

THE SOFTNESS OF THESE HORSES

By
Kendall Roper

It's Saturday and I have some free time, so I decide to take a drive out to the ranch to see my new horse Cassie. When I get there she's sleeping in the field in the sun with her Mom standing guard over her. I don't have the heart to walk into the paddock and get Cassie up just to say Hi—I'm not working with her today, just visiting--so I stand at the stall door and talk to her and her Mom from there for a while. Then I let myself out into an adjoining paddock that's empty, and I walk over to where they are on the other side of the fence. I stand there, in the sun, talking to Cassie and her Mom, and I say Hi to the other mares, Lilly and Tess, who are also stretched out on the ground nearby. The calico cat, Angelina Ballerina, comes by to purr and lay at my feet and I am struck by how peaceful and unconcerned we all are right then: the horses, the cat, and me.

On my way out I stop to talk to Cowgirl, and try to give her part of an apple I had brought for my horse, but Cowgirl doesn't want it. Instead, she moves her nose towards my hair and gently smells all over my face and neck and around the collar of my jacket. She lets me rub my face against the side of hers, and stands there quietly with me.

After saying goodbye to Cowgirl, I stop to talk to Lottie who is standing near the feed bins on the other side of the fence by my car. I offer her part of an apple, too, and she eats it eagerly. When she has finished chewing, she puts her nose in my hair, like Cowgirl had done, and smells all over my head, neck, face, and shoulders. Finally she puts her nose right up against mine and we stand there like that, breathing in each other's scent. Lottie smells healthy to me: like dust and sweat and grass and fresh air all mixed together. I wonder what I smell like to her. Lipstick and perfume, perhaps. Or maybe the Mexican food I had for lunch. I don't know what I smell like to Lottie, but it must be good, because she keeps her nose up against mine, gently breathing in and out, until I decide I have to go and I break the contact we have with each other.

As I get in my car, it strikes me, not for the first time, how generally quiet-minded and un-worried these horses are. There are people who say horses come from a fear-based mentality and that the only way they look at the world is from a predator-prey viewpoint. I don't sense that in these horses on this ranch. I never have, and I definitely don't today. These horses have a quietness about themselves, a settled-ness that I enjoy being around. This is one of the reasons I keep my horse here and am willing to drive an hour each way to see her and work with her. I want Cassie to grow up to have the same quietness that Lottie and Cowgirl and all the other horses here have. I want my horse to be as unconcerned and calm as often as she can be. I believe she'll be a better horse that way.

Driving away, I start to think about all the little things that normally concern me and grab my attention, knowing at the same time that this ranch with its quiet-minded horses is always here and that I can stop by any time I want. I say a little prayer, thanking my Higher Power for that. Then I turn left onto the County highway, and head home.

End

Kendall Roper is a retired Park Ranger and burgeoning horsewoman from Sonoma. Although a back injury keeps her from *riding* horses very often, she has found many ways to spend time with them on the ground!