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HOME

A Novel of the Swing Era

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This story begins with Pearl reimagining the tale of “The Pied Piper of Hamelin.” She thinks up a better ending, one which doesn’t end so tragically. Which childhood story ending would you like to revise? How would you change it?
2. In the first chapter, Ray hears about how his parents fell in love. The happier-days story surprises Pearl, who only knew Ray’s folks to be abusive and emotionally absent. Why might Ray’s parents have undergone this kind of transformation? How is Pearl’s perception accurate? How is Pearl’s perception lacking?
3. Some folks in Bliss weren’t keen on the mixing of races at the dances. What might have led them to feel that way? How were times different then? What echoes of that mentality did you witness in your own childhood? What echoes do we still witness in our culture today?
4. When Mama calls on the telephone, Pearl asks her if she’s coming home. Mama responds, “It’s not that easy.” What do you think she meant by that? What do you think of Pearl’s reaction?
5. Daddy goes to visit Mama, only to come home with a broken heart and a busted lip. What do you think happened during the visit? What might have happened if Mama had come home with him that night? How might that have changed matters for Pearl?
6. The children at school are especially cruel to Delores Fitzpatrick. Why do they single her out for teasing? Why is it that Ray feels

protective of her? Think of a situation from your childhood when you or a classmate was bullied. How was the situation handled? How can a child survive such torment?

7. Delores uses a vile word for Opal Moon. Where had she learned such a thing? How is something like racism passed down from one generation to the next? Are there any negative family cycles you've been able to put an end to?
8. Opal tells the racial history of cakewalks. Did you know this history before? Do you know of other seemingly benign traditions that had racially charged beginnings? Perhaps look up the practice of black-face as well as racial stereotypes in film and literature. How might these have proved detrimental in the way our culture views people of color? How should we respond once we know of such history?
9. How did you feel when Pearl described Mama coming home? How about the compromising situation Mama found herself in? Did you expect a different reaction from Pearl? Or from Daddy? What might you have done under those circumstances?
10. As in life, most characters in the Pearl Spence novels have suffered hardship. Why does hardship change some people for the worse while it refines others to become stronger, better people? See 1 Peter 1:6-7. Which characters came through the process "like gold"?
11. Throughout the story we see several examples of forgiveness and redemption. Identify which one resonated most with you and explain why. What aspect of Pearl's story best reflects God's forgiveness and redemption through Jesus Christ?
12. What would you guess happens next in Pearl's future life? How about Ray, Mama and Daddy, or the other characters? How would you write the next chapter for them?