

THE BODECIA BOOK CLUB REVIEW

The Palace of Strange Girls by Sallie Day Grand Central Publishing £6.99 ISBN 9780446545860

Blackpool in 1959 is changing just like the rest of Britain – a new modern life (as we know it now) was dawning, and the Singleton family is at the seaside resort for their annual vacation. Young Beth has survived a life-threatening heart operation and is desperate for adventure, while her 16-year-old sister tries to break from their mother's iron grasp. With the arrival of a letter filled with secrets, Jack, an upstanding father and husband, may have to choose between his family and his past. At the same time, his wife, Ruth, obsessively orders everyone's lives to create the perfect world that she sees in magazines.

The Palace of Strange Girls is Sallie Day's debut novel. Sallie grew up in Burnley, Lancashire and her father ran a cotton mill, so it stands to reason why the father in this book also works in a cotton mill.

Each chapter title is an I-Spy item with description, which is both adorable and light hearted, but turns appropriately serious for the later conflict. I-Spy books are spotters' guides written for British children and particularly successful in the 1950's and 1960's. They are currently making a comeback with the books being re launched last year by Michelin Travel Publications. Titles include I Spy Birds, Cars, Trees, On a Car Journey etc – if you have little one go out and get one – we all fondly remembered having them as youngsters.

Unfortunately, we had trouble connecting with any of the other characters, and they are the real driving force of the story. All of them were self-centred and difficult to like. Ruth was controlling, materialistic, frosty, and way too status-obsessed, while Jack was preoccupied with himself and what he wanted, rather than considering how things impacted his family. Helen was headstrong and unwilling to listen to anything her parents say. While she was written as a very believable teenager, she still was frustrating and difficult to like

Additionally, The Palace of Strange Girls had a tendency to jump in time without any warning for the reader. One paragraph would be the present, and the next would be in the past – it was very confusing. It would have been easier if there had been some sort of indication when the novel was moving to a flashback. All the story lines seemed to never come to anything and just fizzled out.

We did enjoy the book bringing back memories of the 60's – of having a proper tea service on the beach (no polystyrene cups then!), Kali (sherbert powder) and the old fashioned ways of the late 50's looked at the way the women were the house keeper, the solid foundation of the house hold. We found it amusing that the only courses available on offer for women at that time were sewing, cooking and all about good housekeeping. How things have changed!

We gave The Palace of Strange Girls **4.6 / 10.**

The book we are now reading is **The Northern Clemency by Philip Hensher**

Don't forget the first rule of Book Club!