

Drowning Ruth Study Guide

Drowning Ruth by Christina Schwarz

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Plot Summary

Drowning Ruth by Christina Schwarz gradually reveals how Ruth Sapphira Neumann, as she always believes, drowns at age three along with her mother Mathilda but is revived. Raised by Aunt Amanda, Ruth learns that her best friend is her half-sister, born the night of the tragedy, and that helps keep her from marrying the son of their common father.

Ruth Sapphira Neumann is a quarrelsome three-year-old in an unstable household, her mother Mathilda having drowned mysteriously and her father Carl serving in the Army in Europe. Ruth retains memories of also drowning, something that Aunt Amanda strenuously (but falsely) denies. Amanda is determined to be Ruth's mother, which adds strain to her mental instability. Amanda carries the guilt of having borne an illegitimate daughter and given her away on the night that her sister drowns.

Amanda eventually allows Ruth to start school. An outcast, Ruth is gradually drawn out of her shell by the most popular girl in school, Imogene Lindgren, who turns out to be Amanda's abandoned baby and, thus, Ruth's half-sister. As the girls mature they attend business school together and talk about going to Chicago to work in advertising. They also attend dances, and fall for the same wealthy young man, Arthur Owens.

Arthur is the son of the married man who long ago impregnates Amanda during a tryst. Amanda is determined to prevent an incestuous marriage. Earlier, Carl suspects that Clement J. Owens, who finds Mathilda's body, is responsible for impregnating her and abating her death. Carl stalks Clement and barely refrains himself from committing murder. Amanda takes Clement out into the lake to tell him the truth and abandons him there, apparently not recalling that he has a heart condition. Amanda and Ruth concoct a letter that succeeds in breaking up Arthur and Imogene. Imogene goes to Chicago to recover from the shock and Ruth settles in to care for Amanda, who has so cared for her.

The mystery of Mathilda's drowning is revealed only in the final paragraphs: having saved Ruth, who also falls through the ice, Mathilda sacrifices her life to prevent Amanda's drowning. Amanda has put down newborn Imogene and is stretched out on the cracking ice, trying to pull Mathilda up. Mathilda bites her sister's thumb to make her let go, leaving a prominent scar. Giving Imogene to a good mother, Amanda starts life over with Ruth.



Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Ruth insists that she has drowned, but Aunt Amanda denies it, for there are things that children need not know. Amanda recalls how on 27 March, 1919, she agrees to take time off from her job in a Milwaukee hospital until she regains control of her life. She is a brilliant and beloved nurse but is too nauseous, tired, and uncoordinated to function. Her little sister, Mathilda, welcomes her, and Amanda cares for Mathilda and her baby Ruth, while Mathilda's husband Carl recuperates from war wounds in France. Amanda hopes that things will be like they were before he came between the sisters.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel begins with Aunt Amanda disclaiming Ruth's life-long contention that she remembers drowning. Aunt Amanda insists that this is impossible, but then admits to the reader that she has consistently lied to the girl for her own good. Amanda then goes on to admit her failure as a nurse and tell of her warm welcome home by her younger sister Mathilda. They set up a household without Mathilda's husband Carl, who is recovering from war wounds in Europe. Nothing is said about Amanda being pregnant, but her symptoms (other than hallucinations) are clear. While laying out the setting in fictional Nagawaukee, the chapter introduces, tangentially, Mary Louise Lindgren, whose family later becomes critical to the story.

This pattern of narration—a constant shift between an impersonal narrator and Ruth and/or Amanda commenting on the events in focus—is carried on throughout the novel and can be confusing. When Ruth or Amanda recall events, it is often unclear when exactly the events happened. However, the opening date is explicit: Amanda is asked to leave her hospital job on 27 March, 1919.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Amanda recalls reporting Mathilda missing to Sheriff Kuhtz. She cannot face returning to the island, but even the old family farm house holds nightmares. She convinces herself that all will be well if she refrains from checking Mathilda's bed. Amanda treats puncture wounds around her thumb. When Ruth cries for her mother in the morning, Amanda knows that Mathilda is gone and that it is wrong to shush the crying girl or lie to her. Ruth cannot be fooled. Amanda dreams of walking towards Mathilda but being unable to reach her. Amanda is drowning in grief as she clings to Ruth.

Amanda keeps a scrapbook of news clippings about Mathilda. Carl writes that he is coming home. By 12 February, Amanda has prepared for him the room where her own mother suffered her stroke while Carl and Mathilda were courting. Their father surprisingly orders them to marry and Amanda to enter nursing school. Amanda is ready to care for him. As she dresses Ruth for the station, Amanda plans how to buy Carl out of his half of the farm and let him start a new, unburdened life. She will be rebellious Ruth's mother.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Amanda recalls reporting Mathilda missing and denying what she knows is true: Mathilda is dead. The chapter contains further signs of Amanda's mental instability. Amanda treats puncture wounds around her thumb that prove to be her sister's bite marks, made while trying to keep Amanda from drowning along with her. The thumb will be mentioned often. Amanda realizes that Ruth cannot be fooled but feels that she must fool her. Ruth is a rebellious child early on. It is said poignantly that Amanda is drowning in grief as she clings to Ruth.

Amanda keeps a scrapbook of news clippings about Mathilda that eventually lead Carl to false conclusions about Mathilda's death and nearly result in a homicide. It is an effective way of establishing the chronology and facts of Mathilda's demise.

Preparatory to the introduction of Carl in person, Amanda recalls his courting of Mathilda, offering a snapshot of early 20th-century mores. They marry and Amanda goes to nursing school in the context of the girls' mother's being incapacitated by a stroke. Amanda regularly reveals a certain resentment at having to be responsible for her younger sister and bear with her being everyone's favorite. Much detail is provided. Amanda insists, of course, that she is not resentful. She is also willing to care for Carl when he arrives, but she wants to buy him out of his half of the farm and be Ruth's mother.



Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Carl walks on two canes and he and Ruth do not hit it off well and Amanda, seeing that Carl cannot care for Ruth, dislikes him. Amanda recalls Mathilda and Carl marrying in December, six months after meeting, and causing gossip. Carl is nothing special and has no money saved. Mother is too ill to attend the wedding, but receives them in her room afterwards. Amanda accidentally breaks Mother's cherished crystal vessel that day.

Carl tries too hard to make small talk with Ruth and sees Amanda hide smiles when Ruth reveals her dislike for her father. Amanda's recollections of Mathilda do not match his own and she forbids his moving with Ruth to the island before he is healed. Amanda recalls listening to the couple in bed and working daily to build a house on her island, while also helping out on the farm, as she packs for the university. Carl impractically makes a bluebird house as a going-away present. Carl dreams rarely about Mathilda but regularly about being wounded in a foxhole.

Amanda insists that Carl visit Mathilda's grave for appearances' sake. He still expects her somehow to return. Ruth recalls the ride to the cemetery and watching him walk with canes. She and Amanda visit often. Like Amanda, Carl talks about Mama being in heaven, but Ruth knows that heaven is where they had lived on the island and that she had drowned while the ice baby cried and Aunt Mandy had not waited for them.

Amanda daily tends Carl's wound. When Carl asks why they had lived on the island and why she had left without Ruth that fatal night, Amanda suggests that reckless Mathilda had probably wanted to skate and failed to test the ice. With Mathilda dead, details do not matter. Carl is scared of Amanda's talk about sorrow over things done that cannot be undone. Amanda hands him the scrapbook and remarks that she knows that he is sorry to have left. More confused, Carl cannot imagine that Mathilda drowned herself for love of him. Mental pictures of her are few, but Carl recalls her as willful, decisive, and impulsive, but not reckless. He has seen people do unimaginable things.

Ruth warms up to Carl and he one day races out to rescue her from a fall and falls himself. Thereafter they play daily, leaving Amanda half-charmed and half-irritated. One day Amanda takes Ruth to the post office, where Ruth is intrigued by a large car outside. A boy a bit older than she accompanies a man who calls Amanda Amy and makes her panic. She struggles to flee Clement Owens, who believes that they had split amiably and cherishes their time together. He has taken her advice and bought land for a summer house on the lake. Amanda notices in the parked car a woman in a peacock-green coat.

Carl runs to the house from the lake when he hears Ruth's cries and wraps her up from the cold bath as Amanda pays no attention. Amanda demands Ruth back, calling her



Mattie, and then disappears. Carl finds her in chin-high, frigid water at the lake and carries her home. A doctor recommends that she go to St. Michael's for some rest.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

Carl receives a cold welcome from Amanda and Ruth. Amanda continues her recollection of Mathilda and Carl's courtship and marriage. Amanda never lives down accidentally breaking Mother's cherished crystal vessel. The incident will later serve to contrast Amanda, who never drops anything again, with careless, clumsy Ruth. Amanda is vengeful, enjoying Carl's failures to win over Ruth. Amanda recalls how the couple comes to build a cabin on what she considers her personal island. Amanda does not want to provide Carl details about the fatal night, which only makes him more curious, leading to a search for clues that covers many chapters. When Ruth eventually warms up to Carl, Amanda is emotionally torn.

Carl's nightmare about being wounded in a foxhole is introduced. Amanda regularly has nightmares about the night that Mathilda drowns. Carl's details are also filled in gradually, helping to show how he enlists for World War I to prove to himself that he is not a coward. Mathilda and particularly Amanda assume that he merely needs freedom and Amanda is loathe to let him be Ruth's father. Ruth muses about how adults all talk about her mother being in heaven, but Ruth considers the island heaven. In her still childish recollection she adds detail to the fatal night, talking about the ice-baby. The full meaning of this comes out only at the end of the novel. Carl and Ruth's visit to the cemetery, for appearances' sake, is mirrored later in the novel when Ruth takes her friend Imogene there. This begins revealing the fact that Imogene is Amanda's abandoned baby.

A new plot line opens when Amanda takes Ruth to the post office and they encounter Clement Owens and his young son Arthur. Their names are already familiar from the scrapbook, for they find Mathilda's frozen body. Amanda is in a panic to get away from the handsome man who calls her Amy and is said, by the narrator, to believe that they had split amiably. Amanda spotting in the parked car (a clear sign of affluence, for most folk are still using animal-drawn vehicles) a woman in a peacock-green coat suggests that they break up because Clement is married. The story of the romance is built up in coming chapters and proves to be the pivotal event in the novel, for Imogene, given up for adoption, is their child together. Young Arthur grows up to fall in love with his half-sister, an act of incest that Amanda insists must be prevented.

As Chapter 3 ends, a doctor recommends that Amanda be institutionalized. This forms the core of Chapter 4.



Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Ruth is four in April 1920, when Amanda leaves, to none of the neighbors' surprise. Women recall her being uppity at Mathilda's birth and abandoning her and Ruth when the old people die. Amanda enjoyed having Mama all to herself during pregnancy. Hearing the gossip while slitting open his mail with an inferior pocketknife—having lost his monogrammed silver one—Clement wonders if Amanda has always been crazy as well as naïve.

Amanda meets Clement when he helps subdue delirious Private Buckle. He is enthusiastic about his revolutionary invention, a vacuum box for sterilizing instruments. Visiting her parents, she brings the influenza that despite her best efforts drowns them in their bed. She remembers her father both disciplining her and teaching her arithmetic. Amanda wishes that she could die for bringing this horror on them. Mathilda does not object when Amanda returns to her hospital work, accepting the worst assignments.

One day, as she helps Clement pick up dropped files, they talk and begin dating. He introduces her to champagne and nicknames her Amy. Their dates always involve long, romantic drives. Intimacy comes slowly as when he announces that he loves her, Amanda pictures an ideal life together at the lake. She understands Clement's standing her up for essential war work (a heart ailment prevents him taking up arms). Still busy and often absent after the war, he is excited when the Army takes an interest in his vacuum box. Preparing to go to Washington for testing, he distractedly hands Amanda his silver knife. Celebrating in Chicago, Amanda regrets having sex and talks about getting married immediately. Clement figures that she had known that he is married.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 establishes that Amanda goes to St. Michael's in April 1920, when Ruth is four. Neighbors are not surprised that Amanda is crazy, having suspected her all the way back to Mathilda's birth. They also do not forgive her for leaving when her parents die. A multitude of detail is provided to illustrate the neighbors' point of view, after which young Amanda is allowed to offer rebuttal. She has perfectly good reasons for being rude to the adults who impose on her cherished time with her pregnant mother. Amanda alludes to Blind Pew in Robert Lewis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and to characters Cowslip and Parsley in Beatrix Potter's *Cecily Parsley's Nursery Rhymes*. These suggest rather eclectic taste for a seven-year-old.

