



What's the Girl Worth?

By Christina Fitzpatrick
ISBN: 9780060958756

Introduction

We were silent, and I couldn't help but feel sitting in that empty bar full of its loud brightness that that silence meant something. My father didn't want to be my father anymore. I could feel it.

Catherine Kelly -- hard-edged and weary of men -- recalls her childhood trips to the Blue Lagoon bar with her father and the game they used to play, "What's the Girl Worth?" When her parents get divorced and her father moves to Maine, his contact with Catherine becomes less and less. The most monumental loss in her life, her father abandoning her as a child, is revealed to us. Within Catherine's detailed portraits of her father, we see a man who is charming and an alcoholic, a man who regularly takes his seven-year-old daughter to a bar and plays games with her, amuses her -- instills her with such adoration, such comfort, that she will spend the rest of her life, once he leaves, pining and pining

for him.

Now in her 20s and working as a cocktail waitress, Catherine dreams of a world beyond school, work, failed relationships, and her unresolved issues with her father. Against the advice of her roommate, she takes a summer internship in Madrid. But she will soon learn that even the color and glamour of Madrid can't camouflage the darkness of her past.

Swept into a circle of Spanish friends, Catherine introduces us to the seductive Spanish culture and some intriguing characters: her sophisticated roommates Celia and Isabel who take her under their wings; Monica, an intrusive and suspicious girl who is obsessed with Catherine's relationship with her father; Esteban, a older gay man who has a surprising proposition for Catherine; and Felipe, an admirer she's never met. Back home, her troubled roommate Harlan also demands her attention and her mother arranges the unthinkable -- a visit from the man who haunts her still, the person who will force her to finally answer the question, "What's the Girl Worth?"

An exploration of the effects of abandonment, *What's the Girl Worth?* is "a coming-of-age story full of wonder and surprises" (Kathleen Cambor).

Discussion Questions

1. As a child while playing the game "What's the Girl Worth?" with her father, Catherine recalls, "the more ridiculous my response, the more points I earned, and, as a consequence, I was worth more," (page 20). Her father found value in being silly and playful. Do you think that Catherine grew up to be such a serious person as a way of rebelling against the father that abandoned her?
2. Discuss the main male characters -- Catherine's father, Harlan, Esteban. How do they each exorcise their demons?
3. American food products appear throughout the novel. Do you think the author was trying to symbolize something? What do they represent?
4. "It was one of my greatest peeves: That stupid belief that your parents, and what happened to you as a kid, controlled who you were," (page 68). Catherine is referring to Monica but do you think that she is also scolding herself? Why or why not?
5. Catherine disagrees with her mother on the subject of her father and men in general: "It's like all you want to do is show your father that he had no right to ignore you, to leave you like that... You want to prove to your father, my mother said, 'to all of the men who think they can just leave you that you aren't some worthless thing,' (page 71). Do you agree with this analysis or do you think her mother is, as Catherine says, "an expert in the field of magazine article psychology?"
6. What purpose do you think Kansas Katy serves in the story?
7. "[A]ll humor to me, was not the symptom of a happy light-hearted person. If that was the case, drunks wouldn't be so funny, and crazy people wouldn't be laughing all the time. Humor was, and always would be, in my mind, the rejection of all you felt, of every dark thing that loomed over you -- it was your own personal fight," (page 146). Do you agree with Catherine's statement or do think humor can be created by the content and happy?
8. Catherine's romantic relationships with men -- Rick, Lenny, Borja, and Felipe -- reflect the evolution of her own maturity. Discuss what she learns about herself from each of them.
9. Catherine takes her father to a bullfight: "It seemed impossible not to like the sufferer better -- particularly after having watched that same bull run like mad, sprint from one side of the ring to the other, charging one cape and then another; sword after sword had been stuck through his back, yet he kept running, kept moving. He never backed off," (page 280). Is she merely describing a bullfight for us or is Catherine thinking of the wounded men in her life? Or is she, perhaps, talking about herself?
10. Why did Catherine get so upset when she saw the couple fighting in the club Arabia?
11. "There were parts of people, very hidden parts, that could only be revealed by the people they chose to care about, the people they felt were theirs," (page 334). Who did Catherine care about and what do they reveal about her?
12. When she finally takes Raul up on his offer, what does Catherine discover about the shopkeeper?

13. Catherine's father is an alcoholic who abandons her as a child and only visits her in Spain at her mother's request. Despite these flaws, do you think he is a sympathetic character? Do you want Catherine and her father to bond? Or do you want her to abandon him?

14. Were you satisfied with the novel's ending? Why or why not?

About the author:

Christina Fitzpatrick received her MFA in 1999 from Sarah Lawrence College. She has worked as a bartender for the past ten years. The author of *Where We Lived*, she has also taught writing at Iona College, Gotham Writers' Workshop, and Valhalla's Women's Prison. She currently teaches ESL in Rome and remains affiliated with Teachers and Writers Collaborative in Manhattan. She divides her time living in New York City and abroad.