



Marianne Dreams

Catherine Storr

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Ill and bored with having to stay in bed, Marianne picks up a pencil and starts doodling - a house, a garden, a boy at the window. That night she has an extraordinary dream. She is transported into her own picture, and as she explores further she soon realises she is not alone. The boy at the window is called Mark, and his every movement is guarded by the menacing stone watchers that surround the solitary house. Together, in their dreams, Marianne and Mark must save themselves...

Marianne Dreams Details

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Manybooks says

The basic premise of Catherine Storr's Marianne Dreams is that when the main protagonist, that when young and boisterous Marianne is confined to her bed for many weeks due to serious illness (the exact nature of her malady is never clearly stated, but I have always wondered whether it might be a case of rheumatic fever) to ward off her boredom and frustrations at having to remain not only inside but actually firmly bedridden, she passes her time drawing pictures (but with a special and as it turns out rather magical drawing pencil she has found, and which drawings start to increasingly take over both her dreams and her reality, her life as it is). Now the house that Marianne imagines (dreams about) and then proceeds to draw with her special pencil has a boy in the window (who actually also turns out to be a real boy named Mark who has had polio and is thus housebound and cannot or perhaps will not come out, cannot or will not leave his home, which is probably why at first Marianne has imagined and the drawn her envisioned domicile without doors or stairs). And while originally, Marianne is much sympathetic towards Mark, and tries to help him by providing (by drawing) luxuries and necessities (including stairs), and while the two children do seem to almost immediately become something like best friends in their dream world, Marianne soon becomes nastily jealous of Mark for some reason and unfortunately, the eyes (the malevolent, monitoring eyes) she has drawn (in her fit of jealous rage) on the boulders near the house make these same into a genuine and dangerous horror and threat for and to both Mark and her. And indeed while Marianne soon realises and very much understands that the eyes she has given to the stone boulders have created actual and palpable danger, all and sundry attempts of Marianne's to correct this, to correct her act of willful and unbridled, unnecessary drawn and created envy or to even render the so-called Watchers less ominous and make them more potentially benign, badly do rather majorly misfire, finally necessitating a daring and dashing rescue and escape, and with this, a liberation for both children, Mark from his often self-imposed exile due to polio and his belief that he is somehow lesser because of his bout with said disease and Marianne from her tendency towards jealousy and easy, fast anger and nastiness (which in my opinion demonstrates that perhaps, the ominousness of the boulders and the fact that they were created, that they were drawn in envious anger notwithstanding, the Watchers and the adventurous rescue of Mark and escape from them is actually, was actually necessary and a true requirement for both children).

In Marianne Dreams author Catherine Storr plays with the concept that reality and fantasy can and do overlap and in fact often interplay, and that children are also not by nature always innocent and shiningly glowing, that they do have the desire, or at least that they can have the desire and capability for destruction, anger, even evil in them, in their natures (and that by outing these desires, these thoughts, these feelings of resentful frustration, such as how Marianne proceeds to visually portray her jealousy of Mark by means of the Watchers, while there is indeed a genuine threat created and engendered by and through this, the Watchers and the dangers, the potential evil emanating from them can or at least might also be harnessed and thus used to cause liberation, escape and an emergence of more positive, more healthy and less destructive general attitudes and behaviours). For without the Watchers precipitating the action, making necessary Mark's rescue and escape from the house, Mark himself would likely and even probably never have even considered leaving (escaping) his polio induced exile from society and reality and similarly, Marianne's jealous nature would have simply and unhealthily festered inside of her, tainting her soul, ravaging her feelings. Highly recommended (but I would definitely consider Marianne Dreams more a novel for older children above the age of eleven or twelve, as while there is no real violence depicted and presented, there definitely is a constant vein of potential creepiness featured, and the implied threat from the Watchers is very much ever-present, which might indeed be rather frightening to and for younger or very sensitive children, especially if they should also have the tendency towards and for lurid, colourful dreams).

And yes, there also appears to be a sequel, Marianne and Mark (which I unfortunately have not yet managed to read, as it is not nearly as well known as Marianne Dreams and sadly also not in current print and all that readily and easily available at reasonable purchasing prices).

Kay says

I loved this book when i was growing up. The idea that anything you drew could take on a life of its own in your dreams had me wishing so abadly that I could do the same! The film made of this - 'Paperhouse' was really well done and really brought across the dark side to it all. That i can have such a lingering memory of it after all these years is testament to its content.

