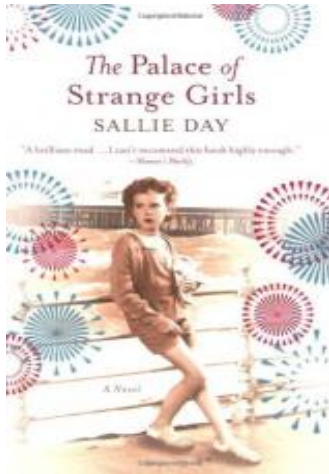

The Palace of Strange Girls

by Sallie Day



About the Book

Blackpool, England, 1959. The Singleton family is on holiday. For seven-year-old Beth, just out of the hospital, this means struggling to fill in her 'I-Spy' book and avoiding her mother Ruth's eagle-eyed supervision. Her sixteen-year-old sister Helen, meanwhile, has befriended a waitress whose fun-loving ways hint at a life beyond Ruth's strict rules.

Discussion Guide

1. What role does the setting of Blackpool play in this novel? Can you draw parallels between this locale and economic and social climate in England with those in U.S. history? How about with present-day American life?
2. What do you think the function of Beth's I-Spy book is? Can you relate her game to one that was prominent in your own childhood? How does Day's use of excerpts as chapter headers affect the movement of each chapter and the flow of the novel as a whole?
3. What are the similarities between Beth and Helen? The differences? Which do you find a more sympathetic character?
4. Why does the author set this novel during the annual holiday? What similarities can you draw between the Singleton's vacation and a summer trip in the U.S.?
5. Day describes the birth of Beth to us on pages 162-63. What do you make of Ruth's staunch desire for a son and her subsequent reaction to the birth of her second daughter? How might you relate this scene to Ruth's actions at the flashback of Beth's surgery?

6. How does Beth change after her one-on-one encounter with the Tiger Lady? What do you think the title of this book means to or does for her? What sort of 'palaces of strange girls' can you think of in your own life?
7. How do the roles of friends function in this book? Think about Cora, Doug and Connie. How does this compare to the function of your own friends? What does it say that Beth is the only Singleton without a go-to pal?
8. Why doesn't Jack tell Ruth about the jobs he's been offered? Further, why is he more eager to tell her about his long lost Greek lover than about these offers?
9. Spending time with his daughter, Jack describes different sorts of cloths to Beth: seersucker, chintz, brocade (pages 215-219). Thinking about how he describes each of these weaves, could this scene be a metaphor for other happenings in this novel?
10. When Day writes that 'Jack is a fervent believer in cotton' (page 169), what else do you think she may mean by that statement? Holding this description of Jack up to the scene of Ruth buying the rose-printed foreign fabric, what deeper ideas do you discover about their characters?
11. Why do you think Jack ultimately sleeps with Connie? Is he alone responsible for this infidelity? How is he able to retain our sympathy thereafter, if at all?
12. If the book were to continue slightly further in time, what do you think would become of Ruth and Jack's relationship based on the emotional state of each of them at the end of the book? What about Jack and Eleni?
13. We learn in the epilogue that Helen plans to attend University. What effect does her experience with Alan Clegg have on this decision?
14. How have the individual members of the Singleton family changed during the holiday? Can you think of a short experience in your own life that had a great impact on you

Author Bio

I was born in Lancashire, England. My dad worked as a 'loom overlooker'. After school I applied to College and stayed there one term before dropping out and moving to the other end of the country. The next 25 years were taken up with marriage and children and it was only when the children left home that I decided to take up writing as a hobby. Before I knew where I was I'd graduated from the amateur writing group to an M.A. course at Manchester University and from there to writing "**Palace**" which won the Portico Prize in 2008.

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