

# BOOK CLUB KIT

DEBORAH GOODRICH ROYCE  
Author of *Finding Mrs. Ford*

# RUBY FALLS

*A Novel*

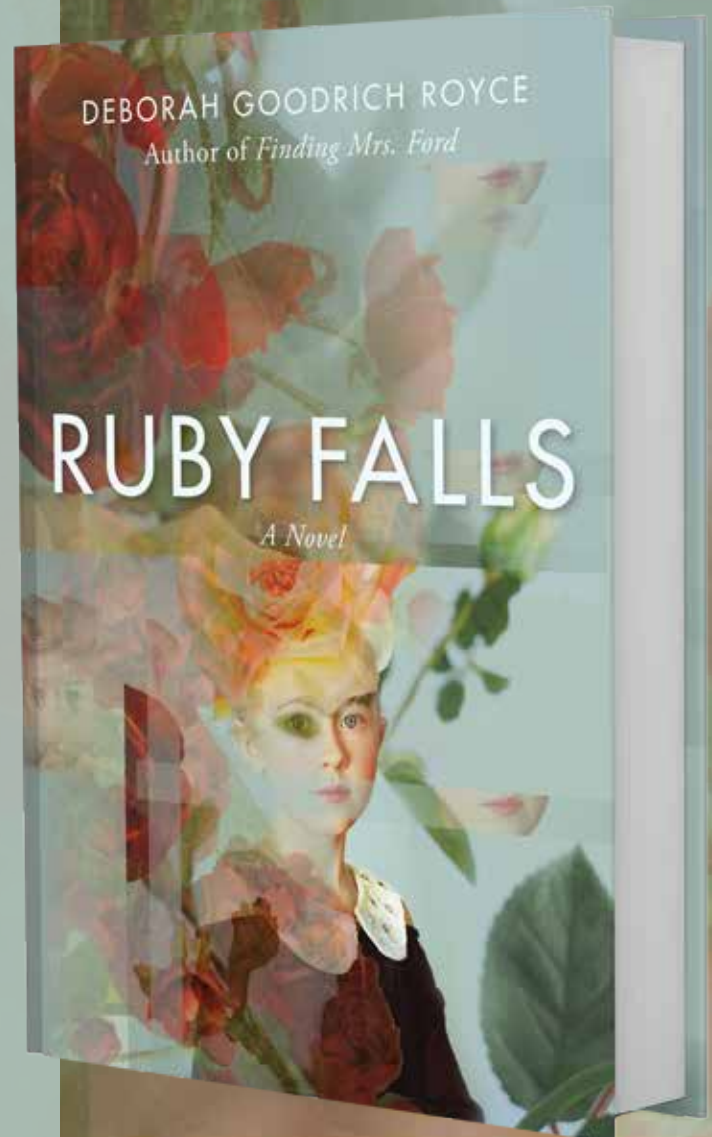


Like the chilling psychological thriller *The Silent Patient*, Deborah Goodrich Royce's *Ruby Falls* is a nail-biting tale of a fragile young actress, the new husband she barely knows, and her growing suspicion that the secrets he harbors may eclipse her own.

On a brilliantly sunny July day, six-year-old Ruby is abandoned by her father in the suffocating dark of a Tennessee cave. Twenty years later, transformed into soap opera star Eleanor Russell, she is fired under dubious circumstances. Fleeing to Europe, she marries a glamorous stranger named Orlando Montague and keeps her past closely hidden.

Together, Eleanor and Orlando start afresh in LA. Setting up house in a storybook cottage in the Hollywood Hills, Eleanor is cast in a dream role—the lead in a remake of *Rebecca*. As she immerses herself in that eerie gothic tale, Orlando's personality changes, ghosts of her past reemerge, and Eleanor fears she is not the only person in her marriage with a secret.

In this thrilling and twisty homage to Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, the story ricochets through the streets of Los Angeles, a dangerous marriage to an exotic stranger, and the mind of a young woman whose past may not release her.



# PRAISE

Winner!  
Best Plot Twist  
*Zibby Awards*

Named one of the 20 most riveting books of spring 2021  
by *Veranda Magazine*.