In another post office scene, Clement Owens disapproves of gossip about Amanda and has to slit open his mail with an inferior pocketknife, having lost a costly monogrammed silver one. This knife becomes one of the clues that jealous Carl finds while jumping to false conclusions about Mathilda. Clement too, however, wonders if Amanda has always



been crazy as well as naïve. This again suggests that their break-up is because he is married.

The story shifts to details of Amanda and Clement becoming a couple and at the same time sets up the death of her parents to whom she brings home influenza germs from the hospital. The post-World War I pandemic is a major historic event. Amanda's nursing skills cannot keep them from drowning them in their beds as their lungs fill up. The harrowing description reinforces the theme of drowning. Amanda reminisces about her father teaching her arithmetic, which is a talent that her daughter Imogene will inherit.

Clement introduces Amanda to champagne and takes her on long, romantic drives. She is understanding about his sometimes needing to stand her up for essential war work, which carries over after the war. In his excitement about having an invention draw the interest of the Army, Clement uses his knife to cut the strings on a bouquet that he gives Amanda and leaves it with her. They have sex in Chicago, leading Amanda to assume that they will marry. He announces lightheartedly that he is already married.

Note that a heart ailment keeps Clement out of World War I. Decades later, a box of medications will become a major clue to his drowning. Note that Amanda's roommate Eliza is rereading *Jennie Gerhardt*, a contemporary novel by Theodore Dreiser set largely in Chicago that deals with an illegitimate child, marriage impediments, and great heartache. For those who have read the novel it is a choice, succinct indication of the tastes of the time. Even without it, sophisticated Clement and naïve Amanda display sexual mores on the eve of the Roaring Twenties. During their courtship, Amanda pictures Clement leaping from the water and splashing her, as she had, disapprovingly, seen Carl and Mathilda doing during their courtship.

Clement is irreligious and it seems that Amanda and Mathilda have little contact with their Lutheran church, apart from Mathilda's funeral. It is noted several times the conflict between Catholics and Lutherans over who makes suitable marriage partners. People gossip about why Carl and Mathilda marry only six months after meeting. Only late in the novel will Carl visit a Catholic church to give thanks for not having killed Clement. The downplaying of religion in the rural Midwest in this era is somewhat surprising.

Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

Clement leaves wife Theresa in bed to contemplate his break-up with Amanda. It is worse than with most of his lovers. He has convinced Theresa to invest in lakefront property on Amanda's lake to be near her. They are building an impressive summer house. The Army has dropped his vacuum box idea and Theresa is patronizing about money and cold over his other women. He wonders why Amanda has a little girl with her and is so angry. Theresa enjoys having Arthur to herself all day as she raises money for the public library, talking with snooty prospective donors about children's prospects, summer houses, and social clubs. Her interest in building the house is that it keeps Clement from straying.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 examines the break-up and why the Owensens are at Nagawaukee Lake at the time of Mathilda's drowning. Theresa Owens appears to have a sizable fortune, which her husband taps for pet projects. She is aware of his infidelities and wants to find a way to keep him close to home. He does not divulge that he is interested in Nagawaukee property because of Amanda. This reverberates again near the end of the novel. Chapter 5's light touch is watching Theresa put up with fellow rich socialites as she solicits funds for the library. They talk about manipulating their children's lives for the children's best interests.



Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

Carl's cousin, Hilda Grossman, comes from Tomahawk, WI, to help with Ruth. Her remarks about the island and the drowning only heighten Carl's suspicions. Ruth is restless and tearful at first and neither adult can comfort her. Hilda jumps at the chance to discipline her with a wooden spoon, and chastises Carl for Ruth's not being reliably toilet trained, which reflects on both her mother and aunt. This makes Carl angry enough to send Hilda home, but also makes him wonder about the drowning and wish that he could talk to Mathilda. When Ruth begins smashing things and bites Hilda, Carl worries about losing Hilda. Amanda is unkempt and unresponsive when Carl visits.

Amanda speaks mentally to Mathilda, reminding her that she had told her to go back. Mathilda never minds her as a child, crying all night. Amanda remembers being exiled from the bedroom and neglected when Mathilda gets red spots. That is when she borrows a rowboat and first visits her island getaway. When Hilda turns coquettish and claims that Ruth is her good helper, Carl worries more. Ruth begins mimicking Hilda and watches her applying make-up. When Carl invites local ladies to a card party, Hilda objects but later warms to the idea. Carl does all the arranging. Hilda teaches Ruth, who has stopped causing trouble but has also stopped talking, to help serve tea. Having watched Hilda slip into—and rip out—her corset, Ruth disappears while the awkward party begins, only to return, streaked in make-up and wearing the corset, so embarrassing Hilda that she returns home.

Carl is frustrated, dealing with his untrained daughter alone. Cleaning her up, he takes her to St. Michael's, where Ruth declares that she hates her aunt and, backing away, trips down the stairs. Amanda runs to help her. Ruth asks her to come home. She has made Hilda go away. Amanda mentally tells Mathilda that Ruth is reckless and stubborn, like Mathilda as a toddler. Amanda had not wanted to share her island with Mathilda, but soon finds it is more fun there together. Mathilda had called herself Queen Imogene and would struggle to get free while wading together. Mathilda and Ruth should have let Amanda go on the night that Mathilda drowns. Mathilda may come back now.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 introduces and fairly rapidly disposes of Carl's cousin, Hilda Grossman, whom he asks to help raise Ruth. Later in the novel it becomes clear that Carl and Hilda had not gotten along well as children and he should have known what he was getting into. Hilda is a disciplinarian, straight-speaking but not articulate. The main point of contention is toilet training, which she cannot bring herself to say out loud. Her philosophy is, you mess them you wear them, while Ruth's is to lose them. Knowing that



he cannot cope without Hilda, Carl vacillates and tries to reconcile. It is futile, because Ruth's goal is to make Hilda leave so that Amanda can come home.

The highlight of the chapter comes as Ruth watches Hilda dress and make herself up for a card party. Stiff corsets are in this period going out of vogue, but Hilda insists on wearing one, until it comically splits at the seams. As she bustles about trying to make a success of the party but being totally inept, Ruth dons the corset and paints herself and then appears. It is the last straw for Hilda. Having gained some sympathy with her planning the party and being steered through it by the card-playing regulars, Hilda abandons Carl to care for his devil child himself. Carl takes Ruth to visit Amanda, who is suddenly cured. A description of her earlier in the chapter as largely unresponsive points up the dramatic change.

The chapter features an inner monologue, Amanda to Mathilda, on the subject of Mathilda's never minding as a child, which leads to the tragic drowning. A few more childhood memories fill in their characters without advancing the plot.



Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

Amanda recalls feeling little better coming home to Mathilda and baby Ruth. Food makes her sick and she knows that it is the pregnancy but pretends otherwise. She wants to run away to a convent to have the baby—and maybe become a nun. At least her parents will not know her shame. She recalls Mama's spells, when any noise hurts, and one day Mama hides in the cellar. Amanda searches everywhere for her.

Amanda badgers Mathilda into the three of them moving to the island for the summer. Neither Mathilda nor Rudy likes the idea, but agree. Mathilda takes it as a game, but Amanda thinks seriously about never coming back. After checking the ice, Amanda moves the supply sled out. The musty house gives her second thoughts, but she hopes that the summer leaves will preserve her secret. Ruth asks Amanda about the moon-shaped scar around her thumb, which Amanda claims is a reminder from Mathilda never to leave Ruth. When Mathilda fails to mind Amanda, she goes away and never comes back.

When Carl now suggests a visit to the island, Amanda demands that he board it up instead. Carl dislikes how Amanda wipes Mathilda out of Ruth's life, although he sees that memories can make no difference. He takes Ruth along for the boarding, explaining, when she balks, that the lake is like a giant bathtub. Carl is shocked to see that Ruth resembles him. Joe Tully goes along, and when he asks about Amanda, Carl invites him to dinner. Joe wonders if Amanda will welcome him.

Long before there exists a house on the island, Mathilda brings Carl over. Joking, she falls overboard in shallow water to see if Carl, who cannot swim, will save her. He fails the test. Carl now recalls their many fights but not her response when he proposes marriage. Taking a last look around inside the five-year-old cabin, Carl recalls hoping to live in Chicago or Toronto, but Mathilda cannot leave, so an isolated cabin seems a good compromise. Her father buys the materials. Carl works by day on the farm while Mathilda draws plans, clears brush, and paints, and by night Carl and hired men build, followed by cold supper. When Mary Louise is there it is like a party. When Amanda goes to school in September, Carl and Mathilda feel alone.

Among the items that Carl finds is a silver pocketknife. As he and Joe improvise shutters, Carl recalls a cozy life before the war. Mathilda some nights would flood him with details about her happy day, and other nights would cry, worrying about things happening to him or the baby. Mornings, she is euphoric about her past and plans for expanding family and lands. Carl feels himself being tied to a life he does not want, with a father-in-law who looks down on him. By February, tiny Mathilda is big and bossy and afternoons demands to skate, despite the risk. Carl wonders if Amanda is right, claiming that Mathilda drowns while wanting to skate.



When Ruth is born in the spring, Carl feels enormous responsibility. He resents that only Mathilda's breast can quiet the baby and having to keep the cabin too hot. Now finishing the shuttering, Carl is ashamed of having shown Mathilda who is in control by going to war. Mathilda is enraged and warns that she may not be there if he gets back. He forgets those words, which he is now sure that she had not meant. When Ruth screams for her mama inside the boarded up cabin, Carl pries the door open and finds her beneath Mathilda and his bed. Ruth has found a bag of marbles.

Back home, Amanda upbraids Carl for taking Ruth to the lake. If he had not left them, Mathilda would be alive. Joe plays marbles with Ruth to divert her. Ruth recalls the walk, not turning back at the usual point in the forest, being afraid of the water, not remembering the island from babyhood, but maintaining that she never cries. Smelling Mama inside, she searches all of the secret places and finds a bag of marbles, once forbidden her. She uses her gray tooth to undo the chord, while sitting on the now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep rug in Mama's room. Ruth recalls being told angrily to go to bed but hiding under the bed. Amanda had given her candy and told her not to be afraid. Ruth knows from the screaming that things will not be fine. As the pounding outside now continues, light gradually vanishes indoors until Ruth sits in darkness. When Ruth calls out, Carl fetches her.

Amanda recalls alternating between sleeping and being a whirlwind as she puts the island in order and keeping Ruth safe. Mathilda spends time writing to Carl or reading books—and letting Ruth wander too near the water. Once mother and daughter playing in the water frightens Amanda, who rebukes them. That both are naked scandalizes her. Amanda now feels her own baby kick. She keeps Ruth out of school for as long as possible, teaching her arithmetic, reading, and nature studies. Faking an epileptic fit works one year, but the next time Ruth has to start school.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 specifies that Amanda comes home in March 1919, feeling little better. Signs of pregnancy are building, but she chooses to ignore them. She considers running away to a convent to have the baby—and perhaps become a nun. Knowing little about religion or prayer, she gives up this thought. Eventually she buries her sister as a Lutheran, so the whole thought of a convent is rather irrational. Amanda recalls her mother's extreme sensitivity to noise and is only realizing as an adult that the chief offending noise in the household is herself, Amanda. Note Amanda's search of the farm for her missing mother, ending in the cellar. The search for missing characters is a major motif of the novel.

Amanda, Mathilda, and Ruth move to the island for the summer, with Amanda thinking seriously about never returning. Everyone is dead set against the move, but Amanda is a persuasive personality. It is emphasized in the description of moving supplies to the island that Amanda is thorough about checking the condition of ice, even in the depths of winter. The mood turns playful as the heavily-laden sled picks up momentum and drags the trio to the island. Amanda's motive is to have her pregnancy shielded from the



prying outside world by the lush vegetation that will return within months. Shifting abruptly back to the present time, Ruth again raises the question of the moon-shaped scar around Amanda's thumb. Amanda claims that it is a reminder from Mathilda never to leave Ruth. When Mathilda fails to mind Amanda, she goes away and never comes back.

When Carl in present time suggests visiting the island, Amanda turns manic, to the point of demanding that he board it up. This allows the narrator to consider Carl's unspoken reaction to Amanda's wiping Mathilda out of Ruth's life. Amanda is busy when he heads to the island to accomplish his task, so he takes Ruth along. Ruth is fearful of the water. Carl for the first time sees how Ruth resembles him. Joe Tully, mentioned as a Amanda's failed beau, enters the story in a minor way. Recall that Amanda resents how her parents send her away to relatives to get her over Joe but push Miranda and Carl to marry six months after they meet.

Chapter 7 provides additional scenes from the courtship. These also serve to point up Carl's concern about his own lack of physical bravery, which contributes to his decision to enlist in the Army. Carl never wants to be a farmer and lacks aptitude, but Mathilda enjoys it and her happiness imprisons him. He recalls her being very pregnant but insisting on skating. This makes him wonder if perhaps she had not gone out skating on the night of her death as Amanda has vaguely suggested. At any rate, Carl is ready to get away when the draft begins. He waives the parental exemption from service, saying that it would be cowardly. Mathilda warns that she may not be here when he returns.

