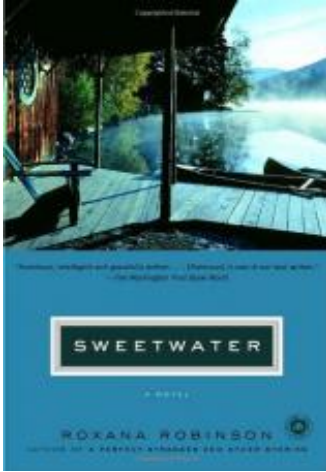


# Sweetwater: A Novel

by Roxana Robinson

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## About the Book

In this brilliant, luminous novel, one of our finest realist writers gives us a story of surpassing depth and emotional power. Acclaimed for her lucid and compassionate exploration of the American family, Roxana Robinson sets her new work on familiar terrain --- New York City and the Adirondacks --- but with **Sweetwater** she transcends the particulars of the domestic sphere with a broader, more encompassing vision. In this poignant account of a young widow and her second marriage, Robinson expands her scope to include the larger natural world as well as the smaller, more intimate one of the home.

Isabel Green's marriage to Paul Simmons, after the death of her first husband, marks her reconnection to life --- a venture she's determined will succeed. But this proves to be harder than she'd anticipated, and the challenges of starting afresh seem more complicated in adulthood. Staying at the Simmons lodge for their annual summer visit, Isabel finds herself entering into a set of familial complexities. She struggles to understand her new husband, his elderly, difficult parents and his brother, whose relationship with Paul seems oddly fraught. Furthermore, her second marriage begins to cast into sharp relief the troubling echoes of her first. Isabel's professional life plays a part as well: a passionate environmental advocate, she is aware of the tensions within the mountain landscape itself during a summer of spectacular beauty and ominous drought.

In her cool, elegant prose, Robinson gracefully delivers a plot that is complex, surprising and ultimately wrenching in its impact. As the strands of family are woven tightly and inevitably together, and as the past painfully informs the present, the vivid backdrop of the physical world provides its own eloquent dynamic. **Sweetwater** is a stunning achievement by a writer at the peak of her craft.

## Discussion Guide

1. Grief plays an important part in **Sweetwater**. How does the heritage of loss move through the book, influencing the

characters? How does it influence Theresa? Michael? Isabel?

2. How is the issue of responsibility, public and private, central to the book? How do the characters carry out their responsibilities to each other - Isabel to Michael, and Isabel to Paul? Charlotte and Douglas to their children? How do the characters carry out their larger responsibilities to society and the planet?

3. Why does Isabel marry Michael? Why does she marry Paul? What are her choices based on, and what do you think of the choices she makes?

4. The first chapter establishes the setting and introduces the characters. How is the book's plot foreshadowed here?

5. What role does the natural world play in the book? How does it mirror the emotional lives of the characters? What does the mountain lion represent?

6. Robinson is known as a consummate literary stylist. How does her language reflect the emotional climate of the action throughout the book?

7. The family plays an important part in this book. Who are the various families portrayed, and how do their attitudes and strategies differ?

8. Charlotte and Douglas are powerful characters. How do they affect their sons? How do they affect Isabel? How would you assess their marriage? Does it work?

9. Water plays a central role in the book. What are some of the pivotal scenes in which water is an important element? What does water represent?

10. Robinson's work has often been compared to that of Edith Wharton, whose lucid, elegant prose chronicled a darkly glittering world of passion and complexity. Why do you think this comparison has been made, and why do you agree or disagree with it?

## Author Bio

Roxana Robinson is the author of 11 books --- seven novels, three collections of short stories and the biography of Georgia O'Keeffe. Four of these were chosen as *New York Times Notable Books*, two as *New York Times Editors' Choices*.

Her fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *Best American Short Stories*, *The Southampton Review*, *Epiphany* and elsewhere. Her work has been widely anthologized and broadcast on NPR. Her books have been published in England, France, Germany, Holland and Spain.

Roxana Robinson has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation and the MacDowell Colony, and she was named a Literary Lion by the New York Public Library. Robinson has served on

the Boards of PEN and the Authors Guild, and was the president of the Authors Guild. She has received the Barnes and Noble ?Writers for Writers Award,? given by Poets and Writers, and the Award for Distinguished Service to the Literary Community from the Authors Guild. She teaches in the MFA Program at Hunter College.

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