“Royce’s prose is taut and propulsive. *Ruby Falls* inhabits a hallucinatory Hollywood where fact and fiction mingle freely and even the smallest acts can feel ominous...an enjoyable pastiche with plenty of twists and turns.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

“Deborah Goodrich Royce does an outstanding job of creating a contemporary parallel story that connects *Rebecca* and *Ruby Falls*. This is highly recommended reading for those who like gothic stories infused with psychological tension and introspection. The tale exposes the fine paradox between magic, family ties, and the boundaries of what is real and what is not.”

— Diane Donovan, Senior Reviewer, *Midwest Book Review*

“Imaginative, unique, spine-tingling, and just the right amount of eerie, *Ruby Falls* is what a reader wants a psychological thriller to be.”

— Sandra Brown, *New York Times* bestselling author

“A tribute to Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, this unnerving story about a Hollywood starlet haunted by her past will captivate you right up until the shocking ending.”

— Emily Liebert,  
*USA Today* bestselling author of *Perfectly Famous*



# PRAISE

*continued*

“Fans of *Rebecca* will be enthralled with how the classic story is woven into the masterful plot of *Ruby Falls*.”

— Vanessa Lillie, Amazon bestselling author of *Little Voices* and *For the Best*

“Mix a dark childhood trauma, a fragile young actress, and a hasty, ill-advised marriage. Add old Hollywood glamour, dashes of enchantment, and lashings of noir suspense. Now shake—and prepare to be shaken.”

— Elka Ray, author of The Toby Wong Vancouver Island mystery series

“Secrets abound in this bang of a book, a haunting tale sure to give readers chills. A stunner with some serious Gothic vibes.”

— Kimberly Belle, Internationally bestselling author of *Dear Wife* and *Stranger in the Lake*

“*Ruby Falls* is a skillfully plotted page turner!”

— Wendy Walker, national bestselling author of *Don't Look For Me*

“With fun twists and whip-smart language, clever Deborah Goodrich Royce leads readers down a familiar path—until she doesn't. I promise *Ruby Falls* will become your next favorite book!”

— Maureen Joyce Connolly, author of *Lovely Little Things*

“A haunting, unforgettable thriller.”

— Daniela Petrova, author of *Her Daughter's Mother*

“*Ruby Falls* is a psychological tour-de-force that grabs you on page one and doesn't let you go until the end.”

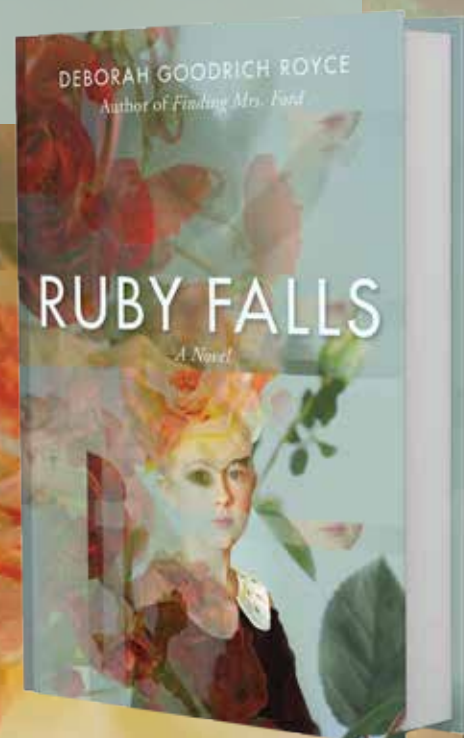
— Kris Frieswick, author of *The Ghost Manuscript*

“*Ruby Falls* takes the reader on a Ferrari ride through the twists and turns of the Hollywood Hills, moving so fast your hands are clammy and you can't catch your breath. But you must! I was up until two am in the grip of this fast-paced modern twister of a gothic novel.”