The visit to the cabin includes two finds crucial to Part 2. First, Carl comes upon and casually pockets an expensive-looking silver knife that eventually (wrongly) convinces him that Mathilda is impregnated by Clements Owens while he is away. Secondly, Ruth finds a bag of marbles that draw her into friendship with Imogene Lindgren, who turns out to be her half-sister. Carl and Joe negligently nail her in and find her, once she screams, beneath the bed where Imogene is born. This tense scene is finally described only at the novel's conclusion, but the key elements—the braided rug on which now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep children's prayers are said and the peppermint candy—are laid out in Ruth's recollection.



Part 2 Chapter 8

Part 2 Chapter 8 Summary

The Lakeridge School is surrounded by pastures. A dozen girls eat together, but Ruth sits apart. The girls form a retinue for Imogene Lindgren, whom the boys try to impress. During hide-and-seek, boys versus girls, for a kiss or glimpse of underwear, Imogene hides in a concrete culvert, where messy, purposefully odd Ruth is shooting marbles alone. Her one dead, black tooth gets Ruth teased regularly. The school's marble champion, Imogene recruits talented Ruth to beat swaggering Bert Weiss and win his blue aggie. Ruth bungles her early shots on purpose to lure him in and agrees to put up her black tooth as a bet. Blood spurts when the tooth is pulled. Imogene gives Ruth a handkerchief. Ruth quickly defeats Bert and gives Imogene the marble that she intends to keep forever. Imogene asks if it is true that Ruth's mother is dead and disputes that Ruth could have drowned but be alive. Imogene's mother finds her, as in the Green Fairy book. In no hurry to get home, Ruth returns to the culvert and folds the bloody handkerchief into a crown.

Part 2 Chapter 8 Analysis

The Lakeridge School is introduced along with the queen of the schoolgirls, Imogene Lindgren. Pages are devoted to describing the sights and particularly the smells of the urban area. Boys and girls are just beginning to discover the opposite sex. Marbles are a major interest for both sexes and Imogene is a champion. Her nemesis is a greasy, annoying boy. Chapter 7 has shown in passing that Amanda keeps Ruth out of school as long as possible and, once enrolled, Ruth keeps to herself. She is picked on for a dead, black incisor and general unkempt exterior.

Imogene sees Ruth's skill at marbles and recruits her to best Bert Weiss and win his blue aggie. Bert demands the tooth as part of the bet and Ruth agrees. Imogene's squeamishness and the marble that they win returns late in the novel when Ruth backs out of a trip to Chicago and Imogene waffles. The handkerchief that Imogene lends Ruth—and then gives her outright—forms a kind of blood pact. Ruth, who also imagines and calls herself Queen Imogene, later folds it to form a crown.

Early in their friendship Imogene asks about Ruth's dead mother. Ruth again claims also to have drowned and claims that not all drowned people are dead. Imogene claims that her mother finds her, as in the Green Fairy book. This refers to a popular series of fairy tales published around the turn of the 20th century.



Part 2 Chapter 9

Part 2 Chapter 9 Summary

After a year or two of adjustment, Amanda, Carl, and Ruth settle in as a family. Joe visits regularly and takes Ruth out on Fridays, while on Saturdays she and Carl listen to the radio. Amanda refrains from commenting on Ruth's new friendship with Imogene. Since leaving St. Michael's, Amanda often visits the bait shop to check on Imogene, even though this endangers her secret. Mary Louise is protective. During one visit, Amanda realizes that Imogene has scarlet fever and quarantines herself with the family. Amanda and Imogene play together during the recovery as Ruth had never been allowed to play. Amanda also teaches her her numbers. Imogene excels in arithmetic. As the girls get older, Amanda sees that Imogene resembles Mathilda and worries.

Clement and Arthur Owens visit the bait shop. They are thinking of starting a tour boat company on Nagawaukee Beach. Imogene and Ruth mention features they would like on such a service, circling the lake, and afterwards about the Owens' White House. When she grows up Ruth wants a store where the products are not alive. She likes the neat ledger books that Imogene has to tally. Otherwise, Imogene is lazy about chores. Since she has to be kept entertained, Ruth takes Imogene to see her mother's grave. Ruth generally dislikes the cemetery, feeling sorry for the people under ground. At least the children's souls go to heaven.

Ruth recalls being ashamed of bringing her bored friend to Mathilda's grave. Imogene notices that Mathilda's death date is her own birth date. Ruth jokes about reincarnation and explains Rudy's concept. Walking back to town, Imogene talks about being famous in a past life, perhaps Pocahontas; she is darker than her parents. Ruth explains further about there being no connection with the former person and supposing they were both ordinary in past lives. Ruth thinks about Imogene being born while she and her mother are drowning. Amanda lists chores that Ruth has missed while being out with Imogene. She suggests having Imogene visit. Ruth likes Imogene partly because she has nothing to do with Amanda.

For months Carl searches the cabin for proof of Mathilda's infidelity. Amanda is nervous when he shows her the pocketknife with initials CJO. Twice Carl is sure that he hears her voice and is shocked that it is Ruth, who also shares her mannerisms. Rudy tells Carl stories from the girls' youth, running to the island to avoid family trouble. When Rudy tries to talk them home the last time, Mathilda refuses, while Amanda stays out of sight. Rudy now regrets not taking Ruth, for the sisters would have followed and all would be alive. Carl thinks Mathilda and Amanda harbor CJO, a shirker. Carl is sure that Mathilda does not love him but is merely kind. That night over dinner Carl and Amanda argue about farming and then Amanda tries to change the subject from the crying lost baby that they take to its mother.



Part 2 Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 jumps forward a few years and concentrates on Amanda's interest in Imogene, Ruth's new friend. Note that Amanda realizes the danger of giving away the secret and Mary Louise's protectiveness of the daughter that she has been given. Disease again is the tool of fortune. As influenza takes away Amanda's parents, now scarlet fever gets her quarantined with the Lindgrens. Note that the Starkey knack for arithmetic comes out in Imogene. This will be important, going forward. Imogene allows Amanda to play in ways that Ruth never does. Amanda worries about Imogene's growing resemblance to Mathilda.

The chapter sets up Clement Owens establishing a tour boat company on the lake and characterizes Imogene as needing to be continually entertained in order not to grow bored. Having nothing else to offer, Ruth takes Imogene to see her mother's grave, where Imogene notices that Mathilda's death date and her birth date exactly coincide. Ruth begins thinking about this, but never works out the answer for herself. Amanda has to admit the truth. The girls talk about reincarnation, which the family hired man, Rudy, has vaguely described to Ruth.

Meanwhile, Carl is searching for proof of Mathilda's infidelity, centering on the pocketknife with initials CJO. Carl jumps to the conclusion that CJO is a wartime shirker. Carl notices that Ruth has Mathilda's voice and shares other mannerisms. Rudy fills Carl in on suspicious details about the sisters' staying on the island that fatal winter. When Ruth brings up the detail of a crying baby that night, Amanda quickly changes the subject.



Part 2 Chapter 10

Part 2 Chapter 10 Summary

Amanda recalls little Ruth wanting to swim when she and Mathilda want to sleep. After Amanda teaches her to paddle, Ruth squirms away to play hide-and-seek under an overhanging willow. Mathilda stares at Amanda's pregnant belly for the first time and will have to help hide the secret.

On a hot July day, Imogene talks Ruth into taking Ray and Lewis to the island. Imogene announces that it is where Ruth is born and her mother dies. That is why Ruth is not allowed to go swimming. As a child Ruth had believed her mother is a mermaid, farming the bottom of the lake, but she also has nightmares of being dragged down. Reaching the island, they find the cabin open. Ruth ducks beneath the willow while the others splash and compete in swimming underwater. Recalling stories of her hiding like this as a child, Ruth wades out and her friends teach her to swim. Meanwhile, Amanda searches for Ruth, overdue from school, realizes where she is, and rows Joe's boat to the island. She arrives angry and hears Mathilda's voice coming from both Ruth and Imogene. Amanda hauls Ruth aboard, rows out into the lake and throws her overboard to teach her to swim. Amanda rows tantalizingly ahead but ignores Ruth's cries to pull her in. Thrashing, she learns to swim and at the end dives underwater to hide under the willow, panicking Amanda. She shows everyone that she can swim, if not elegantly.

Part 2 Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 is about swimming. It opens with Amanda recalling the willow tree on the island where little Ruth enjoys playing hide-and-seek. As they play, Mathilda first sees that Amanda is pregnant. The scene then shifts to a summer day when Imogene, Ruth, and two boys row to the island to cool off. Ruth recalls thinking about her mother as a mermaid. This motif returns late in the novel, when Ruth discovers a vial of pills in the rowboat. In another search scene, Amanda realizes where Ruth, late from school, must be and, seeing her in the water with friends, teaches her—the hard way—how to swim. Amanda stranding someone in deep water is repeated late in the novel, but results in yet another drowning rather than the acquisition of a life skill. Ruth gets even by swimming underwater to her hiding place, causing Amanda to panic. They remain an antagonistic pair. Amanda's reaction to the sexual implications of the foursome is underplayed.



Part 2 Chapter 11

Part 2 Chapter 11 Summary

Amanda recalls that Mathilda does not ask, as she would, how she could get pregnant but who the father is. Amanda plans never seeing him again, so it does not matter. Mathilda creates a plan to say that they find the baby: that a poor serving girl knows that Amanda is a nurse, comes for help, and dies in a terrible birth. Knowing that Mathilda is an excellent mother, Amanda gives the baby to her to raise with her daughter. Slowly Amanda accepts the idea and rejoices in being safe.

Forcing Ruth to swim is a mistake. Three years later she still wonders what her real motive is and what Mathilda would think. She is bitter that Ruth keeps slipping through her fingers and knows that she should not grasp. She is glad to have Imogene near and that Imogene has made Ruth less odd. Braiding Imogene's hair Amanda sees Mathilda in an enigmatic photograph that Ruth has framed in her room. Meanwhile, Carl and Rudy have wasted a day looking at a tractor that they cannot afford. Farm prices are so low that many talk about dumping milk in protest. Amanda has been suggesting that Carl take a job and has resumed nursing. Ruth runs an after-school roadside shop. Rudy wonders why Carl is so impatient.

Arriving home and seeing Imogene's braids, Carl rushes to the bait store, where he cannot find words to ask Mary Louise if she does not see Mathilda in Imogene. Embarrassed, he looks to flee, but she asks him not to tell Imogene. He promises. Mary Louise repeats Amanda's tragic story of how they get their daughter. She is relieved to have it off her chest. The baby had been ice cold. By the time Amanda returns to the island, Mathilda is gone. She cannot explain why Ruth is with Amanda rather than Mathilda. Carl pretends to believe the ridiculous story, but is sure that Mathilda is the tragic birth mother. Imogene kills her and Carl must kill CJO. Amanda is a liar and thinks that he is a fool. He goes to the cathedral for the first time since the war and prays not to hate Mathilda. Closing his eyes, he sees his buddies bayoneted and recalls his own cowardice. Carl promises not to be late again and looks through the scrapbook closely. If Imogene kills Mathilda, why does Amanda say that she drowns? Reading the news stories, he confronts Amanda, who nods at Owens' name. Ruth is reading a dramatic part of a novel when Carl asks about her mother. Although she recalls the events leading up to her drowning, Ruth claims to remember nothing.

Part 2 Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 watches the sisters—mostly Mathilda—plan a cover-up for the pregnancy. Amanda is at first willing to let Mathilda raise her child along with Ruth, but in the end, having given birth, she reneges, leading to the tragedy. When Amanda then gives Imogene to the Lindgrens, panicky Amanda recalls Mathilda's cover story about a poor hired girl dying in childbirth.



Jumping forward three years, Amanda is still tormented about forcing Ruth to swim and bitter about Ruth naturally slipping away, as maturity demands. Prices dropping to the point of farmers dumping milk in protest is characteristic of the 1920s. Amanda wants Carl to get a paying job which, recall, is his preference. At present, however, he is on a sacred quest that has him unusually irritable. Braiding Imogene's hair, Amanda pictures an enigmatic photograph of Mathilda, looking to the side. Amanda, of course, knows the story, but fears that others will put the clues together.

The hairdo provides the clue for Carl, who rushes to confront Mary Louise. Largely without words they acknowledge the situation and Carl promises not to tell Imogene. Mary Louise gives yet another rendition of the tragic story, recalling in particular (as earlier Ruth does) that the baby is ice cold. Mary Louise cannot explain any of the loose details of what Carl considers a ridiculous story. He is sure that Mathilda is the birth mother and vows to kill whoever CJO is. There follows a brief aside in the cathedral where Carl remembers in greater detail than before the death of his war buddies buddies and his own cowardice.

