

Phoebe's Heron

Winnie Anderson

Crispin Books (Feb 5, 2018)

Softcover \$16.95 (224pp)

978-1-883953-91-1

This is a sensitive and thoughtful juvenile historical novel that emphasizes the importance of kindness.

Winnie Anderson's first novel is an engaging and informative story about a young girl's summer of change. Loosely based on Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron," the novel follows twelve-year-old Phoebe as she moves from bustling turn-of-the-century Denver to a remote Colorado cabin where her mother, who is suffering from tuberculosis, hopes to recover.

At first, Phoebe misses the bustle of the city, and especially misses her lively friend Lisbeth, with whom she had secretly been teaching a millinery shop parrot cuss words. As her tale unfolds, however, Phoebe's views alter—when it comes to her friend, her hometown, and the people and values she holds most dear. A new friend and the outdoor experiences they share change her forever, and the transformation is neatly expressed in Lisbeth and Phoebe's letters.

The historic setting is well evoked, thanks to period lingo—"full of ginger," "for crummy's sake"—and descriptions of clothing, meals, holiday celebrations, and the dusty cow town of Denver in the midst of its booming growth, when trolleys, wagons, and cowboys on horseback in pursuit of escaped cattle tangled in the crowded streets. Nice imagery brings the mountaintop cabin to life, too, as with the "trickle-whisper" of the nearby spring.

Phoebe has a diverse group of mentors: her parents, her mother's nurse Daisy, a Denver fortune-teller, an Audubon Society member, and a young bird-plume hunter. They give her much to mull over as she decides how to tackle various problems. Some mentors are quite eloquent in their advice: "Daisy says the fear that is in all of us is just courage turned inside out."

Phoebe's Heron not only sheds light on the early conservation movement and the tuberculosis epidemic but explores how adolescents develop their own identities and perspectives on issues. It emphasizes the importance of treating people fairly and kindly and of staying true to one's values, even when it creates issues with family and friends. This is a sensitive and thoughtful juvenile historical novel that incorporates many themes in a delightful package.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (Children's SIP 2017)

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