— Jane Ubell-Meyer, Bedside Reading, Founder

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## DEAR READER,

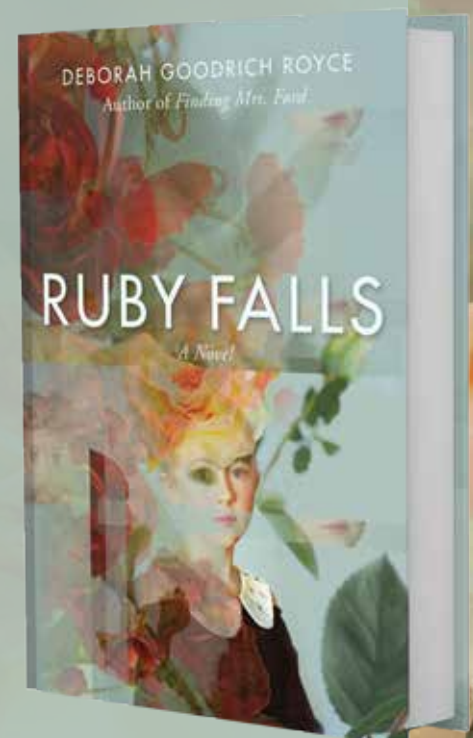
I am delighted you've somehow been led to *Ruby Falls*. I use that term intentionally because my own journey into this book was one in which I was led more than I was leading.

Yes, I visited *Ruby Falls* as a child and yes, I was scared when they turned off the lights. But, I wasn't consciously aware that the experience had had such an impact on me. And I certainly did not intend to write a book that took that little germ from my own life and turned it into a roller coaster ride for one Eleanor Ruby Russell!

The first two chapters downloaded into my head and through my fingers onto the page one day in June 2016. I was astonished because—up to that moment—I had been planning to write a different book. But Ruby made herself known and she let me know where the story would start. From there, it was up to me to write an actual novel. That process took four years.

Beyond that, the inspirations for this book were many. Victorian Gothic novels such as *Jane Eyre*, *The Woman in White*, and, of course, *Rebecca* (not actually written in the Victorian era but very much in that genre), loom large in the mood and ambience of *Ruby Falls*. While *Rebecca* was a primary influence, *Ruby Falls* is NOT a remake of that novel (or the Hitchcock film). Rather, it is a flight of fancy from the premise in *Rebecca* of a young and vulnerable woman marrying a sophisticated stranger and the doubt and suspicion that ensue.

Another major influence on *Ruby Falls*—on everything I do, really—is film. I was in the movie business—both as an actress and as a story editor at Miramax Films—and I always see a book in my mind's eye in the same way I see a movie. I also write real places. In my books, if I name a street...that street is exactly where you will find it if you go there on



a field trip. Which I recommend you do! My first novel, *Finding Mrs. Ford*, is set partly in Watch Hill, Rhode Island and the local tourism commission has created a walking tour of sites from the book.

In *Ruby Falls*, I had a lot of fun naming chapters. Each title hints at what is going on in that chapter. And the sources of those names are varied. Many chapters, like *The Day of the Locust* and *Suspicion*, are film titles. *Flores Para Los Muertes* is not the title of a film but comes from a line in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. *The Shadow of the Wind* is named after a favorite novel.

I hope you enjoy the ride with Ellie/Ruby. She is a tender girl who suffered a blow as a child. Like all my characters, she has many facets and she is not always who she seems. Who among us is?

xo,  
Debra

Ps...I can't end without sharing a story. Several months after completing *Ruby Falls*, I received an email from Fred Walton, a film director who'd been very important in my early career. He had really liked the galley I'd sent him of the book. This meant a lot and felt a little like a father figure's approval of my work, since my own dad had died without seeing anything I'd ever created. Then I went about my business that day, which included a stop at an old storage unit to look for something. While there, I found a box of papers I hadn't remembered. And out of it fell a photograph. Of me and my father at Ruby Falls Cave in Chattanooga, Tennessee when I was just a little girl. I was stunned. I think it was my father's way of telling me that he has seen my work all along.



# AUTHOR INTERVIEW

## Actress to Author: The Episodic Life of Deborah Goodrich Royce

by Lise Floris

Originally published in *Womanscape* on 01/02/2021, updated on 01/12/2021

I cannot hide my excitement so the first question I ask Deborah Goodrich Royce is “who did you play in *Beverly Hills 90210*?” It turns out that she played Sandy, the girlfriend of none other than my early-twenties-crush Jason Priestley. Royce’s big break came in 1982 with a lead role, Silver Kane, on ABC’s soap opera *All My Children*. Her career took off and roles followed in movies like *Remote Control*, *April Fool’s Day*, and *Just One of the Guys* and television shows like *St. Elsewhere* and *21 Jump Street*.



