

Think of Horses

Mary Clearman Blew

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In Mary Clearman Blew's novel *Think of Horses*, a disheartened, middle-aged romance novelist returns to her native Montana to reevaluate her life choices.

It's summer in Sun Creek, the mountainous ranching country that skilled horse breaker Tam abandoned thirty years ago to raise her son, Rob, and pursue her career. Now, at fifty, Tam revisits the cabin and pastures of her youth to find new purpose.

Tam finds that the community's atmosphere has become strange and uneasy. Moneyed newcomers have replaced ranchers and farmers. Neighbors carry weapons ever since Bunce, a rancher and Tam's family friend, was murdered. And Tam feels endangered when she learns that Rob, who despises her, and his father, Allen, who blames her for ruining his life, have appeared in Sun Creek.

In the midst of all of this change, Tam forms a connection with James, who is alluring, broody, and Rob's age. She draws on her passion for horses to help James's brother, Calvin, whose girlfriend left for California. And she and James take long rides together, too, intensifying their unspoken desire.

Tam and Calvin's horse-training exploits are a fascinating glimpse into the laborious demands of the work, set against the lush mountain terrain on which they ride. But Tam's halcyon days are upended when Allen instigates a revenge scheme. James and Zenith, an eccentric, perceptive ex-convict, safeguard Tam, even as Rob breaks from Allen to atone for his transgressions. For Tam, self-transformation is an act of optimism that bolsters her newfound relationships and mends her outlook on life.

Exemplifying the maxim that "If you don't like who you are ... you can always be somebody else," *Think of Horses* is a redemptive novel set in the contemporary American West.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (September / October 2022)

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