

Ten Cents a Dance Study Guide

Ten Cents a Dance by Christine Fletcher

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Plot Summary

Ten Cents a Dance is a novel by writer Christine Fletcher. In this novel, Ruby Jacinski is a fifteen-year-old girl who recently quit school to take a job to support her family. Ruby's job does not pay enough to cover her family's living expenses, let alone their past rent and her mother's medical bills stemming from her rheumatoid arthritis. Therefore, when Ruby hears that she could make fifty dollars a week working as a dance instructor, she jumps at the opportunity. It turns out that instructor is a misnomer. Ruby quickly discovers if she treats the men coming to the taxi dance hall well, they not only will dance with her for a nickel a dance, but they will also tip her well and take her out on the town, often paying for restaurant meals and give her spending money. Ten Cents a Dance is a tale of a seedier side of life in the 1940s, illustrating the trouble that a young girl can get into even when her intentions are pure.

Ruby Jacinski is a fifteen-year-old girl who has lived something of a sheltered life until recently. Ruby's mother has struggled to raise her two girls properly despite the death of their father and the necessity of working in the packinghouse. However, Ruby's mother developed rheumatoid arthritis and was fired from her job. After selling off all they could, Ruby's mother finally admits to Ruby that it is time for Ruby as the eldest child, get a job. Ruby has been working in the packinghouse as well, stuffing pigs feet into jars filled with brine, a back-breaking job. For this reason, Ruby's mother lets her go to a local dance after much arguing and begging.

At the dance, Ruby gets into a fight with another girl over a boy. Ruby is kicked out of the hall without her jacket in the freezing rain. When Ruby tries to get back inside for her things, the club will not let her back in until local bad boy, Paulie Suelze, shows up and escorts her inside. When Paulie walks Ruby home, she feels like the luckiest girl in the world, especially when he kisses her. Paulie tells Ruby about a job that pays fifty dollars a week, more than three times her salary from the packinghouse, but accuses her of being too immature to try it. Ruby is desperate, however, and she decides to give it a try.

The job, a dance instructor at the Starlight Dance Academy, seems too good to be true when Ruby passes the interview process. Ruby tells her mother that she has gotten a job as a phone operator, but she has to work nights. The first night, Ruby wears a dress she has from a relatives wedding, only the dress proves to be too childish compared to the other girls' gowns. Ruby is told she must find a better gown before she comes back. This causes Ruby to be forced to turn to her friend, Angie, to beg Angie to steal a gown from her married sister. Angie makes Ruby promise to return the dress unharmed, but the first night she wears it Ruby goes to a restaurant with one of her coworkers and two customers only to spill a whole plate of food on the white dress.

Ruby asks her customer for the money to buy a new gown and he gives her twenty dollars. That same night, Paulie shows up unexpectedly at her window and gives her a navy blue gown she can wear at the Starlight. For this reason, Ruby decides to use the money that her customer gave her to pay her family's debt at the local grocery stores



and redeem her mother's wedding ring from the pawn shop. Within a short period of time, Ruby has earned enough and gotten from her customer, enough money to get the rent paid up and significantly improve her family's diet.

As Ruby continues to work at the Starlight, flirting with and enticing customers to give her money, she also begins dating Paulie. Ruby manages to ignore the seedier side of her occupation for a time. However, when her mother begins to lie to Ruby and her sister, then becomes suddenly engaged and married to a new man, Ruby feels pushed out. At the same time, Ruby begins to realize that she is not the only Jacinski sister to lie about her relationships with men. When Paulie suggests that Ruby become a prostitute to earn money for them both, she suddenly realizes the precarious position she has placed herself and her family in.

Ruby neutralizes Paulie to protect her sister, despite her sister's insistence that she can care for herself. At the same time, Ruby's mother learns the truth about where all the money that saved their family comes from. Ashamed, but also realistic, Ruby decides that she and her family would be better off if she leaves. For this reason, Ruby goes to San Diego where she gets a job building ships for the military.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

Ten Cents a Dance is a novel about the seedier side of life in the 1940s. The author draws from true history to make her novel authentic, but the characters are all purely fictional.

In Chapter 1, Ruby Jacinski goes to a dance at the Union Hall in her neighborhood with her best friend, Angie. Ruby has recently quit school in order to take a job working in the packinghouse. The dance is a chance to relax and be a teenager for a little while again. However, it was a hard fought battle with her mother to get the permission to go. For these reasons, Ruby throws herself into dancing, something she greatly enjoys. This leads to a fight with another girl when Ruby chooses a partner she knows can keep up with her, but who is currently dating the other girl. Ruby and the girl are both thrown out of the Union Hall without their jackets, and Ruby is missing a shoe. It has begun to rain. Ruby tries to get back in, but is turned away. Then bad boy Paulie Suelze shows up and escorts Ruby back into the hall. Paulie has a reputation for being a bad boy because he has recently been released from Army prison for beating up a superior officer. Ruby and Paulie dance for a while and then he walks she and Angie home.

After dropping Angie at her house, Paulie suggests that Ruby go with him to a local park. They talk. When Paulie learns that Ruby works at the packinghouse, he tells her about a friend who has just opened a dance academy. Paulie tells Ruby she could make fifty bucks a week there, more than three times what she is making at the packinghouse. Ruby, however, knows her mother would never approve. Paulie then walks Ruby home, kissing her not far from her front stoop, horrifying Ruby because she is afraid a neighbor will see and tell her mother. Ruby does not think she will ever see Paulie again.

In Chapter 2, the next morning, Ruby wakes missing the life they had before her father died. Ruby remembers the nice house they once had. However, after her father's death, her mother went to work in the packinghouse and they had to move to this tiny flat. Then, last year her mother began to have symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis and was finally fired from the plant a few months ago. The day they sold her wedding ring in the pawn shop, Ruby's mother told her it was time to quit school and go to work. Today, Ruby's mother is angry because one of the neighbors saw Ruby with Paulie the night before. Ruby is still angry after their argument, even as the family prepares for church.

In Chapter 3, the following day after work, Ruby goes to the Starlight Dance Academy to apply for a job. The interview is quick and Ruby is happy to get the job. At home, Ruby tells her mother that she got a job as a telephone operator. Ruby tells her mother she will be making eighteen dollars a week, six dollars more than she was making before. Ruby's mother is not happy that Ruby will be working nights, but excited at the increased income. The first night, Ruby arrives at the dance hall with a gown she wore



to a relatives wedding. It turns out the dress is far too juvenile for the dance hall, but it is all Ruby has. The other dancers make fun of Ruby, especially the queen bee, Yvonne. Ruby makes the mistake of sitting at Yvonne's dressing table and is quickly made to pay for it in humiliation.

