



Cowboys Are My Weakness

Pam Houston

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In Pam Houston's critically acclaimed collection of strong, shrewd, and very funny stories, we meet smart women who are looking for the love of a good man, and men who are wild and hard to pin down. "I've always had this thing for cowboys, maybe because I was born in New Jersey," says the narrator in the collection's title story. "But a real cowboy is hard to find these days, even in the West." Our heroines are part daredevil, part philosopher, all acute observers of the nuances of modern romance. They go where their cowboys go, they meet cowboys who don't look the part – and they have staunch friends who give them advice when the going gets rough. *Cowboys Are My Weakness* is a refreshing and realistic look at men and women – together and apart.

Cowboys Are My Weakness Details

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Author : Pam Houston

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Tara says

I truly enjoyed Houston's prose and her adventure stories, but admit that near the end of the book, they seemed to sort of all meld together into one long story. And seemed to verge on creative nonfiction. Other people obviously enjoyed this effect, however, as it was a huge bestseller. I think her best quality is in her narration--simple, yet profound.

Grace says

I'll admit it, I picked this up based on the title. I mean, what a great title, right? Unlike most books chosen based on title, though, this one paid off. It's a great book of short stories, mostly centered around women's relationships with men who are unsuitable for one reason or another, generally due to being one kind or another of "cowboy."

Which I realize doesn't make it sound very good. In fact, it makes it sound pretty fucking trite. But it's mostly not. Houston's female characters are strong and self-aware, even as they become enmeshed in or unraveled from men who are not good enough for them. They are thinking, feeling, acting women, and are fun to read about for that reason. She writes about them with empathy, but without pity, and although the strands of autobiography are certainly there, they don't seem to cloud things too much.

The best of the stories, though, are the ones that don't center around weak relationships, but around strong ones. The first of these, "For Bo," is a fairly simple tale of a day in the life of a woman, her husband, her dogs, and her pain-in-the-ass mother. It had me laughing hysterically, and it also had an underlying romantic feeling--real romance, not the flowers and lace kind--that left me feeling lighter for having read it. The second, the book's last story, "In My Next Life," is the heartbreaking tale of a friendship between two women, one of whom is dying of cancer, and of its unrealized potential. Though the story is very sad, Houston's decision to have it end a book of stories mostly about unsatisfactory relationships between women and men is telling--I love the implication that, as Abby says in the story, there is so much more to life than romantic relationships with men.

Other reviews of this book have criticized the similarities between Houston's female characters (almost all Easterners in love with the West, almost all women in love with untameable men, blah blah blah), and those criticisms are valid. However, given the shortness of the stories and the differing conclusions (or un-conclusions) the women in them come to, I was not bored by this similarity. I felt it gave the book an overarching narrative, something that tied all of the short pieces together, and I liked that.

I'll admit that cowboys are my weakness, too. Not in the sense of specific men, as is the case in most of Houston's stories, but in the sense of my having a natural predilection towards anything "Western." I get a pass on it, because I'm actually from the West, but it may have biased me in favor of this book. Be that as it may, though, I enjoyed the stories a lot and would recommend them.

Robin McCarthy says

Reading these stories feels like meeting a new person for the first time and knowing, almost instantly, they will become a dear friend. Reading these stories is like the first real conversation with that friend, where you hear yourself saying "Oh my god, me too!" so often that you wind up irritating even yourself.

This book smells like cold weather and sweat. Wood smoke.

Feels like wool blankets. Tastes like warm tomato, fresh off the vine.

I would recommend this book to friends who have taken a while trying new things and figuring life out, but probably not my mother.

Emily says

This is the first book my then-boyfriend, now husband gave to me...and he turned me into a life-long Pam Houston fan. He LOANED ME One Hundred Years of Solitude first but he bought me this one...

