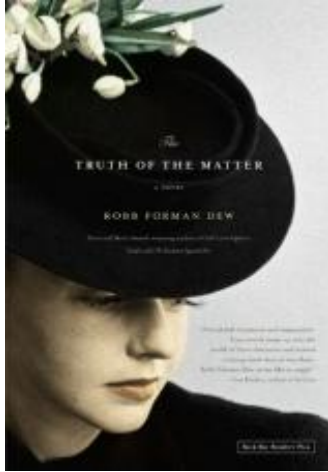


# The Truth of the Matter

by Robb Forman Dew

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## About the Book

With the pitch-perfect prose and the acuity of perception that have distinguished all of her fiction, including her National Book Award-winning first novel, **Dale Loves Sophie to Death**, Robb Forman Dew immerses us in the world of Agnes Scofield, whose husband has died mysteriously in an icy morning car crash and whose children have been swept into adulthood by World War II.

Agnes wakes to the realization that she is a tourist in her own life - a wife with no husband, a mother whose children no longer need her - and she must forge a new way of defining herself.

The Truth of the Matter is at once the stunning tale of an American family at midcentury and a timeless portrait of the quiet tensions that arise between parents and children and between the present and the past.

## Discussion Guide

1. Agnes's children come back to Washburn after the war because they so longed for home, and Agnes, too, had dreamed of having a full house once again. But when the family is finally settled under one roof after years of being apart, the experience isn't quite what they expected. What does *The Truth of the Matter* say about home? Is home a house, a group of people, a state of mind? Have you ever felt as though you had no home to go to, even if logic tells you otherwise? How do you go about rebuilding a home?
2. The Scofields, though not the wealthiest family in Washburn, are certainly one of the most closely watched. How does this affect the family? the way Agnes rears her children, the way the children view themselves? It is said that they are "the subjects of a collective pride" in town. Are the town's expectations burdensome to any of the family members?
3. As the Scofields return to the house, Agnes and her children experience flashes of love and resentment, devotion and

bitterness. Where in the story is this friction most apparent? What is the root of these contradictory feelings? Can you love someone and hate him at the same time? In which characters is this clash most evident?

4. What do you make of Agnes Scofield? Is she a selfish character? A noble one? Or does she fall somewhere between those two extremes? Does your view of her change throughout the novel? How does her analysis of herself compare with her children's opinion of her? Why do you think her definition of herself is always so different from the definition others impose on her?

5. When Agnes meets her son Claytor's wife, she thinks that "Lavinia didn't seem to be anything at all like a Scofield." What does it mean to be a Scofield? How do you think Agnes would define Scofieldness? What makes Lavinia so purportedly different from the rest of the family?

6. Family members and outsiders alike constantly make reference to the Scofields' sameness: the brown eyes, the blond hair, the unmistakable temperament and quality of movement. Yet as much as the Scofields take pride in this unity, they also demonstrate a palpable effort to distinguish themselves from each other. Which characters struggle most with this need to be different? Which struggle least? Why do you think this is so?

7. Throughout the novel, there is the recurring theme of discomfort with the familiar, of feeling like a tourist in one's own life. Where do you see this manifested? What characters embody this sense of unease, and what instances best depict this feeling? Is there anyone in the novel who escapes this sentiment, who serves as a foil to the book's central tension?

8. At one point the author writes of Agnes: "It was what she believed for the time being as opposed to what she knew." How does this explain Agnes? What is this statement getting at? Discuss the significance of this statement with regard to the novel's title, *The Truth of the Matter*. What, to you, is the "truth"? Do you think Agnes would agree or disagree with you?

9. What role does Sam Holloway play in the Scofields' lives? What does he bring to Washburn? What does he represent to Agnes, and why do you think she chooses to open up to him at the end?

## Author Bio

Robb Forman Dew is the author of the novels *DALE LOVES SOPHIE TO DEATH*, for which she received the National Book Award, *THE TIME OF HER LIFE* and *FORTUNATE LIVES*. She also penned the *Washburn Trilogy* (*THE EVIDENCE AGAINST HER*, *THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER* and *BEING POLITE TO HITLER*), which chronicles the evolution of American family life through the 20th century, as well as a memoir, *THE FAMILY HEART*. She lives in Williamstown, Massachusetts, with her husband, who is professor of history at Williams College and the author of several books of Southern history.

## Critical Praise

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