIRST DOCUMENTED CASE** OF OUTRIGHT PERPETUAL **ENSLAVEMENT IN VIRGINIA**. HIS CASE WOULD BECOME THE FOUNDATION FOR CHATTEL **ENSLAVEMENT OF "NEGROS"** AMONG THE **THIRTEEN COLONIES**. HE DIED TEN YEARS LATER AT THE APPROXIMATE AGE OF 45.





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