This is probably my favorite book but everything she's written is fantastic - and while I count the days until her next book, once it's out, I SLOWLY read it...kind of like I did with John Irving when I first read World According to Garp or Widow for One Year...every page is satisfying...and although she's completely different than David Sedaris, they are the two authors I constantly look up online, just in case they have something new coming out...

Sara Foster says

Before reading any of Pam Houston's books I attended her reading of Sight Hound because my roommate absolutely loved the book. Seeing Pam in real life, and hearing her book in her voice really added to my experience when I then read the book myself. I followed that up with Waltzing the Cat which I also enjoyed.

And then I found this book on my friend's shelf. It turns out that my lack of interest in short stories trumped my level of enjoyment in reading Pam Houston. The format just doesn't appeal to me. I enjoyed the stories but I wasn't crazy about them. Maybe because so many of them dealt with relationships that left the female characters wanting. Many of the men pissed me off with their indifference, but then I was even more irritated with the women for tolerating substandard behavior. Maybe some of the stories just hit a little too close to home!

My favorite story was about the couple who celebrates the Kentucky Derby each year. This particular year, after semi-celebrating with the woman's persnickety mother, they head off to the pound to adopt another stray dog. I loved how they were a couple, made complete by their growing family of canines. And I am a cat owner!

If you have the chance to attend a reading by Pam Houston, by all means, go! I think her stories have bits and pieces of her real life in them. At least it seems so when you hear more about her life. She shares time between Colorado and California and has that outdoorsy look about her that makes you think that maybe she likes rafting, riding horses, and ranch living.

Nicole says

Oh wow. I never knew I had a deeply closeted obsession with cowboys and outdoorsmen until I read this collection of short stories. Houston's writing makes me want to trade my corolla for a horse, my books for guns, and my nerdy love interests for roguish deer hunters. Seriously. This is great stuff. Fast, smart, witty, and undeniably unique. A treasure.

Ben Loory says

He winked and touched the horse's flank with his spurs and it hopped a little on the takeoff and then there was just dirt flying while the high grass swallowed the horse's legs. I leaned against the door of my pickup truck watching my new cowboy riding off toward where the sun was already low in the sky and the grass shimmering like nothing I'd ever seen in the mountains. And for a minute I thought we were living inside my painting, but he was riding away too fast to tell. And I wondered then why I had always imagined my cowboy's truck as it was leaving. I wondered why I hadn't turned the truck around and painted my cowboy coming home.

Erin says

After reading several raving reviews of this book, I had high hopes for it. The title made me laugh and piqued my curiosity. Its a book containing ten or so short stories about different women and their cowboys... The first short story was absolutely horrible, I didn't like the style of writing and was so annoyed by it that I almost put the book down. But I gave it a chance, and thankfully the rest of the stories were narrative and I wasn't distracted by the writing style.

In general, I couldn't relate to any of the characters, and the stories were so short that I didn't get a chance to connect with them. I found most of the characters to be very flat and unrealistic. With the exception of a couple stories, I found the plots to be uninteresting and shallow.

Overall, I was disappointed in the book. I guess you could say that cowboys aren't my weakness... Now, if the book was about snowboarders/surfers, I may be more intrigued. :)

Johnny says

I gave this collection to a girl once who I was trying to woo. I truly felt as though Houston had captured the "essence" of modern femininity and that by giving this young lady such a relevant and symbolic short story book, I was on my way to...well, you know. The young woman's reaction, however, was laughter and not the kind of laughter I was seeking. It was sardonic, "you thought I would like these stories??" kind of laughter.

But I kind of enjoyed the stories. Houston doesn't play games with reader; she has her formula and sticks to it, and I find her work fundamentally pleasing most of the time.

Jerry says

Later, when we were safe and on the two-lane heading home, Jack told me we were never in any real danger, and I let him get away with it because I knew that's what he had to tell himself to get past almost losing me.

"The river gave us both a lesson in respect," he said, and it occurred to me then that he thought he had a chance to tame that wild river, but I knew I was at its mercy from the very beginning, and I thought all along that that was the point.