Philip Jackson says

I'd never come across this children's novel at all until a friend recently recommended it to me. I can imagine that whoever has read this as a child would have been haunted by it. Marianne is a young girl who is bedridden as a result of an unspecified illness. Discovering a pencil which had belonged to her grandmother, Marianne draws a house set within a fence. That night in her dreams, she visits the house, but can't gain entry as she hasn't drawn anyone inside who is able to let her in. Awake again, draws a figure in the upstairs window, but in her next dream he still can't let her in because she hasn't drawn any stairs in the house. And so it goes on.

The book is incredibly imaginative, cleverly structured, and tightly plotted. There is a tremendous sense of foreboding throughout the dream sequences which builds to a terrific climax.

Even though this is ostensibly a children's book, I would heartily recommend it to anyone with an interest in tales of the supernatural and unrest. Catherine Storr doesn't appear to have written many novels, which is a pity since her imagination was able to conjure up such an inventive little story.

Kinga says

A Children's book was exactly what the doctor ordered for this gloomy never ending winter. This book is a fabulous old-school kind of children's book with its old-fashioned vocabulary that makes it all more enojayble. It takes you back to the time when life was fresh and exciting. Now when we are old, the novelty of life has worn off, we have to go to work, buy groceries and pay the rent and we have to be reminded sometimes how exciting life really is.

Children's books do it for me.

This one really took me away and during the 40 minute tube ride I completely forgot I was actually going to work.

It tells a story of a little girl who confined to bed for weeks amuses herself with drawing. As it turns out the pencil she has been using is not just an ordinary pencil but the kind that makes her drawings come to life later on at night when she is dreaming. The story is very atmospheric and quite spooky, the borders between reality and dreams become quite blurry and I have to admit I was tiny bit frightened when I read it late at night in my bed.

All in all it was a "jolly good book" to read when it is so "beastly" outside.

Melody says

Where was this book when I was 9 or 10? Man, I would have adored it and read it over and over and over. Marianne is bedridden with what sound like mononucleosis to the modern ear, and she finds herself whiling away the long hours drawing with a magic pencil and visiting her drawings in her dreams. There's a boy with polio involved, and several missteps and a nearly perfect ending. This one was delicious. Thanks, Constance!

Michelle, the Bookshelf Stalker Queen of the Undead says

I read this when I was a kid. It is a MUST read if you like dark fantasy. The book was made into a movie and surprise, surprise... the movie was excellent!

Jane says

Catherine Storr's 1958 novel *Marianne Dreams* is one of those classic children's stories that passed me by, but luckily I spotted a Puffin copy from the 1970s, I picked it up, I thought it looked lovely, and so I brought it home.

It was lovely, it was spooky, and it was the kind of book that brought out the child who loved books inside me.

Marianne is confined to bed with an illness that will keep her there for several months. Bored, she starts to draw to pass the time, using an old pencil she found in her grandmother's workbox. She draws a house, with a garden, set in rough moorland.

When she falls asleep she dreams that she is standing outside the house she drew. She goes to the door but she finds that she can't get in, because she didn't draw a door knob. She adds that the next day, and after the next night's dream she adds a staircase, so that she can go upstairs to meet the boy she drew looking out of a window.

The next day she goes back to her drawing, and she adds a door handle, and a boy looking out of an upstairs window. That night's dream makes her realise that she needs to add stairs, and when she has added those she meets Mark. He tells her that he is trapped, because he has been ill and he can't use his legs properly.

Marianne had been having lessons with Miss Chesterfield, a tutor who gave lessons to sick children in their own homes; and she realised that Mark was another pupil Miss Chesterfield had told her about, who had polio. That intrigued Marianne, but it also upset her when her tutor was a little late on her birthday, explaining that it was because Mark had arranged for his mother to buy her flowers; many more flowers than Marianne had own mother buy.

Later that day, still upset, Marianne drew bars across Mark's window, and sinister eyes on the boulders that she had drawn to fill the space on the page outside the house and garden. Later she regretted what she had

done, but the marks that the pencil made couldn't be arased, and all Marianne could do was add more to her drawing.

(The black and white illustrations in my copy are really effective.)

I saw that the pencil captured Marianne's intent as she drew as well as the marks she made on paper. She didn't notice that, because she was too caught up in the adventure and the practicalities that presented themselves. I would have been the same if I read the book as her age; and I would have been as disturbed as she and Mark were by the watchers.

The eyes that Marianne drew onto the boulders when she was angry with Mark had turned them into sinister, sentient beings that she knew would harm the two children if they tried to leave the house. But she knew that they had to leave the house, because their health and happiness in the waking world reflected their health and happiness in Marianne's dreams.

What could she draw to give Mark the strength to escape, and to allow them to escape the watchers ?