In Chapter 4, the boss, Del, warns Ruby not to come back if she cannot find something more appropriate to wear by the next day. Ruby begins to dance and quickly discovers that none of the customers are really there to learn how to dance. However, she also discovers if she is nice to the customers, she can make a big tip. Unfortunately, Ruby gets taken in by a customer who convinces her to dance with him for free for more than an hour. By the end of the night, Ruby is exhausted and her feet hurt. Ruby is disappointed by her small earnings. At this rate, she will never reach Paulie's fifty dollars a week. Outside the club, while walking to the streetcar stop, Ruby sees Yvonne leave with a couple of customers. Ruby also runs into Ozzie, the trumpet player for the band. Ozzie gives Ruby a flyer for a new club owned by his cousin, Lily.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

The setting of this novel is important for the reader to take into consideration with the first pages of the novel. The novel is set in 1941, just a few months before the beginning of World War II. This is important because Chicago of 1941 is a vastly different place from modern Chicago. In this setting, a girl's virtue is one of her most precious possessions. As the daughter of a respectable woman, Ruby is expected to guard her virtue with her life. It is for this reason that Ruby's mother did not want her to go to the dance at the Union Hall and why she is not allowed to wear makeup in private or public. Ruby should never place herself in a position in which a man might think he could touch her inappropriately or kiss her. This fact is very important to the development of the plot of this novel.

Ruby attends the dance because it is something a teenager would normally do, because it is fun and relaxing, and because it is a return to the childhood Ruby left behind when she was forced to quit her job and go to work. Ruby's mother does not want her there because of how close a boy must be to a girl to dance and because it was thought that dancing made boys think of more intimate things. For Ruby, everything her mother is afraid will happen does happen. Ruby meets Paulie Suelze, an older boy who served time in Army prison for beating up a superior officer, just the kind of boy her mother does not want to see her with.

Despite her mother's fears, Ruby is a smart girl who has her priorities straight. Unfortunately, those priorities are filled with financial obligations she feels she must meet but cannot with the respectable, if embarrassing, job she has. Ruby is faced with supporting her family because her mother cannot, a responsibility that is much too huge for such a young girl. Therefore it is no surprise to the reader that she would turn to a less than respectable, but higher paying, job to meet that responsibility.



Most modern reader more than likely do not know what a taxi dancer is or that they really existed in this time period. However, they did exist. A taxi dancer is someone who is paid to dance with customers, in this case a dime a dance of which Ruby and the other dancers receive half. These men are usually lonely men who are looking to have a little fun and be close to a woman. However, these men can also be looking for something a little more intimate and are willing to pay for such. This is not a respectable job, but Ruby is naïve when she first takes the job and does not realize how dangerous it could be. Ruby simply needs the money and she goes into the job looking at it as a means to an ends. However, the reader can see the danger and suspects where Ruby might find herself in a very short time.



Chapters 5-10

Chapters 5-10 Summary

In Chapter 5, the next morning, Ruby wakes with the conviction that she will not be able to find a suitable dress and will have to quit the Starlight. However, as Ruby talks to her mother about quitting, she remembers that Angie's married sister has some gowns her husband bought for her on their honeymoon. Ruby tells her mother she is going to do her errands for her and goes to find Angie. Angie skips her afternoon classes to go around with Ruby. Ruby tells Angie about the Starlight and her need of a gown. Angie gets the only good gown her sister owns, a white one with sequins along the bodice. When Ruby dresses that night at the Starlight, it is clear that this is a much more appropriate dress. Even Yvonne seems impressed. Ruby dances frequently that night. Late in the evening, Peggy, another dancer, introduces her to two customers who have expressed interest in taking the girls out. Ruby becomes friendly with Tom. The men check Ruby and Peggy out early.

In Chapter 6, Tom and his friend take Peggy and Ruby to a small Chinese restaurant. Ruby has never been to a restaurant and is quite impressed. Ruby's excitement causes her to accidentally spill a plate of food on the white dress. Ruby is horrified because she has promised Angie to return the dress by the weekend so that her sister can wear it out. Peggy suggests that Ruby get Tom to pay the dry cleaning bill. However, when Ruby expresses her desperation to Tom, he instead gives her enough to buy a new dress. Due to this generosity, Ruby allows Tom to kiss her before dropping her back at the Starlight. Peggy, however, tells Ruby she made a mistake promising to pay the money back.

In Chapter 7, the next morning, Ruby wakes because someone is tapping at her window. When Ruby looks out, Paulie is standing in the alley. Paulie tells her he has left a gift for her in the backyard. Ruby runs out there and finds a brand new dress in the coal bin. Ruby takes the dress and goes out, telling her mother she is running errands again. Ruby goes to Peggy's and learns that the dress was stolen. Later, Ruby thinks about the money Tom gave her. Ruby does not want to offend him by allowing him to find out another man bought her new dress, so she uses the money to reclaim her mother's wedding ring from the pawn broker and pay off their debt to the local grocery stores, as well as buying some things they need. Ruby's mother is horrified by the expense until Ruby tells her she got an advance from her job.

In Chapter 8, Ruby hears Yvonne talking in the ladies room about tricking a couple of guys into thinking she was going to sleep with them and then disappearing with their money. Peggy tells Ruby this is a common trick the girls use on men who are leaving town. Over the next couple of weeks, Ruby sees Tom more and more. Ruby tries to pay him back his money, but he allows her to keep it. Ruby uses the extra money to buy more gowns from an illegal shop filled with stolen gowns. At the Starlight, Ruby has learned more and more about getting fish and tricking them out of money. Peggy



introduces her to one, a Filipino named Manny. Ruby talks them into going to Lily's, the nightclub owned by Ozzie's cousin. Ruby loves the hot jazz Ozzie often plays, and writes, during breaks at the Starlight. When they arrive, Ruby and Manny quickly hit the dance floor. After the club, Peggy and Ruby are alone in a taxi when Peggy tells Ruby she is married to a Filipino.

In Chapter 9, the next day after work, Peggy and Ruby go to a diner where Ruby begs Peggy to tell her story. Peggy admits that she met a Filipino named Vidal at another taxi dance hall where she worked. Despite the fact that her family disapproved, Peggy married Vidal. A few months later, Vidal was called home to the Philippines because his mother was sick. Vidal's family did not approve of his marriage, so he left Peggy behind with no intention of coming back. Vidal married a Filipina girl.