Deborah Goodrich Royce and Clayton Rohner in *April Fool’s Day* (1986)

But Royce said goodbye to the glitz and glimmer of Hollywood years ago. This autumn day in 2020, she is seated in her conservatory room in Riverside, Connecticut gathering inspiration for her next book and posting book reviews on Instagram. In a video, she invites her followers to witness the arrival of a special package.



# AUTHOR INTERVIEW

*continued*



It contains the very first prints of Royce's second novel *Ruby Falls*. She cuts open the box and exclaims to the camera: "Oh wow, look at her! I am absolutely overjoyed, beyond excited! Isn't she beautiful? She's a little spooky."

Royce was drawn to storytelling, but it was only after some detours in life that she threw herself into writing. In 1992, 10 years into her acting career, Royce, her first husband and their two young daughters moved to Paris. "I knew I couldn't continue acting from France, so I was grateful when I met a woman who worked for Canal+, a French movie studio. She was looking for native language readers," says Royce.

Royce fell in love with the job as a reader and, upon her return to the US, her combined acting and reading experience, landed her a job as the story editor for Miramax films. Helping to develop films like *Emma* and *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain*, Royce worked with writing partner, Mitch Giannunzio. This led to a grant to develop an original screenplay, *Susan Taft Has Run Amok*. "In many ways, Miramax became my writing school," says Royce. It was to bring the next big chapter of her life – becoming an author.



A book signing at The Mysterious Bookshop in New York

# AUTHOR INTERVIEW

*continued*

## THE EPISODIC LIFE OF WOMEN

Royce describes the transition from acting to writing as a very natural one: one episode of life gliding into the next.

“As women, I feel that we live episodic lives,” she says. “And although men are starting to go down the same route, they have historically followed one career path.” Royce’s experience is that people believe they have to do their best work in their youth. In contrast, Royce says it was turning 50 and seeing her youngest child leave the nest, that finally allowed her to dive deep into writing.

Her first book, the thriller *Finding Mrs. Ford* was named one of *Forbes’s* Top 5 and *Good Morning America’s* Top 10. Royce’s second book, the freshly unboxed *Ruby Falls* which she showed her followers in a sneak preview, is also a thriller. It is the tale of a young actress, a new husband she barely knows, and her growing suspicion that the secrets he harbours may eclipse her own.



Royce classifies *Ruby Falls* as meta-gothic. “Don’t think vampires – think *Jane Eyre*,” she says, referring to her main character who, like the main character in Brontë’s classic novel, is a young woman in a distressing situation where others might not be who they seem to be.

# AUTHOR INTERVIEW

*continued*

Common to both of Royce's novels, is the focus on identity. Royce wonders: Who are people? Why do some present themselves as something they are not? What if they're concealing something?



Deborah and her husband Chuck Royce  
at The Avon.

"Most of us conceal something – usually something benign – but I love to write about that," says Royce.

On the topic of identity, it seems natural to ask Royce how being a writer is different from being an actress. "As a writer, I get to say exactly what I want to say – and that is an enormous privilege," she says, adding that the celebrity world lost its charm for her years ago and she enjoys a much quieter life.

"One day," I said to my husband "I think I'm a better writer than I was an actress." He promptly replied, "Oh yes, absolutely," says Royce bursting into laughter.

Although books play a big role in Royce's life, she has by no means lost interest in movies.

When she and her husband Chuck Royce got the opportunity, back in 2001 to restore and later reopen the Avon Theatre Film Center in Stamford, Connecticut, they jumped at the chance.

The 1939 landmark is a non-for-profit theatre that features independent, classic, foreign and documentary films. Famous directors and writers (Robert Altman, Jane Fonda and Richard Gere to mention but a few) have visited the Avon to showcase their films and discuss their work. The late Gene Wilder – a long-time friend of Royce's and one of the first and most avid supporters of her writing – also made regular appearances at the Avon. Wilder would have been thrilled to know that Royce's next novel is in the pipeline.