Well-written stories each from a very similar, if not the same, narrator, and her relationships with masculine and non-masculine men. That is to say, Republicans (cowboys) and non-Republicans (who want to be cowboys, but never will).

Her taste in men seems to change slightly throughout the book, but most of that seems to involve slowly giving up her dreams. The stories are as much about how the narrator views women and men, and masculinity, than any of the actual events she takes part in in the stories.

Janet says

Cowboys are NOT my weakness....and they're not Pam Houston's either.

I would never pick up a book with this title except that I heard that it was not what it sounds like and that much was true but I still had to hide it in my purse out of embarrassment. It's about relationships but mostly what is lacking in relationships between men and women and in the end Houston's most meaningful relationship is with a woman. It's well written and whip smart.

Houston is a tomboy with a taste for perilous adventure and the outdoors. She confides that she had broken 5 major bones by the time she was 28. So naturally she is attracted to men who feed that thrill to danger. In this series of short stories, she relates her affairs with men who share her activities and bed but don't engage her mind or emotions. She is attracted to their "bad boy" animal nature which she tries to tame and when she's successful, loses her attraction to them.....sound familiar?

There was much in this book that resonated with me. Houston talks about immersing herself in her man's activities and then realizing one day that she used to dance and listen to music i.e. she's given up things that she loves, sublimated herself to the inclinations of her lover. It's unconscious on her part and something that most women do in a relationship.

She talks about being in a relationship with a man who "lied by omission". Been there, done that! Sheesh!

In one vignette, she declares "I love you" to her guy and he responds "I feel the same way"which when you really think about it means he loves himself....lol.

Parts of it made me laugh out loud. About one of her "cowboys" she says that Homer wasn't really a cowboy but "a capitalist with a Texas accent who owned a horse". I've known a few of those myself.

Ultimately, this was a few hours well and enjoyably spent.

Jolie says

Striking, visual and dare I say poetic short stories about loving all things untamed, including your own heart.

Note, this edition's cover design (i.e., cowgirl legs with strange cowboy figurine standing in-between them) is laughable and just plain awful - do not judge this book by that particular cover

Erin says

The writing here is whip-smart and I would pay a hundred dollars for the reaction I have in my gut when I read this book. Pam Houston helps me locate the memories I forget I carry: the glittering world inside a trout, the mystery and excitement of peeling a deer's skin from its body, the satisfaction of sewing bait fish onto sturdy, sturgeon-catching hooks—my earliest arts and crafts, mostly forgotten.

I grew up plucking ducks and geese in the West with a complicated outdoorsman father who is not unlike some of the men in this book.

Also, side note: Houston will always have a special place in my heart for writing the passage: "You might forget, for example, that you live in a city where people have so many choices they throw words away, or so few they will bleed in your car for a hundred dollars. You might forget eleven or maybe twelve of the sixteen-in-a-row totaled cars. You might forget that you never expected to be alone at thirty-two or that a crazy man might be waiting for you with a gun when you get home tonight or that all the people you know—without exception—have their hearts all wrapped around someone who won't ever love them back." (From the essay, "The Best Girlfriend You Never Had"). Read her.

David says

I enjoyed this book a great deal more than I expected to. I've kind of gotten burned out on western wilderness books, but this had such a different feel to it. It was fresh at the same time that it was still spare and solid. Very nice writing.

Erik says

A friend of mine is on a quest to find the female Bukowski. And while I don't think Houston qualifies that, she certainly found the Carver of my heart. I love stories about people, not events because the most changing events occur when we don't expect them to, over a period of unforeseeable time. It could be a moment, it could be days, it could be the length of an illness, or a night in the snow with your dogs. Houston does a great job with this. It's a little too gender stereotypical at times and when she tries to find strength, I find the expected. But all of her women (and this is a book about the women in each story) are strong, independent, vulnerable and tough.