Over the next few weeks, Ruby continues to go out with both Tom and Manny after work, neither knowing about the other. Tom continues to give Ruby money. Then one night after work Tom is waiting for Ruby. Tom has been acting possessively and tonight he is quieter than usual, making Ruby nervous. Then Tom takes Ruby to a motel that rents rooms by the hour. When Ruby realizes what Tom is trying to do, she runs out into the street. Tom follows her and tells her that he has given her fifty-three dollars over the last few weeks and that he expects something in return. Tom accuses Ruby of being a prostitute and tells her she has to pay him back one way or the other. Tom also tells Ruby he is married and has kids, that the money he has given her was stolen out of their mouths. Ruby, who thought Tom was serious about her, is horrified.

In Chapter 10, Ruby tries to turn to her friend Angie for help, but Angie is angry with Ruby for her sister's damaged dress. This is compounded when Angie does not understand the urgency of Ruby's problem and Ruby blows up at her. Ruby then goes looking for Paulie, but is unable to find him. When Ruby tells Peggy what happened with Tom, Peggy suggests that Ruby sleep with him. This is not what Ruby wants to hear.

Chapters 5-10 Analysis

Ruby thinks she might have to quit the Starlight, but her friend Angie comes through by allowing her to borrow a dress of her sister's. However, this becomes a bone of contention between the two girls when Ruby spills food on the dress and not all the stains come out. Not only this, but in a few short weeks it becomes clear that Angie no longer lives in the same world as Ruby. These two best friends quickly lose sight of one another and grow apart. Angie's world is full of normal teenage dreams while Ruby has been forced into the world of the adult.

Ruby begins seeing a young man named Tom after work at the Starlight. Tom is gentle and generous, often giving Ruby money to buy dresses and other things. This money helps pull Ruby and her family out of debt when she uses it to pay off their credit to the many grocery stores in their neighborhood. Ruby begins to dream of moving her family out of their poor neighbor and to a better place. However, the money is not free and Tom eventually calls in his marker. Tom makes it clear to Ruby that he has been nice to

her in expectation of sharing her bed. Ruby is mortified even though Peggy has warned her of the dangers of taking from the customers, or fish as a man like Tom is called. Now Ruby must come up with the money she owes Tom or go to bed with him.



Chapters 11-16

Chapters 11-16 Summary

In Chapter 11, on Sunday, Paulie is waiting for Ruby after church. Paulie is angry that Ruby went looking for him all over town, but Ruby accuses him of liking her too much to be mad. It turns out Ruby is correct. Paulie kisses Ruby and gives her the money she needs to get Tom off her back. Tom shows up two days later as Ruby is leaving the Starlight. When she gives him the money, Tom threatens to tell Del stories about Ruby and Peggy anyway. Ruby threatens to tell Tom's wife about his actions at the Starlight. Tom finally gives up and leaves. After this, Ruby begins seeing Paulie regularly, sneaking away to meet him at a theater in a different neighborhood from the one she lives in. At the same time, Ruby strikes up something like a friendship with Ozzie, sitting with him in a dark room while he writes songs during their breaks from the dance floor. One night, Ruby goes out with Manny, Peggy, and Alonso. She becomes very drunk while dancing at Lily's. When Ruby comes home, she cannot hide her drunkenness from her sister or her mother. The next morning, Ruby wakes to learn the Japanese has attacked Pearl Harbor.

In Chapter 12, Ruby, her mother, and sister spend the afternoon listening to the news at their neighbor's house. Ruby rushes out when she realizes how late it is to meet Paulie at the theater, but he is not there. Worried that he might have to reenlist in the military, Ruby again searches for Paulie. Paulie meets Ruby after work that night and again chastises her for searching for her, then assures her he will not have to reenlist. For the next few weeks, Ruby and the other girls at the Starlight feel the impact of the attack on Pearl Harbor. At first the attack lowers the number of customers. Then the attack causes many of the older customers to tell war stories. The Starlight also finds itself facing some of the sudden racism that has spread through most major cities against Asians. Finally, the Starlight begins seeing a large influx of military customers. At the same time, Ruby discovers that there is not much to talk to Paulie about. Paulie spends most of their dates talking about the big score he hopes to make. For this reason, Ruby tells him about the policy kings, the men in the black section of town who run a type of lottery system.

In Chapter 13, in April, Ruby is recognized by a boy from her neighborhood while at the Starlight. Ruby speaks with him and tries to convince him not to tell her mother about her job. Later, when the boy goes out with Yvonne and her friends, Ruby agrees to give Yvonne two weeks of her earnings if Yvonne will promise not to tell him about Ruby's after hours activities.

In Chapter 14, Yvonne appears to have kept her word, but Ruby suspects she did something else to Ruby's detriment. Unable to find out what, Ruby goes ahead and pays Yvonne her earnings for the next two weeks, holding on to just her tips. At home, Ruby finds herself getting into more and more arguments with her sister, Betty, who feels she deserves something for keeping the secret that Ruby and Paulie are seeing



each other. At the same time, Betty tells Ruby that their mother is lying about having joined the ladies auxiliary at church. To add to things, Paulie is beginning to push Ruby to have sex.

In Chapter 15, on a Monday in May Ruby's mother asks her to go shopping with her. Ruby does, picking out a lovely dress and helping her mother do her hair that night, believing that her mother is going to the ladies auxiliary at church. At the same time, Ruby goes out with Paulie. However, when Paulie pushes Ruby for sex, she turns him down and he leaves her stranded miles from home. When Ruby finally gets home, it's to find her mother excited and with an announcement of her own to make. It turns out that Betty was right. Instead of going to church all those nights, Ruby's mother was seeing a bus driver named Chester.

In Chapter 16, Ruby and Betty meet Chester the next day. They learn that their mother met him while on her way to a doctor's appointment several weeks ago. They are married in just a few days and Chester quickly moves the family into his home. Angry that her mother lied, Ruby goes to find Paulie and agrees to finally have sex with him.

Chapters 11-16 Analysis

Paulie comes back into Ruby's life, an angry young man who scares her at first, but soon becomes gentle and loving, convincing her of his sincerity. However, the reader and Ruby both know that Paulie was once convicted of a violent act and he has left bruises on Ruby's arm. This suggests that Paulie is a powder keg just waiting to explode and by continuing to spend time with him, Ruby is putting herself in danger.

