



The Second Escape of Arthur Cooper

Cynthia Stowe

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Slave catchers have been spotted in New Bedford!

In 1822 the community of Nantucket, Massachusetts, rallies around Arthur Cooper, a former slave. Told from the voice of ten-year-old Phebe Folger, the true tale of Arthur's second escape unfolds in this fictional account.

A curious young girl, Phebe prefers the company of Mary, the freeborn wife of Arthur, to school. Mary works for the Folger family, doing what the injured mother, Katherine, can't do. As she gets to know Mary and her family, Phebe is intrigued by Arthur's first escape from slavery as a nineteen-year-old. As a Quaker, Phebe can't believe that God would let slave catchers come to Nantucket to catch Arthur and return him to his former owner. She feels angry, but knows the feelings are wrong and go against Quaker beliefs. She is very relieved when one of the Elders speaks in Meeting, admitting feelings of anger and vengeance, too!

When the slave catchers finally arrive in Nantucket, Phebe is able to help the Cooper family, first by hiding Mary in the Folger home, and then by taking a message to the Elders who help reunite the separated family in their safe hiding place. Although the slave catchers finally leave, Mary remains jumpy. They do return, however, this time with the sheriff and an arrest warrant for Arthur and his entire family. Even though it is the middle of the night, Phebe goes with her father to join the Quakers who unite to protest and prevent the arrest of the Coopers. Phebe realizes that the only way to get the Coopers out of their house without harm is through the back, and the slave catchers are finally lured to the front of the house when the arrest warrant is questioned. Finally the family, with Phebe's help, is taken to a safe place.

Stowe gives readers a glimpse of life in a Quaker household, including the plain language of "thee" and "thy." Quaker values of equality and respect for all others are clearly shown. Phebe is portrayed as a young girl who struggles to be good while asking for forgiveness for the lies she tells in the interest of saving the Coopers. Mary becomes a valued member of the Folger household, especially after she begins helping Katherine recover from her accident. While this is a short novel, it is hard to put down. Appealing characters are combined with a true story, and readers interested in the time period, Quakers, or issues of slavery should enjoy this book.

TRACY FITZWATER (September / October 2000)

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