

## Dead Key Discussion Questions

by DM Pulley

### Author Bio: (Fantastic Fiction)

D.M. Pulley works as a Professional Engineer specializing in the rehabilitation of historic structures and forensic investigations of building failures. The Dead Key is a mystery novel based on the authors structural survey of an abandoned building in Cleveland. She lives in Northeast Ohio, with her husband and two children, and is currently at work on her second novel.



The Dead Key won the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award Grand Prize in 2014.

### Characters:

- **Beatrice Baker:** (1978) 16 year old working as a secretary at the 1<sup>st</sup> Bank of Cleveland. Lives with her Aunt Doris. Mother's name is Ilene.
- **Iris Latch:** (1998) 23 year old Civil Engineer Grad working at WRE (Wheeler Reese Elliot) architectural firm. Sent to draw up floor plans at the 1<sup>st</sup> Bank of Cleveland.
- **Doris Davis:** (1978) Beatrice's aunt.
- **Mrs. Cunningham:** (1978) In charge of secretary pool at bank. Secretaries are Francine, Maxine, and 2 unnamed women.
- **Randy Halloran:** (1978) Son of one of the bank's VPs. One of Beatrice's bosses. Wants her to look into Maxine's "Secret Project" and discover what it is.
- **R. Theodore "Teddy" Halloran:** (1978) VP of Finance at bank. Randy's father.
- **Maxine (Max) McDonnell:** (1978) Secretary at bank. Beatrice's pretty and flashy friend. Has a special project at the bank where she is reconstructing missing records surrounding old safety deposit boxes.
- **James Stone:** (1978) VP of bank.
- **Mr. William (Bill) Thompson:** (1978) Bank manager. Had an affair with Aunt Doris. Name on many of the Safety Deposit expiration letters. He is the one who requested the safety deposit box audit Max is doing.
- **Anthony (Tony) McDonnell:** (1978 & 1998) Maxine's brother. A police detective.
- **Carmichael:** (1978 & 1998) Bartender at Theatrical Grill in 1978 and Ellie's place in 1998.
- **Suzanne "Suzie" Peplinski** – (1978 & 1998) Worked in HR at bank. 547 key was in her desk. Having an affair with Bill.
- **Ramone:** (1978 & 1998) Security guard at 1<sup>st</sup> Bank of Cleveland.
- **Amanda:** (1998) Coworker of Iris'. Staff liaison at the firm.
- **Brad:** (1998) Fellow engineer at WRE. "Boy Scout." In charge of Iris and the Bank design.

- **Mrs. Capretta:** (1998) Iris' busybody elderly neighbor.
- **Ellie:** (1998) Iris' friend. Goth bartender at Club Illusion.
- **Nick:** (1998) Coworker of Iris' at the architectural firm. Architect.
- **Mr. Wheeler:** (1998) Head of Iris' department at WRE. An Engineer.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This book switches between 1978 and 1998. Did you find the timeline switches confusing or did it enhance the plot of the novel?
3. Did you like Beatrice? Did you like Iris? Who was your favorite character in the book?
4. How would the story have been different if Beatrice and Iris had each been given their own separate books?
5. Which characters do you think were in the prologue? Did you go back and read it a second time after you finished the book?
6. Do you think a bank today would be abandoned the way the 1<sup>st</sup> Bank of Cleveland was in this book?
7. Why do you think Aunt Doris has the 547 key on her key ring when she has the stroke?
8. Why do you think Iris took the 547 key from Suzanne's desk in the beginning of the novel?
9. Do you think the little old lady who died in the car accident after starting the Safety Deposit box inquiry actually died accidentally or was murdered?
10. Why do you think Doris and Max felt they could trust Beatrice so readily? Do you think Iris is as trustworthy?
11. Why do you think Ramone helped Beatrice find a way into/out of the building and didn't turn her in for trespassing?
12. Which part of the story surprised you the most? Which part surprised you the least?
13. Did you think the heroines featured in the book were stereotypes or fully developed characters? Did you notice any stereotypes in the book?
14. If you were to write a sequel, where would you expect to find Iris and Beatrice? What intrigues might they uncover?
15. Do you have a safety deposit box? If yes, how did this book make you feel? If no, will you get one?
16. Did this story change the way you feel about Cleveland? Did it teach you anything you didn't already know?
17. Do you think old buildings have "souls"?

18. How do you think Pulley's history as a structural engineer affected the book?
19. Pulley's second book "**The Buried Book**" will be out August 2016. Will you read it?

**References:**

- Goodreads – <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/22914448-the-dead-key#>
- D.M. Pulley - <http://www.dmpulley.com/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/p/d-m-pulley/>
- Facebook (DM Pulley) – <https://www.facebook.com/DMPulleyAuthor/?fref=ts>
- University of California Press eBook Collection – <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft4x0nb2jj&chunk.id=d0e4679&toc.id=&brand=ucpress>

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**Pulley's Novels**

- The Dead Key (2015)
- The Buried Book (2016)

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**If you liked Dead Key, try...**

- Cuts Through Bone – Hunt, Alaric
- The Lace Reader – Barry, Brunonia
- Ode to a Banker – Davis, Lindsey
- High Country – Barr, Nevada
- No Shred of Evidence – Todd, Charles