Returning to the scrapbook, Carl sees who CJO is and Amanda acknowledges it with a nod. Many paragraphs develop Amanda's state of mind as the long-dreaded confrontation arrives. She considers options and does not expect Carl's calmness. When asked in turn about the drowning, Ruth recalls it vividly but claims to know nothing, She is annoyed at being interrupted while reading a particularly dramatic part in a rather novel, *Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot. It is a rather risqué reading choice in 1930 for someone Ruth's age, having some parallels to the current story. This is the second time that a piece of literature has enhanced the story line for those familiar with it and does not detract for those who have not read it.



Part 2 Chapter 12

Part 2 Chapter 12 Summary

Early on 10 September, 1931, Clement Owens prepares to return to the city while on the roof of his carriage house, Carl prepares to kill him with a scoped rifle. Unable to go through with it, Carl is relieved. He tells a gas attendant about almost killing someone, but the man misunderstands. Only as he reaches the farm does Carl consider his secret, lifelong cowardice. He is eight and Hilda four when Carl cannot bring himself to tell a man to stop beating his fallen horse; Hilda is the hero. Now, Carl is serene, having followed the trail of evidence and spared the culprit. Now he can think only of Mathilda, whom he had loved. Amanda, on the other hand, is worried that she has driven Carl away. She wants to leave instead, feeling foolish to expect forgiveness from Carl. Laundering Carl's shirts later, she is sure that she and Ruth will do fine without him. She will tell Ruth that he is on another of his recent mysterious missions. If Carl does come back, Amanda worries how they will relate to one another. He cannot banish her, for the farm is half hers. She will not allow him to take Ruth away.

As Carl arrives, whistling and singing and ignoring Amanda, she packs emergency supplies, just in case. Talk at meals is routine, but then Carl plays old phonograph records—and they dance. Amanda is wary. Carl announces that he is getting a paying job. Amanda needs to unburden herself, but Carl laughs when she mentions Owens, admits that he can barely remember Mathilda, and believes that they had loved one another. When he enlists, she becomes a different, unknown woman. Carl acknowledges Amanda's sacrifices for him and Ruth, which he can never repay. Amanda finally admits to letting Mathilda go. Carl ships out on the *Rebecca Rae*, making circuits of the Great Lakes. Amanda vows to tell the full truth next time they meet. Carl sends postcards, which Ruth collects in a shoe box on the island, so as not to have to share and listen to people's comments. She follows Carl's travels on a map, memorizing details of the card, in case he does not return.

Part 2 Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter 12 again establishes an exact time frame, as on 10 September, 1931, Carl nearly assassinates Clement Owens from the roof of his carriage house. Carl's moral struggle is examined at length as Clement, dressed in a bathrobe, tends his flowers. The bathrobe becomes a motif, playing an important role later when Clement goes missing and eventually turns up dead. Carl is relieved not to kill Clement. The rifle, conspicuously left behind, becomes a lost detail. Carl largely disappears from the story before Clement is dealt with. Carl recalls yet another case of his lifelong cowardice, when younger cousin Hilda steps forward to challenge a bully.

Much of the chapter is structured as back-to-back soliloquies, as Carl is grateful for having spared the culprit and concentrates on his love for innocent Mathilda, and



Amanda worried about driving Carl away. She contemplates how she and Ruth can survive without him. She jumps between options and moods. Amanda is still not mentally stable but apparently not hallucinating. Above all she is determined not to let him take Ruth away. Amanda is taken aback by finding Carl cheerful and even suggesting that they play music and dance. He has decided to join the Merchant Marine. Amanda finally admits to letting Mathilda slip away beneath the ice, but Carl is focused elsewhere. Amanda has yet to make a clean breast of her secret.



Part 2 Chapter 13

Part 2 Chapter 13 Summary

Amanda resents people thinking that they have a right to comment on her thumb. Carl never asks. Meanwhile, in 1937 Imogene and Ruth go to the new dance pavilion every Friday, hoping to meet the wealthy summer boys. As all dote on Imogene, Ruth hides in the restroom, reading. Rich girls, taking her for a towel girl, joke about Imogene smelling like grubs. Back at the table, Ruth sees Arthur watching her sitting alone, while also looking at Imogene. On Imogene's insistence, Arthur and Ruth dance, and afterwards all go out on Bobby's power boat. Ruth denies that a woman has drowned nearby, but hears the baby crying in her memory and feels the water pulling her down. Ruth is suddenly seasick.

Arthur tells Ruth about coming to the lake for summers since he is five and about his father's crazy schemes. He recalls that cold morning, when he falls on top of the lady trapped in the ice. He scrambles back, screaming, and points his father to the spot. His father tells the sheriff. Now, Arthur steers by his waterfront home and Zita begs him to throw another party.

Amanda recalls gardening when Mathilda warns that Rudy is approaching. Hiding in the outhouse reminds Amanda of her shame. At Brown's Business College Imogene excels at shorthand, typing, and accounting, while Ruth falls behind and doodles in her notebook. Imogene plans on them going into advertising together in Chicago. She will handle business and Ruth creativity. Although dubious, Ruth practices fashion illustration and pictures a sophisticated life. When a fashionably dressed woman asks directions to old Mr. Brown's office, Imogene escorts her, playing up her own qualifications for the personal secretary job that Mrs. Owens is about to post.

Part 2 Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 opens with Amanda again obsessing about her thumb. The story has jumped forward to 1937 and centers on Imogene and Ruth as teenagers at the new dance pavilion. The social dynamics of wealthy and poor, summer residents and "lifers," and popular versus overlooked are examined in entertaining detail. Particularly rich is when Ruth reads in the restroom and is taken for a towel girl. She feels bad that girls are joking cattily about Imogene smelling like the grubs sold in her family's store.

Arthur becomes a center of attention, as he watches both Ruth and Imogene. Another society boy, Bobby, takes everyone out on his power boat for some drunken revelry. Various pairings up are described. A catty question directed at Ruth about a woman drowning nearby wrecks the mood as Ruth mentally relives the scene and gets seasick. Talking alone, Arthur recalls in detail finding the body trapped in the ice. One of the

young women insisting on another party at Arthur's house points up the teens' vapid lifestyle, isolated from questions of life and death.

After high school graduation, Ruth and Imogene enroll in business college, where Imogene excels and Ruth doodles. They plan on going into the advertising business in Chicago, but this is interrupted by fate. Mrs. Theresa Owens hires Imogene as her personal secretary.



Part 2 Chapter 14

Part 2 Chapter 14 Summary

Imogene gushes about the Owens' house and claims to be learning much from Mrs. Owens, who presides on many committees. Neither Amanda nor Ruth sees the point in ostentation. When Amanda asks coyly about Mr. Owens, she panics to hear that he has some business with ships, but recalls that Rebecca Rae is outbound. For a week Imogene models hand-me-down clothing and affects Mrs. Owen's speech and handwriting. Amanda is jealous.

Amanda recalls being exhausted and uncomfortable as her baby grows big. Reading and gardening are too much effort. She lets Ruth go to the lake but warns her away from the water. Spying a piece of paper wedged between rocks, Amanda recovers a dropped note from Mathilda, addressed to Carl, who is still away at the war. It reveals Amanda's shame and sounds like a different Mathilda. Amanda wraps it around a rock and throws it into the deep. She warns Ruth not to mention it.

Early mornings, Amanda rows out to spy on the Owens' house. Clement comes out in his bathrobe to the pier for a swim, swallows something from a small box, and suns himself. Imogene arrives, surveys the property, and enters the house. One morning she comes out to cut flowers and Clement takes her on a walk. Amanda knows what is going on. Meanwhile, Ruth struggles at Brown's and finds life dull. Imogene loses faith in the advertising agency. Business people will never listen to them or let them be part of their world, except by marriage.

Having her sights set on Bobby Hanser, Imogene encourages Ruth to dance with Arthur. Arthur often asks Imogene's help on projects and she comes to dream about marrying this good prospect. Worried about Ruth, she includes her in their activities but rejects the idea of going into business together. Mrs. Owens has promised to get her a job in Chicago, but Imogene no longer wants that. Resenting the selfishness, Ruth claims to understand. Ruth wants not to be a threesome, but accepts. They go for malts after work and talk about books. Amanda objects to the arrangement and asks if Imogene and Arthur are serious. Cautiously, Amanda suggests that summer people cannot be trusted on matters of romance and tells herself to be more careful about Imogene's future. She is confident that she has raised Ruth properly.

Arthur is restless. He has given himself the summer to decide on a path, and now it is fall. He must decide between joining his brother's firm and starting a business of his own. He likes bright, beautiful, ambitious, confident, and inquisitive Imogene—and his mother approves. Plain-looking, reserved Ruth is linked to him by the woman he finds in the ice and is intriguing. Arthur arrives late to the last dance of the summer. Ruth is tired of hearing Imogene talk about him and wishes that they would make a decision. Ruth longs, guiltily, for him to look at her. When the group goes out on the boat again, Kitty makes a move on Arthur. Angered, Imogene jumps aboard, twisting her ankle. When Dr.



Karbler grounds her for at least a day, Imogene talks Ruth into skipping school to fill in. The work is simple.

Part 2 Chapter 14 Analysis

Under Mrs. Owens' influence Imogene grows annoying. Amanda's reflection concerns finding a note from Mathilda to Carl in Europe, revealing the secret of her pregnancy. She destroys it. This sets up, but does not directly cause, the forged letter from Arthur to Ruth later in the story. This memory merges into Amanda's early-morning boat trips to spy on Clement. She learns his routine, which includes swallowing something that she cannot make out and ends in a tanning session in which he looks like a man in a coffin. In context, this phrase is ominous; in terms of the later story it is prophetic. Amanda jumps to the conclusion that Clement has his eye on young Imogene. It later develops that she may not be entirely wrong. Meanwhile, Ruth struggles, having lost her friend's constant company. She cannot see how the Chicago plan will work.

Thrown together with Arthur at work, Imogene falls for Arthur and also loses interest in Chicago. The couple takes on Ruth as a threesome for wholesome activities. Arthur often asks Imogene's help on projects and she comes to dream about marrying this good prospect. Worried about Ruth, she includes her in their activities but rejects the idea of going into business together. Mrs. Owens has promised to get her a job in Chicago, but Imogene no longer wants that. Resenting the selfishness, Ruth claims to understand. Ruth wants not to be a threesome, but accepts. They go for malts after work and talk about books, particularly William Dean Howells' *The Minister's Charge*, which deals with how everyone is responsible for everyone else. Arthur contends that marrying one person when one loves another is a mistake. This becomes precisely Arthur's dilemma a few chapters later. Ruth denies that she resembles the character Jessie. Imogene, perfectly in character, declares that nothing is more important than love. Again, a novel provides extra texture to *Drowning Ruth*.

Amanda grows more watchful of Imogene's future and Arthur worries about his future, professional and personal. Each are detailed, making clear that he is a young man of privilege. Imogene is again described in literary terms. Invited to the theater to see Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Imogene virtually memorizes the play and also studies Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *The Wild Duck*. Mrs. Owens is impressed by Imogene's inquisitiveness and potential to be properly molded. Note that *A Doll's House* deals with a woman's decision about what to do with inconvenient children. Ruth's attraction is less obvious. She feels guilty about wanting Arthur to notice her. Another boat party sets up an ankle injury for Imogene, which requires Ruth briefly to substitute for her with Mrs. Owens. The novel is approaching its climax.



Part 2 Chapter 15

Part 2 Chapter 15 Summary

Amanda recalls that by November, Joe, delivering a letter about Carl's return, sees her condition. Mathilda dances for joy. Joe tells Mathilda that Mary Louise has lost another baby. Now, Amanda steers the motorboat toward the Owens', determined that Arthur and Clement must leave Imogene alone. She ties up and begins sunbathing and waiting for Clement. When he approaches, furtively, Amanda is speechless for terror; seeing him close up and feeling his appreciation reminds her that she had once been young—and misused. She hates him. He suggests they take her boat out to speak privately. When they reach deep water, too far from shore to be seen without binoculars, Clement asks if she needs money. Not knowing how to tell him that Imogene is their daughter, Amanda suggests that he take his usual swim. Puzzled, he suggests that afterwards they visit her island. She is amazed at how natural he is around her and oblivious to all that she has gone through because of him. Perhaps he thinks that she has forgiven him and wants him back.