The idea behind this book was inspired, and the execution was perfect. The internal logic held, and Catherine Storr had the wisdom to not explain so much. She focused her story on her characters; I liked Marianne and Mark, I felt for them and I believed in them; they behaved exactly as children their age would. I do wish I'd met them when I was their age, but I'm glad that at least I've met them now.

What I wouldn't have noticed when I was that young is that the writing is elegant, the story-telling is lovely, and that the book has hardly dated at all.

Marianne's story was adapted for television in the 1970s, it was modernised for the cinema in the 1980s (Bernard Rose's 'Paperhouse'); and a few years ago it was adapted for the stage.

It would sit very nicely among the children's classics on anyone's bookshelves; and I understand that it is still in print

Joanne Harris says

The latest in my season of re-readings of classic children's books. It's been a long time since I first read this one, but it still packs a punch: it's well-written, dark and in places, genuinely chilling - those whispering stones always freaked me out as a child, and they still do. The characters are marvellous; well-drawn and quite without sentimentality: I especially love the fact that illness makes them both so cranky and unpleasant - it reads as a deliberate challenge to the "saintly invalid" trope that permeates so many children's books (Little Women, Pollyanna, etc. even Jane Eyre). The Freudian undercurrents are much stronger and more apparent now than when I was a child, and all the more satisfying for that: this is the kind of book that grows with you, rather than staying in the realm of childhood.

Kimberly says

Long ago I came across the movie Paperhouse. It's a haunting tale of a sick little girl who draws an alternate world that she visits in dreams. There she encounters a little boy who also happens to be ill in real life. It's spooky and magical and much more enjoyable than this book.

I recently discovered that the movie was based on this book, so of course I wanted to read it. The book is described as a children's classic. It's definitely for children but the writing isn't as inventive and emotional as the summary of the tale might suggest. This might be a fine read for early readers, however I recommend that adults bypass this book in favor of the film.

yengyeng says

When I read this as an 11-year old, I didn't quite fully grasp how incurable illnesses and death exist in a desperate murky no-man's-land dreamworld. Now I do. Both Marianne and myself got perspective, learnt about the floor-dropping sensation of cause-and-effect and consequences and grew up a little. It's a lovely little book about friendship, sharing and being responsible. I really like the ending because it's so positive.

Hilary says

Marianne is convalescing after an illness when she finds a pencil that she draws a house with. Later when she dreams she visits this house and discovers that what she draws with the pencil in her waking life will appear in her dreams.

The watching stones are a fun, scary addition to the story and we enjoyed the coming together of the two children's lives and their escape. The illustrations are good too.

Mariel says

I think anyone who dreams or imagines a lot about things they hear about, or just likes to make stuff up, would like *Marianne Dreams* a lot. Marianne is bedridden and only has her thoughts and drawing materials to keep her sane. That's a pretty thin grip on things, so dependent on moods. It only takes a creepy looking tree outside to throw a new light on impending future. (Some of us *like* to work ourselves up, too.)

Marianne's tutor tells her about another boy in the town, and Marianne includes him in those drawings. When Marianne's dreams come to life (dream or reality?), Mark is in danger. It is up to Marianne to imagine a way out.

I recognized that feverish dreamlike feeling that makes things look sinister or magical (or both). (I can get that feeling even from a lack of sleep, or being awake at a certain hour with no one else about.) 'Dreams' evokes those feelings to the best of their abilities. I have to say I LOVE that feeling (there is such a thing as too much of a good thing, though).

The closest book to this one I can think of is *Charlotte Sometimes* by Penelope Farmer. In fact, I found out about this one because I was on the looksie for another book I would like as much as that one. Another dreamy fantasy about keeping ahold of yourself and what is real amongst the darker side of fantasies. It did the trick.

CLM says

An unusual book about a girl who is bedridden and starts drawing out of boredom - and the things she draws begin to exist and draw her into their world while she is sleeping.

rosamund says

Marianne discovers that she can manipulate her dreams by using a pencil she finds in her great-grandmother's sewing basket. Marianne is recovering from a long illness, and through her dreams she meets Mark, who has polio. As a child, I found this book frightening: the world Marianne discovers in her dreams is chilling and populated by malevolent figures. What struck me on this reread is the nuanced portrait of illness and disability, and the genuine fear that the children will not survive. It's an interesting take on recovery from illness and the way serious illness affects our way of thinking.

Rebecca McNutt says

Great children's classic, with vivid and memorable characters, a dark yet beautiful dream world and the power of imagination. I can remember how much I loved it as a kid, and I recall watching a pretty good film adaptation of it called *Paperhouse*, as well. This classic, reminiscent of stories like *Skelig* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, is timeless and magical and unlike any other.