The marriage of Ruby's mother to Chester Nolan is a surprising twist in the story that surprises not only the reader, but Ruby and her sister, Betty. However, it is clear to the reader that Ruby's mother has done this because she knows that it is her responsibility to care for her family, not Ruby's, and that a good marriage is the only way to do so. For this reason, Ruby's mother jumped at the only opportunity she had to save her family, especially Ruby. Ruby resents this, however, seeing Chester as a threat to her own role in the family. Ruby has become the bread winner, the responsible member of the family, and by marrying Chester, Ruby's mother has essentially redefined Ruby's role in the family. Ruby is angry and feels lost.

Betty, Ruby's sister, is beginning to make waves for Ruby. Betty suspects that Ruby has continued to see Paulie and she often tries to use this as a weapon to force Ruby to give her things. Betty has a sister and a mother who both lied to everyone. This is a lesson well taught and it foreshadows a time when Betty will also behave in a devious way to do what she wants, when she wants, with whom she wants just like her sister and mother.



Chapters 17-21

Chapters 17-21 Summary

In Chapter 17, Chester's house is a small, brick two bedroom bungalow. It is much nicer than the flat where Ruby and her family lived before and all the appliances are much better. Ruby behaves aloof the first few days there and her mother thinks it is because she misses her father, but it is really because Ruby is worried her mother will learn she has had sex. Later, Chester announces to Ruby that she will be going back to school in the fall. Ruby does not want to stop working, but she does not know how to convince her mother to allow her to continue. It is not that Ruby likes the Starlight, but she likes the restaurants and clubs that customers take her to afterward. Ruby convinces Chester to ask her mother to allow her two weeks to work out her notice. At work, Ruby's secret visits with Ozzie are discovered, though they think she is drinking rather than spending time with a colored boy, and Del puts an end to it.

In Chapter 18, Paulie is putting pressure on Ruby to move out. To try to relax from all the pressure on her, Ruby talks a fish into taking her to Lily's. She has not gone since Manny and Alonso joined the Navy. However, when she arrives she sees Ozzie's girlfriend with another guy. Ruby talks Ozzie into dancing with her, but it only seems to make the situation worse. The next morning, Ruby is arguing with her mother when Paulie shows up unexpectedly. Paulie takes Ruby to the beach. Afterward, Ruby tells Paulie that she will move out.

In Chapter 19, it is supposed to be Ruby's last night at work, but Ruby is determined to remain at the Starlight. For this reason, Ruby finds herself struggling to find a way to tell her mother she is moving out. All night, Ruby struggles with this. Then, in the dressing room, Ruby grows tired of Yvonne's queen bee behavior. For this reason, she sits at Yvonne's dressing table to fix her makeup. When Yvonne catches her, she drops cigarette ash on Ruby. In return, Ruby drops a lit cigarette onto Yvonne's fox fur coat. In the chaos afterward, Ruby tries to leave the ladies room, but one of Yvonne's friends spills a soda down the front of her dress. Ruby goes back in and quickly changes into another dress in her locker. However, when she goes out on the floor and the lights are turned up, everyone discovers that Yvonne has written stockyard cow on the back of her dress in lipstick. Ruby is furious, so she uses Yvonne's fox coat to clean herself up before leaving for the night.

In Chapter 20, Paulie finds Ruby as she walks away from the Starlight. They go to a diner and Paulie tells Ruby how he robbed a policy king's delivery man. Ruby is sickened because she was the one who told him about the policy king in the first place. However, Ruby stays until Paulie tells her that he found a flat for her and he wants her to quit the Starlight and begin turning tricks for him. Paulie practically calls her a prostitute and suggests she has been doing it all along. Ruby gets angry and dumps the contents of the table on his lap and walks out. Paulie follows and begins beating Ruby



in the street until a cop comes along. Ruby gets away from Paulie, but his threats follow her.

In Chapter 21, Ruby is badly bruised the next morning on her ribs, but she manages to go to church with the family anyway. During the service, Betty gives Ruby a note telling her that Paulie called and apologized. Paulie wants Ruby to meet him at a diner that evening, but Ruby decides not to. Ruby spends the day helping her mother and promises to go with Chester later to drop off some things at church for a jumble sale.

Chapters 17-21 Analysis

Ruby discovers soon after moving in with Chester that she will be expected to give up her job and go back to school. Ruby has already discovered that she has little in common with the girls she used to go to school with and she knows that she does not want to miss out on the clubs and restaurants her fish often take her to. For these reasons, Ruby resists the idea of going back to a more normal existence. Ruby is unsure she can be happy going back to the way things were with all that she knows and has done.

Ruby gets into a scuffle with her coworker, Yvonne, who has been causing her trouble since her first days at Starlight. It all finally comes to a head when Ruby decides to stop allowing Yvonne to behave like the queen bee. Ruby believes she is just as good as Yvonne, if not better, and deserves the same advantages that Yvonne gets. This leads to a fight that ends with Ruby humiliated on the dance floor. Ruby responds with some immaturity, but ruining Yvonne's prized fox fur jacket. It seems silly, but it is a satisfying conclusion to a tense situation for Ruby.

Ruby and Paulie get into a fight when Paulie accuses Ruby of being a prostitute and asks her to work for him, getting money from men that they can both live on. Ruby is humiliated and angry at this suggestion and walks out on Paulie, only to have him become violent. The reader and Ruby are aware of Paulie's past violent behavior, therefore this is not a surprise. However, it is enough of a change in behaviors that Ruby finally sees Paulie for who he is and leaves him. It seems like a good turn, but when Paulie calls the next day it makes the reader wonder if Paulie will be that easy to escape. At the same time, the reader must feel Ruby's concern about Betty's fascination with Paulie, as well as her actions with some of the soldiers leaving for the war. Betty seems to be heading for more trouble than Ruby has yet to find, leaving the reader wondering what she might be setting herself up for next.



Chapters 22-25

Chapters 22-25 Summary

In Chapter 22, Ruby goes with Chester to the church. When they return, Ruby is shocked to learn that Betty has decided to keep Ruby's appointment with Paulie. Ruby rushes out of the house after Betty, finding her holding hands with Paulie in a crowded diner. Ruby has to physically drag Betty out of the diner, sending her home with an old friend who happens to be waiting to get into the diner. Ruby then goes inside and punches Paulie, warning him to stay away from Betty.

In Chapter 23, Ruby knows that Betty and she will never be safe as long as Paulie is in Chicago. For this reason, Ruby goes in search of Ozzie in hopes that he can take her to the policy king. Unable to find Ozzie, Ruby goes to his cousin Lily, who is able to get Ruby in with the king. Ruby makes the king promise not to kill Paulie before she tells him what Paulie did and where he can find him. The police king agrees to force Paulie to sign up with the merchant marine.