Arriving at 8:30, Ruth notices a boat out on the lake, but the water is too foul to go near, so she walks to the house. She declines the maid's offer of coffee, paces the elegant office, and opens the roll-top desk to start typing the letters that Imogene has left. She makes minor mistakes on four sheets of watermarked bond before Mrs. Owens arrives and says that it need only be legible. To cover her false starts, Ruth folds the sheets and puts them in her purse. She busies herself with other tasks and taking in the room.

When Ruth resumes typing, Arthur enters, surprising her. Small talk about Imogene's ankle makes her nervous. Arthur offers to type the letters for her, provided that she then go for a drive with him. Alone in the car, Ruth gradually relaxes. They stop for picnic supplies and head to a secluded spot, where Arthur talks of hating to leave the lake for the winter and wanting to return weekends. Amanda is sure that he wants to be with Imogene, but when she mentions marrying Imogene, Arthur says that she will make someone a fine wife. Ruth forces herself to feel nothing for Arthur and asks to go home.

Part 2 Chapter 15 Analysis

Amanda's recollection opening Chapter 15 is that Carl writes about returning as Mary Louise Lindgren suffers another stillbirth. This gives way to Amanda in the present time going beyond surveying the Owens' house to confronting Clement about him and his son leaving Imogene alone. Much emphasis is given to the atmosphere as weed-cutting has left the shoreline clogged and stinking. It does not affect the plot. Amanda finds herself speechless when Clement arrives and finds her emotions twisted and confused. She cannot figure out how to say that Imogene is their daughter. They end up in the middle of the lake, beyond unaided eyes, and Clement finds himself taking his usual swim. Both are puzzled by this meeting and search inwardly for answers.



Ruth arrives for work early and is shown settling awkwardly into the job. Mrs. Owens is quite kind. Note that Ruth is embarrassed about typing mistakes and folds the pages in her purse to dispose of at home. Amanda will find and preserve them, leading to the forgery that brings the story to its climax. Arthur, it turns out, is a competent two-finger typist, because his father insists that he keep up with business matters. He types his mother's letters and then takes Ruth for a drive, their first without Imogene. They talk about Arthur's prospects before Ruth asks about his intentions for Imogene. To Ruth's dismay, he refuses to commit himself to her. Nothing comes of the rather ominous description of them driving to an isolated spot and an old man, a stranger, intimating that Ruth must be up to something being alone with this young man.



Part 2 Chapter 16

Part 2 Chapter 16 Summary

Amanda recalls enjoying sitting in the boat as Clement swims. She wonders why she had demanded an exclusive relationship with him. He is exhausted after two laps and Amanda dismisses ideas of him having designs on Imogene. His lecherous comment when she declares that she wants to tell him about Imogene inspires Amanda to yell the truth as she chugs away. Halfway to shore, she throws Clement's robe overboard. Forgetting about his heart condition, Amanda cannot imagine that this monster will drown.

Part 2 Chapter 16 Analysis

A short Chapter 16 has Amanda recalling abandoning Clement in the middle of the lake, as she had Ruth. This time, she does not keep pace with him. She claims not to realize that he has a heart condition that will result in his drowning. A lecherous comment about Imogene inspires Amanda to leave. The motor's sound probably covers her revelation that they are Imogene's parents.



Part 2 Chapter 17

Part 2 Chapter 17 Summary

Amanda recalls being unready for the baby when the pains start, but is calm as Mathilda panics. When Ruth hides under the bed, Amanda gives her a peppermint stick to calm her. Now, having dragged the boat ashore, Amanda awakens from a dream about Ruth drowning. Amanda bathes, dresses, and starts dinner as Arthur delivers Ruth home. Amanda comforts herself that when summer ends, the problem will go away. She wants not to talk about Imogene, but Ruth insists, complaining about the ruin of their Chicago plans when Imogene and Arthur marry. Amanda declares that they must prevent this and insists that they involve no one else.

Ruth rejects the idea that Imogene is Clement's daughter until Amanda admits to being the mother. Ruth recalls Imogene's birth, with Amanda making scary sounds while she tries to lie quietly under the bed. When Mathilda announces a girl, Ruth tries to cry, but that is just not her. Ruth now insists that Amanda must tell Imogene, but Amanda counters that the truth will kill Mary Louise, who has been an excellent mother. Ruth must imagine learning something that ruins everything that she has known. Amanda collapses, fearing that Imogene will hate her. Ruth favors telling an Owens male and letting them prevent the marriage. Saying that Imogene will learn the truth that way, Amanda changes the subject: Ruth and Imogene could have been raised as sisters had Ruth obeyed and come back off the ice. Ruth remembers needing to run that night. Amanda comforts her now, but reminds her that she has given up everything for her. Now Ruth must do this for her.

In bed, Ruth wonders if she has pulled the string that unravels her family. Slipping off to the island, she realizes that the bottom of the boat is leaking and finds a silver box full of pills blocking the plug. Perhaps it belongs to a tramp who sleeps in the boat—but perhaps it is a gift from her mermaid mother. Ruth can no longer share such romantic fantasies with Imogene. All is destroyed by something that Ruth does as a three-year-old. Why had no one stopped her? Ruth lies on the cabin floor, listening in her mind to Imogene's birth and wondering why whoever saves her has not also saved Mathilda.

Part 2 Chapter 17 Analysis

Chapter 17 adds details about Imogene's birth from Amanda's recollections after she returns from the lake and dreams about Ruth drowning. She is thus primed for a battle when Arthur drops Ruth off. Ruth talking about how Imogene marrying Arthur will ruin their Chicago plans elicits a sharp response about preventing this without involving anyone else. Amanda reveals that she and Clement are Imogene's parents. Recall that neither girl is optimistic or enthusiastic about Chicago, but Ruth is clinging to it as a way out of an increasingly tangled situation.



This leads to Ruth recalling Imogene's birth from her perspective beneath the bed. Although now a grown woman, she describes the harrowing, unseen activity in a child's terms. In the present time Ruth and Amanda argue about what to do and what impact various options will have on Imogene and Mary Louise. Amanda's greatest fear is selfish: that Imogene will hate her. Amanda also reminds Ruth of all that she has sacrificed for her. Ruth internalizes the guilt of pulling the string that unravels her family. Ruth cannot understand how anyone can let a three-year-old determine fate. Recall that Amanda has thrown Clement's robe overboard on the run to shore. Retreating to the island, Ruth finds the pill box that falls out of the pocket and fantasizes about its origin. Mathilda as mermaid briefly returns but without Imogene to share stories with, this is of no interest.



Part 2 Chapter 18

Part 2 Chapter 18 Summary

Two and a half days after Clement disappears without word—and leaving his cars behind—Theresa is worried. Sheriff Kuhtz is blasé. Imogene, who is staying at the house, keeps Ruth abreast of rumors (there are few facts). Mention of Clement's missing heart pills makes Ruth suspicious of the box. Ruth figures that Amanda is with Clement in the boat and wonders if she has him hidden somewhere on the farm. Learning that Imogene is staying at the house, Amanda insists that Ruth forge a letter on the letterhead that she has fished out of the trash. Amanda's language seems unnatural, but Ruth writes as dictated: Arthur has fallen in love with another and wants not to hurt Imogene. It would be wrong not to let her find someone who will truly love her. He asks Ruth's advice. Ruth perfects forging Arthur's signature.

Ruth delivers the note to Imogene, who has been wishing to see her. Imogene cannot decide whether they want Clement to be run-away or dead. Ruth nervously hands Imogene the letter. Stricken, Imogene cannot believe the words. Arthur walks down the lawn to the pier where they stand, causing Ruth to contemplate seizing the letter, but then figuring that he will read and deny it and she can finally tell the truth. She cannot imagine Amanda's reaction. Imogene does not give him a chance to read before demanding whether he loves another. The wind whips it into the lake. Arthur refuses to discuss it while his father is missing. He does not know if he loves her. After swooning, Imogene pushes Arthur into the lake and stalks away.

Part 2 Chapter 18 Analysis

Chapter 18 shows the chaos into which the Owens' household is thrown by Clement's disappearance. Sheriff Kuhtz is shown having grown jaded by several decades of police work. Mention of the pill box makes Ruth suspect that Amanda and Clement have been recently in the boat, but she is unwilling to conduct another search of the farm for fear of finding Clement hidden somewhere.

Amanda concocts a plan to forge a letter from Arthur to Ruth to break up Imogene's romance. She insists that Ruth type it on the Owens letterhead that she has fished out of the trash and forge Arthur's signature. Ruth's conflict over obeying is investigated, but Amanda's logic is inescapable: Imogene deserves to find someone who will truly love her. Recall the discussion of Howells' *The Minister's Charge*. Ruth delivers the letter to Imogene on the dock, Arthur appears and is confronted without being given an opportunity to read the text. When he cannot declare that he loves her, Imogene pushes him into the lake.



Part 2 Chapter 19

Part 2 Chapter 19 Summary

Ruth recalls Imogene waiting for her out of view of the house in the woods. Imogene feels like a fool, while Ruth insists that Arthur has told her that she will make a wonderful wife. Imogene hates him. It feels like something has broken inside her. Ruth knows the feeling. She suggests that they go to Chicago. Amanda's friend, Miss Fox, will surely put them up and Mrs. Owens can get Imogene a job. Ruth exults at the thought of being free of Amanda's influence. Imogene is worried but agrees. They agree to meet at the train station that evening. Ruth thinks that she sounds like Amanda when she discourages Imogene from thinking that Arthur might still love her.

Amanda recalls first seeing the newborn. She is exhausted. Seeing Mathilda hold the baby, Amanda feels displaced rather than grateful or relieved. She hates Mathilda but falls asleep before she can explain. In the middle of the night, Amanda drags herself from bed, dresses warmly, and heads off to somewhere warm to start a new life. Some day they may be able to return to visit or stay. Amanda is good at judging the ice and it is a cold night. She has not gone far when Ruth yells for her to wait for her, but Amanda orders her to stay at the cabin and inches carefully on.

Amanda watches Ruth pack for Chicago, wondering why things cannot go on as before. She suggests that they and Imogene go to the island. Ruth tries to silence her by suggesting that it is odd that as excellent a swimmer as Clement should disappear. Amanda considers throwing herself down the stairs to keep Ruth home, and loses her balance as Ruth leaves. Ruth hears her cries as she struggles with her bag to the station. Imogene arrives, driven by Maynard Owens. He will take them to Chicago. As Imogene talks of healing, Ruth thinks about abandoning the woman who has cared for her her whole life and decides to stay. Imogene takes it well and decides to go alone. Imogene gives Ruth the blue marble for luck. Ruth believes she will return.

Part 2 Chapter 19 Analysis

Ruth and Imogene meet in the woods and decide to resurrect their Chicago plan. They will make arrangements for lodging and work and meet at the station. Imogene's squeamishness over pulling Ruth's tooth is recalled as she agrees to the present plan. Ruth hears Amanda's carping as she shapes Imogene's thoughts.

Amanda recalls first seeing the newborn Imogene being held by Mathilda. It looks like a Madonna and Child painting. Mathilda oversteps by claiming the baby as her own, which leads to Amanda's flight across the ice, carrying her baby under her coat. Amanda is confident of a new life, but the plan falls apart when Ruth bolts after them. In the present time, Amanda kibitzes as Ruth packs. Ruth defiantly brings up the oddity of Clement, an excellent swimmer, disappearing.



Amanda again panics, considering throwing herself dramatically down the stairs to keep Ruth from leaving and, after Ruth leaves, accidentally slips and injures herself. Ruth hears her cries as she walks to the station but ignores them, determined to be free of Amanda's smothering control. The walk recalls in reverse Amanda's trudge from the station to the farm house early in the novel after being dismissed from the hospital. At the station, Ruth recalls all that Amanda has done for her and backs out of the trip to Chicago. Imogene needs to go, to heal her heart. She gives Ruth the blue marble that begins their friendship. This convinces Ruth that Imogene will return some day which, as unlikely as it seems, comes true in the final chapter.



Part 2 Chapter 20

Part 2 Chapter 20 Summary

Ruth thinks about Imogene visiting with husband Jack and baby Louisa, and staying on the island. Ruth cares for Amanda's injuries and sees her as she must have been before all of the guilt. Ruth throws the box into the lake just before Clement's body washes ashore. She gives up typing for farming, which she enjoys. She turns down two proposals from Arthur but they remain friends. Amanda recalls Ruth running out without a coat, ignoring their orders and Mathilda running heavily after her. When she snatches Ruth up, their combined weight is too great and they plunge into the water. Amanda leaves her newborn to rescue them. Mathilda has pushed Ruth onto the ice but slipped under. Amanda snatches her, but when the ice begins to break, Mathilda bites her thumb to make her let go. Amanda gathers Ruth, who does not respond to CPR, and Imogene under her coat and heads for shore. Imogene's body heat revives Ruth. Amanda leaves Imogene with Mary Louise, who asks no questions, and Amanda and Ruth start life again.

