



# Drowning Ruth

*Christina Schwarz*

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## **Drowning Ruth** Christina Schwarz

In the winter of 1919, a young mother named Mathilda Neumann drowns beneath the ice of a rural Wisconsin lake. The shock of her death dramatically changes the lives of her daughter, troubled sister, and husband. . . . Told in the voices of several of the main characters and skipping back and forth in time, the narrative gradually and tantalizingly reveals the dark family secrets and the unsettling discoveries that lead to the truth of what actually happened the night of the drowning. . . .

## **Drowning Ruth Details**

Date : Published July 31st 2001 by Ballantine Books (first published 2000)

ISBN : 9780345439109

Author : Christina Schwarz

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Historical, Historical Fiction, Contemporary

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## From Reader Review Drowning Ruth for online ebook

### Tory says

Stupid Oprah. I quite liked this book, it annoys me to find out that it's an Oprah book. It makes me like it less by default. Why do authors LET her put her name on their books? It's a shame.

"But a sense that there might also exist some entirely different destination, one that he couldn't yet see but which lay just beyond the obscuring undergrowth of long habit and expectations, troubled him and kept him from moving forward. He had no idea how to hack through the foliage, nor whether whatever he uncovered would please him, but neither did he want to follow blindly the manicured course on which his feet were already set."

All the characters were slightly crazy, but with good reason. I loved the narration, switching between past and present, from the perspective of different characters. I loved the story, and how it played out. Giving just enough of the past to keep you interested in the present.

I thought it was very good.

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### Jenna says

Stupid Oprah. Stupid predictable book. I feel like an asshole for even paying \$0.10 at the library book sale for it.

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### David Abrams says

Drowning Ruth is one of those novels that gets readers so worked up, so lathered, so feverish that they run around pressing the book into the hands of friends and, perhaps, strangers on a plane, insisting with wide eyes and spittle-flecked lips, "Here. Read this."

"Well," the dumbfounded party responds, "what's it about?"

"I cannot tell you."

Exactly. Drowning Ruth is one of those books you want to tell everyone about, but can't. To reveal a little would be to spoil too much. There are so many mysteries, so many surprises in Christine Schwarz' debut novel that nice folks will only give out crumbs of the plot. By "nice folks," I mean those readers who think prematurely reading the last ten pages of an Agatha Christie mystery is punishable by a jail sentence.

In fact, Drowning Ruth might just be this year's literary equivalent to The Sixth Sense.

Which is not to say that Drowning Ruth is a ghost story. It isn't. But yet, there are many characters who are haunted, you see, and--and--

Okay, I'm starting to get lathered up again.

[Deep breath.:]

There. I'm fine now.

From the first sentence to the last word, Schwarz carefully unpeels the mystery of what took place between sisters Amanda and Mathilda and Mathilda's daughter Ruth when they spent an isolated winter on a Wisconsin lake island in 1919. There is a tragedy and there is high drama of the kind familiar to readers of Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens and Theodore Dreiser (to punch home the obvious, Schwarz even has one character reading Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt).

We literally don't know what happened on the island until the very last sentence, and that's what propels us with such page-turning, lip-smacking fury through the book. Schwarz does a masterful job of gradually uncovering details of the three women's lives before 1919 and in the nearly three decades following the tragic events. The story moves between past and present quickly and sharply--like someone flipping back and forth through the pages of a photo album. But even readers who are easily confounded by non-linear narrative can find their way just fine through these pages. Schwarz knows when to give us a peek and when to keep the curtain pulled across the mystery.

Drowning Ruth bears the look of a book that belongs in the recent flood of what less-charitable critics call "chick lit." The fact that Ms. Winfrey has stamped her book club "O" on the cover doesn't help matters. But Drowning Ruth lifts its head high above the tide of mass-produced, Kleenex-friendly chick lit. Sure, there's a fair share of turn-of-the-century soap opera shenanigans and, yes, the story is strikingly old-fashioned in scope, but Schwarz's skill with words, characters and pace is so profound and startling that it becomes the sort of literature that sticks in the mind long after the final, shattering page is turned.

I simply cannot tell you enough about this book.