In Chapter 24, Ruby returns home and discovers that Betty has told their mother about Ruby working at the Starlight, information Paulie gave to Betty before Ruby dragged her away. Ruby tries to explain to her mother, but nothing will take away the shame her mother feels. For a time afterward, Ruby's mother refuses to look at her. Ruby goes a few days later to get her things from Starlight, but learns Del has thrown them out. Ruby picks up some dresses from the cleaners and takes them to Peggy, only to find Peggy packing up to go home to Wisconsin. A short time later, Ruby sneaks out of the house in the middle of the night and goes to Lily's where she learns that Paulie is safely gone to the merchant marine.

In Chapter 25, when Ruby went to Lily's, she stayed all night even though Lily asked her to leave over and over. Afterwards, Ruby and Ozzie spoke for a minute, talking about their dreams, trying to ignore reality. Although Ozzie is on his way to Kansas City, he knows it will only be a matter of time before he is drafted into the military. Ruby tells him that she plans to go build ships. Ruby tells her mother this when she arrives home. A short time later, Ruby is living in San Diego, working in the nose turrets of bomber planes. Ruby keeps in touch with her mother through letters.

Chapters 22-25 Analysis

Ruby finds Betty with Paulie and sees Betty going down the same road she did. Ruby cannot allow this to happen. Ruby physically pulls Betty away and hits Paulie, but she knows this will not be enough to keep him away. For this reason, Ruby tells the policy king what Paulie did to his delivery man, but only after making him promise that he will not kill Paulie. Ruby clearly still loves Paulie, but knows that he is dangerous for both



her and her sister. Ruby continues to take care of her family despite all that has happened, despite the change in her role in the family.

Ruby has had to quit the Starlight to satisfy her mother, but in the end her mother learns the truth. Ruby is ashamed and saddened that her mother cannot look at her. Ruby is also angry, however, that her mother never questioned the things Ruby was able to give to her with the job and seems to feel that her mother understood what was happening and was so happy for the money that she purposely turned a blind eye. Ruby has reached a level of maturity that is much more advanced than that of most girls her age and makes it clear that she cannot return to the naïve blindness of other girls her own age. Therefore, it is no surprise that Ruby decides to leave town and start over rather than attempt to return to a life that no longer exists for her.

The novel takes a young girl from the immaturity of the typical 1940s teenager to that of a young woman trusted with the survival of her family. Ruby took on many things that should not have been placed on her shoulder and she made a success out of the situation, but she did it in a way that was not respectable and potentially dangerous. Ruby did this with all the best intentions, but it still dragged her into a situation that left her, and her family, in some level of danger. Ruby took the reins again and made the danger go away, but it left her forever changed and unable to return to a simple life. For this reason, Ruby moved away, started over in a life that might not have been completely respectable by the standards of the day, but respectable enough to take her away from the dangers of her previous experiences. In this way, Ruby showed growth of character.



Characters

Ruby Jacinski

Ruby Jacinski is a fifteen-year-old teenager when the novel begins. Ruby is a typical 1940s teen when the novel begins, a young girl who wants to dance and be allowed to wear makeup, a girl just beginning to understand what men want and anxious to find a man who wants her. However, Ruby is not a typical teenager in the fact that she has been forced to quit school so that she can get a job and earn an income for her family. Ruby's mother is unable to find a job because of her severe form of arthritis, leaving the family without an adult bread winner. Ruby works at the same packinghouse her mother once worked out and feels mature for having such a job while at the same time embarrassed by the cuts and smell the job of placing pig feet in brine leaves her hands with.

Ruby knows that her family is severely behind in their rent and that they owe money to all the grocers in the area. This compounds the problem of the impending winter and the family's lack of winter gear. Ruby knows that they need more than the small amount she makes each week. Therefore, when a local bad boy tells Ruby about a job where she can make more than four times her current salary she jumps at the chance.

Ruby begins working for The Starlight Dance Academy, a place that is supposedly a school to teach men to dance, but is really a taxi dance establishment where men go to dance with women and perhaps more. Ruby quickly figures out how things work and soon has several guys who are willing to not only pay for most of her dances, but take her out to restaurants and clubs afterward. These men also give Ruby money at times, a fact that excites her and provides her with money that she desperately needs to save her family.

As time goes on, Ruby makes enough money to provide well for her family. At the same time, she begins dating a bad boy who puts pressure on her to become more intimately involved. When Ruby's mother marries a man she has never met, Ruby is angry and hurt, feeling pushed out. Ruby reacts by turning to her boyfriend. In the end, Ruby finds herself forced to choose between her family and her boyfriend. When her boyfriend becomes violent and shows his true colors, and Ruby must save her sister from him, she chooses her family. In the end, however, Ruby cannot return to her naïve teenage life and chooses to leave the family and begin working on military planes.

Betty Jacinski

Betty is Ruby's sister. Betty is a year younger than Ruby and seems very naïve at the beginning of the novel. However, as the novel progresses, Betty becomes obsessed with Ruby's boyfriend, Paulie, and all the lies Ruby tells to see him. Betty also learns how to manipulate Ruby to get what she wants. In the end, Ruby discovers that Betty is



heading toward more trouble than she could ever have found at the Starlight. Ruby saves Betty from Paulie, but she knows that she has not presented much of an example for her younger sister by working at the Starlight. Hence, Ruby decides to leave the family and start over rather than just present another kind of lie to her sister.

Mrs. Jacinski-Nolan

Mrs. Jacinski is Ruby's mother. Mrs. Jacinski was widowed when Betty and Ruby were small and moved them out of the neighborhood where they once lived and into the sad little flat where they live at the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Jacinski is a hard working woman who, until she became disabled with arthritis, held down a job to provide for her children. After the arthritis caused Mrs. Jacinski to lose her job, she tried her best to provide for her family, but when she is forced to sell her wedding ring to pay the rent, she knows that it is time for Ruby to go to work. It is clear that Mrs. Jacinski is not happy about stealing her daughter's childhood from her and she does all she can to make their lives better. Mrs. Jacinski finds a way to take the responsibility of supporting the family away from Ruby when she agrees to marry Chester Nolan. However, by the time this marriage comes around, Ruby has already gone too far to return to a teenager's existence.

Chester Nolan

Chester Nolan is a bus driver in Chicago that Mrs. Jacinski meets on her journey to see a new doctor. Chester is a kind man who befriends Mrs. Jacinski. In a short time they appear to fall in love and Chester asks Mrs. Jacinski to marry him. Chester moves the Jacinski family into his home after the quick wedding, a home he bought several years prior to care for his elderly mother. Chester's mother has since passed away and he is more than happy to open his life to Mrs. Jacinski and her children. However, Chester is embarrassed and ashamed when he learns the truth about Ruby's profession, but clearly is not ashamed enough to divorce Mrs. Jacinski.

