



Freedom Dues

Indra Zuno

Spinning a Yarn Press (Jan 31, 2020)

Softcover \$15.99 (438pp)

978-1-73416-521-0

Enlivened by captivating historical details, Freedom Dues is a riveting coming-of-age love story.

Steeped in thorough research, Indra Zuno's historical novel *Freedom Dues* concentrates on indentured servants in eighteenth-century America.

In Ireland, fifteen-year-old Blair is given a chance to move to the New World, but he must be a servant in Pennsylvania for four years to pay off the cost of his ocean crossing. Once those four years are up, he is told that will be free to live as he pleases in a land of opportunity, where he hopes to find work and a wife whom he loves.

In London, a ten-year-old orphan, Mallie, is caught pickpocketing. She is sentenced to eight years as a servant in Maryland as punishment for her crime, narrowly avoiding death for the first, but not the last, time. Both Blair and Mallie arrive in America exhausted and battered, having witnessed illness and death aboard their ships and anticipating more stress in the years ahead. Over the coming years, they suffer long days of chores, whippings, and brutal schemes from their masters. Then, their paths cross, they fall in love, and they determine a way to escape their indentured servitude.

Mallie is a meek but strong-willed; she tries to keep her head down, knowing that the only way out is by going through. When she falls pregnant at the hands of her master, the heartbreaking results strengthen her resolve, even though she loses her trust in others. Blair is more optimistic and outgoing, and always keeps his eyes on the prize of freedom. He risks playing fiddle at parties across the city, knowing that if he is caught, every penny he earns will go straight to his master.

Mallie and Blair's stories are told in parallel for much of the book until they meet and a traumatic event forces them to flee. A tribe of Native Americans, whose villages and interactions with European leaders are authentically detailed, aids them in their escape. Blair, Mallie, and the other servants perform a variety of tasks for the wealthy men they serve, including cooking, cleaning, shoemaking, and weaving, resulting in a comprehensive view of servants' life during the period. Colloquial speech patterns help to round out the sharp text.

Mallie and Blair endure many tragedies; instead of destroying them, these incidents are catalysts for them to develop strength. The experiences of other servants whom Mallie and Blair befriend widen the book's scope, tying hard realities—deaths from contagious illnesses, forced family separations, and racial disparities—to their story of endurance and love.

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AIMEE JODOIN (April 29, 2020)

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