Part 2 Chapter 20 Analysis

Imogene returns, married and a mother, and her family wants to live on Ruth's island. Amanda seems relieved of her burden of guilt as Ruth nurses her back to health. She clears up for Ruth that Ruth had been running to Amanda over the ice rather than running from anyone or anything. The elimination of the final evidence against Amanda and the finding of Clement's body is rather glossed over. Ruth picks 13 April, 1941 as a fitting ending place for her story.

Amanda provides the final details of how Ruth does, indeed die. Despite CPR, she shows no signs of life until Imogene's body heat miraculously revives her. Mathilda sacrifices herself to keep Amanda from also drowning, but Amanda's hands are so numb that she feels no pain that would make her let go of her sister. Somehow, she does and Mathilda sinks. Mary Louise asks no questions about the story or the frozen baby or the blood, and Amanda and Ruth start life again.



Characters

Ruth Sapphira Neumann

The novel's title character, Ruth is essentially orphaned when her mother Mathilda drowns and her father Carl is in the U.S. Army in Europe during World War I. Ruth is raised by Aunt Amanda, who has a history of mental instability and clings to her as if Ruth were her own daughter. Ruth throughout her life recalls lying under the bed on the island as Amanda gives birth to an illegitimate daughter, and then following Amanda across the ice as Amanda flees to prevent Mathilda from claiming the baby. Ruth and Mathilda both fall through the ice but Mathilda manages to push Ruth to safety before drowning. Ruth always insists that she too drowns. She does not know until the end of the novel that the warmth of her newborn half sister's body somehow revives her when CPR fails.

When Carl returns, Ruth treats him like a stranger and only gradually warms. When Amanda is committed for a year to a mental institution, Ruth is raised by Carl's cousin, Hilda, who rightly regards Ruth as a problem child. The enmity is mutual. Hilda finally abandons them and Amanda is well enough to return. Amanda still yearns to have Ruth all to herself, keeping her out of school for years and only reluctantly allowing her to have friends.

Among Ruth's friends is Imogene Lindgren, who turns out to be the child that Amanda gives up to raise Ruth. Ruth is a young woman in business school when this truth slips out. She is amazed that she had not seen the physical resemblance between them. Amanda talks Ruth into forging a letter to keep Imogene and her half-brother from marrying. Ruth, out of loyalty to the woman whom has given up everything for her, gives up plans to go to Chicago and stays with Amanda. Throughout the novel, Ruth narrates her version of events in voices appropriate to her age at the time. Her share of the narration expands with time.

Amanda (Mandy) Starkey

Ruth's maternal aunt who undertakes to raise her after her younger sister Mathilda (Starkey) Neumann's drowning, Amanda is tall, clumsy, awkward, and mentally unbalanced. She is proud of being a brilliant, popular nurse in a veteran's hospital, but realizes that she has lost control and returns home to recuperate. Amanda's symptoms are those of pregnancy (compounded by hallucinations), which months later results in the birth of a daughter whom she names Imogene and gives up for unofficial adoption to the Lindgrens on the night that Amanda delivers and Mathilda drowns.

When Amanda leaves the hospital, Mathilda assumes that she will take care of her and her baby, Ruth, while her husband Carl is away at war. There are conflicts before Carl leaves. Coming home to the farm that is legally half hers, Amanda grows too possessive



of Ruth. To hide her pregnancy, Amanda and Mathilda move back to the island and agree to raise the baby together. When Mathilda this time grows possessive, Amanda changes her mind and flees across the ice with the newborn. Ruth, who is hiding under the bed during the delivery, runs after them. Mathilda catches Ruth, they fall through thin ice, and Amanda tries to save them. To keep Amanda from falling in too, Mathilda bites her thumb to make her let go. The ragged scars are a life-long reminder and cause of wonder in others.

Abandoning her drowned sister, Amanda also abandons her newborn to concentrate on raising Ruth. When Carl returns, wounded, Amanda nurses him and together they care for Ruth. It is a tense relationship. When Carl wonders about the circumstances of the drowning, Amanda's nervous condition returns, requiring her hospitalization for a year. Eventually, Carl joins the merchant marine to earn money, leaving Ruth entirely in Amanda's smothering care.

When Ruth is grown and attending business school, Amanda learns that the son of the man who impregnated her is courting Imogene, her natural daughter, and she uses Ruth to break them up. She lures the father, Clement J. Owens, out onto the lake and abandons him to his death (not knowing that he has a heart condition). When Ruth threatens to move to Chicago with Imogene, Amanda throws herself down the stairs, knowing that Ruth will return and nurse her back to health. At the train station, Ruth realizes how much Amanda has sacrificed for her and does, indeed, return.

Amanda frequently narrates her memories of key events, alongside the impersonal narrator. She recalls being responsible, as a child, for her more beautiful and lovable sister Mathilda, being Mathilda's maid of honor at her wedding, breaking their mother's prized vase, considering the island her own exclusively, but admitting that the newlyweds need a place of their own. Most of all she dwells on her guilt over Mathilda's self-sacrificial death. She relives it in nightmares every night. Sometimes she dreams of Mathilda appearing as a mermaid on the rocks of the island. Mathilda tries hard to reach her but is never able.

Mathilda (Mattie née Starkey) Neumann

Ruth's mother, Mathilda is seen in the novel only in memory, having disappeared on 4 December, 1919 and having been found two days later drowned beneath lake ice. Mathilda meets her future husband Carl on the Fourth of July when she is 17. They court a bit too freely for those days over the summer. When Mama Starkey suffers a stroke, her father insists that they marry to avoid scandal and Mathilda's elder sister, Amanda, who has cared for her since birth, is sent off to nursing school.

Mathilda is petite, well-liked, pretty, and adventurous, quite the opposite of her sister. She and Carl live happily on a small island until Ruth is born. Then, feeling trapped by farm work, Carl joins the army without consulting Mathilda and goes to France. Mathilda leaves the island to live on the family farm and welcomes Amanda when work in a hospital destroys Amanda's nerves. In fact, Amanda is pregnant. To cover this up,



Mathilda takes Amanda back to the island. They agree that Mathilda will raise Amanda's baby, who will be said to be orphaned at birth.

When Amanda changes her mind and flees across the ice with the newborn, followed by Ruth, Mathilda gives chase, catches Ruth, and their combined weight drops them through the ice. Mathilda pushes Ruth to safety and when Amanda is at the point of falling in while trying to save her, bites Amanda's thumb to make her let go.

Carl Neumann

A meat packer when he meets Mathilda Starkey, Carl is a good dancer who knows about horses, but has few prospects and no savings. His future in-laws look down on him. Carl plays drum in the Bayside Meatpackers Band when he and Mathilda meet at a Fourth of July parade. He is boyishly good-looking with brown hair falling over his eyes. In the course of the novel it begins to gray. Their marriage in December causes gossip.

The couple lives on the Starkey farm while building a house on the island. Their daughter, Ruth Sapphira Neumann, is born there. Disenchanted with farming and having always found himself wanting in courage, Carl enlists in the U.S. Army during World War I without consulting Mathilda. He is sent to France. For the rest of his life he has nightmares about an explosion that flattens him and watching German soldiers approach to bayonet the survivors. The dreams always end in a fade to red.

Carl returns home shortly after Mathilda's drowning, moves in with Amanda, who is caring for her niece Ruth, and allows her, a trained nurse, to care for him as well. Amanda plans to buy his half of the farm, assuming that he will want a fresh start in life, unencumbered by a child about whom he knows nothing. Carl and Ruth learn to get along only slowly, which only makes Amanda jealous. Eventually Carl grows suspicious about the circumstances of Mathilda's death and his questions aggravate Amanda's nervous condition. She spends a year in a mental hospital, during which Carl is forced to ask his disagreeable cousin, Hilda, to help out. Ruth dislikes Hilda and drives her to quit. Amanda is well enough to return.

Gradually the tensions with Amanda reduce but Carl's suspicions about Mathilda's death grow. He searches for clues, jumps to conclusions on their basis, and nearly murders Clement J. Owens, whom he believes has impregnated Mathilda in his absence. He refrains and dedicates himself to loving Mathilda's memory. Carl takes a job in the Merchant Marine when farming becomes economically inviable and largely disappears from the story.

Eliza Fox

Amanda Starkey's roommate in a Milwaukee boarding house full of unmarried nurses, Eliza has to pull Amanda out of bed when she dreams that she has lost both legs. While Amanda is dealing with being stood up by Clement J. Owens, Eliza is rereading Jennie Gerhardt, a novel that shares some themes with Drowning Ruth.



Hilda Grossman

Carl Neumann's second cousin once removed on his father's side, Hilda comes from Tomahawk, WI, to help care for his three-year-old daughter Ruth after Ruth's aunt Amanda is institutionalized. Strict, serious, and humorless, Hilda and Ruth instantly dislike one another. Hilda sees Ruth as a problem child and appears to enjoy punishing her. Carl wants to get rid of her but needs help with the cantankerous child. Ruth for a while appears to grow closer to Hilda but only to set her up for a prank that makes her go away, claiming that Ruth is a devil child.

Bobby Hanser and Harold Koch

Two of the wealthy young summer residents of Nagawaukee Lake, Hanser and Koch are, with Arthur Owens, members of the yacht club, racing their graceful A-boats. Imogene Lingren makes Ruth Neumann go to dances every Friday night in hopes of getting to know the boys better and, perhaps, get married. Bobby has a reputation for summer flings and appears to have a crush on Imogene. He shows off, taking the group out on his Chris Craft power boat after dances.

Sheriff Cyrus Kutzt

A local farmer who does light law enforcement work on the side, Kutzt learns from Amanda Starkey that her sister Mathilda (Starkey) Neumann has gone missing one cruel night in November. Mrs. Kutzt, her face showing concern, invites Amanda and baby Ruth inside and assures them that Cy will bring her back. Kutzt realizes that Amanda has crossed the ice from the island, which is the subject of local gossip. Late in the novel, Kutzt handles the recovery of the body of wealthy Clement J. Owens, also a drowning victim. Affecting vast experience in such matters, Kutzt overlooks evidence of foul play.

The Lindgren Family

Amanda Starkey's childhood friend in Nagawaukee, Mary Louise Lingren works in Heinzelman's Bait and Tackle, which is Amanda's first stop on returning from her hospital fiasco, claiming that she is on vacation. Mary Louise, who is one of nine children, and husband George are expecting again, having lost five babies to miscarriage in five years of marriage. On the night that Mathilda (Starkey) Neumann drowns in Nagawaukee Lake, Amanda brings to Mary Louise, still mourning her latest loss, a newborn, Imogene, said to belong to a hired girl who dies in childbirth. Imogene (Genie) is, in fact, Amanda's newborn. Mary Louise is so joyful that she does not notice that Amanda and Ruth wear nightgowns and appear frozen and that Amanda is covered with blood.



As they grow up, Imogene and Ruth become best friends. Pretty, popular Imogene helps plain, eccentric Ruth to come out of her shell, and they go on to attend business school together and talk of partnering in business in Chicago. When Imogene falls in love with Arthur Owens, however, and they talk of marriage, Ruth is forced by Amanda to help break up the incestuous relationship without revealing the truth. Imogene goes to Chicago to get over her heartbreak, marries, and returns home with husband Jack and baby Louisa. They go to live on Amanda's island.

Ramona Mueller

The Postmistress of Nagawaukee, Ramona relies on safe small talk with patrons, such as "Spring's coming," but insults Amanda Starkey by declaring that her newly-returned brother-in-law, Carl Neumann, is lucky to have her to help with his daughter Ruth. Amanda considers herself the half-orphan's mother. Mueller is used largely as a vehicle for gossip early in the novel.

Dr. Nichols

The hospital administrator who asks Amanda Starkey to take a temporary leave from her job. His speaking in the first person plural (we) makes her suspect that others have been discussing her condition.

The Owens Family

Wealthy residents of Milwaukee, WI, the Owens family become summer residents of Nagawaukee. Clement J. Owens reports finding Mathilda (Starkey) Neumann's body trapped in the ice of Nagawaukee Lake. He is surveying property in preparation for building a home. Clement has a wealthy wife, Theresa, and three children, Maynard (age 17), Avis (15), and Arthur (5) as the novel opens. Arthur first spots the body and yells for his father, who reports it to the sheriff.

Using Theresa's fortune, Clement and Theresa build an impressive house on the lake that his lover, Amanda Starkey, so highly recommends. Theresa knows that Clement is a practiced philanderer and hopes the project will keep him home. Clement fails to mention to Amanda that he is married and he cannot understand why Amanda is so upset when he announces it. The break-up is less amicable than most. He does not know that Amanda gets pregnant during the one time that they have sex and gives their illegitimate daughter, Imogene, to the Lindgrens to raise as their own.