Paulie Suelze

Paulie Suelze is the neighborhood bad boy in Ruby's neighborhood. Paulie has just recently been released from Army prison as the novel begins for beating a superior officer over a girl. Paulie takes an interest in Ruby at a Union Hall dance and is the one who tells her about the Starlight. Paulie even provides Ruby with a dress to wear at the Starlight when she is in desperate need.

Paulie clearly likes Ruby, as witnessed by the fact that he often comes around to see her. However, Paulie's interest seems to be primarily in the sexual nature of the relationship. Paulie continuously pressures Ruby for sex and leaves her bruised once when she refuses. Ruby, however, believes Paulie loves her and will marry her one day. This relationship continues until Paulie practically calls Ruby a prostitute and asks her to prostitute herself for him.



After Ruby and Paulie split, Paulie tries to make amends. Betty takes the message. Ruby decides to cut off all connection to Paulie, but Betty goes in her place to see Paulie. This frightens Ruby as she can see that it presents the opportunity for Paulie to use Betty against Ruby. For this reason, Ruby knows she has to stop Paulie from hurting either she or Betty ever again. For this reason, Ruby tells the policy king that Paulie shot his delivery man and stole his money. In the end, Paulie is forced by the policy king to join the merchant marine, forcing him to leave the area and Ruby alone.

Peggy deGroot

Peggy is Ruby's friend and coworker at the Starlight. Peggy teaches Ruby the ropes as much as Ruby will allow her to. Peggy also introduces Ruby to Tom and Manny, two fish that Ruby uses to buy her dinners and take her to clubs. Peggy and Ruby become close enough friends that Peggy tells Ruby that she was married to a Filipino man once. Peggy later falls in love with another Filipino man who then joins the Navy and disappears in the war. In the end, Peggy goes home to make amends to her parents from whom she has been estranged from since her marriage.

Yvonne

Yvonne is a woman who works at the Starlight. Yvonne is a top earner at the Starlight and therefore she feels that she is due a permanent dressing table even though there are not enough tables for all the dancers. Yvonne is cruel and she goes out of her way to make fun of other girls, especially those who threaten her, including Ruby. In the end Ruby and Yvonne go head to head. Ruby ruins Yvonne's fox fur jacket, but Yvonne humiliates Ruby on the dance floor. There really is no clear winner, except for the fact that Ruby escapes the Starlight after only a year, but Yvonne continues to work there even though she is growing older.

Ozzie

Ozzie is the trumpeter in the Starlight's house band. Ozzie is wildly talented, but his talents are not fully utilized at the Starlight where the customers prefer slow tunes. Ozzie plays at his cousin's afterhours club as well, Lily's. Ruby enjoys Ozzie's music and often sits with him during breaks at the Starlight while he is writing new jazz tunes. Ozzie, though not a major character in the novel, proves to be an important one to Ruby. Ozzie shows Ruby how to overcome adversity and be true to herself. It is a lesson Ruby takes to heart.

Tom

Tom is one of Ruby's fish. Tom is a married man who develops a fascination with Ruby. Ruby is unaware that Tom is married and honestly believes that he simply likes her. However, after giving Ruby more than fifty dollars over a period of weeks, Tom begins to



think that she owes him something. Tom takes Ruby to a motel and tries to make her sleep with him. Ruby resists and finally gets Paulie to give her the money to escape him and his attentions. This is Ruby's first experience with the darker side of taxi dancing and the dark natures of men.

The Policy King

The policy king is a man in the colored neighborhood of Chicago who runs a lottery like game. This game involves the buying of tickets and the awarding of anywhere from a couple of hundred to thousands of dollars to the winner. The policy king is a very wealthy and well-respected man in Chicago. Ruby is unaware of this game and the policy king until she sees him in Lily's one night. Ruby later tells Paulie about the policy king in an attempt to have something to speak to him about. Paulie later robs one of the policy king's delivery men of all the day's receipts. After Paulie makes unspoken threats against Betty, Ruby goes to the policy king and tells him what Paulie did in exchange for the promise that the policy king will force Paulie to join the merchant marine rather than kill him.



Objects/Places

Mrs. Jacinski's Wedding Ring

Mrs. Jacinski is forced to sell her wedding ring in order to pay some of the back rent that they owe. Being seen without a wedding ring is very shameful for a married woman during this time period, even when the husband is deceased. Therefore, Mrs. Jacinski often hides her hand when she is out in public so no one will know. For this reason, the first thing Ruby does with her earnings at the Starlight, and Tom's gifts of money, is to buy back her mother's wedding ring from the pawn broker.

Necklace

Paulie gives Ruby a gold necklace of daisies shortly before they break up. Angie also receives a necklace from her beau, Stu. However, Stu breaks up with Angie before going to Navy pilot school because she is more serious than he wants to be.

Powder Compact

Ruby throws a powder makeup compact at Tom after he accuses her of being a tease and taking money without giving anything back.

Romance Magazines

Before quitting school and going to work, Ruby and Angie spend a great deal of their time learning about boys and romance from Angie's romance magazines. After Ruby begins working at the Starlight, the advice in these romance magazines is no longer of any use to her, causing another rift in her friendship with Angie when she realizes she no longer lives in the same world as Angie.

White Gown

Ruby borrows a white gown from Angie's sister without the sister's knowledge. Ruby is told to return the dress in a few days in perfect condition, but she spills Chinese food on it and dry cleaning does not remove all the stains, causing a break in Ruby's relationship with Angie.

Evening Gowns

The dancers at the Starlight are required to wear evening gowns. Ruby at first has to borrow a gown from her friend Angie's sister, but later is given a gown by Paulie.



Eventually Ruby is making enough money that she comes to own five gowns, including the one Paulie gave her.

Green Convertible

Paulie borrows a green convertible multiple times so that he can have some privacy with Ruby on their dates.

Taxi Dancer

A taxi dancer is a woman who dances with a man in exchange for payment. Ruby dances with men at the Starlight for one ticket per song that cost the man a dime. Ruby gets a nickel from the ticket while the Starlight keeps the other nickel.

Fish

Fish is a slang term for a man a taxi dancer is able to keep on the line and fleece for all he is willing to give. Ruby develops two fish at the beginning of her days at the Starlight, Tom and Manny. Tom gives Ruby money, but he eventually wants something in return. Manny only gives Ruby trips to restaurants and nightclubs, particularly Lily's.

