



# The Ever-After Bird

*Ann Rinaldi*

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## **The Ever-After Bird** Ann Rinaldi

Now that her father is dead, CeCe McGill is left to wonder why he risked his life for the ragged slaves who came to their door in the dead of night. When her uncle, an ornithologist, insists she accompany him to Georgia on an expedition in search of the rare scarlet ibis, CeCe is surprised to learn there's a second reason for their journey: Along the way, Uncle Alex secretly points slaves north in the direction of the Underground Railroad.

Set against the backdrop of the tumultuous pre-Civil War South, *The Ever-After Bird* is the story of a young woman's education about the horrors of slavery and the realization about the kind of person she wants to become.

## **The Ever-After Bird Details**

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Author : Ann Rinaldi

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# From Reader Review *The Ever-After Bird* for online ebook

## Joshua D Lambert says

Another great work by Rinaldi! This story, especially, paints a very vivid picture of life in the south pre-Civil War era. Well written as always!

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## Laura Black says

This is the best and yet weirdest book Rinaldi has ever written. CeCe McGill's father dies and her uncle comes to claim her as his ward. He's a doctor and an artist that paints birds. He takes ceCe with him, along with a freed young African American woman named Earnestine. They travel through Georgia, looking for a rare species of heron called the Ever-After Bird. Along the way her uncle tells slaves how to find the Underground Railroad and use stars to navigate their way to freedom. But it wasn't this alone that made this novel stand out. It was a study of how isolation and privilege can warp the human mind. The coastal plantations were run by a selection of sadistic and quirky characters, some good and some bad. It was a fresh approach to an exhausted subject.

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## ~ Cheryl ~ says

This book is categorized as “children’s literature.” On the back of my copy, it says: *Ages 10 and up*. Personally, I wouldn’t recommend it to anyone under 12. My daughter read the book last year (at age 11); thoroughly enjoyed it, and then told me I ought to read it. She is on the mature side for her age, but as I read it, I was kind of horrified that she’d had to digest the difficult subject matter.

According to the author’s note, Rinaldi says many of the cruel scenes of slavery are “taken from record.” So they may be factual, and therefore important, but decidedly heart-wrenching.

The story is set in the pre-Civil War South. We follow 13-year-old CeCe (recently orphaned) as she travels with her abolitionist uncle. He is a medical doctor and ornithologist, and it is his mission to travel from plantation to plantation seeking birds, and secretly informing the slaves about the Underground Railroad.

But beware, it’s got everything:

Whippings, rape, abuse and inhumane treatment, dysfunctional parent-child relationships, infidelity; smothered babies, nakedness, accidents, injuries and death. **None** of these are spelled out in explicit detail, but they are part of the story nonetheless. And for young children, it may be the first time they have to make sense of some of these concepts.

I was at first tempted to dismiss Rinaldi’s writing style as simplistic, perhaps dumbed-down for the younger set. But I realized as the story went on, it was *utterly appropriate*. Told in the first person, we are getting a recounting of CeCe’s experience during one fateful and life-changing summer. It was as though an older

CeCe was sitting at my kitchen table telling me about her past. Toward the end, during the climactic scenes, it was *pitch perfect*. Not one word wasted. It kind of reminded me of Doris Lessing's writing style. Spare and direct. And in this story, Rinaldi used it to great effect, it turns out.

If you're an adult, don't feel foolish for browsing in the children's fiction section of your library; I've found there are gems there to be unearthed. So why read this one? Because, it's also got good stuff:

Courage, faithfulness, redemption, hope and love. And not the flowery, romantic sort of love. This is the love-as-a-verb kind of love. The greater-love-hath-no-man-than-this kind of love. And that's worth getting through the hard stuff for.

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## **Linda Lipko says**

Recently, after reading so many books re. the holocaust, I began to point fingers at the Germans, wondering just what kind of culture perpetrated such egregious violence against those whom they deemed less worth.

Then, I was snapped back to reality that cruelty and vile inhumanity isn't reserved merely for the Nazis. In fact, as I'm well aware, our country has a nasty, ugly history of barbarism.

My most recent read is one I highly recommend for many reasons, primarily because of the simple yet complex way in which Ann Rinaldi addressed the issue of American slavery and the culture that stoked the fires of injustice.

CeCe McGill is a young teen aged girl when her father, an abolitionist, is killed while helping slaves escape. Unkind to her, yet sensitive to the plight of slaves, her father risked his life to help others.

When her Uncle Alex is appointed her guardian, she learns he also is an abolitionist, but is wary of hypocrisy and doesn't trust him. As the story unfolds, a beautiful relationship develops.

