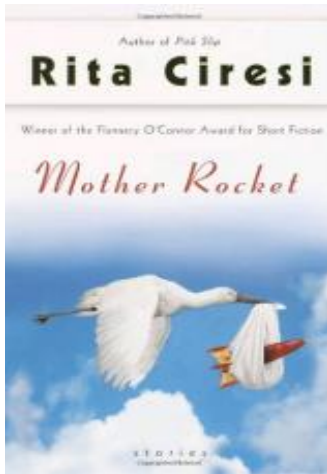


# Mother Rocket

by Rita Ciresi

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## About the Book

Rita Ciresi earned blockbuster acclaim and legions of new fans with her tender and hilarious novel, **Pink Slip**, a story of family and career, love and longing. Here she brings us seven award-winning stories, vibrant slices of life that are at once piercing, funny, and heartbreaking. In the title story, Ciresi weaves a tale of a New York City dancer whose spectacular sexuality and antic humor keep a life of tragedy at bay. In *"The Silent Partner,"* a young woman is caught up in a love affair that is both infantilizing and harrowing. In the linked stories, *"Resurrection"* and *"Second Coming,"* we meet a piano student hopelessly in love with his alluring teacher and at the mercy of his sexually knowledgeable older brother; decades later, the brothers come together again, their relationships with their women utterly changed. And in *"Pioneer Woman,"* we watch a man's dream of the ideal wife turn into the blissful nightmare of another woman's fervent love.

Captivating, beautifully crafted, and full of the poetry and chaos of life itself, the stories in **Mother Rocket** solidify Rita Ciresi's place as an exquisite storyteller and an unmatched chronicler of life as we live it today.

## Discussion Guide

1. In "Silent Partner" Tim says that some scars are meant to be felt, not seen. What do you think he means? In what ways can this analogy be used to describe Tim and Baby's relationship?
2. Baby revels in stories and nursery rhymes. Do you think the stories and rhymes she tells exemplify some of her delusions? What else does she project in her storytelling?
3. Baby and Tim rent an apartment in what used to be the Emergency Room of an old hospital and their neighbors, Sly and Esperanza, live in what was once the morgue. What is the significance of this?

4. The author makes frequent references to bugs and insects in this story. Why? What does Cirese mean for these references to say about Tim?
5. What purpose do you think Philip, Madame Novitski's cat, serves in "Resurrection?" What does his presence reveal about the characters?
6. Madame Novitski tells Karl, "the older you get, the easier it is to resurrect yourself." What does she mean by this? After reading "Second Coming," do you think this is true for Karl?
7. Karl says that the silence of Madame Novitski's home reminds him of church. Yet, he later remarks that he hates church and isn't sure of what he believes in. Why, then, would he make this comparison?
8. What lessons can Karl learn from Madame Novitski's "absent husband" and musical family of composers?
9. In "Second Coming," Karl believes that one needs to be "lucky" to find a wife and have a home. Do you think that this belief/attitude carries over from "Resurrection?"
10. Karl sees his baby as, "the miraculous second coming of a miniature me." What does he mean by this? What would he want his son or daughter to do differently than he did?
11. In "Resurrection," Karl describes the kind of girl that he sees himself with in the future, the kind of girl he would have to be content with. Does Claire fit this mold? Why or why not?
12. Karl states that he envies Lorenz's comfortable lifestyle. What are some examples of this? Do you think that Lorenz is at all jealous of Karl's lifestyle?
13. What is the significance of Jude's bell anklet in the title story, "Mother Rocket?" Why do you think she is still wearing it 15 years later?
14. Jude loathes her history, yet feels superior to others because of it. What are some examples of this? Why do you think she feels this way?
15. Jude thinks, "if you couldn't make things up, what was the point of living?" Do you think that there is some truth to that? Do you think that she takes this motto too far?
16. When Jude revisits the polar bear in the zoo at the end of the story, she finds that he is still pacing the cage like a madman, wide-eyed and out of control. How does her reaction to this differ from her first encounter with the polar bear? What does this suggest about her character?
17. In *Lifelines* Mary Ellen doesn't believe that anything lost can ever be found again in its original state. What do you think she means by this? What are some examples?
18. At the end of the story, Mary Ellen remarks that the "Lifeline" doesn't register the small, horrible things that have happened. What does she mean by this?

19. Mary Ellen's mother decides to move to Port Charlotte before ever having been there, based solely on the name of the town. What does this say about her? What kind of a life do you think she is creating for Mary Ellen?
20. Bob tells Mary Ellen that the Loveline starts right where the Lifeline begins. What does he mean by this? Do you think this is true for Mary Ellen?
21. What does the tarnished POW bracelet Janie finds in her old bedroom in "The End of the Season" symbolize for both her and Rich?
22. Janie had once taken love for "heedlessness, carelessness, maudlin dramatics." Still, she wants to feel some intensity toward Rich. Do you think that she'll be able to find that sort of happiness with him? Why or why not?
23. Rich is always careful not to show extreme emotion while Janie can't keep anything inside. What are some examples of this? What are some other conflicts in their personalities?
24. What does the wax birthday candle signify at the end of the story? What do you think this suggests about what happens to Janie and Rich after the story ends?
25. Zogg, from "Dutch Wife," originally sees the bruise on Didi's knee as "a map of the world," but later finds it dull. Why is this? What are some other examples of how Zogg's feelings change throughout the story?
26. Why do you think Zogg falls in love with Aunt Adeline? What is something they have in common? Do you think he would have fallen in love with her if he had met her face-to-face?
27. Dusseldorf says that pictures are "better than seeing the real thing because they leave out all the bad parts." Do you agree with this? Do you think that Zogg and Didi would agree with this?
28. What was Zogg hoping to achieve by traveling north? What did he learn from his experience?
29. Discuss the different possible meanings behind each of the titles of these stories. Why do you suppose the author chose these? Do you think they are appropriate?
30. What are some ongoing themes throughout these stories? Do the themes differ from story to story or is there continuity? Why? What are some examples?

## Author Bio

Rita Ciresi is the author of *Mother Rocket*, which won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, and the novels *Pink Slip* and *Blue Italian*. She lives with her husband and daughter in Florida.

## Critical Praise

"Elegant works of fiction."

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