

The Freedom Business: Including A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa

Marilyn Nelson

Marilyn Nelson art by Deborah Dancy

Deborah Dancy, Illustrator

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The Freedom Business (Wordsong, 978-1-932425-57-4) is a cross of forms encompassing an original narrative transcribed from a 1798 manuscript by the one-time slave Venture Smith, poems from Newberry Honor author Marilyn Nelson, and art by Deborah Dancy. Smith was born the son of West African royalty; once in bondage he was determined to work his way free. Through industry, thrift, sharp thinking, and good luck, Smith secured his own liberty, then his entire family's. The next step was to pay off the masters of other slaves in hopes of gaining motivated labor for his burgeoning enterprises. Smith died with an impressive inventory of property, but dismayed at how few of those he freed showed meaningful loyalty.

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