

The Reading Guide

Reading Group Questions

1. Based on her demeanor at the scene of the accident and her behavior throughout *Blue Water*, how would you describe Cindy Ann Kreisler, the woman responsible for Evan Van Dorn's death?
2. What role does the small-town atmosphere of Fox Harbor play in Rex and Meg Van Dorn's decision to seek time at sea on their sailboat, the Chelone?
3. What aspects of life on the Chelone draw Rex and Meg closer together, and what aspects push them further apart?
4. How does Toby's relationship with Mallory Donaldson, Cindy Ann Kreisler's sister, complicate the Van Dorns' decision to seek legal damages from Cindy Ann?
5. How does Cindy Ann's sexual abuse by her stepfather, Dan Kolb, impact Meg's feelings about her son's killer?
6. In what ways does Meg's budding friendship with Bernadette Hale and her invalid son, Leon, transform her feelings about seeking revenge and granting forgiveness?
7. To what extent is Evan's accidental death the cause of the deterioration of Rex and Meg's marriage?
8. What explains Meg's decision to befriend Cindy Ann Kreisler on her return to Fox Harbor, and how does this decision impact her relationship with Rex?
9. How would you describe Meg and Rex's methods of grieving over the course of *Blue Water*?
10. At the end of the novel, what does the birth of Toby and Mallory's daughter, Sadie, represent to Meg?

The Reading Guide

About the Book

When Megan and Rex Van Dorn sail into Houndfish Cay, they look to all the world like a couple who have left the cares of the shore behind them to live their dream. But when people ask, 'Do you have children?', Megan doesn't know how to answer. For Megan and Rex took to the water following the death of their only child, Evan, in a road accident - killed by Cindy Ann Kreisler, who, back when they were teenagers, had been Megan's best friend.

Impassioned, intense and insightful, BLUE WATER is a story of the desire for revenge, the impact of tragedy upon a marriage, and of Megan's coming to terms with the ties she shares with the woman who has wounded her so badly

An Interview with the Author

Blue Water grew out of your own adventures at sea on a 38-foot sailboat. At what point did you realize your experiences on the water would lead to your next novel?

Each time I do something that's even a little bit out of the ordinary, there's a part of my brain—let's call it "the accountant"—that pipes up and says, "Maybe you can use it." Well, for me, this is the kiss of death. It's one thing to do research in support of a genuine curiosity or passion; it's quite another to go out in the world in order to "use" life, rather than to participate in it. Yet the idea is, at times, very tempting, particularly when everyone you know is saying, "Why on earth are you moving onto a sailboat? You can barely dog-paddle!" So I told people I was writing a novel set on a sailboat, but, actually, I was getting very little done because either we didn't have enough battery power to run both a computer and the refrigerator, or else something would break and we'd be reading technical manuals, or else other cruisers would happen by, or else I'd just be so exhausted and sunburned and hot and itchy that the idea of writing seemed about as appealing as, I don't know, stripping more teak. Eventually, I resigned myself to the fact that I'd never even write a story set in a swimming pool. It was after I moved off the boat that I first heard Meg's voice in the opening paragraphs of the novel. It was a first person voice that, I realized, might earn the capacity to encompass—and reveal—the voice of another character as well. I love books in which traditional conceptions of the first person point of view get stretched, augmented, modernized.

You've written that only ten paragraphs of your original draft of Blue Water remain in the finished novel. Why do you think this novel was so difficult for you to write?

I wrote most of the first draft of Blue Water while I was pregnant. During the second trimester, I developed diabetes and insomnia, and I couldn't remember anything I'd

The Reading Guide

written even five minutes earlier, so that was part of it. At the same time, I was also more physically active than I'd been in years, so there were lots of temptations—so many pleasures!—that, in the past, hadn't ever been out there for me. I suppose, too, that I was struggling to process how rapidly my life had changed. At thirty-five, I was using a scooter to cross a city block. I typed with braces on my elbows and wrists. I had eyestrain which made it impossible to drive, to read or write for any length of time. Then, at thirty-eight, I found myself living a relatively unrestricted life. There were all these possibilities. I didn't know what to do first. Finally, there was the experience of having a child. I felt as if I couldn't wake up. Eventually, I accepted a teaching job at the University of Miami. Things began to click. I had the good fortune to have really terrific students. Teaching is always inspiring, stimulating.

As someone who confronts a chronic medical condition, are you especially drawn to metaphors of illness in your fiction?

Actually, I really dislike so-called “metaphors of illness” because they often result in stereotypes that make it hard for disabled people—particularly those with visible disabilities—to live in the world as concrete beings, individuals, rather than symbols of (other people's) fears or fetishes or over-idealized hopes. I would hope that a character like Leon, for example, is first and foremost a flesh-and-blood child, a beloved son, rather than a metaphor for some abstract, external concept such as courage, sorrow or—heaven forbid—weakness.

Much of your fiction is set in Wisconsin, where you grew up. How did the constantly-shifting setting of *Blue Water* challenge you as a writer?

It was a terrific challenge, in some ways, but it was wonderfully liberating in others. I couldn't rely on landscape to provide the stability that it has in my earlier books, a kind of mounted mirror in which each character can return to study his or her own face. On the other hand, I got to write more extroverted, dialogue-driven interactions between my primary characters: Meg and Rex; Meg's brother, Toby; Cindy Ann Kreisler. And then, of course, when Meg returns to Wisconsin, I had that fabulous winter landscape back on the page, all that clean, white space, and I was amazed to see the ways in which it paralleled the open ocean. There's this wide sense of possibility and promise coupled with an incredible awareness of one's human vulnerabilities, one's isolation. One wrong move can kill you.

Reading questions and author interview taken from Manette Ansay's website:
<http://www.amanetteansay.com/wordpress/>