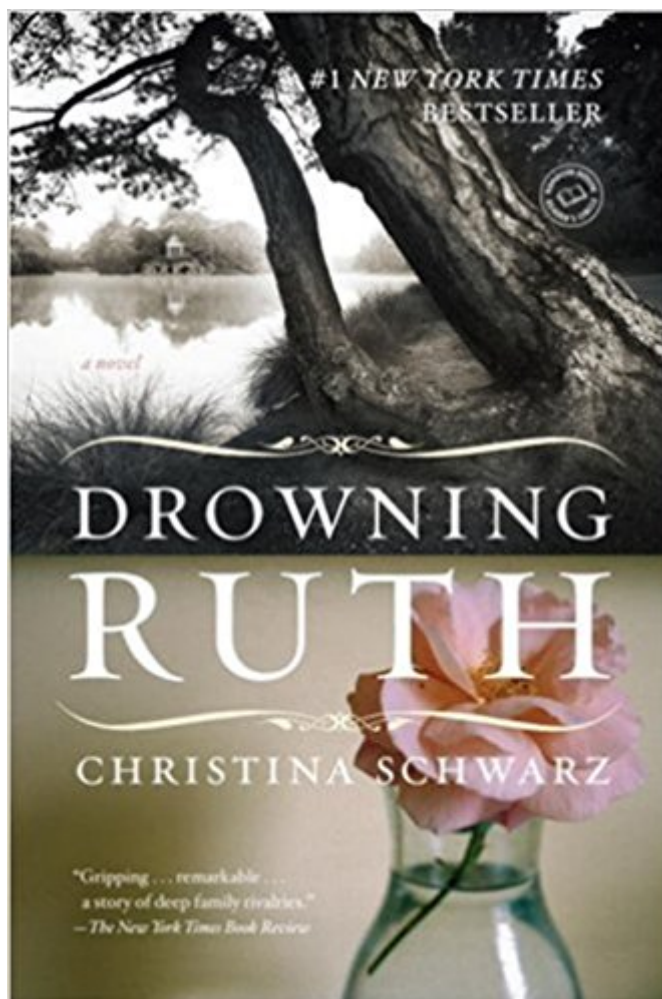


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Drowning Ruth: A Novel (Oprah's Book Club)



Synopsis

âœPOWERFUL . . . SUSPENSEFUL . . . RICHLY TEXTURED . . . [A] CHILLING, PRECOCIOUSLY GOOD START TO A BRIGHT NEW NOVELISTâ€™S CAREER.â•“ “The New York Timesâœ[A] gripping psychological thriller . . . 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. . . . Schwarz certainly succeeds at keeping the reader engrossed.â•“ “FRANCINE PROSE *Us Weekly*âœDEFT AND ASSURED . . . [WITH] STRONG CHARACTERS AND A PLOT LONG ON TENSION AND SURPRISES.â•“ “TimeâœA 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.â•“ “ANITA SHREVE *Author of The Pilotâ€™s Wife*âœRIVETING . . . A VERY SUSPENSEFUL TALE, ONE THAT WILL KEEP READERS UP SHIVERING IN THE NIGHT.â•“ “USA Today

Book Information

Series: Oprah’s Book Club

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Ballantine Books (July 31, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0345439104

ISBN-13: 978-0345439109

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 starsÂ• See all reviewsÂ• (779 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #29,734 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #83 inÂ• Books > Literature & Fiction > Women’s Fiction > Mothers & Children #700 inÂ• Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Thrillers & Suspense > Psychological Thrillers #3652 inÂ• Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical

Customer Reviews

I thoroughly enjoyed this novel -- from its memorable, engaging first sentence ("Ruth remembered

drowning." How could *that* be?) to its quietly poignant final scene. The plot centers on a mystery of family secrets surrounding Ruth's murky memory. Along the way to its resolution, the author develops a psychologically sophisticated portrait of a family living in rural Wisconsin during World War I. Time, place and the personalities of some wonderful, idiosyncratic characters are presented in rich detail. This book reminded me of two personal favorites of recent years. Like *Snow Falling on Cedars*, it is densely atmospheric. The lay of the land and the vagaries of the weather become important elements in the story; the effect is to transport the reader into a vividly imagined world. Like *Anywhere But Here*, this book is eloquent in its portrayal of intensely ambivalent relationships among women: between sisters; between mothers and daughters. Drowning Ruth should appeal to fans of many genres: family drama; historical novel; mystery and psychological thriller, to name a few. I recommend it most highly!

