



Hang a Thousand Trees with Ribbons: The Story of Phyllis Wheatley

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New to Choice:

off

Media type:

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Phyllis Wheatley was the first black American poetess, born free in Africa and captured and sold to the Wheatley family in Boston who treated her almost as a daughter, especially once her particular talent was discovered. Of the two Wheatley children it was Nathaniel who took her under his wing and taught her to read and write and continued to educate her. Phyllis did work as a slave so found herself between two cultures and her growing love for Nathaniel made her position increasingly difficult and caused problems with the other slaves and his sister, Mary. Phyllis actually had to prove to the leading lights of Boston that she had written her poems and not somebody else.

She travelled to London with Nathaniel but returned in disgrace to find her mistress dying and the house in disarray. With the onset of the War of Independence and subsequent marriage, her early promise was not fulfilled and she came to a sad end.

In Ann Rinaldi's skilled hands this tragic story becomes alive for the reader. Philanthropic though the Wheatleys were, in the end Phyllis was their servant even when she was given her freedom, and the injustice and iniquity of slavery is clear to all. Phyllis was given a new life by the family and her poems are available today, but her experience first as a captive torn from her homeland and family, and then her position as 'Mrs Wheatley's nigra girl who writes poetry?', makes for uncomfortable but compelling reading.

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