Packinghouse

The packinghouse is where employees cut up and package animal parts for human consumption. Both Ruby and her mother held jobs here at one time. Ruby worked putting pigs feet in glass jars of brine, causing cuts on her knuckles and a yellow, smelly stain to her hands.

Starlight Dance Academy

The Starlight Dance Academy is the taxi dance hall where Ruby takes a job to support her family.

Lily's

Lily's is an afterhours club that is run by Ozzie's cousin, Lily. Lily's is a black and tan, an establishment that allows all races as well as mixed couples, such as a Filipino man who is escorting a white woman.



Young Men's Club

At the beginning of the novel, Ruby goes to a dance thrown by the Young Men's Club at the Union Hall. This is where Ruby first meets Paulie Suelze.

The Yards

The Yards is the name of the neighborhood where Ruby, her mother, and sister live. This place is so nicknamed because it is in the same neighborhood as the packinghouses and the stock yards.

Chicago

The novel takes place in Chicago, Illinois in the years 1941 and 1942.



Themes

Responsibility

This novel is about a young girl whose mother has become too ill to work. The young girl, fifteen-year-old Ruby, must go to work to make the income her mother cannot. In the time in which this novel is set, there were not programs such as welfare that helped families that for reasons beyond their control could not care for themselves. For this reason when Ruby's widowed mother became so crippled by arthritis that she could not work, Ruby had to go to work to support the family.

Ruby is not resentful of having to quit school because she did not enjoy school. Ruby made bad grades and skipped classes more often than not. However, the burden of work is difficult for Ruby. Ruby dislikes the work, having to fill glass jars with brine and pigs feet because of the difficulty of the work and because of the stigma of working in such a place. Ruby also dislikes the fact that she is not making as much money as her family needs. It is humiliating that the family cannot get credit at the local grocery stores and butchers because they are already too far in debt. It is also humiliating to have to beg the landlord to continue being patient despite the fact that they are seriously behind on their rent.

Ruby is a teenager who should not have to worry about the rent, the groceries, eating the same cheap beans day in and day out. Ruby should not have to worry about her mother's lack of a winter coat or gloves. Ruby should not have to worry about her mother's medical care. However, Ruby does have to worry about these things as the new bread winner in her family. That is why when Paulie tells Ruby about an opportunity to make more than four times her current salary she jumps at the idea even though it means lying to her mother. Ruby knows her mother will not survive another winter with things the way they are and that her sister needs better nutrition and peace of mind. For these reasons, Ruby takes a job that is less than honorable but will change her family's situation. This is what makes responsibility a theme of the novel.

Coming of Age

Ruby is a teenager when the novel begins. Most teenagers, even those who live in the same era in which the novel is set, are usually somewhat naïve and their biggest worry is whether the boy they like likes them back. However, Ruby finds herself having to worry about her family's basic ability to survive.

When Ruby first takes the job at the Starlight, she thinks that it is as an instructor. Ruby thinks the worse that can happen is that some clumsy guy might step on her foot. However, before the first night is over Ruby realizes that this is not the case. Ruby knows that the men who come to the Starlight are not interested in learning how to dance, but in dancing with beautiful girls. Ruby also discovers that many of these men



are willing to tip a large amount to girls who are especially nice to them and that they will often take willing girls out to restaurants and clubs after work.

The longer Ruby works at the Starlight, the more she begins to understand about a man's psyche as well as how to best take advantage of a man's generosity. Ruby's innocence quickly disappears, replaced by a knowledge that even an older woman should not be forced to acquire. Not only does Ruby learn from her clients, her fish, at the Starlight, but she also learns from her boyfriend, Paulie, that not everything is as it should be. Paulie is a violent, cruel man who wants to use Ruby to make money. Eventually Ruby sees through Paulie, she sees who he is and what he is. Ruby also opens her eyes to all she has seen and done at the Starlight. This is a coming of age for Ruby that should not have had to happen to her, but circumstances being what they were, they were the best she could expect. Ruby handles her situation with grace and eventually finds her way out of the darkness to make a new, and courageous, start for herself, making coming of age an important theme of the novel.

Racism

Racism is a minor, but important theme in this novel because it touches on the historic accuracy of the novel. The modern reader more than likely is aware of the prejudice that happened on a regular basis in this time period against black people. It appears in this novel as well as the characters at the Starlight discuss the lack of black customers. Blacks were not welcome in taxi dance clubs such as the Starlight except as members of the band. Ozzie, a friend Ruby makes at the Starlight, is a black man. For this reason, there is no hint of romance between Ruby and Ozzie despite Ruby's great enthusiasm for Ozzie's unique jazz sound.

When Ruby first begins working at the Starlight, she is surprised to discover that Asians are welcome customers. Many of the girls will not dance with the Asians. Ruby herself is worried about dancing with the Asians and is surprised when her friend, Peggy, befriends and goes out after hours with the Filipinos. For Peggy, Ruby eventually agrees to go out with a Filipino man named Manny. Ruby is surprised to find Manny just like other men and she actually enjoys going out with him because he loves jazz just as much as she does.

After Pearl Harbor the dislike of Asians grows stronger. There is a fight at the Starlight between male customers, some of whom disapprove of the Asians dancing with the girls. This leads to a shift in the type of men who continue to come to the Starlight. Manny and his friend, Alonso, both enlist in the Navy. Manny says that America educated him and he would like to fight for her, but he is afraid of being assigned to cleaning decks and peeling potatoes. The ironic thing about the discrimination against the Filipinos in this part of the novel is that the Philippine Islands were also attacked by the Japanese.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view. The main character, Ruby Jacinski, is the narrator. The first-person point of view allows the reader to develop an intensely intimate relationship with Ruby, deeply concerned about each and everything that happens to Ruby. This point of view also limits the reader's knowledge of what is happening in the plot to what Ruby herself knows. This allows the reader to be surprised by certain actions just as Ruby is, to feel as Ruby feels as the novel's plot unfolds.

The point of view of this novel is appropriate to the plot because it creates a relationship between the reader and the main character that makes it impossible for the reader not to worry about what might happen to her. The point of view is also one that leaves the reader dependent on the main character for all the information about the plot. This is important in this novel because the main character is a young, naïve girl who does not really understand the world she has just walked into. Therefore, when the reader begins to experience this unfamiliar world of taxi dancing, she does it through the eyes of someone who is not familiar with it as well, making it an experience of new revelations for both reader and character. Hence, the point of view works well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is set in Chicago in the years 1941-1942. These years are significant because these are the years that Pearl Harbor is attacked and the United States joins World War II. This is a world in which respectability is one of the most important things to most Americans and most would do anything to protect their public image. Ruby's mother is a widow who has worked hard to provide for her children. Mrs. Jacinski will not allow her daughters to go out with boys, to wear makeup, or to do anything that might set the neighbors to talking. However, Mrs. Jacinski has become crippled by arthritis and can no longer work. For this reason, Ruby goes to work and quickly learns that she cannot make enough money to help her family and be respectable.

