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Deep Creek

Finding Hope in the High Country

By Pam Houston

“Pam Houston is the rodeo queen of American letters. In *Deep Creek*, her voice has never been more fully realized, and her message never more important.”

—Samantha Dunn, author of *Not By Accident*

“In the face of the world’s turmoil, this book is utter clarity. In the face of the world’s harshness, this book is a soft place to land. . . . If you find yourself careening toward despair, pick up *Deep Creek* and read even just one page. The words there will lift you back to hope—not the sentimental kind, but the kind that can and does change the world for the better. What gratitude we owe to Pam Houston for writing it.”

—B. K. Loren, author of *Animal, Mineral, Radical*

“Houston has a great range of vision, and she’s fun to read. She gets the land right. Through water wars and love-worn days, she conveys life on a remote Colorado ranch, bringing to the place the maelstrom of her own history. This is a perfectly American memoir. A restless heart finds its place.”

—Craig Childs, author of *Atlas of a Lost World*

“*Deep Creek* is a love letter to earth, animals, and the best of humanity. Pam Houston has taken our heartache and woven it back into hope. Her stories of love, loss, and a life lived in relationship to land give us good reasons not to give up on ourselves or each other. This is the book we need right now to remind us how to endure—passionately. An unstoppable heart song.”

—Lidia Yuknavitch, author of *The Misfit’s Manifesto*

“There is so much beauty, wisdom, and truth in this book, I felt the pages almost humming in my hands. I was riveted and enlightened, inspired and consoled. This is a book for all of us, right now.”

—Cheryl Strayed, author of *Wild*

“Full of wisdom, wit, and loving attention, Pam Houston’s survey of her life and land should be required reading for anyone who loves this planet we call home.”

—Camille T. Dungy, author of *Guidebook to Relative Strangers*

“This book is endlessly wise, funny, and full of heart. To say that its clear-eyed, doom-laden—yet loving—message is important and timely would be an understatement. It is unapologetically sincere, utterly moving.”

—Tommy Orange, author of *There, There*

At 31 years old, fresh off a tour promoting her first collection, *Cowboys Are My Weakness*, Pam Houston had “no job, no place to live except my North Face VE 24 tent.”

On an impulse and a good instinct, she spent her royalties on a 120-acre ranch near Creede, Colorado. It was more than she could afford, and required more maintenance than she could manage. And yet, twenty-five years later, it's the piece of land that's defined the largest part of her life. **DEEP CREEK: FINDING HOPE IN THE HIGH COUNTRY [W. W. Norton & Company; January 29, 2019; \$25.95 hardcover]** tells the remarkable story of “that girl who dared herself to buy a ranch, dared herself to dig in and care for it, to work hard enough to pay for it, to figure out what other people meant when they used the word ‘home.’”

In its chapters, Houston spends her days walking along the fences on her property, watching leaves on the aspens ignite into an eruption of fall colors, and caring for the animals on her ranch: the horses, sheep, chickens, Irish wolfhounds, and a pair of miniature donkeys with outsized attitudes. Houston's audacity and generosity are on full display as she cares for an elk calf abandoned by its herd and sleeps outside to comfort her old hound. *Deep Creek* raises concern about the many ways we endanger the natural world's delicate balance, and nature's enigmatic powers to survive and to save. It's also a chronicle of recovery.

Houston's childhood was marked by her parents' alcoholism and abuse—harrowing experiences, which with Houston's deft hand are imparted in a way that's both straightforward and deeply affecting. More shocking than her surviving multiple car wrecks at the hands of her intoxicated parents are her strength of spirit and openness of heart, qualities that illuminate every page. It's no wonder that despite the seclusion of her ranch, Houston is never without friends, from writers like Antonya Nelson and Robert Boswell, to practical strangers who have her back in every situation. There are the locals who come to her aid when she's snowed in, the woman who shelters her as a child from her volatile parents, a surgeon who performs an astonishing operation on her pulverized arm, a wise neighbor who tactfully keeps the ranch from being bought out from under her, and firefighters who risk their lives to try and keep a massive wildfire from destroying her ranch.

The “Diary of a Fire” section is a gripping account of the West Fork Complex wildfire and the efforts to try and contain its growing intensity. The burning traveled all the way to Houston's backyard, which, by nothing short of a miracle, was saved by a valiant stand of aspen trees that kept it at bay. The fire scorched the mountains around her home, transforming her landscape, though not destroying it. Taking stock of the damage, Houston notices fireweed, baby aspen, woodpeckers, and the exquisite green of new grass shoots coming up through all the char.

Encompassing Houston's childhood, her adventures, and her details of everyday life at the ranch, *Deep Creek* is, above all, a testament. In holding on to her ranch,

Houston carved a life to support her spirit and her talents, and discovered that she could be the cowboy of her own story. “I know,” she explains, “that when I claimed these 120 acres they also claimed me. We are each other’s mutual saviors.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Pam Houston is the author of the novels *Contents May Have Shifted* and *Sight Hound*, the short story collections *Cowboys Are My Weakness* and *Waltzing the Cat*, and *A Little More About Me*, a collection of essays. Her stories have been selected for volumes such as *The Best American Short Stories*, *The O. Henry Awards*, *The 2013 Pushcart Prize*, and *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*. She is the winner of the Western States Book Award, the WILLA Literary Award for contemporary fiction, the Evil Companions Literary Award, and multiple teaching awards. She cofounded the literary nonprofit Writing By Writers, is a professor of English at UC–Davis, and teaches in the Institute of American Indian Arts’ low-residency MFA program and at writer’s conferences around the country and the world.

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