Except: "Here. Read this."

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## **Bookguide says**

The excerpts from reviews on the back cover of books are often gushing and raise your expectations too much. Other books are so hyped, that if you read it long after it was published, you may have heard so many friends enthusing about it, that when you finally get to it, you can only be disappointed. Then there are books like this one. I had never heard of this book nor the author, never read any reviews, and had been putting off reading it for a few months, in spite of the rave reviews from respected sources on the back cover, because I didn't want to be let down. All I can say is, this book exceeded my expectations. It is well-written, the characters are well-rounded and sympathetic, and the story is interesting and believable, spanning the years from just before America joined WWI to the Depression, and set in rural Wisconsin. If you don't enjoy books which switch between the perspectives of different characters, or backwards and forward in time, you will not enjoy this book. These devices are both used to great effect in 'Drowning Ruth' to build up the mystery surrounding the death of Ruth's mother Mattie, and the involvement of her sister Amanda. It leads you to wonder throughout the book about who was responsible, whether she really drowned, who was the

mysterious baby who Ruth claimed to have heard on the night of her mother's death. Throughout the book, new twists and turns are hinted at and revealed, and a new and dangerous development arises as Ruth grows older and makes friends with the popular Imogene. There are powerful emotions, family loyalties, secrets, crises of conscience and moral dilemmas galore. The only thing which jarred slightly was that Mattie's widowed husband Carl, despite a major misunderstanding of what really happened, decides that he can reconcile himself with what he believes to be the truth and leaves to work elsewhere. I'm not sure his presence would have made much difference, but it did seem odd. This was only a minor quibble, however. This was one of those books which makes you want to read more by the author. Superb.

Taken from my BookCrossing review, <http://www.bookcrossing.com/journal/7....> Passed on to a BookCrossing friend, Elizardbreath.

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## **Melonie says**

I read this book a few years ago and forgot everything. Now that I've reread it for bookgroup, I can see why I forgot. The characters bore me. They have no characteristics that surprise, delight, or inspire. The only reason I kept reading is to find out how Ruth drowned. Ruth turns out to be just as woosie as her Aunt Amanda. Her father is a woose too. The only one with any character (Mattie) is dead, so that should tell you something. And we know who Imogene is the first time she wants that blue marble...Anyway, I gave it two stars because the writing is tolerable and she kept the "big secret" of how Mattie drowned until the end. Kudos for that, at least.

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## **Christina says**

To tell you the truth...This book was the bomb. It was a page-turner and at the end I had gotten teary-eyed. Drowning Ruth just looking at the title captivated my attention. Then the lady has my first name which made it better. On top of all things it's part of Oprah's book club(which i didn't know she had).... In my review since I'm doing this for school I'm going try not to make mistakes and talk about each character and the story plot. I'm also put my thoughts in parenthesis. This review contains spoiler. You could say I'm retelling the book in my own words for 2 hours but not talking about it writing about it. This book is a book that makes you actually think and use your foreshadowing skills. In the Winter of 1919 this mother(Mathilda a.k.a Mattie)(i'm having goosebumps writing this)drowns in a lake in Wisconsin her death changes her sister, daughter and husband lives. It opens up secrets that should've been kept quiet. Amanda Starky is Mathilda's oldest and only sister who lived on the farm with her family until Mathilda got married to her husband(Carl) so Amanda(a.k.a Mandy) left and went to nurse school. She finally came back after she was in kahoots(if that is even a word) with a fling(btw he was married at the time of the fling)with this guy named Clement Owens. While she was a nurse she met him in the hospital trying to sell the hospital something and they met. She didn't know he was married...she thought he was the perfect man( which every lady in that time wanted..even in this time) He bought her roses and took her to the fanciest places but he went on a lot of business trips(i think he went home to be with his wife..but that's my opinion.) But he was perfect in her eyes because he never forced her to do anything..all he did was take her to romantic places and kissed her cheek and touched her neck then he will kiss her lips..it was romantic..but then one night he came to he excited sayin he got a job to work in the military so they could use his inventions..They went to a hotel and she was devirginized(btw she was in her 20's)but back then that was normal because they waited till they were married..anyways later in the book i realized she conceived a little girl that night..but she told him it was ok

