



Blaize Speaks: A Novel

Kirk Ward Robinson

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In the sensitive novel Blaize Speaks, a girl and her friends forge new identities in the foster care system, learning to seek independence.

In Kirk Ward Robinson's second series novel *Blaize Speaks*, a girl comes of age in the foster care system while her uncle attempts to recreate the past.

After her mother leaves her on the front steps of her grandmother's house, Blaize settles into a new routine with her grandmother and her uncle, Bo, who has worked at the depot in town for much of his life. After the depot is bought by a new owner who sows seeds of jealousy and rivalry among Bo and his friends, Bo tries to bring back the camaraderie established under the previous owner and is met with threats and mistreatment. And after the death of his mother, Bo feels that he is unable to care for Blaize; he sends her into the foster care system and begins a quest for vengeance.

At an orphanage, Blaize meets Kitty, who becomes like her older sister. After they are separated, Blaize meets Joss, who is her age and whose backstory is shrouded in mystery. They form a deep friendship and become inseparable. Joss even trusts Blaize to take care of her after she runs away from summer camp. Blaize doesn't have the language to express love, which she instead shows through her actions and thoughts; she puts her loved ones' safety above her own.

Though the choices they make differ—Blaize and Joss decide to create a new life for themselves; Bo pursues his sense of justice at the cost of his job, his house, his friends, and his town—the characters are all on their own quests for stability and love. Indeed, they are often most known, and best developed, through their relationships to others; found families have a deepening effect for many. But their worldviews don't often change, even when their circumstances do, resulting in some static sections of the book.

Still, the book establishes its small-town setting well, both via characters' language and through keen descriptions of the land. As Blaize explores her surroundings, the worldbuilding deepens and changes: her perceptions are at first colored by youthful curiosity; later, she becomes aware of dark and eerie aspects of the world, intuiting danger; later still, her descriptions become more detached, as she comes to regard beauty as a mere tool for getting what she wants.

In the sensitive novel *Blaize Speaks*, a girl and her friends forge new identities in the foster care system, learning to seek independence. In this series entry, unanswered questions remain at the end, including about where Blaize and Joss will end up and about some other characters' fates.

JESSICA SULLIVAN (October 17, 2023)

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