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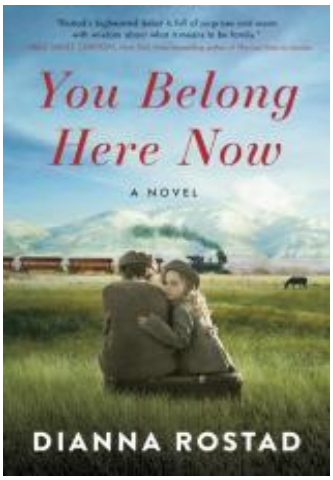
You Belong Here Now

by Dianna Rostad



About the Book

In this brilliant debut reminiscent of Kristina McMorris? SOLD ON A MONDAY and William Kent Krueger's THIS TENDER LAND, three orphans journey westward from New York City to the Big Sky Country of Montana, hoping for a better life where beautiful wild horses roam free.

Montana, 1925: An Irish boy orphaned by Spanish flu, a tiny girl who won?t speak, and a volatile young man who lies about his age to escape Hell?s Kitchen are paraded on train platforms across the Midwest to work-worn folks. They journey countless miles, racing the sun westward.

Before they reach the last rejection and stop, the oldest, Charles, comes up with a daring plan, and alone, they set off toward the Yellowstone River and grassy mountains where the wild horses roam.

Fate guides them toward the ranch of a family stricken by loss. Nara, the daughter of a successful cattleman, has grown into a brusque spinster who refuses the kids on sight. She?s worked hard to gain her father?s respect and hopes to run their operation, but if the kids stay, she?ll be stuck in the kitchen.

Nara works them without mercy, hoping they?ll run off, but they buck up and show spirit. And though Nara will never be motherly, she begins to take to them. So when Charles is jailed for freeing wild horses that were rounded up for slaughter, and an abusive mother from New York shows up to take the youngest, Nara does the unthinkable, risking everything she holds dear to change their lives forever.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think the wild horses represent or symbolize in the book?

2. Charles protects Patrick from racist slurs at school by filling Billy?s mouth with dirt and holding it closed. If Charles were your son, how would you handle correcting him while acknowledging his courage to stand up to a bully?

3. The ranch hand who pulled up Opal?s dress was viciously beaten by Charles. Neither went to jail. Is it okay to use violence as a form of punishment, protection or justice?

4. Do you think Papa should have taken a stand against the people who slurred Patrick rather than encouraging him to hide his Irish lilt?

5. When Patrick prayed and made the sign of the cross against his chest, how different were the reactions of Mama and Papa Stewart to his Catholicism? Were they substantially different?

6. Charles and Patrick go about things very differently and have unlike dispositions. Why do you think this is? How does it inform the way they see and treat animals? Their horses?

7. Nara?s actions towards the kids are unmaternal at best. How does it contrast with her behavior toward the little horse caught on the fence? Did you think she?d ever make a good mother to the three orphans?

8. Nara tells her father that she wants Jim, their Cheyenne ranch hand, to be foreman. Papa says, ?Ain?t nobody gonna listen to an Injun.? Was his reply racist or just representative of 1925 and the reality of that time?

9. Should Nara have been braver and admitted that she liked Jim romantically? Did Nara?s unwillingness to admit that she was interested in Jim make you believe she was prejudiced?

10. Mama Stewart usually has something to say about everything, so when she noticed Nara?s interest in Jim, why do you think Mama Stewart didn?t say anything --- even to Nara?

11. Jim clearly tries to fit into the world beyond the reservation by how he dresses and cuts his hair, but ultimately, did it do him any good? If you were Jim, would you have gone back to the reservation?

12. If it?s the only way to raise livestock, do you think it?s okay to round up wild mustangs and use them for chicken feed to preserve forage for human food production? What would you rather see happen?

13. Were the children of this day and time better left in orphanages and asylums in New York or sent out on the train to the farms and ranches? Overall, do you think the orphan train is a better adoption program/foster care system than we have today? How would you compare them?

14. Should Opal?s mother have been allowed to take her back after Opal ran away numerous times? If that happened today, what do you think the response would be from our social services? The Stewarts fake Opal?s death and hide her from her mother. Was it the right thing to do for Opal? What would you have done?

15. Ivar is clearly under financial duress yet refuses to accept monetary reparation for the mustangs Patrick sets free. Why? How do you think this staunch individualism manifests in our culture and politics today?

16. Do you think Mama Stewart was happy in her marital/family role? How does Nara?s attitude about women's roles

play into her mother?s happiness in the story?

17. Charles was jailed for freeing the wild horses, though Patrick committed the crime. Would you have freed the mustangs? Do you feel it was a crime?

18. How does Nara?s attitude towards right and wrong differ from Charles?? How do these two views converge in the book?

19. The State Trooper disobeyed a bench order and left without exhuming Opal?s body. Was justice served when the trooper refused to enforce the judge?s order? By what measurement or process can we effect justice in our world?

Author Bio

Dianna Rostad was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. Her parents and extended family come from the ranches of Montana and the farms of Arkansas. Dianna raised three kind, human beings, and when they began to test their wings, she took to writing with a passion, completing Southern Methodist University Writer?s Path program in 2009. A favorite task of her creative endeavors is the discovery and research of people and places where her novels are set. She has traveled extensively to pursue the last artifacts of our shared history and breathe life, truth and hope into her novels. Now living in Florida, Dianna continues to write big-hearted novels for wide audiences everywhere.

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