I rarely send in reviews of books, but "Drowning Ruth" moved me to add my voice to the crowd. This is by far the most interesting and engrossing novel I have read in a very long time. I love it when I find myself sinking into the story, into the characters, and that is exactly the feeling I got when reading this novel. The writing is so good that it carried me away, to another place altogether, to a cold Wisconsin lake in the winter. Christina Schwarz paints such a compelling picture of the sisters' relationship that I felt almost a part of the scene. In fact, all of her characters are so vivid that I feel as though I would recognize them walking down the street. And the story itself is a page-turner. Anyway, BUY IT!! READ IT!!

DROWNING RUTH is deceptively clever. What seems initially like the conventional, usually predictable murder yarn turns out actually being a meticulously crafted story of considerable artistic merit. The circumstances of the drowning of Ruth's mother serves as the catalyst that precipitates an intriguing flow of interrelated events in the lives of Amanda (the drowned woman's sister) and her niece Ruth. Christina Schwarz is a wonderfully talented writer who has woven a rather intricate tale of psychological suspense. There are many engrossing twists and digressions (but quite necessary) in this very emotional narrative. The mystery is sustained throughout because the reader, as if carefully and thoughtfully fitting together all the jagged pieces of a puzzle, learns in successive chapters what actually occurred that particular wintry night so long ago in the past of both Amanda and Ruth. The writer does a marvelous job in pacing the delicate unravelling of the knitting. This is a thoroughly enjoyable thriller. I recommend this book very highly.

Yet again, based on glowing reviews, I bought this book and staggered through 338 pages trying to determine specifically why it's been so lauded. While the writing is just fine, crisp and tidy, and the characters are well wrought, there's really nothing new here. Certainly, there are no surprises. The book begins in 1919 and ends in 1941. I don't know why. There are no definitive period details that set the era for us (aside from brief mentions of corsets and hair bobbing). No one seems to suffer any of the ill effects that so many suffered in that period between the two world wars. It's a tale, often told, of history repeating itself. Everything is telegraphed, so that one expects exactly what is delivered. The character of Amanda, whose voice is predominant throughout, is so irritating that it's difficult to be sympathetic. And her niece, Ruth, who starts out an interesting, quirky and determined child who often thinks how wonderful it would be to have her own store (a lovely touch), deteriorates in the latter part of the book into a variation on a theme of Amanda and ultimately is just as irritating as her aunt. The secondary characters, Ruth's father, Carl, and the farm help, Rudy, are more interesting and sympathetic. But the author disposes of Carl about midway through the tale (and doesn't mention him again until the final few pages; and Rudy is merely retired off without ever being allowed any significant input--despite the fact that he's featured throughout the book). From that point on the narrative lumbers to its very predictable conclusion. As a first novel, it's a solid effort, but it suffers from a lack of oxygen. It's like spending a very long evening in a dimly lit room, on an uncomfortable sofa, with people you've just met, who are not gifted in the art of conversation. You can't wait to get outside and gulp down fresh air.

What a great story! There are so many levels to this book. At the most basic; it's a powerfully engaging mystery that keeps you turning the pages way past midnight. But beyond that it's a totally engaging story about family relationships, love, and the power of secrets. Watch out for how the author peels back the layers of secrecy with simply placed statements that one by one reveal the truth as you learn more and more about the complex characters that populate this great first novel.

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