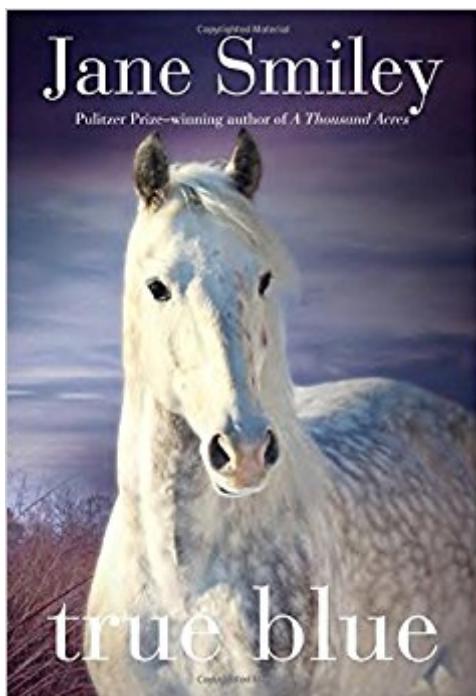


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# True Blue: Book Three Of The Horses Of Oak Valley Ranch



## Synopsis

True Blue is a beauty, a dappled gray, and when Abby gets to take him to her family's ranch, she can hardly believe her luck. The horse needs a home: his owner— a woman brand new to the riding stable— was tragically killed in a car crash and no one has claimed him. Daddy is wary, as always. But Abby is smitten. True Blue is a sweetheart, and whenever Abby calls out, "Blue, Blue, how are you?" he whinnies back. But sometimes True Blue seems . . . spooked. He paces, and always seems to be looking for something. Or someone. Filled with riding scenes and horse details, this newest middle-grade novel from a Pulitzer Prize winner offers a mysterious and suspenseful almost-ghost story.

## Book Information

Series: The Horses of Oak Valley Ranch (Book 3)

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Yearling; Reprint edition (August 7, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375862323

ISBN-13: 978-0375862328

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 33 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #195,627 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #20 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Sports > Equestrian #121 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > 20th Century

## Customer Reviews

JANE SMILEY is the author of many novels for adults as well as three works of nonfiction. She won the Pulitzer Prize for *A Thousand Acres* and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2001. She lives in Northern California, where she raises horses of her own.

Chapter 1 I had gone into the house to change my jeans, and I was only about halfway out of my boots--which were very muddy--when the phone started ringing. And it kept ringing, all the time I was pulling off my boots and hanging up my hat and pushing my hair out of my face. I was really wet--I'd been riding Happy in the arena when the rain fell out of the sky like water out of a bucket, and we were drenched so fast we just started laughing. Daddy was in the barn, and Mom

jumped off of Jefferson and ran in there with him--she was right by the gate, so she didn't get as wet as I did. I could barely see my way across the ring, the water was coming down so hard. But Happy didn't care. All of our horses lived outside anyway. Rain was just a bath to them. And then it all stopped. There we were, standing in the aisle of the barn, looking out at the clouds blowing off and the sun shining through the misty air. Mom said, "Oh, I love California. The weather just comes and goes. And there are no tornadoes. I love that the best." Back in Oklahoma, where Mom and Daddy had grown up, there were tornadoes every day, or at least that's how they made it sound when they talked about it. But I had to change my jeans at least--my jacket had kept my shirt a little dry. The phone rang and rang, and I knew because of that it would be Jane Slater, and it was. Jane was a trainer at the big stable on the coast; she had helped us sell a horse there in the fall. She said, "Oh, Abby! How are you? I do so miss talking to you. What's it been?" I said, "We saw you at New Year." How--"But she was excited about something, so she interrupted me. She said, "Then I didn't tell you that Melinda is back, did I?" "No, when." "She hasn't grown an inch, and Ellen Leinsdorf thinks she's her worst enemy! Their lessons are back to back, and they're both riding Gallant Man, because, you know, there's been a big brouhaha about Melinda's parents' divorce, and they have to half lease him to the Leinsdorfs to afford the board, which is fine, but, goodness! What am I talking about?" Ellen and Melinda were two students she taught; I'd helped her with them from time to time. Melinda was older--about ten--but Ellen was tougher. I laughed to think about them and said, "I don't know." "Oh, Abby, I miss you. I feel surrounded by little little girls!" I said, "I miss you, too." "Well, why don't you come over here and look at this horse, and I can see you." "What horse?" "Such a sad story. But he's a nice horse. His name is True Blue. Very pretty dappled gray, black mane and tail, black points. Is your dad around?" Just then, Daddy came in. I handed him the phone and ran upstairs. That was the first I heard of Blue. While I was looking for a clean pair of jeans, the rain came again, and by the time it was over, the arena was too soaked to ride any more that day, because even if there was no more rain for the rest of the weekend, it would take twenty-four hours ("Only a day!" Daddy always said) for the arena to drain. This meant that our work in the winter could be a little intermittent, but at least there were no blizzards. Back in Oklahoma, whenever there weren't tornadoes, there were blizzards, and Daddy and Mom had to walk through them for hours on end to get home from school,

