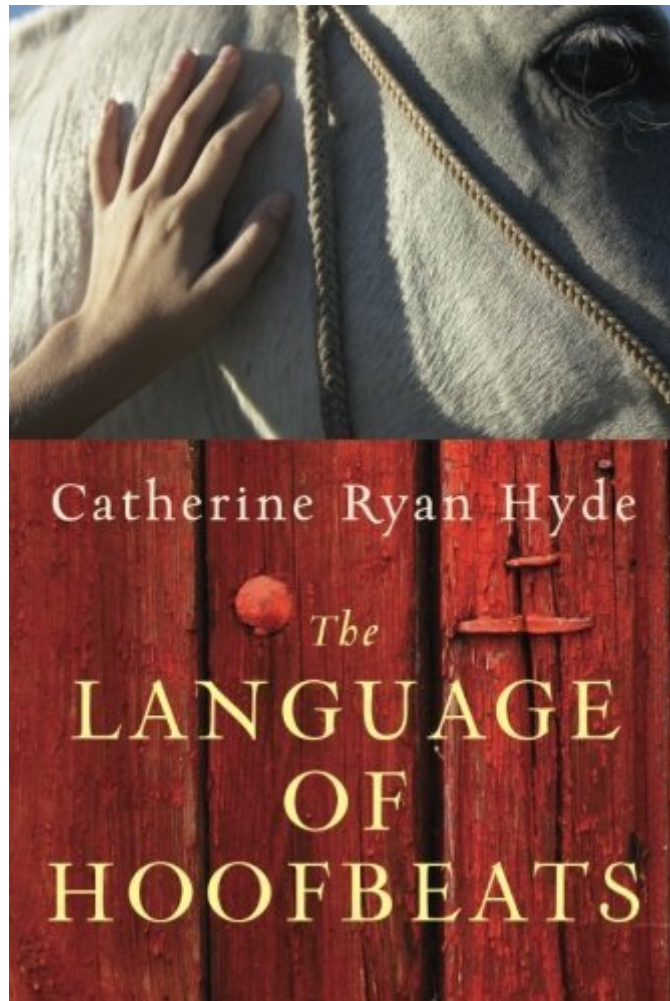




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The Language Of Hoofbeats



Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *Pay It Forward* comes a story of the heartbreak and healing power of family. New to a small town, Jackie and Paula envision a quiet life for their kids: a young adopted son and two teenage foster children, including the troubled Star. However, they quickly butt heads with their neighbor, Clementine, who disapproves of their lifestyle and is incensed when Star befriends her spirited horse, Comet. Haunted by past tragedy and unable to properly care for Comet, Clem nevertheless resents the bond Star soon shares with the horse. When Star disappears with Comet, the neighbors are thrown together—far too close together. But as the search for the pair wears on, both families must learn to put aside their animosity and confront the choices they’ve made and the scars they carry. Plumbing the depths of regret and forgiveness, *The Language of Hoofbeats* explores the strange alchemy that transforms a group of people into a family. Winner of a Rainbow Award

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Customer Reviews

On occasion, I've been accused of being a "spoiler" by telling too much of the plot in a review,