Her Uncle is a doctor and an ornithologist who paints exquisite renditions of rare birds found in the south. When Cece accompanies her Uncle's and Erline, his black, educated assistant, traveling to Georgia in pursuit of the rare scarlet ibis, CeCe witnesses the horror of slavery.

Named the forever-after bird by slaves, it is thought that when this bird is spotted, those who are bound will be freed.

Accommodated at beautiful plantations, Earline must play the role of slave and CeCe must keep the secret that not only are they looking for rare birds, but in addition, they are providing guidance and resources for slaves to follow the Northern Star toward safety in the Underground Railway movement.

CeCe astutely observes the hypocrisy and cruelty of lily white rich plantation owners who claim to want

what is best for society while brutally subjugating an entire population of people they feel inferior.

When black Earline falls in love with a white man, severe consequences occur and CeCe is left with a moral decision that will forever change her.

This is a beautiful multi-layered book with many themes.

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### **Hannah says**

\*3.75

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### **Anne Osterlund says**

CeCe doesn't believe in the Underground Railroad. It was her father's passion, and he didn't love her. He told her she had no soul.

When he dies, Uncle Alex arrives and challenges CeCe to a journey in the South. In search of the Ever-After Bird.

She agrees, but she has no intention of helping her uncle with his larger mission—that of giving the slaves on the plantations directions to find their way north.

The question is . . . who is more stubborn? CeCe or her uncle?

And will the journey prove Papa right?

I liked the blend of science and history within this book. As well as the author's interwoven exploration of fallibility, foolishness, and bravery.

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### **Jennifer Wardrip says**

Reviewed by Sally Kruger aka "Readingjunky" for TeensReadToo.com

If he hadn't been determined to help runaway slaves, he would still be alive. That's why CeCe McGill hates abolitionists. Her father devoted his life and their home to giving aid as part of the Underground Railroad, but it was also what ended his own life when he was shot. His death left CeCe an orphan.

When CeCe's uncle, a doctor and an artist, arrives after her father's death, she is nervous about leaving the only home she's ever known to live with him in Ohio. It doesn't take long for her to realize he has a kind and gentle soul. So why is it a surprise when she learns he is an abolitionist just like her late father?

The difference is that CeCe finds herself more directly involved in the abolitionist movement. Uncle Alex and his assistant, a young, black college student, are planning a trip to the South. Uncle Alex wants to study

rare birds, and his assistant wants to research the institution of slavery for her studies at Oberlin College. CeCe is invited along for the adventure.

The three travelers must adhere to the behaviors and customs of the South. Uncle Alex's assistant, Earline, will be assuming the role of slave, and CeCe and her uncle must act in character as her owner and mistress. If they are discovered, the punishment could result in death. CeCe is well aware that her uncle will be doing more than just searching for the scarlet ibis known as the Ever-After bird. He will also be helping point slaves in the direction of freedom.

CeCe's adventure is filled with educational opportunities as she learns about the world of rare birds and the workings of slavery. She sees the hope of freedom, but it is often colored with the tragedy of abusive treatment and even death. All she hopes is that they survive and, in some small way, make the world a better place.

Ann Rinaldi is well known for her historical fiction. *THE EVER-AFTER BIRD* paints a unique picture of slavery in the South, and the fight fought by brave individuals who wanted to see its end. Her descriptions compare the gentle refinement of the South with the startling reality of life behind the grand plantation houses and blooming magnolia bushes.

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### **Cindy Norris says**

Young girl travels in the south with her abolitionist uncle while he paints pictures of birds. Interesting story about a young girl awakening to the horrors of slavery.

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### **Hannah says**

I'm usually a big Ann Rinaldi fan because of the way she grounds her stories in interesting historical moments (without getting caught up in minute details that slow down the plot), along with the nuanced characters--both male and female--that she creates. She's fantastic at making characters who have realistic flaws and face truly challenging dilemmas instead of making her heroines into idealized types: a major temptation for YA lit. The beginning of *The Ever-After Bird* had a lot of promise for me then: an interesting premise where our main character--who grew up fearing and not understanding her cold, abusive, abolitionist father--gets an opportunity to learn about her family history and abolitionism by seeing slavery firsthand with her uncle Alex, who was also raised under her father's harsh gaze. Accompanying CeCe and Uncle Alex on their journey to visit southern plantations is Uncle Alex's strong-willed assistant, Earline, a former slave who now is attending university and writing about slavery; during the trip, she goes undercover as CeCe's slave in order to travel through the South.