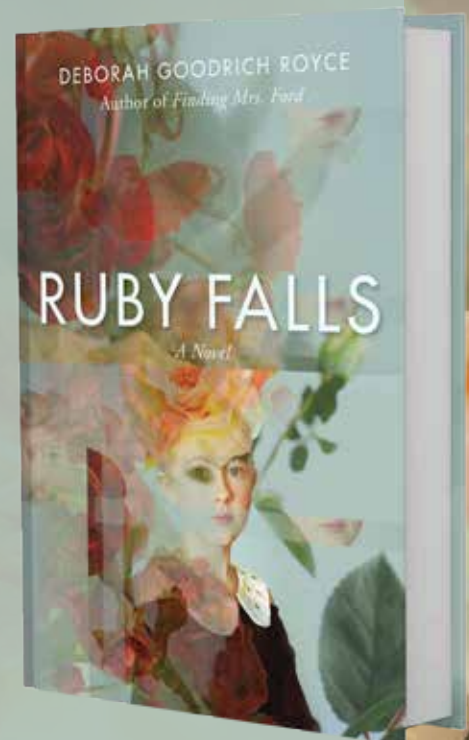
It is a parallel timeline story that takes place partly during a pandemic (inspired by Covid-19) and takes place partly during the aftermath of an unresolved mystery. Drawn from real life, Royce was influenced by her mother's best friend who was murdered when she was 12 years old. "It affected my mother deeply

# AUTHOR INTERVIEW

*continued*

and made her fearful, so I wanted to explore how an act of violence affects the surrounding people,” says Royce.

When asked by a reader on Goodreads.com what the best thing about being a writer is, Royce replied that it is “that magical feeling when you sit at your computer and your characters do or say something that you just never thought of.” Royce explains that she plans and outlines where she’s going but sometimes, the book takes her somewhere else. In many ways, Royce’s writing process bears a striking resemblance to her real, episodic life which likely still holds many surprises.



# DEBORAH GOODRICH ROYCE

Deborah Goodrich Royce's literary thrillers examine puzzles of identity. *Finding Mrs. Ford* and *Ruby Falls* will be joined by *Reef Road* in January 2023.

Deborah began her career as an actress, starring as Silver Kane, sister of the legendary Erica Kane (played by Susan Lucci) on the ABC soap, *All My Children*. She went on to star in feature films such as *April Fool's Day* and *Just One of the Guys*, TV movies such as *Return to Peyton Place* and *The Deliberate Stranger*, and series such as *Beverly Hills 90210* and *21 Jump Street*.



After the birth of her daughters, she moved with her family to Paris and worked as a reader for le Studio Canal Plus. In the 1990's, Deborah was the story editor at Miramax Films in New York. There, she oversaw readers, manuscript acquisitions, and script development, editing such notable screenplays as *Emma* by Doug McGrath, and early versions of *Chicago* and *A Wrinkle in Time*.



With writing partner, Mitch Giannunzio, Deborah won a grant from the Massachusetts Arts Council in 2002 to develop and workshop their original screenplay, *Susan Taft Has Run Amok*.

With her husband, noted small-cap investor, Chuck Royce, Deborah restored the 1939 Avon Theatre in Stamford, CT. Under her leadership, the Avon hosts an ongoing series of film luminaries, most recently, Mira Nair, Richard Gere and Chloe Sevigny. The late Gene Wilder, a longstanding advisory board member

Deborah Goodrich Royce - *Soap Opera Digest*

# DEBORAH GOODRICH ROYCE

*continued*



Avon Theatre Film Center, a 1939 landmark in Stamford, CT

Weekapaug Inn, and The Margin Street Inn), a bookstore (The Savoy in Westerly, RI), and numerous other Main Street buildings in Westerly, RI and Tannersville, NY.

of the Avon, was an early advocate for Deborah's writing.

Deborah serves on the governing boards of the New York Botanical Garden, the Greenwich Historical Society, and the PRASAD Project and the advisory boards of the American Film Institute, the Greenwich International Film Festival, the Preservation Society of Newport County, and the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach. She is a former trustee of the YWCA of Greenwich and the Garden Conservancy.