they had sex.. they'll just get married(oviously normal thing to do)but he was liike i have a wife and kids and he left. At that time she packed up her stuff and went back to her hometown Winsconsin to live with her sister. Her sister Mathilda was a million times happy that she finally came to visit her and her daughter(Ruth)..(btw Carl is in war at this time)..So I'm guessing after a month when she noticed she wasn't feeling well and her cycle didn't come she noticed she was pregnant.She and her sister ever since little had a lot of land which included their own lake and island and land. She begged her sister( before she told her sister she was pregnant) if all three( Mathilda,Ruth, Amanda) of them could live on the island. They were debating back and forth. So finally they moved to the islandand her pregnancy began. Mathila decided to come up with a story saying that she found this young girl who was having a baby and she couldn't take care of it because she couldn't so Mathilda will raise the baby has her own. Amanda agreed with the story because she didn't want people talking and ban her. During the 9months they lived on the island. The night of the birth I leave for the end because that's the same day Mathilda drowned(my eyes are getting watery). The baby girl is born and named Imogene(you'll be hearing that name again). Later on in the story Ruth grows up and is ready for school...Carl is back from war and goes deeper in the Mathilda drowning story..Now I don't want to tell te whole book because I guarentee you would want to read it yourself. So Ruth is in elementary school and she is a loner doesn't have many friends but is spotted by the most popular girl in the school whose name is Imogene( after Mathilda died Amanda took care of Ruth)... They became the bestest friends but they didn't know they were related. There older now in their 20's 3 yrs apart. They are at business school learning how to type and stuff. They know this boy named Arthur Owens(son of Clement Owens). Ruth and Arthur have a connection because he's the one who found her mom when she drowned when he was younger. But Imeogene gets a job working for Mrs. Owens and falls in love with Arthur Owens. They hang out a lot but little do theyknow that they are brother and sister. He know she's probably a good wife but he's in love with Ruth which is his cousin... I'm goin to stop here because I think you should read it yourself...Bye..

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## Gaia says

My mother gave me this book. Someone from her work gave it to her. The good thing: neither of us paid for it. My mom told me it was hard to get through. She wasn't kidding.

The book centers around Amanda, a nurse who travels home to her family homestead in Wisconsin after she suffers several breakdowns while treating wounded soldiers. She had gone home to rest, get well and to help her sister, Matilda, look after the home while Matilda's hubby, Carl, was stationed in France. Sadly, there is a drowning. Matilda dies during the drowning. Young Ruth, Matilda's daughter, remembers drowning, but doesn't remember the details. Amanda takes responsibility for Ruth, raising her as her own, and then cares for Carl when he comes home from the war. Throughout the book we learn of the events that lead to the drowning and what truly happened that night. The plot is okay. The story-telling just bombed.

The author goes back and forth between first and third person, between World War I, War War II and the period before World War I and probably the period between both wars, but I don't remember because the jumping around was so mind-numbingly annoying. Some authors truly master the art of going back and forth between characters, narratives and time periods. Christina Schwarz does not.

The characters are unlikable and unmemorable. The only ones that were semi-interesting were Rudy the caretaker and Carl. And both were forgotten. Seriously. Carl plays a major part in the plot for a good majority of the book, there is tension and development there. Carl is desperate to solve the mystery of his wife's death. He searches the houses and asks questions, trying to get a clue. You are lead to believe that he may discover the secret. And then the author suddenly discards him. It was like she couldn't figure out what

to do with him so she just ties up his story by saying he went to work on a ship and that's it.

Amanda, the main character, oh, you just want her to drown from the very beginning. Matilda is likable, but predictable. It's all cliché - Amanda is the less-attractive and more straight-laced sister. Matilda is the free-spirited pretty sister. Mommy and Daddy favor Matilda, blah blah blah.