All of these situations and characters set up many angles to explore, but I felt like a lot of these were only half-addressed, maybe because of the book's audience (preteen to teen). Earline had a lot of potential as a character, but never got past seeming vindictive, capricious, and thoughtless to me, tragic past or no tragic past. It's probably more realistic that she and CeCe never (view spoiler). CeCe recovering from being treated coldly and abusively by her father was subtly dealt with over time, but I felt that her and her uncle's shared experience of living with CeCe's father was something that could have been delved into much more. The ending also came in a bit of a rush. Another reviewer pointed out that this book raises a lot of disturbing

issues (abuse, rape, slavery, racism, etc) and that she felt like these were dealt with in an appropriate manner for this age group. I kept wondering myself how I would have felt reading this book at 13 or 14: if I would have also felt shocked and horrified at these events despite the way that they are swiftly told and alluded to, or if I would have rushed on without really processing them. As an adult, I felt like these were moments I wanted Rinaldi to explore more. She did, however, do a wonderful job of showing what life on different plantations was like, showing a range of master-slave dynamics beyond the usual gamut. (view spoiler)

I also felt like this particular book had some awkward, Judy Blumish moments that I don't remember from Rinaldi's previous books. I'm not sure whether Rinaldi or her editors added these in, but they felt like bald-faced appeals to teens to seem relatable (look, I'm worried about my period, too!). Sadly, the mawkishness of these forced moments affected my feelings towards the rest of the book, making moments that should have been tragic seem more soap opera-esque than anything.

Overall, definitely not one of my favorites by her, but it was still interesting to read.

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### **Andria Davis says**

This book is set in the 1800's and is a story about a little girl that goes on a trip with her uncle through the south so he can hunt for a certain bird, however, when they are traveling, she learns her uncle is also an abolitionist and is using his trip as a cover to help slaves learn how to escape and to offer them resources they need to get away from their plantations.

I enjoyed this book even though, at times, it was emotionally hard to read. I learned a lot about what slaves went through during those times and also the ways that the few people tried to help them. I learned about relationships between families at that time and how the slaves were dealt with. This book was written in a way that made me feel like I was right next to the characters, going through their journey with them.

(Historical Fiction)

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### **Megan Billick says**

I thought it was a neat story about the life of CeCe, how she transforms from a young girl who doesn't know much about slavery and abolitionism because her father never let her in to his life, to then suddenly losing her father and being thrust into a life she'd never experienced with her uncle Alex who suddenly asked for her opinion and valued what she had to say. She grew into a wonderful young woman because of it and it was fun to watch her grow throughout the story.

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### **AlixJamie says**

Plot

It has become clear that Ann's best relationships are older male mentor to a young {usually early teen} girl - either a sister or a ward. She's a past master at creating literary crushes {I find one in nearly every book} and her writing just can't be matched. She's SO creative with her words, her dialogue is never dull, her plots are solid, her premises intriguing, her research exhaustive.

Thus she creates CeCe.

To be honest, I didn't really notice the plot. It escalated gradually and came to a quiet climax. What was important was each little domino that fell in turn. Something like slavery, with all the stories and horrors, is hard to portray. It's really impossible to comprehend cruelty unless you are either present for it or experience it yourself. CeCe portrays this well - the confusion over her feelings about slavery and the slow horror she develops as she witnesses its reality. {In the author's note, Ann Rinaldi discloses that most of the things she has CeCe witness were actual documented happenings and that she even toned some of them down for her narrative}

Really, the plot is an even pattern of traveling, stopping at a plantation, unpleasant experience, more traveling, find something along the road, stop at another plantation, another unpleasant learning experience, Earline causes some sort of trouble, back on the road again, ect. Uncle Alex's ornithology and his warnings of the slaves aren't what's important here. However, it is interesting to see how each plantation operates and how each individual owner's view of their property is reflected in the treatment of their slaves.

There are a few slightly mature moments and conversations since CeCe is a growing girl who can't keep her mouth shut and Uncle Alex is a doctor and somehow it's common for them to discuss things that might make some girls uncomfortable to read.

Overall, it had a promising start, but unraveled near the end into a rather anticlimactic finish.

#### Characters

##### CeCe McGill

CeCe is a delightfully and also frustratingly obnoxious Rinaldi heroine. She's very typical of the author in being headstrong, plain-spoken, stubborn and tending to idolize the male who has her charge. Not everything she does makes sense {which I think is more a weakness of plot than a weakness of character} but her heart is usually in the right place even if she does disobey her uncle at nearly every turn.

I found her observations about slavery to be very sound and interesting. Her thoughts on anything else were generally less sound and she had an annoying tendency to be very appropriately immature. However, her confusion over her own treatment and views of slaves were honest and thought-provoking. Forced by her circumstances to act as if she agreed with slavery and also to treat the slaves around her - Earline included - in keeping with those views, she grappled convincingly with the consequences of such power.

##### Uncle Alex

Rinaldi literary crush extraordinaire. Much less realistic than the Rinaldi heroes of yore, he comes off way to strong in the romantic category.