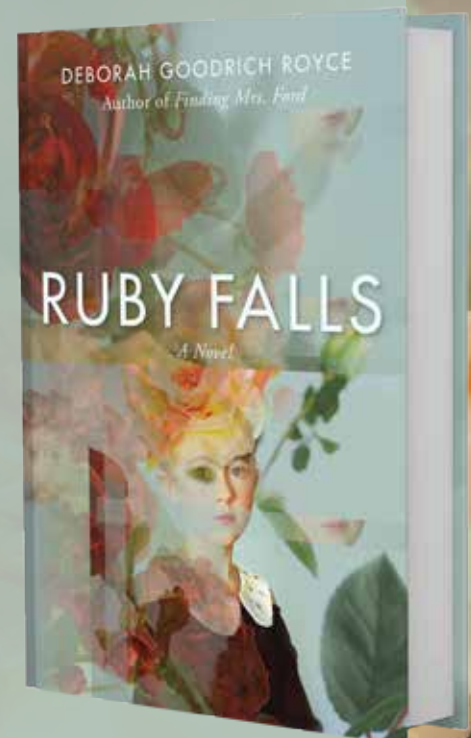
Deborah and Chuck have restored several hotels (Ocean House, Deer Mountain Inn,



Ocean House—one of only 13 triple Forbes five-star properties in the world

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When her father vanishes from the bowels of Ruby Falls Cave, six-year-old Ruby experiences a trauma that leaves lasting scars. The reason for his disappearance—kidnapping? drowning? abandonment?—remains the core unanswered question of her life. What could have been done to help the child come to terms with this incident? Do you believe that psychotherapy, meditation, journaling—any kind of mindful practice—can help to lessen the impact of profound emotional injury? Is there a window of opportunity for such healing?
2. Eleanor flees to Europe after a breakdown at work that was severe enough to hint at criminal charges. It is not until much later in the novel that the reader learns that it was a letter containing shocking revelations that set her off. Do you think Eleanor might have maintained her equilibrium had she not received Dottie's letter? Had Eleanor's recovery been more complete in childhood, might she have been less vulnerable to this later trigger?
3. Eleanor decides not to tell Orlando about the cataclysmic event of her childhood. The reader increasingly learns of deeper levels of Eleanor's deceptions, most notably the lies she tells herself. A lie can lead to another lie, until it is hard to distinguish truth from fiction, becoming almost impossible to extricate from the lies in an undamaged way. Is there a point in Eleanor's life where you feel that she (or those around her) could have applied the brakes to her runaway emotional train?
4. One of the most important elements of Daphne du Maurier's novel, *Rebecca*, on which *Ruby Falls* is loosely based, is its sense of place. The first line in *Rebecca*, "Last night, I dreamt I went to Manderley again," establishes a location that is dreamlike and, perhaps, ominous. Hollywood is a familiar setting to any of us who have watched movies since their inception. We recognize the twisty streets of the Hollywood Hills and their signature lampposts, the gates of the Paramount Pictures lot, the Hollywood sign. Did you find that the Hollywood setting of *Ruby Falls* adds to the ethereal and unsettling mood of the novel in the way that Manderley and the coast of Cornwall does in *Rebecca*?