This becomes a critical factor as Imogene and Ruth become best friends and grow up and both fall in love with Arthur, who cannot make up his mind. Ruth is forced by Amanda to help break up the incestuous relationship. Amanda tries to tell Clement about it but instead takes him out in her boat and abandons him in the middle of the lake. While a strong swimmer, Clement has a heart condition that brings on his drowning. Earlier, Ruth's father, Carl Neumann, grows convinced that Clement has



seduced not Amanda but his late wife Mathilda, and narrowly restrains himself from killing Clement with a high-powered rifle.

Theresa employs Imogene as her private secretary and keeps her close during the search for her husband's body. Amanda uses Theresa's stationary, obtained while substituting for Imogene, to forge a note from Arthur, claiming that he loves another. Imogene moves to Chicago and marries safely.

Rudy

The Starkey family's hired man for decades, Rudy helps Amanda deal with her brother-in-law, Carl Neumann, when he returns from World War I gravely injured. Rudy keeps the farm afloat financially. He finds Amanda's precise planning amusing and joins her for the day's big meal at noon. Earlier he disapproves of Amanda, Mathilda, and Ruth moving to the island, but is easily manipulated to see Amanda's point of view. He feels guilty for not grabbing Ruth off the island, to force Amanda and Mathilda back to the farm, as that would have spared all of their lives. Late in the novel, too old for farm work, Rudy marries and moves into town.

Henny Sims and Pete McKinley

Carl Neumann's buddies during World War I, Sims and McKinley are killed in a foxhole, Sims by the explosion that also wounds Carl and Pete by a German bayonet. Carl dreams about this event regularly. Everything turns red at the end.

Henry and Lucy Starkey

Amanda Starkey and Mathilda Starkey Neumann's parents and Ruth's grandparents, the Starkeys also have a son, Randolph, who dies of diphtheria between the sisters' births. They do not approve of Amanda's first beau and pack her off to relatives to get over him and do not approve of Mathilda's choice of a husband, but insist that they marry to avoid scandal. They also pack Amanda off to nursing school to be prepared to deal with the aftermath of Lucy's stroke, suffered weeks after Mathilda and Carl meet. Since her father is a Union Army captain, Lucy believes that her daughter rates better than a butcher. Amanda is tasked with watching Lucy when Lucy is feeling poorly and not sleeping, but has to find Mathilda to do her chores. Thus, Amanda is missing when Lucy is stricken. Lucy is not well enough to attend the wedding but receives the newlyweds afterwards. Amanda accidentally breaks her special vase that day. When they die, the Starkeys' farm is shared by the daughters equally. Neighbors gossip about Amanda leaving after the parents die.



Joe Tully

Amanda Starkey's first boyfriend, Joe falls short of her parents' expectations and she is packed off to a female relative to get over him. Later, while living with her widowed brother-in-law Carl Neumann, Amanda again grows close to Joe, who helps Carl build the cabin on the island. Joe and Amanda go to movies and fish fries on Friday nights but she resists anything more.

Bert Weiss

A swaggering, nose-picking eight-year old boy in the Lakeridge School, Bert carries around a greasy bag full of marbles, including a prized blue, which Imogene Lindgren is determined to win from him. She uses Ruth Sapphira Neumann to lure him into a game. This begins their life-long friendship.



Objects/Places

Nagawaukee

Amanda Starkey and Mathilda Starkey Neumann's fictional home town in the region of Milwaukee, WI, Nagawaukee is where most of the novel is set. The town's chief venues include: the train station, which is on the route to St. Paul, Sioux Falls, Pocatello, and Spokane; Heinzelman's Bait and Tackle shop, run by the Lindgrens; the Post Office run by Ramona Mueller, which is a major center of gossip; and the Starkey family farm on Glacier Rd. overlooking Lagawaukee Lake.

Much of the characters' time is spent on a dark island sitting in the northeast corner of Taylor's Bay, and the green-roofed house that Mathilda, Carl, and Amanda build and share before World War I. Amanda considers it her personal island and allows others to visit reluctantly. Mathilda drowns crossing the ice in November. Late in the novel, in 1937, a dance arena opens on the lake shore. The wealthy have by then bought up lake shore property and built fine summer homes.

Appleton, IL

A real town in Illinois, Appleton is near the hospital in which Amanda Starkey works as a nurse. It sports a fashionable supper club to which Clement Owens invites Amanda on their first date.

Brown's Business College

A vocational school in or near fictional Nagawaukee, Brown's enrolls Imogene Lindgren and her friend (and half-sister) Ruth Neumann. It is run by young Mr. Brown, the stylish typing teacher, and old Mr. Brown, the founder. No longer young, Young Mr. Brown's ambitions have been crushed. He takes every opportunity to touch the female students. There are rumors that he drinks.

Chicago, IL

The big city to which Amanda Starkey and her best friend (and half-sister) Imogene Lindgren intend to move to seek their fortune in advertising, Chicago is a two-hour drive from fictional Nagawaukee. Clement Owens often drives Amanda Starkey to Chicago to dine and dance and there they conceive Imogene in an unnamed hotel.



Lakeridge School

An elementary school in or near fictional Nagawaukee, Lakeridge is where Ruth Neumann begins her education after Aunt Amanda Starkey runs out of excuses for keeping her home. Lakeridge is surrounded by pastures that smell of manure. In one corner there are concrete culverts from a failed construction project. There are a dozen girls in the school. Imogene Lindgren is the queen of them and attracts all of the boys. She befriends odd, standoffish Ruth.

Madison, IL

A real town in Illinois, Madison is where Amanda Starkey attends nursing school.

Milwaukee, WI

A real town in Wisconsin, Milwaukee provides a point of reference for fictional Nagawaukee and is the site of the novel's opening. Amanda Starkey works in an unnamed hospital prior to 27 March, 1919, when she is asked to leave until she gets over her hallucinations, fainting, and accidents. The hospital, treating World War I victims, stinks of gangrenous flesh, vomit, ammonia, burnt oatmeal, camphor, urine, and feces. Dr. Nichols is nearly kind in suggesting that Amanda needs a rest.

Nashotah, WI

A real town in Wisconsin, Nashotah is home to the fictitious and tragic mother of Imogene Lindgren. It is located a conveniently long buggy ride away from Nagawaukee, where the birth occurs.

Oconomowoc, WI

A real town in Wisconsin, Oconomowoc is home to Precious Blood Children's Home, the charity to which Amanda Starkey directs donations in her late sister's memory. It is between Nashotah and Nagawaukee.

Rebecca Rae

An iron steamship making circuits of the Great Lakes, Rebecca Rae becomes Carl Neumann's refuge after nearly killing the man whom he assumes has had an affair with his late wife. He sends postcards of the various ports of call to his daughter Ruth, who follows his travels on a map and memorizes the cards.



St. Michael's Sanitorium

St. Michael's is the institution to which Amanda Starkey is sent after suffering hallucinations, when her brother-in-law, Carl Neumann, returns from World War I and begins asking questions about his wife's mysterious drowning. Amanda is treated for about a year and released. St. Michael's is a converted monastery with the atmosphere of a spa.

Tomahawk, WI

A real town in Wisconsin, Tomahawk is home town to Hilda Grossman, Carl Neumann's second cousin once removed on his father's side whom, on recommendation from Pastor Jensen, Carl invites to help care for his daughter Ruth after her aunt Amanda is institutionalized.

Waukesha, WI

A real town in Wisconsin, Waukesha hosts the Fourth of July parade where Carl Neumann and Mathilda Starkey first meet. Mathilda's sister Amanda goes along as chaperon and Margaret Schwann, Harrit Lander, Will Audley, and Fritz Kienast also attend. Civil War veterans totter along at the end of the parade.



Themes

Jealousy

Jealousy runs throughout Christina Schwarz's novel *Drowning Ruth*. In flashbacks, it is established that Amanda Starkey resents losing her exclusive claim to her mother when Mathilda is born. She has then to care for the girl who is far prettier and more lovable than she. Amanda never admits to being jealous. When Mathilda's husband, Carl, goes off to war after their baby Ruth is born, Amanda moves back to help raise the baby. Amanda grows obsessed with Ruth and openly preempts Mathilda's motherhood, making Mathilda jealous and resentful.

The tables turn when Amanda returns home pregnant. The sisters take Ruth to their island to hide until the baby is born and concoct a cover story to allow Mathilda to raise the baby with Ruth. As the birth nears, Mathilda grows possessive to the point that Amanda takes her newborn over the ice to start a new life. Ruth runs after her aunt to stop her, Mathilda runs out to rescue Ruth and drowns when she falls through the ice. Amanda uses the concocted story to give the newborn, Imogene, to a friend whom she knows is a good mother. Amanda dedicates herself to raising Ruth as her own.

When Carl returns from the war, Ruth takes to him slowly. This brings Amanda satisfaction, for she is not about to relinquish Ruth to anyone. When they begin to bond, Amanda grows jealous and a combination of factors puts her in a sanitarium for a year. During that time, Carl brings in a tough relative to help out, who treats Ruth as a devil child. Ruth succeeds in driving her away and a cured Amanda returns. Before leaving for the war, Carl had exhibited normal male jealousy about not being able to calm his baby by nursing her.

Imogene grows up beautiful, befriends Ruth in school, and becomes the most popular student. As a teen, she draws the jealousy of fellow female students who cattily comment on her working in a bait shop. Amanda tries to keep tabs on Imogene and is rather jealous of her adoptive mother, a close friend. Amanda's attention makes this reciprocal. Crisis comes when Imogene falls in love with handsome, wealthy Arthur Owens. No one but Ruth knows that Arthur is Imogene's half-brother. Ruth also has feelings for Arthur, which she fights down out of loyalty to her friend. When Amanda can find no way to prevent an incestuous marriage and also keep her shameful secret, she enlists Ruth to break them up by deception. They forge a letter from Arthur to Ruth asking her advice about how to handle having fallen in love with someone else. The ploy works, Imogene goes away brokenhearted, and Ruth never has to reveal her feelings for Arthur.



Sex

In a rather puritanical way, sex underlies all of Christina Schwarz's novel *Drowning Ruth*. Preceding the main action, Amanda Starkey is sent away to get over a beau of whom her parents disapprove, but her sister Mathilda is encouraged to marry quickly to prevent a scandal when she and Carl Neumann are too explicit in their enthusiastic courtship. Soon after they have a daughter, Ruth, Carl goes off to war, and Amanda comes to help raise the child. It soon becomes evident that Amanda is pregnant and her shame has to be hidden from society until the birth.

The father is a wealthy married man, Clement J. Owens, who has a history of affairs. He muses at one point about the various reactions of partners when they break up. He meets naïve Amanda at work and they begin dating. She does not realize why he might insist that they drive far away to wine, dine, and dance, and Clement long remains a perfect gentleman. On the eve of leaving for Washington, DC, for an extended period, he stops a few times for drinks on a celebratory trip to Chicago, and gently coaxes her into having sex. Immediately remorseful, Amanda assumes that they will immediately marry, while Clement assumes that she has known all along that he is married. The break-up from her point of view is bitter, while he still has feelings for her and wants to be friends, possibly with continuing benefits. His wife knows of his philandering and tries only to keep him preoccupied with building projects.

The outcome of this one indiscretion is a pregnancy. Amanda talks Mathilda into going to their island to avoid detection and concocts a plan to raise the baby as her own, claiming that an unknown woman has died in childbirth. When Mathilda grows too possessive, Amanda flees with the newborn and Mathilda drowns chasing them. Amanda gives up the baby, Imogene, and concentrates on raising Ruth.

Decades later, Ruth and Imogene become close friends and take an interest in society boys, hoping to marry well. Imogene, it is noted already in elementary school, is developing physically, turning the little boys into crazy beings and making the little girls jealous. The teenagers' behavior is described at some length, showing that sexual mores have softened considerably, but Ruth still considers one young woman's behavior lewd.

The crisis comes when Imogene falls in love with Arthur Owens, Clement's son. Amanda alone knows that he is her half-brother, but wants not to reveal her shameful secret. Amanda forces Ruth to break them up before incest results. Amanda tries to tell Clement the truth, but fails. Seeing him close-up again, Amanda swings emotionally between sweet memories of being young, attractive, and in love and hate and loathing for what Clement has done to her life. She abandons him in mid-lake during a swim and Clement drowns. She is not sure whether Clement might be debauched enough to seduce Ruth or Imogene. A forged letter claiming that Arthur loves another brings Imogene to her senses and she goes away. The danger is, thus, rather facilely removed.