Ruth had promise. First, the author has obviously never encountered a child. The narratives that supposedly come from 3-4-5 year old Ruth are obviously written by someone in their 30's who has maybe seen a small child once or twice and is just guessing at the way children think. Ruth's character seems like she is getting a sort of backbone and is developing into her own person and then her personality just fizzles out. I guess Ruth drowned twice. Once during the night at the lake where she literally almost drowned. And then in her life, drowned by her overbearing Aunt Amanda.

The plot is a little interesting. The characters are blah. The details leave a lot to be desired. No wonder it's an Oprah book club favorite. I can normally finish a book of this size in a day. It took me a month to read it. I forced myself to get to the end...which was predictable.

Was this review jumpy and confusing? Yeah, it's just like the book.

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### **Leslie Callahan says**

I CAN'T do it! I'm ? of the way into it and I keep waiting for "the gripping psychological thriller" to start but unless I force myself to pick it up and read it I don't. I keep telling myself the last 50 pages are going to be awesome and pull it all together.... But is it worth my time for the first 250 pages - nope!

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### **Brian says**

Set in rural Wisconsin between the First and Second World Wars, this story of two sisters and their children growing up on the shores of a lake is full of secrets, guilt, misunderstandings and tragedy. There's an intensity about the plot that makes it quite difficult to bear at times - especially the ending when so much is at stake.

As a debut novel, it's quite remarkable and I wasn't surprised to hear that it was an Oprah's Book Club choice; but I think it has its weaknesses. In particular, the male characters are pretty shadowy and, despite its undoubted emotional power, I didn't really enjoy it. There wasn't enough light in the story for me. It felt claustrophobic and I could only read it in little bits. She's undoubtedly a promising writer, but I felt relieved to have reached the end.

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### **Carrie says**

The last thing I do in the world is take advice from celebrities so when I discovered this was on Oprah's book club list I almost didn't pick it up. But the book kept calling out to me and I folded. Beautiful story. It reminded me a lot of "The Heretic's Daughter", by Kathleen Kent. Though completely different it had the same feel.

'Drowning Ruth' is a story of painful secrets, love for a child and a woman's life sacrifice for this child. This is one of those stories that tugs at your heart and keeps you turning the pages in hopes things will turn out right in the end. It also pulls you on in hopes to discover the mystery that has been woven throughout.

Characters were believable, flawed, likeable and real. I found myself frustrated at times when secrets lived on but that is what made it valid. Secrets enslave us more often than protect. Dialogue was right on and I flew through the story. The only problem I did have was in the beginning. It jumps from one's point of view to the next and even jumps from one time to another but once I figured that out, I found it easy enough to follow.

Glad I own this Book!

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### **Haley says**

I'm having trouble putting together my thoughts on this book. The story was interesting and the mystery kept me engaged. I felt that some things were unanswered, and so I was left a bit unsatisfied. (i.e. I wanted to know more about Amanda and Joe's past, I felt confused about Amanda's "mental illness") I also felt that the transitioning from past to present wasn't always clear. The switching in and out of 1st and 3rd person was different and took some getting used to. The characters were interesting, yet I had trouble figuring out both Ruth and Amanda at times. Overall I definitely liked it more than I disliked it and thought it an interesting read.

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### **Charly says**

Horrible! Horrible! The only reason this gets a star is that we don't have minus stars. Not even reading this next to the shore could save this.

Confusing as you read to a fairly obvious conclusion. Second Oprah book while on vacation; she's having a bad season because they both were pretty bad. Did I mention this was horrible.

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### **Taylor says**

I read this upon the recommendation of an old co-worker and figured, Hey! It's part of Oprah's book club and I loved *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *She's Come Undone*, *The Reader*, *White Oleander*, and have MANY OTHER Oprah picks on my 'tbr' list... yet, I was so disappointed.

*Drowning Ruth* is a jumpy historical "mystery" novel centered around the mysterious death of young mother Mattie. Her sister, Amanda, is the main narrator of the story and coincidentally returns home from her duties as a WWI nurse shortly before Mattie's death. As the story progresses, Schwarz allows the narrator to change from Amanda to Mattie's survived family, and allows the novel to progress through these perspectives *through time*.