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*continued*

5. Every chapter of *Ruby Falls* is titled. Many of these titles (*Vertigo*, *Gaslight*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*) are names of films, from gothic to film noir to Hitchcock. Some are titles of books (*The Woman in White*, *The Day of the Locust*, *The Shadow of the Wind*) representing genres from gothic to thriller. Some are quotations (*Flores para los Muertos*, *Dona Nobis Pacem*) that come from a variety of sources. Did you enjoy this literary puzzle that gave the reader hints about the content of corresponding chapters and the secrets held within the novel?
6. Eleanor “curates” her life, as though she is writing a book or directing a film. The English chintz curtains she hangs, the Italian wine she serves, the Spode china she uses, her mother’s clothing that she wears—all of these are conscious choices that help Eleanor create the world she wishes to inhabit. We all do this to a greater or lesser degree. How much of it is healthy and when does it become a pathology?
7. Eleanor forms an unlikely bond with Dottie, her much older neighbor. This relationship—both in its real form, when we believe it is actually happening, and in its imaginary form, once we learn that Ellie has conjured up a friendship with a dead woman—represents Eleanor’s need for a guiding figure. Since Ellie has a good relationship with her mother, why do you think her mother does not fulfill this need on Ellie’s behalf? Is Ellie’s need so great that a mere mortal cannot fill it?
8. The significance of tiny pieces of paper looms large in *Ruby Falls*. Eleanor remembers a dinner in New York where Lisette advised her to place a scrap of paper in her doorjamb so that if it fell out, she’d know that someone had broken into her house. Sonny, Eleanor’s father, gave little Ruby an important message on a piece of paper in the cave before he disappeared, one that she has hidden in a secret drawer in the secretary ever since. Do you think that the first paper, the one given by her father, led her to make up—or overestimate the meaning of—the second? What does this say about Ruby’s need to read signs in objects and occurrences?
9. *Ruby Falls*, like many Gothic novels, hints at the supernatural, especially in the character of Dottie Robinson. Wilkie Collin’s *The Woman in White*, and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* are two examples of Gothic novels where the



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

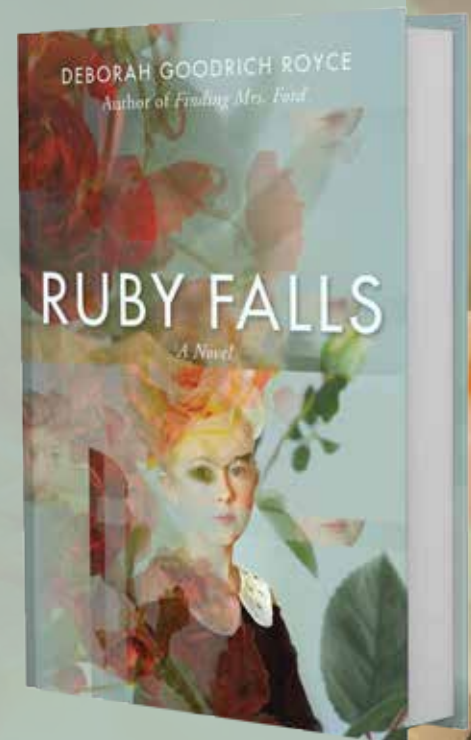
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reader is led to an otherworldly interpretation of mysterious happenings, only to have more concrete explanations given later on. Did you enjoy this playful use of genre conventions?

10. Because it is vital for Eleanor's sense of self to find an important reason for her father to have left her, she grows up to be something of a conspiracy theorist. In her search for the meaning of her father's desertion, she explores everything from the FBI to the CIA to the KGB to an organized crime syndicate called the Dixie Mafia. Because the story unfolds between the 1960s and the 1980s, Ellie's ability to research these threads is limited to what she finds in libraries. How would the book be different if it played out today, in our era of widespread access to the Internet and whatever conspiracy theories are available for perusal there? Do you think most conspiracy theories stem from a similar need to find deeper significance and meaning in what often feels like a random universe? Do we look to ascribe a cause to tragic events (an assassination, a plane crash) so that we can convince ourselves that we can keep such things from happening to us?
11. Eleanor's final night on Primrose Avenue is one of increasing chaos and decreasing coherence. Suddenly, it is revealed that nothing is what it seemed. Eleanor has told herself—and the reader—a fabricated tale worthy of a Victorian Gothic novel. Though you may not have seen it coming, were you able to go back after this revelation and follow the breadcrumb trail to add up the clues you may have missed—clues such as the opening quotations from Edgar Allan Poe and Edmund Burke, the fact that the people surrounding Eleanor never actually meet one another, the fact that Eleanor never does spend the night at Dottie's, or the fact that the exotic emporium on Hollywood Boulevard is, in reality, a stationery store where Eleanor orders her "Mrs. Montague" writing paper?
12. The book ends with Eleanor/Ruby walking away from her cottage on Primrose Avenue, into the orb of the rising sun, and getting hit by a car. As the accident unfolds, Ruby looks up to see her father standing before her. She takes his hand—the hand she lost hold of so many years before—and feels a sense of well-being. Did you see any other way out for Eleanor? Do you think she may finally have found peace? Can death be a happy ending? Or is the author playing with perception one last time and did Eleanor really die?

