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Young Adult Fiction

Robin: The Lovable Morgan Horse
Ellen F. Feld
Jeanne Mellin, illustrator
Willow Bend Publishing
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Young horse lovers everywhere will fall in love with this book, fourth in a series about Morgan horses. The novel tells the story of fourteen-year-old Karen, a budding horsewoman with her own Morgan horse, Robin. One day, a group of more experienced (and reckless) riders peer-pressures Karen into going on a trail ride on Comet, a finicky horse she has never ridden. When a dirt bike appears out of nowhere, Comet is spooked and dashes off towards the road, throwing Karen into the path of an oncoming car.

Though Karen recovers from her physical injuries, her emotional healing is not as easy. She moves Robin to a new barn—away from the irresponsible kids who led her on that treacherous trail ride—and meets a fellow rider named Heather. With Heather's help, Karen tries to regain her confidence as a rider and to overcome her fear, but there will be challenges along the way, including a dramatic adventure deep in the woods.

Though the simplistic tale may bore those uninterested in all things equestrian, any pre-teen rider is bound to be enthralled by its combination of fiction and education. Life lessons are doled out along the way—the importance of self-confidence and how to help a friend overcome a traumatic event—but the author also defines horse-world terminology and lingo: "rain rot" is a bacterial illness affecting horses left to pasture in a damp place too long; "proud flesh" is a healing pattern of some wounds; and "soft hands" are jargon for a rider who is gentle with the reins. When delving into equestrian illnesses, veterinary diagnoses, and the psychology of horse behavior, the author never talks down to her readers, and serious riders will love that additional information tucked into the story of Karen's recovery.

Feld writes regularly for regional and national horse magazines; her Morgan Horse books have twice won the prestigious “Children’s Choices” award given by The International Reading Association.

What’s particularly special about this novel is that parents play only a peripheral role; Chauncy, the kindly owner of the barn, is the sole central adult character. Without straying into the caricatures of a *Charlotte’s Web*-like barnyard, Feld fully develops all of her animal characters, including Blackjack (the resident show-off stallion), Champ (Heather’s energetic puppy), and Rerun (the miniature horse that accompanies Robin to the new barn). This truly is a novel all about kids and the horses they love, so any kid who loves horses is bound to love this tale.

Iris Blasi