

A New Dawn Rising

Patricia Marie Budd

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Reviewed by April Sullivan for Reader Views (11/06)

There are many novels out there about slavery and life in the southern United States in the early 1800s. So I wasn't expecting anything great or spectacular out of this book. But "A New Dawn Rising" was a pleasant surprise. It took a new twist on the slavery issue that really made me think.

Slavery has always been about skin color. Those people with dark skin were treated differently based on it. What if a white man was born into circumstances that made him a slave? How will the others around him treat him? Will it be based on the term "slave" or on his skin color?

In "A New Dawn Rising" John Connolley is born as a slave to Mister Jacob Barlow. He is white. He is treated like a son by his master until the fateful day of his fourteenth birthday when Mr. Barlow reacts to a bad situation by treating him like a slave. In order to maintain respect as a slave-owner, he must follow his own rules when one of his slaves disobeys. And by doing so he loses the love of a young man who will never forget his station in life again.

When John is almost thirty years old he has a chance to work toward buying his freedom and owning his own land. Under the watchful eye of his master, he goes out into the world under the guise of a free man. John's strange ways and refusal to own slaves are confusing to the townspeople, and keeping his secret is harder than it seems. On top of that Mr. Barlow is asking John to forgive him, while still treating him like a slave.

Patricia Marie Budd has done her research for this book. She has the demeanor and voicing of the characters of this time period down to perfection. She even goes into great detail on fashionable dress of the period in one section of the book. The characters are well developed with the good guys likeable and the bad guys despicable.

I would recommend "A New Dawn Rising" to anyone who likes a good read that really makes you think. The topic of slavery is not a light one. The book has its intense moments. It can also be funny and romantic and carries you away into a time and place of a not to long ago America. This book is rich in context about slavery, relationships, social mores, and above all forgiveness. Patricia Marie Budd unfolds the chapters in a way that keeps you hanging on by a thread and holding in your breath.