

## Love and Country

by Christina Adam

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### About the Book

When rodeo practice begins, young Kenny Swanson is hugely disappointed to learn that he won't be able to compete. He and his mother, Lenna, have just moved to a new town and can't afford the risk of injury that is a fact of riding broncs. But a boy's dreams die hard, and Kenny is soon hanging on a fence rail, watching the local rodeo star.

Kenny's longing drives **Love and Country's** singular story of four seasons in a high valley in Idaho — a complex and poignant year of discovery for him and others in this mesmerizing first novel. As Lenna struggles to find a place for herself — alone with her son, surrounded by vast and sometimes frightening open spaces — Kenny witnesses death on a hunting trip with his estranged father, risks the consequences of breaking colts, helps a mare to foal, and learns the meaning of forgiveness.

Christina Adam captures an American landscape and the sweet pangs of both young and mature love with simplicity and grace. Her characters find challenges in being outsiders and strength in making connections at the most important moments. Like the migrating geese that catch Kenny's attention, they fly first in different directions, eventually gathering together in formation.

### Discussion Guide

1. The great American West is often romanticized in fiction. Did **Love and Country** change any ideas you previously held about this part of the country? Why does or doesn't the West appeal to you as a place to visit or to live?
2. One theme of **Love and Country** is how people learn, almost against their will, that they are not alone in the world. How do Kenny, Lenna, Roddy, and Cynthia come, each in his or her own way, to understand this?
3. Kenny's father, Kenneth Swanson, is largely absent from Kenny's life. Does Kenny think differently about his father after their shared hunting trip? How does Kenneth's death affect his son?
4. Discuss how changes in the weather and seasons emphasize—or counterpoint — the action of **Love and Country**
5. Roddy Moyers seems to have it all: a well-off family, local fame, freedom to be the "bad boy," and the admiration of women. Do you think he is satisfied with his life? Why or why not?

6. How is Lenna's love for her son revealed? Does her relationship with Roddy disprove her devotion to Kenny?
7. Why do you think Christina Adam's original title for this novel was *Canada Geese*? What do the geese flying overhead mean to Kenny (pages 13 and 206)?
8. Cynthia Dustin is a young woman yearning for escape from her family. How do you envision her future away from her community and from her father, Earl? What, if anything, will she miss about her former home?
9. How would you explain the intensity of the fight between Kenny and Earl? And why does Cynthia behave so tenderly toward Earl when he is in the hospital?
10. Christina Adam once said that **Love and Country** was a "group coming-of-age story." What do you think she meant?
11. Kenny dreams of being a great rodeo star. Many western communities enjoy showcasing ranch skills — and celebrating farm culture — during rodeos, but there are critics who claim that rodeos harm animals. Do you think rodeos are ethical and serve a purpose?
12. How does **Love and Country** speak to you of what Kim Barnes, in her appreciation of the novel, calls "the miracle of friendship across the boundaries of gender and age"?

#### Author Bio

Christina Adam's short fiction has appeared in *Crazy Horse*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and many other periodicals, as well as in *CIRCLE OF WOMEN: An Anthology of Contemporary Western Women Writers*. Her first book, *ANY SMALL THING CAN SAVE YOU*, a collection of stories, was published in 2001. The recipient of an Idaho Commission on the Arts Fellowship, *LOVE AND COUNTRY* is her second book.

#### Critical Praise

"Writing with crystalline radiance...Adam starts out with the basics, land and family, and strips away our simplistic notions of a bucolic tradition to reveal a universe of hidden and dire complexities."

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