The setting of this novel is very important for several reasons. In this novel, Ruby must take a job. This is directly affected by the time period in which the novel is written because in modern times when a widow finds herself unable to work there are public assistance programs she could turn to for help. Not only this, but the public school system would not allow for Ruby to simply stop going to school. Then Ruby takes a job as a taxi dancer. While Ruby never does anything to define herself as a prostitute, in this time period she might as well have done so because dancing with men for money would seem to be the same equivalent to most respectable people. Finally, the setting of this novel is important because of the actions of many of the characters against the



Filipinos and the girls who loved them. While racism is still widespread in the modern world, it is not as tolerated and this would not be acceptable behavior.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. The novel is written with the intended audience of young adults and the main character is a young, uneducated girl, therefore the language of the novel reflects both the intended audience and the main character. There are some foreign phrases in the novel, but these phrases are explained within the text or are unimportant to the overall comprehension of the plot. Reflective of the time period in which the novel is set, there is little or no slang in the language of the novel.

The language of the novel reflects the age and limited education of the main character who is telling the novel in the first person point of view as though telling the story to a friend. The language is authentic to the main character in that it is simple, uncomplicated language. It is also authentic to the time period in that it does not contain a great deal of slang, especially slang that is common to the modern world. The language is easy to comprehend for readers of all ages making the language appropriate to the plot of the novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-five chapters. Each chapter is of varying lengths, some very long while others are similarly short. The novel is written in narration and dialogue, showing scenes rather than simply telling a story. The novel's plot follows a linear time line with few flash backs, keeping the plot simple and to the point.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Ruby as she takes a job at the Starlight Dance Academy as a taxi dancer. One subplot follows Ruby as she learns the truth about what it means to be a taxi dancer and how to fleece fish for all they are willing to give. Another subplot follows Ruby's relationship with her boyfriend, Paulie Suelze. Finally, a subplot follows Ruby's relationships with her mother and her sister, Betty. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"For a second, the name didn't mean anything. Then I remembered. Clothesline gossip, whispers in the grocery store or the butcher shop that hushed whenever his mother came in" (Chapter 1, p. 8).

"I dropped out of school the day we pawned Ma's wedding ring" (Chapter 2, p. 26).

"By day, the dance academy was a dump. I walked past it twice before the shoeshine boy finally put me right. I'd been looking for something more glamorous than a plain-Jane second-story walk-up over a butcher shop" (Chapter 3, p. 31).

"I stared at the 10 in the corner of the bill. I'd never held ten dollars all at once in my life" (Chapter 6, p. 91).

"Manny became one of my fish. So did Tom" (Chapter 9, p. 136).

"I prayed to Lucia and Agatha for strength. It didn't help. Maybe I was too bad of a girl already" (Chapter 10, p. 166).

"'The Japs,' she said. 'It's the Japs. They're bombing someplace called Pearl Harbor'" (Chapter 11, p. 187).

"I stood outside Ozzie's room and laid my head back against the wall and listened to him singing notes in the dark. Wild music. A wanting so deep, you would break the world open, just to get your chance" (Chapter 13, p. 214).

"He was the man I loved. I didn't understand why, after what we'd just done, I felt lonelier than I ever had in my life" (Chapter 17, p. 256).

"I was the Queen Bee now" (Chapter 19, p. 285).

"Please God, keep him safe. And keep him far, far from here. Forever" (Chapter 23, p. 326).

"Humming a scrap of something I remembered Ozzie playing. I'd been there when he wrote it. Developing his sound, he'd said. Like me, here, bucking rivets" (Chapter 25, p. 348).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Ruby Jacinski? What is her main concern in the first chapter of the novel? What is unusual about this concern? What is unusual about Ruby's family life? What job does Ruby claim to have at the packinghouse when Paulie Suelze asks? What job does Ruby really have? Why does Ruby work? What job does Paulie suggest Ruby interview for? How much does Paulie say Ruby will make? Is this a large sum?

Who is Paulie Suelze? Why is Ruby so impressed with Paulie? What is Paulie's reputation? Why is Ruby happy when Paulie pays attention to her? Why does Paulie seem to live by different rules than everyone else in the Yards? Why does Ruby's mother become upset when she learns Ruby has been spending time with Paulie? What does Ruby's mother tell her about Paulie and their future relationship? Does Ruby listen to this advice?

Why does Ruby interview at the Starlight Dance Academy? What does Ruby think her job will be? What does Ruby wear the first night at the Starlight? Why does Del dislike Ruby's choice of attire? What warning does he give her? How does Ruby figure out that the Starlight customers do not want instruction on how to dance? Why does Art not pay Ruby for some of her dances? Why does Ruby allow him to get away with such action?

What is a fish? Who is Ruby's first fish? How does she reel him in? What does Tom give to Ruby their first night together? Why? What does Ruby use this for? Why does Ruby not pay Tom back? Why does Peggy warn Ruby to never borrow from a fish? Why does Tom begin acting jealous and possessive of Ruby? How does she feel about this? What does Ruby think it means? What does it mean?

What is a policy king? Where does Ruby see the policy king? Who explains to her what he does? Why does Ruby tell Paulie about the policy king? What does Paulie do with this information? How does Ruby feel about Paulie's actions? What does Ruby do about this? Why does Ruby go to the policy king when she needs Paulie to disappear? Why does Ruby make the policy king promise not to kill Paulie? What does the policy king agree to do to Paulie instead of killing him?

Who is Betty? What makes Betty think that lying is acceptable? How did Ruby influence Betty's idea that lying is acceptable? How did Mrs. Jacinski make Betty feel that lying is acceptable? What has Betty been lying about? How does Betty feel about Paulie Suelze? How does the reader know this? Why does Betty scream and kick when Ruby tries to separate her from Paulie? What was Paulie telling Betty? For what reason? What does Betty do with this information?

Why does Ruby resist giving up her job at the Starlight? Why does Ruby feel she cannot go back to being a simple teenager, a high school student? Why does Ruby feel she no longer fits in with girls her own age? What does Ruby decide she should do about the Starlight? Where does Ruby decide to look for work after she loses her job at

the Starlight? What does Ruby do for a living at the end of the novel? Is this historically accurate? Explain.