though typically I try to avoid summary or synopsis and focus on style and significance. However, frankly I believe it is only honest to lay out the framework of this tremendously readable and meaningful novel. "The Language of Hoofbeats" by Catherine Ryan Hyde deals with several extremely challenging themes. First and foremost, of course, is the fact that Paula and Jackie Archer-Cummings are a legally married lesbian couple who have adopted one child and are fostering two more. Paula is a large animal veterinarian, and the family has just moved to the small town of Easley, CA from their former and much-loved home in the Napa Valley. Their across-the-street neighbor, Clementine, is a belligerent, antagonistic woman, who has a horse named Comet that she keeps locked in a small corral. The horse is fed and watered and the corral mucked out, but otherwise totally neglected. Clementine is too afraid of him to even go into the corral. The oldest of the three children in the Archer-Cummings household, Star, is an extremely difficult, defensive and intransigent fifteen year old. She is also horse crazy, and immediately discovers Comet, falls in love with him, and is infuriated by the neglect he is suffering...and meanwhile, predictably, Clementine is equally infuriated that this brash girl has the presumption to come on her property, touch her horse, and otherwise make a nuisance of herself. And when Clementine is angry, she doesn't mince words. The story is told in first person, chapters alternating between Clementine and Jackie as narrator. The tone is pitch-perfect, and the characterizations of these two women as well as all the other "cast members" are masterfully developed through these alternating perspectives. The major crisis event is of course predictable; Star, completely unable to bear the perceived misery that neglect has visited upon Comet, and being prone to running away due to previous experiences, steals the horse and heads for the hills. This has the inevitable negative effect of pushing Clementine over the edge with a major breakdown, so Paula and Jackie have to deal with that as well as the anxiety of the search for the missing horse and girl. Catherine Ryan Hyde, however, has a miraculous touch for developing a plot in which negativity and grimness merge seamlessly with healthy attitudes and positive outcomes. There is no unrealistic "changing" of people's natures so much as a development of more positive and constructive attitudes and an awareness of better ways of being and doing. In a way, the "working out" of this story reminded me very much (in tone, not in plot detail) of one of the cherished classics of my childhood, "The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Star reflects Mary, and Quinn is the Dickon character (he's even a redhead). And of course Clementine would parallel Archibald Craven, so mentally unbalanced by a past grief as to be unable to deal with anyone or anything else. And, like that wonderful novel, "The Language of Hoofbeats" ends up with a full complement of happy endings and ongoing joys.

There are books over which Netflix won my time; not any of Catherine Ryan Hyde's though, not once. Such good books are quick reads, no matter how much effort I make in taking my sweet time to read, ever so slowly. This story is not so much about the horse, but him as an instrument to bridge gaps between people, neighbors. Some ties are just too broken to mend, but most can still be put back together, with openness, communication, an honest self-assessment and acceptance, the willingness to change, love, and time. These are the timeless topics that Ms. Ryan Hyde is so very brilliant at expounding into beautiful stories. I don't think I'll ever tire of reading her books.

Catherine Ryan Hyde knows how to portray the human condition through the emotions of her characters. She shows us how to love the unlovely by example, not by instruction. I have enjoyed every book of hers I've read so far because of the depth, understanding, and demonstration of real life in her characters.

I generally don't go in for books that are drippy and sentimental. I was worried this book might be too sappy but there is no sap, only grit. I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I have seen it called a YA book and I am not certain how it's officially being catalogued but it doesn't matter, this story would be, and should be, read by middle schoolers on up. I'm 50 and I would recommend it to all my friends. It is a well balanced well written story of loss and longing and hope and belonging. It's put together in a structure that is mature and real but at the same time there isn't anything here that is inappropriate for younger readers. I don't think the story follows a typical lifetime/hallmark outline and that's a very good thing. It reminded me a little of the show on abc family called the fosters. Also half the chapters are written from the perspective of a cranky older neighbor who I found myself reading with the voice of judge Judy. (This book is better than the fosters IMO) Bottom line, great book.

The storytelling style here is easy and calm. Though what the characters are going through is anything but. And that juxtaposition heightens the telling of this tale. We see Clementine and Jackie, as alternating narrators, at odds with each other. And more importantly we witness how they are also in conflict within themselves and their perceptions of each other. How Ms. Hyde manages such a wealth of sub textual storytelling, in such easy lines, makes me come back again and again to her novels. In the case of *The Language of Hoofbeats*, there is what seems like the very first time, a couple: two married women, as major characters and this author

has given them to us. As a given, that in its self was a great aspect to this compelling tale. Again, I'm taken farther through a novel than I expected when reading the blurb. Ms. Hyde always does this, and luckily, her novels always surprise and delight me to find she has again. I can't say more than. Add this new novel to your collection, it will be one you read more than once.

As I've stated before, this author is one of my favorites. You can tell she's lived part of each of her characters in every book. I always find a part of myself in her characters...sometimes the good and sometimes the not so good! Every book is uplifting and every book gives hope. There is laughter, and there are tears. This book is no different. You can feel the characters and you can see their surroundings!

Put them all together and you have an interesting plot driven by obvious conflict. The writing is pretty straightforward; the author spells everything out for the reader so you can't miss a character trait or symbolism. There was an interesting plot twist at the end, but it still felt all too tidy and tied up. With that said, I still liked the story, and would give it 3 stars.

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