The man can do no wrong. There is nothing wrong with him. He's the perfect mixture of handsome, strength, vulnerability, rightness, wrongness and excels at nearly every activity known to man.

I didn't buy it this time.

However, his back story IS intriguing {wish there was more of it} and he does have a very good tongue in his head when it comes to interesting dialogue.

He treats CeCe a little more leniently than is good for her {she could do, on several occasions, with a darn good spanking} and I'm not sure why he has no control whatsoever over Earline when she appears to worship the ground he walks on.

##### Earline

Incredibly confusing. She was a former slave with an extraordinarily complex history. CeCe often complains



of not being able to understand a thing she does, and I am in wholehearted agreement. I can't decide if she was really complex or if she was just allowed to do anything and everything she wanted because the author needed a little action in the plot. She seems like the type of character who would be difficult to control. Earline does, actually, provide nearly all of the action with her independent defiance of the boundaries between slaves and whites. She's the one who CeCe first must treat as a slave {a difficult feat after how she treats CeCe in Ohio where she's free}. She's the one who goes on and falls in love with a white man in the middle of the Deep South. She's the one who stubbornly does exactly what she's been told not to do and she's also the one who pays the steepest price {even though CeCe makes a solid second} when the climax eventually rolls around.

#### Conclusion

This isn't Elsie Dinsmore or Anne of Green Gables. Rinaldi's characters are usually pretty gritty and defiant. They're not obedient, quiet or sweet. Thus there is some language, a lot of disobedience and gobs of literary crushes. But there's also solid history, real-life issues, realistic characters and a refreshing lack of picture-perfect scenarios.

It's life - with a lot of great dialogue thrown in.

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#### **Kimberly Austin says**

I was amazed at how I got into this book. The story takes place in the south during pre-civil war time. CeCe and her abolitionist/ornithologist uncle set on a journey from Ohio to find, study, and paint the Ever After Bird (which is symbol to the slaves that freedom will soon be theirs'). Along the way CeCe discovers herself and comes to understand all the harsh and cruel lives the slaves live. In the end she defends her uncle's assistant who is a free black woman and she ends up getting whipped along with the assistant. Her Uncle swoops in and saves her but not before her she receives several lashes of her own. He uncle does find the Ever After Bird and the slaves feel that freedom is soon to follow. The only down side to this book is that I felt the ending felt rushed. I wish the author would have put a little bit more detail into the ending of the story. Good book for junior high students.

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#### **Dawn Laws says**

This book is about slavery and the underground railroad. CeCe is that main character that must live with her uncle due to her father's death. They travel with an assistant that was once a slave to teach other slaves how to get free.

I gave the book 4/5 because it has a good story line and insight into slavery and the underground railroad. The ending of the book seems as though it was rushed to end.

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#### **Mara says**

**Cover Blurp:** At least it doesn't look dated. I like it well enough, and all the hints about the story it has. Still not my favorite cover out of all her books, though.

**What I Liked:** One thing I always love about this Author's books is she can begin a story with a somewhat unlikable protagonist, and by the end of the story, you love her. CeCe is, at first, rather bratty and not the world's most lovable girl. But as the story progressed, I really began to like her. I liked her more than Earline, who really was rather mean to her and provoked her without cause, though I could sympathize with her after everything she had been through. I really enjoyed watching her and CeCe's relationship grow, and I loved the moment when CeCe tried to save Earline from a whipping. Uncle Alex was lovable from the start - he would be a great older brother.

**What I Disliked:** Nothing.

**Believability:** I've never had anything to complain about Ann Rinaldi's historical details. She portrays slavery as it was without going into a tangent about how all white people were evil. She's always been very good about portraying things fairly and truthfully for all sides. The Author's Note was especially interesting to read, since she talked about how the character of Uncle Alex was inspired by two real-life people.

**Writing Style:** Ann Rinaldi has always been good with accents, and this book is no exception. She writes authentic and believable negro and Southern accents, bringing the characters to life.

**Content:** Uncle Alex tells CeCe that before Earline ran away, she was attacked (raped) by her master, and when they're staying at one plantation, two boys go into CeCe's room with the intention of doing her and Earline harm. But nothing happens, and Uncle Alex offers no details on Earline's past.

**Conclusion:** Ann Rinaldi's shorter stories, like this, always end somewhat abruptly. The Reader knows that the protagonist's life continues, but our observation of the person's life has now ended. It's a very realistic ending, and sometimes those sort of endings frustrate me, but with Rinaldi's books, it always suits. I really liked *The Ever-After Bird*; it offered an interesting peek into plantation life, and it had many good characters.

**Recommended Audience:** Historical fiction fans, girl-read, most ages.

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