

Waterfall

A Novel



MARY CASANOVA

A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *WATERFALL: A Novel*

by Mary Casanova

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“*Waterfall* is a thoughtful and beautifully written story about a young woman struggling to find her independence. Set in the 1920s, the book gives us glimpses of the issues of the day, which remain important now—women’s rights, anti-Semitism, treatment of mental illness, lynchings. A deeply satisfying read, it shows that one can go over the waterfall and still survive.”

—MARY LOGUE, author of *The Street* and the Claire Watkins mystery series

“*Waterfall* is a moving story about healing against all odds. The novel recognizes the seemingly small yet profound movements beneath the surface of everyday life and shows how significant events happen even when you hardly notice them . . . all written in a beautifully crisp style.”

—OLA LARSMO, author of *Swede Hollow*

“With its glorious setting contrasting with the realities of the era, *Waterfall* details darker aspects of the Roaring Twenties, but also celebrates the reemergence of an individual spirit.”

—FOREWORD REVIEWS

“*Waterfall* is most compelling in its portrait of the Baird family, especially the relationships of the mother and the two adult daughters/sisters. Without milking the reader’s sympathy, Casanova shows each woman’s emotional status in the family, their jealousies and traumas, and the repressive social conventions that have soured their time together.”

—HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY

“A refreshing and satisfying read.”

—MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Casanova is author of thirty-nine books, ranging from picture books to historical fiction, including *Hush, Hush Forest; Frozen; and Ice-Out*, published by Minnesota. Her numerous awards include an American Library Association “Notable,” Aesop Accolades from the American Folklore Society, a Parent’s Choice Gold Award, Booklist Editor’s Choice, as well as two Minnesota Book Awards.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

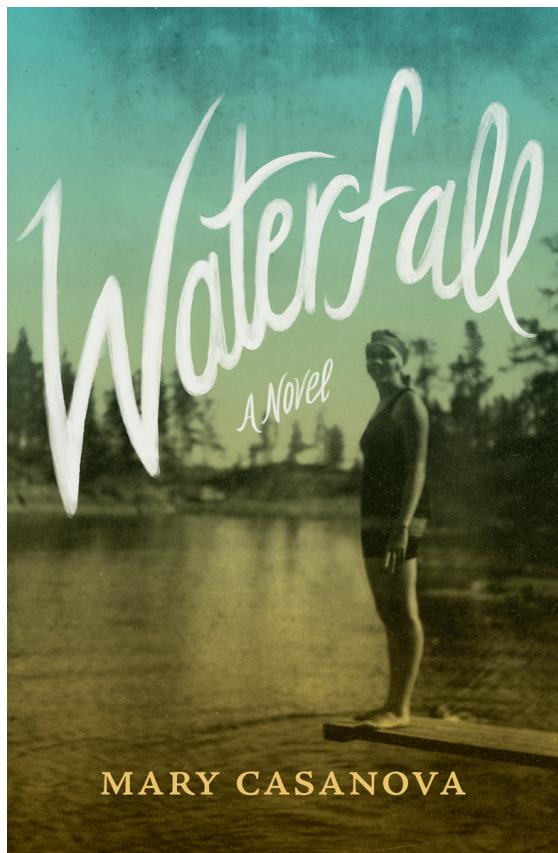
In her third Rainy Lake historical drama, Mary Casanova takes us back to pristine and rugged northern Minnesota. It’s 1922, women have won the right to vote, and Trinity Baird is of age. But at 21, and after nearly two years at Oak Hills Asylum, she returns to her family’s island summer home with her self-confidence in tatters and her mind seared by haunting memories. Her parents are oblivious to what they have put her through and instead watch their daughter for the least sign of defiance. Trinity struggles to be the “respectable” young woman her parents (especially her mother) demand, so that she can return to her independent life studying art and painting in Paris. She never wants to go back to Oak Hills, where they “treat” *hysterical*, i.e., unconventional, young women.

With enough talent and ambition to be accepted into the Sorbonne, Trinity had hoped she would be well on her way as an artist by now. On the island, she returns to what sustains her: painting. While her love for this beautiful place is deep and abiding, the few months ahead present a near-impossible task: recover the strong sense of self she’s nearly lost during her time away, while holding off her powerful family’s efforts to coerce her into submission. When her parents arrive on Baird Island, her father brings along a promising young architect to help with plans to build new guest cabins. Trinity suspects her parents are trying to introduce yet another marriage prospect. Or might she have found an ally?

Informed by historical figures, by the burgeoning growth of women’s rights in the early twentieth century, and the complicated issue of mental illness and how “difficult” women were silenced, *Waterfall* offers a compelling story of an inspired, ambitious, and soulful young woman’s fight to find her way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider and discuss a “woman’s place” in society in the early 20th century. How does Trinity push the boundaries and demonstrate courage and determination?
2. What are the differences between the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness then and now?
3. How does Trinity’s family wealth act as a contributor to her difficulties? To her successes?
4. This being a story of self-realization, discuss the changes you see in Trinity as the novel unfolds. What precipitates these changes?
5. We see wealth and privilege portrayed alongside poverty and servitude. In what instances do you share Trinity’s discomfort and unease? Why?
6. Consider the environmental concerns of Ernest Oberholtzer/Victor Guttenberg. How were his ideas shaped by his relationship with American Indians?
7. What are Trinity’s main challenges? How does she overcome them?
8. Values drive behavior. Therefore, what are the underpinning values of the novel? What are the driving values of various characters?
9. If a romantic relationship continued between Max and Trinity, what kind of hardships and choices might they encounter?
10. Regarding Trinity’s asylum doctor: How were his role and counsel instrumental in her ‘recovery’?
11. Trinity is a young woman ahead of her time in many ways. How does that impact her relationships with her mother and sister? With her fellow Asylum inmates? With Victor, Henry, and Max?



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MORE INFO:

z.umn.edu/waterfall