without mittens or buttons on their coats (at least, that was what my brother, Danny, always said when they started talking about how lucky we were to be living in California). "And uphill both ways!" When he said that, I always laughed. Of course, I went to Oklahoma myself from time to time, and the weather was fine. So instead of waiting around and maybe going over to the coast "at some point" (it was a half-hour trip each way, and more than that if we were pulling the horse trailer), we decided that we had nothing better to do than go look at True Blue and then shop for groceries. We left Rusty, our dog, sitting inside the gate with that look on her face that she always had—"Don't bother to call. I've got everything under control here." The rain might have skipped the coastal part of the peninsula, because even though there wasn't a horse show, the stables were busy with lessons in all the rings, and grooms, riders, and horses were walking here and there. I looked around for my old horse Black George and that girl, Sophia Rosebury, who had bought him, but I didn't see them in any of the rings. I made myself stop looking. I had had tremendous fun on Black George for a whole year. I thought about him often, but I hadn't seen him since they'd driven away with him in the Roseburys' trailer before Thanksgiving. In fact, I was a little afraid to see him, not because I thought there would be anything wrong with him, but because I thought that seeing him would make me miss him more. Jane ran over to meet us when she saw us parking the truck in the little lot. Daddy said, "You didn't get all the rain?" Mom laughed. "We got buckets. It drove us out." "No rain," said Jane. "Just fog fog fog. Did I say fog?" She lowered her voice. "Our golfers don't allow that sort of weather disturbance around here." We all smiled. It was fun to see Jane. The horse, True Blue, was in the nicest part of the barn, and he was standing in his stall, looking out over the door toward the rings with his ears pricked. He saw Jane right away and tossed his head. She said, "He's such a sweetheart. Listen to this." We must have been about fifty feet from the stall still; she called out, "Blue! Blue! How are you?" and he let out a tremendous whinny. She said, "He always answers." "He's a poet and doesn't know it," said Mom. "Absolutely," said Jane. From the Hardcover edition.

Jane Smiley has given us treasured books like "A Thousand Acres." She also writes for children. "True Blue" is the third of her horse books for those of us who fell in love with horses and books simultaneously, whether it was "Black Beauty" or "The Black Stallion." In "True Blue," a horse's owner has died. He is a beautiful dapple gray, who responds to his name with a whinny. Luckily for

the horse, the boarder knows just the family for him when he is left without an owner: the Lovitts, a ranch family down the road, trains horses. Abby, the young girl, is thrilled to have True Blue for her own, to keep her mind off some of the boring stuff in school, like geography and grammar. She can tell you the geography of the horse quite well, from hoof to withers, from ears to tail. As much as this is Blue's story, this is Abby's story. She finds out that "there's no such thing as a gift horse," since horse care is hard work. She also learns that both friends and families have foibles, just as she herself does. Each chapter begins with illustrations. Each chapter reflects a step of growth into young womanhood and greater knowledge of the world outside the pure world of the horse corral. The divisions within the Lovitt family and the mysterious realm of ghosts and spirits keeps this horse tale moving along at full gallop. It's a good primer for people who are not horse owners and as always a good primer for writers on the use of voice, dialog, and back story from the eminent, horse-loving Jane Smiley.

Initially, I thought that the "ghost" subplot did not work, but re-reading *True Blue*, I changed my mind. Jane Smiley has successfully crafted another in her series. Publishers will release the fifth in September, and I have pre-ordered the work. The series is YA/young adult—but I have enjoyed reading the stories, too. Smiley has unerringly written realistic plot and a spunky, talented protagonist. I have purchased all for my classroom and my grandchildren.

I really enjoyed reading this book and I think that the stories end was sweet. I know that the beginning of Jane Smiley's books are a little dry but it couldn't stop reading after the introduction! I just wish that the books were numbered because I think I'm going ahead in the series..... YES it is a series!HONEST RATING: 3.5 stars^^^I wish you could use 1/2 stars to rate books...

I like but don't love this series of books. They were recommended by a friend because I'm into natural horsemanship, but I didn't feel that they represented the topic all that well. It sort of implied that a couple of "tricks" would fix almost any horse in no time. Still, for the youth audience, they are nice books and good reading.

For my 12 year old twin nieces' birthday - they ride every week, and they LOVED these books!!

I'm sold on Jane Smiley's books but am particularly enjoying her series about young Abbie and her

horses. The first is the Georges and the Jewels. Read them in order as there is continuity.

Nice book. I would recommend it to a horse lover. If you haven't read the previous books in the series now is an excellent time to start.

Jane can do no wrong. I love her horse and farm stories.

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