Dreaming

A number of characters in Christina Schwarz's novel *Drowning Ruth* experience dreams that they consider important. More importantly, whenever title character Ruth Sapphira Neumann recalls drowning at the same time as her mother, Aunt Amanda dismisses the idea as impossible and claims that it must simply be a dream. On that tragic night, Amanda tries to ignore—or wish away—her sister Mathilda's death but knows full well that this is impossible and that it is wrong to shush the girl or lie to her. Ruth cannot be fooled.

Amanda is filled with guilt over Mathilda's self-sacrificial death. It is said that she is drowning in grief. She relives it in nightmares every night, walking through deepening water towards Mathilda but never able to reach her. Sometimes she dreams of Mathilda appearing as a mermaid on the rocks around the island. On the day that Clement J. Owens drowns as she abandons him in the middle of the lake, Amanda falls asleep after dragging the boat ashore, and dreams about Ruth drowning. She finds herself unable to draw breath. Years earlier, as a nurse in a veterans hospital, Amanda dreams that she has lost both legs and her roommate has to pull her out of bed. Soon afterwards, Amanda is asked to leave the hospital until she recovers from hallucinations.

As a child Ruth believes that her mother is a mermaid, farming the bottom of the lake. It is not said that this is a dream, but the coincidence with Amanda's dreams seems telling. Ruth does suffer nightmares of being dragged down into the water.

Mathilda's widower Carl Neumann dreams rarely about his wife, the circumstances of whose mysterious death occupy his waking thoughts. He does, however, dream regularly about being wounded in a World War I foxhole. He sees his buddies, Henny Sims and Pete McKinley, shocked by an explosion that flattens him; German soldiers appear to bayonet survivors but freeze as another shell approaches. Everything turns red at the dream's end.



Style

Point of View

Drowning Ruth by Christina Schwarz blends three separate narrators. Most chapters open with title character Ruth Sapphira Neumann and/or her aunt, Amanda Starkey, reflecting briefly on some past event. An impersonal but generally sympathetic narrator then takes over and deals with related themes and events in the present, while preserving a consistent past-tense narration. The remaining characters speak for themselves only in snippets of dialogue, often filtered through Ruth and Amanda's memories. The main narrator is omniscient, being able to relay to the reader the contents of character's minds. Ruth and Amanda have normal limitations in this regard.

Time often shifts between the narrator's telling of the tale and Ruth and/or Amanda's musings. The opening and closing dates of the novel are explicit: Amanda is asked to leave her hospital job on 27 March, 1919 and Ruth selects 13 April, 1941 as a fitting time to end her story. A few other dates are added in between to keep the story grounded in history. Initially the shifting is confusing, until the reader realizes the pattern. The shifts in time are generally marked by additional spacing but lack verbal warning. When Ruth or Amanda recall events it is contemporaneous to the action rather than a true flashback, but their telling can include flashbacks to still earlier events.

Ruth and Amanda are conscious of narrating their versions of the story, but it is unclear to whom they think they are speaking—and whether it is oral or written narration. At one point it sounds as though Amanda is speaking with a psychiatrist, but this is not consistently carried through. The net effect is enigmatic rather than confusing or distracting.

Setting

Drowning Ruth by Christina Schwarz covers a period from 27 March, 1919, when Nurse Amanda Starkey is asked to take time off from her work in a hospital treating wounded soldiers, and 13 April, 1941, when her niece and ward, Ruth Sapphira Neumann decides that her story has been adequately told. The main action ends in 1937. The timing of the novel is crucial, allowing Carl Neumann to be absent, fighting in World War I, as his sister-in-law bears an illegitimate daughter and brings up his own daughter, Ruth, after the mother mysteriously drowns. The influenza pandemic then claims his in-laws before he comes home and resumes his recovery. The rural community is hit by collapsing farm prices in the 1920s and, of course, Prohibition. When Clement J. Owens mysteriously disappears, there are rumors that he has run afoul of the Chicago Mafia.

Most of the novel takes place in fictional Nagawaukee, WI, a rural community in the general vicinity of Milwaukee, WI, and Chicago, IL. Sisters Amanda Starkey and Mathilda Starkey Neumann grow up on a farm in Nagawaukee. Mathilda marries and



remains while Amanda goes to nursing school in Madison and works briefly in a Milwaukee hospital. Descriptions of these locales is minimal. After a brief return home, Amanda spends a year in nearby St. Michael's Sanitarium, to get over hallucinations. A bit more attention is paid to this converted monastery with the atmosphere of a spa.

Nagawaukee's chief venues include: the train station, which is on the route to St. Paul, Sioux Falls, Pocatello, and Spokane; Heinzelman's Bait and Tackle shop, run by the Lindgrens; the Post Office run by Ramona Mueller, which is a major center of gossip; and the Starkey family farm on Glacier Rd. overlooking Lagauwaukee Lake. Much of the characters' time is spent on a dark island sitting in the northeast corner of Taylor's Bay, and the green-roofed house that Mathilda, Carl, and Amanda share before World War I. Amanda considers it her personal island and allows others to visit reluctantly. Mathilda drowns crossing the ice in November. Late in the novel, in June of 1937, a dance arena opens on the lake shore. The wealthy have by then bought up lake shore property and built fine summer homes.

Language and Meaning

In her novel *Drowning Ruth*, Christina Schwarz affords herself the luxury of three separate narrators. Title character Ruth Sapphira Neumann from her childhood insists that she drowns at the same time as her mother Mathilda. Ruth's aunt, Amanda Starkey, maintains that she does not, while in asides to the reader admits that this is a lie and unfair to Ruth. Ruth throughout is led to believe that she is responsible for pulling the thread that unravels the whole family and wants to know why a three-year-old is not prevented from being in this position. She gradually sees that Amanda is an inherently selfish person, but that Ruth's welfare is Amanda's greatest concern. Amanda adds many reflections, which reveal a fevered, guilt-ridden soul.

An impersonal but generally sympathetic and omniscient narrator fills in the objective pieces. Other characters speak for themselves only in snippets of dialog, often filtered through Ruth and Amanda's memories. The story is told simply, eliciting rural life in the post-World War I world. Amanda studies nursing and her story sometimes includes medical jargon. The Owenses are wealthy. Theresa is an heiress socialite who volunteers for charities. Scenes with her depict nobility and taste. Her husband is an accomplished philanderer and inventor who cannot understand that naïve Amanda could think that a sexual affair might lead to marriage. Decades later when they meet again, he is still surprised and finds himself left in the middle of the lake, suffering a heart attack. Ruth's father, Carl, is a disgruntled farmer who flees to World War I and returns wounded to face a feisty three-year-old daughter and obsessive sister-in-law. At one point he is sure that Amanda's seducer has seduced Mathilda and the story turns into a who-done-it and tense potential murder scene.

Various literary works are alluded to in Part 2 of the novel. They are generally post-Civil War and range from collected children's stories to novels that would be controversial for young women to read in this era. Schwarz does not dwell on them sufficiently to frustrate a reader unacquainted with the titles, but the works are carefully chosen to



enhance her themes. Schwarz's references to products of the age accomplish the same subtle effect. Sexual themes are dealt with most discretely.

Structure

Drowning Ruth by Christina Schwarz is divided into two unequal numbered parts. It is also divided into a total of twenty untitled chapters, numbered continuously through the two parts. The story is told by an anonymous narrator augmented by recollections by two of the characters, Ruth Sapphira Neumann and her aunt, Amanda Starkey. The start of such reflections is marked by a heading identifying the speaker. The length of the reflections differs greatly. The normal narrator then takes up the thread, sometimes jarring the reader by the transition. The length of chapters varies greatly.

Part 1 consists of chapters 1 through 7 and covers events through Ruth's preschool years. Ruth is a quarrelsome youngster in an unstable household, her mother having drowned mysteriously when she was three years old. Ruth retains memories of also drowning, something that Aunt Amanda strenuously (but falsely) denies. Amanda is determined to be Ruth's mother, which adds strain to her mental instability. She carries the guilt of having borne an illegitimate daughter and given her away on the night her sister drowns. The general mood of Part 1 is depressed and even oppressive.

Part 2 consists of chapters 8 through 20. It opens with Ruth in second or third grade, happy to be a recluse from fellow students until she is befriended by the most popular girl in school, Imogene Lindgren, who turns out to be Amanda's abandoned baby and, thus, Ruth's half-sister. Although Schwarz withholds the whole truth to the final pages, enough clues are given for the reader to see where this new friendship will lead. The story jumps several times as the girls mature until they are in business school together, attending dances and falling in love. The object of both their attentions is the son of the man who impregnated Amanda long ago. Amanda is determined to prevent an incestuous marriage and Carl earlier stalks the man whom he assumes impregnated his wife. Amanda then, apparently unintentionally, does him in. Despite these serious themes, Part 2 contains more light-hearted material. Details of the mystery of Mathilda's drowning continue to be filled in and in the final paragraphs the truth is fully revealed.



Quotes

"Ruth remembered drowning.

"That's impossible, Aunt Amanda said. 'It must have been a dream.'

"But Ruth maintained that she had drowned, insisted on it for years, even after she should have known better." Part 1, Chapter 1, pg. 3.

"I'm not blaming them, a married couple needs a place to live, after all. Still, if they'd not built their house on my island, Mathilda would not have drowned. If you look at it one way, it's as simple as that." Part 1, Chapter 3, pg. 43.

"I did everything right. Everything. But it meant nothing. They got away from me. Their lungs full of fluid, they drowned in their bed, first my mother, then my father. I was helpless to hold them back." Part 1, Chapter 4, pg. 67.

"Her talking like that made him angry, but maybe she was right, about Ruth anyway. What did he know about raising a little girl? He worried about her, losing two mamas, no wonder she wasn't acting right, but what could he do about it? Hilda knew best, he thought, he hoped, as he hurried out to the barn." Part 1, Chapter 6, pgs. 98-99.

"Ruth Neumann was a mess, as usual. Her fine hair had pulled halfway out of her braid on one side, so that it bulged in a snarled mass over her ear, and the hem of her skirt was coming down. She was so blatantly odd that she'd been a scapegoat almost from the first week she appeared in school four years before." Part 2, Chapter 8, pg. 157.

"Amanda's push was hard, but not so hard that Ruth could not have kept her balance if she'd tried. But Ruth did not try. She flew out over the water, her shadow dark on the waves beneath her, and then at last she dropped." Part 2, Chapter 10, pg. 198.

"When one of his feet slid, he looked down instinctively, throwing his hands out to break his fall. If the lady had not been entombed in ice, he would have landed in her arms. He saw first the swollen gray hand and then the arm, the purplish fabric in folds, and finally the face. It was turned toward him, the blue eyes staring, the mouth open, screaming without sound, trapped in that bottomless black hole." Part 2, Chapter 13, pg. 245.

"Nagawaukee is not a large lake; anyone can swim its width. How was I to guess he couldn't do what a ten-year-old child can do? I'd forgotten about his weak heart.

"Is that true? To be honest, I don't know." Part 2, Chapter 16, pg. 294.

"I know he's Imogene's father because I am her mother. She's my baby.'

"Ruth jerked out of Amanda's grip and turned her face away, covering her ears with her hands. 'Stop it! How can you say such a thing?'

"If Amanda had suddenly insisted that after all the sky was green and the grass was red, Ruth could not have been more confused, more betrayed." Part 2, Chapter 17, pg. 301.



"Aunt Mandy was selfish, but what she wanted for herself was me. Imogene, too, maybe, but mostly me. She'd given Imogene up, but she wouldn't let go of me. How could I leave someone who loved me that much?" Part 2, Chapter 19, pg. 330.

"Released from their ice prison, the waves tossed themselves against the hull with ecstatic abandon, pitching up a fine spray that shimmered in the fledgling spring sunlight. I dipped my fingers in, and instantly my hand ached with cold. That must have been what it felt like, the night I drowned." Part 2, Chapter 20, pg. 334.

"Finally I saw Ruth, a still, little shadow on the dark ice. So much time had passed. I forced my breath between her frozen lips. I pressed my numb and bloody fingers to her neck to find her pulse. But I was much too late. She was gone too." Part 2, Chapter 20, pg. 337.



Topics for Discussion

How do marbles figure in the story, both in terms of character development and symbolism?

How does Carl develop as a character as he becomes a reality in the story, rather than as seen in other's reflections on him? What are his good and bad points as a husband and father? Is he, as he fears, a coward?

How do works of literature color the novel? Is more intended by citing them than is intended by other historical details like the draft, the pandemic, or Prohibition?

How would you have handled preventing Arthur and Imogene's incestuous marriage? What are the good and bad points of Amanda's solution? How would your method be better?

How does having to care for Mathilda as a baby shape Amanda's own development?

The novel regularly includes humorous incidents. What is your favorite and how does it affect characterization and plot development?

Ruth struggles with Aunt Amanda's selfishness but accepts that it shows love. Discuss Amanda's good and bad points, her successes and failures.