Unfortunately, the writing is boring and haulted; sometimes disjointed and not entertaining enough for me to



follow. I have about 1/4 of the book left to read, but I \*accidentally\* peaked and kind of know what is going to happen. It's not enough for me to finish the remaining ~100 pages or less.

Maybe I can pick this book up LATER and finish it, but not right now.

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### **Tiffanie says**

*Drowning Ruth* was an Oprah book a few years ago, which just supports my opinion that Oprah doesn't actually read the books before they become part of her book club and go on to sell millions and millions.

I wasn't all that excited about this book when my book group voted on it in December, but I was pleasantly surprised with how compelling the beginning was. It started out as a mystery with very few clues, so I wanted to keep reading. But after a while what had happened and what was going to happen was pretty obvious, so it wasn't quite as compelling anymore. But I did want to see how it was going to end.

Unfortunately, none of the characters were likable... I didn't really care what happened to them, and didn't really care if there was a happy ending or not. Carl was the only character I really liked, and he disappeared half way through the book. Like several other books that we've read in the last couple years, the ending was so-so. It seems like so many authors get tired and kind of wimp out at the end of the book. It's too bad because the book had a lot of potential--multiple narrators, shifts in time--but was just kind of blah.

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### **smetchie says**

Guess what? This book is about drowning. No really. The whole thing. I think it's some type of theme.

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### **Michael says**

Unfortunately the only drowning I was doing was in exhaustion. I never liked any Oprah recommendation, but I give every book an opportunity to impress me. However this book was so boring, it was extremely tedious, inconsistent and forgettable.

NOTHING about the content made a lasting impression.

I need to trust my instincts more.

NEXT!

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### **GracieKat says**

I swear, with some of the books being written today I could write a book about mutant kung-fu hamsters and get it published. The story danced around the central question: "What Really Happened the Night Mathilda Died?" After a while I just didn't care. The whole lot of them could have fallen through the ice for all I cared.

The characters were stupid to the nth degree and there seemed to be a running theme of "Co-dependency is great!" running through the whole thing. The "big twists" to the story can easily be figured out without the use of much brainpower. For it being a fairly short book and with it raining outside all week it took me three days to get through. I kept thinking of so much better things that I could be doing. Like taking a power tool to my forehead. Something more fun than this.

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## **MyGoodBookshelf says**

(This review also appears on Amazon.co.uk)

Not quite the worst book I've ever read, but it comes close...

Being an Oprah book club recommendation I expected this to be pretty good- she's usually spot-on when it comes to books that are sharp, witty, insightful and thought-provoking... But not this time.

Sorry Oprah, but this was depressing (and this is coming from someone who enjoys 'The Road' and other apocalyptic stories). I didn't exactly expect a happy tale from the title, but good grief I couldn't wait for this one to end. It's mind numbingly tedious.

Because I DID read it all the way though I think I can say that- it's rare I can stop reading a novel altogether once I've started, but this came close to being abandoned. Infact, I only continued reading because I was stuck on a train journey with nothing else to do and there wasn't a shop on board to buy a magazine. It went straight in the charity bag afterwards too, though I feel bad it may eventually be inflicted on some other poor soul.

I'll spare you the summary of this story, it may send me to sleep- but if you're still interested in what happens, check out the reviews of the people who have \*positive\* things to say about this novel.

In my opinion: dull. Dull, dull, dull.

I feel better for getting that off my chest.

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## **Corrinne says**

Amazing! I think I drove my husband insane while reading this because after every page, I would put it down and exclaim, ""This book is crazy, babe!"" The author uses both first and third person to tell her story from multiple perspectives. Some of the negative reviews for this novel sited the use of both first and third person as their main reason for disliking the format of the story. I personally found it quite useful in the character development and that is where this novel truly excelled. The characters were not only interesting but completely relatable. what struck me most is the ending. The characters that grew up as the story progressed, grew to exhibit the traits and characteristics of their familial ties...much as we all do despite our best efforts.

The mystery throughout the book is finding out what happened on the fated evening that changed every character's life for good. It keeps the reader interested and by the end I was dying to know what had

happened. Am I suppose to hate the main character or pity her? In the end, it's both.

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**Kevin Ansbrosio says**

Wishy-washy and predictable.

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