

Don't wish too much for what you want, the old saying goes; you might get it. This is a delightfully magical read for any child who wants to taste the joys and challenges of freedom — and then, like Billie, come safely home again, to a mother who is just beginning to let go.

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### The Necessary Balance between the Worlds of Emotion and Reason

*Summer of Madness.* Marion Crook. Orca, 1995. 188 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-041-X. *Dreamers.* Mary-Ellen Lang Collura. Douglas & McIntyre/Greystone, 1995. 133 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55054-162-5.

Marion Crook's young adult novel *Summer of Madness* is set on a cattle ranch in the Cariboo region of British Columbia. Crook's compelling first-person point of view narrative is provided by sixteen-year-old Karen Stewartson who ably assumes the household duties, her own and her absent mother's daily ranch chores.

Crook's style of writing is engaging. Her setting, described in a realistic manner, makes ranch style life and its problems interesting and credible. Crook's strongly-motivated, believable characters have fascinating depths. Karen's main problem appears to be the emotional turbulence created by her best friend, seventeen-year-old Kevin who is at times grumpy, critical and domineering. "Having troubles with his hormones," Karen's mother remarks. Kevin and Karen both possess the uncomfortable ability to invade one another's thoughts. Trevor Foster, another boy who interests Karen, is, on the surface, a real charmer, and apparently uncomplicated.

The central controlling idea is Karen's attempt to maintain balance between her emotions and reason. Capable, rational Karen's self-control slips when her father's and their neighbour's cattle are poisoned, and dirt bikers cut their fences, open gates and harass their cows. When confronted by Karen about his criminal involvement Trevor reacts by threatening Karen and her seven-year-old sister, Sarah.

Karen believes "emotions are irrational and that people shouldn't act on them," preferring the control of karate to random acts of violence. So she voices her objection when their neighbours vandalize Trevor's motorcycle, one of those used to create havoc on their property. But, as the violence accelerates, Karen rejects reasoned karate moves and chooses a pitchfork as a weapon against Trevor.

It is the final act of the poisoning of her calf, Edie, that shatters Karen's control. Karen tells her veterinarian friend, Reena, "I'm not going to be a vet." She asks her, "When do you get so you can take it? So you don't care so much?" "But not caring would make you a bad vet and a lousy human being," Reena tells Karen.

Forced to do community service, Trevor grows fond of the calf he is caring for, but when it dies through poisoning he finally reveals the identity and motivation of the poisoners. In the final confrontation Karen learns to blend reason and emotion, freeing herself from guilt and anxiety, and using her karate to escape death. She discovers "a lot about feelings," especially the dark, confused feelings of her attacker.

*Dreamers*, by Mary-Ellen Lang Collura, is set in Miller Hill, a little town in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia, and narrated by eighteen-year-old Sam Westgate. In this novel, as in *Summer of Madness*, the focus is on teenage emotions and reason. Sam's story focuses upon the dreams of his friends: Jack, Sally, Bobby and Lenny. Sam dreams about becoming a writer, Jack of having his own band, singing and touring the world. Sally wants to dance. Jack's elderly father, Mr. Bernard, another well-drawn character, recalls his own failed dreams. "Dreams're stupid," he declares, denouncing Jack's skateboard, his band, songs, and singing.

Suddenly, these teenagers' dreams clash and collide violently. And by doing so, they become threatened by destructive emotions, which lack the necessary balance between emotion and reason. These emotions — jealousy, greed, and rage — erupt into outrageous behaviour resulting in distrust, bitterness, physical injury and death. Subsequently, guilt becomes another self-destructing emotion to deal with. Mrs. Demitrovitch, a hospital cleaning lady, scolds Jack: "You've got to learn to think ... See with your heart, your mind. Start with books. Don't lie there doing nothing but feeling sorry for yourself."

The paralysis of grief and guilt sends Sam backwards in time: he remembers Mr. Petersen's grade four class where "the only way I came close to remedying any of the problems I faced was in my daydreams." Sam decides he'll begin with Jack's band because "the option of fixing it existed. Other things were beyond remedy." Jack, who accepts Mrs. Demitrovitch's advice about learning to think, says to his father, "I thought I'd be a hero and challenge a car. And look at me." Sally and Sam reinstate their dreams during shared discussions. When Jack slips back into self-pity and abusive bitterness, Sally says she'll use *her* "pain" in a positive way by returning to her dance classes. Stung into action by Sally's anger, Jack returns to his guitar. Sam writes lyrics for Jack's music. Their separate dreams become a creative blend of emotion and reason during the dance concert which centres upon Sally's dance, Jack's music and Sam's lyrics.

Both books give dramatic representation to one of the most difficult hurdles of adolescence — learning to temper emotion with reason.

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