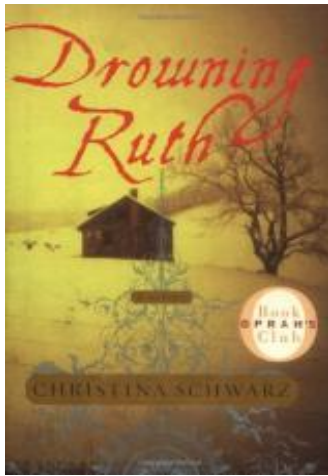


# Drowning Ruth

by Christina Schwarz

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## About the Book

Deftly written and emotionally powerful, **Drowning Ruth** is a stunning portrait of the ties that bind sisters together and the forces that tear them apart, of the dangers of keeping secrets and the explosive repercussions when they are exposed. A mesmerizing and achingly beautiful debut.

Winter, 1919. Amanda Starkey spends her days nursing soldiers wounded in the Great War. Finding herself suddenly overwhelmed, she flees Milwaukee and retreats to her family's farm on Nagawaukee Lake, seeking comfort with her younger sister, Mathilda, and three-year-old niece, Ruth. But very soon, Amanda comes to see that her old home is no refuge--she has carried her troubles with her. On one terrible night almost a year later, Amanda loses nearly everything that is dearest to her when her sister mysteriously disappears and is later found drowned beneath the ice that covers the lake. When Mathilda's husband comes home from the war, wounded and troubled himself, he finds that Amanda has taken charge of Ruth and the farm, assuming her responsibility with a frightening intensity. Wry and guarded, Amanda tells the story of her family in careful doses, as anxious to hide from herself as from us the secrets of her own past and of that night.

Ruth, haunted by her own memory of that fateful night, grows up under the watchful eye of her prickly and possessive aunt and gradually becomes aware of the odd events of her childhood. As she tells her own story with increasing clarity, she reveals the mounting toll that her aunt's secrets exact from her family and everyone around her, until the heartrending truth is uncovered.

Guiding us through the lives of the Starkey women, Christina Schwarz's first novel shows her compassion and a unique understanding of the American landscape and the people who live on it.

## Discussion Guide

1. What do you think of Amanda Starkey? Is she sympathetic? How does her unreliability affect your attitude towards

her?

2. Is love a good thing in this novel?
3. What does the island represent?
4. What makes someone a mother? What do you feel about Amanda as a mother?
5. How does Carl relate to the women in his life?
6. How do the landscape and weather affect the behavior and outlook of the characters?
7. Should Ruth have gone to Chicago with Imogene?
8. Are Amanda and Mathilda good sisters to each other? In what ways are Ruth and Imogene like sisters?
9. Does it strengthen or weaken people to become intensely intertwined with their families?
10. Secrets figure prominently in this book. Why do we keep certain secrets and tell others? Are secrets necessary in life?

## Author Bio

Christina Schwarz is the author of five novels, including *THE EDGE OF THE EARTH* and the Oprah Book Club selection *DROWNING RUTH*. Born and raised in rural Wisconsin, she lives in southern California.

## Critical Praise

"A strong sense of portent and unusually vivid characters distinguish this mesmerizing first novel about horrifying family secrets and nearly annihilating guilt. **Drowning Ruth** is a complex and rewarding debut. "

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### **Drowning Ruth**

by Christina Schwarz

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