# ELLIE'S EIGHTIES PLAYLIST

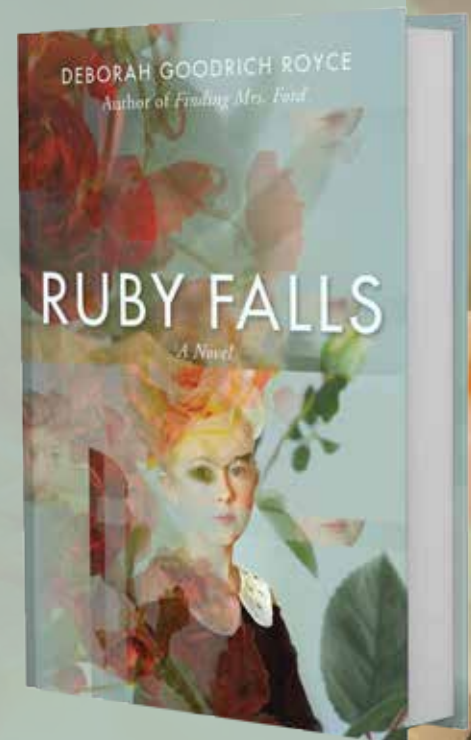
1. When Doves Cry, Prince, 1984
2. Footloose, Kenny Loggins, 1984
3. Against All Odds, Phil Collins, 1984
4. Every Breath You Take, The Police, 1983
5. Dancing in the Dark, Bruce Springsteen, 1984
6. All Night Long, Lionel Richie, 1984
7. Time after Time, Cyndi Lauper, 1984
8. Let's Go Crazy, Prince, 1984
9. 99 Luftballons, Nena, 1984
10. Sunglasses at Night, Corey Hart, 1984
11. Lucky Star, Madonna, 1984
12. An Innocent Man, Billy Joel, 1984
13. Uptown Girl, Billy Joel, 1983
14. Wrapped Around Your Finger, The Police, 1984
15. Wake Me Up Before You Go Go, Wham, 1985
16. Crazy for You, Madonna, 1985
17. Money for Nothing, Dire Straits, 1985
18. Like a Virgin, Madonna, 1985
19. We Are the World, USA for Africa, 1985
20. One More Night, Phil Collins 1985
21. Freeway of Love, Aretha Franklin, 1985
22. Sussidio, Phil Collins, 1985
23. All Through the Night, Cyndi Lauper, 1985
24. Would I Lie to You, Eurythmics, 1985
25. Sweet Dreams, Eurythmics, 1983
26. Addicted to Love, Robert Palmer, 1986
27. Take My Breath Away, Berlin, 1986
28. Rock Me Amadeus, Falco, 1986
29. Relax, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, 1984



# ELLIE'S EIGHTIES PLAYLIST

*continued*

30. You Spin Me Round, 1985
31. In the Air Tonight, Phil Collins, 1981
32. Walk Like an Egyptian, The Bangles, 1987
33. La Bamba, Los Lobos, 1987
34. Don't Get Me Wrong, The Pretenders, 1987
35. Bette Davis Eyes, Kim Carnes, 1981
36. Heart of Glass, Blondie, 1978
37. De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da, The Police, 1981
38. Call Me, Blondie, 1980
39. Luka, Suzanne Vega, 1987
40. Slow Hand, The Pointer Sisters, 1981
41. Hungry Heart, Bruce Springsteen, 1981
42. Psycho Killer, Talking Heads, 1984
43. Burning Down the House, Talking Heads, 1984
44. Take Me to the River, Talking Heads, 1984
45. Almost Blue, Elvis Costello, 1981
46. Bamboleo, Gipsy Kings, 1987
47. Smooth Operator, Sade, 1984
48. Your Love is King, Sade, 1984
49. Promises, Basia, 1987
50. Time and Tide, Basia, 1987



# PRINTABLE BOOKMARKS

