

# The play lucky spot



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Beth Henley's play *The Lucky Spot* is about seven characters looking for love and redemption in the face of loss, rejection and ruin in a small, Southern town, 60 miles west of New Orleans. Set on Christmas Eve 1934, *The Lucky Spot* Dance Hall is lead character Reed Hooker's last chance to hit the big time after a lifetime of loss and failure. Hooker, a 40ish, hardcore card player with fading good looks, won the property for *The Lucky Spot* in a card game (as well as his pregnant, 15 year old girlfriend Cassidy Smith, who lives with him at *The Lucky Spot*) and, as the play opens, is preparing for the grand opening on Christmas Eve.

It is obvious from the beginning of the play that the prospect of success for a dance hall in a poor, Southern town during the Depression, over the Christmas holidays, when people spend time with family, is unlikely. But it's Hooker's pipe dream that keeps him alive when he says, " Hey, look, it's Christmas Eve. People are so lonely out there you can smell it rotting on 'em. Here at *The Lucky Spot* we'll be selling hot music, fine dancing, and sweet solace of kind hearted women." The stakes are raised even higher when Whitt Carmichael, a wealthy, well-dressed man in his thirties, comes to town and informs Hooker that the property he won from his relative has a lien on it and unless he pays him three hundred and fifty dollars for it by January 1st, the property belongs to him.

The prospect for success narrows even further when Lacey Rollins, 30ish with fading good looks, one of the Taxi Dancers Hooker hired to work at *The Lucky Spot*, emerges from the living quarters to inform the others that the rest of the dancers have fled on account of the news that Hooker's estranged wife, Sue Jack Tiller Hooker, has been released from prison early and is headed back there. Sue Jack's reputation precedes her having served time

for throwing a woman over a second floor balcony when she found her in bed with her husband. Sue Jack has a history of boozing and gambling away her time with Reed Hooker, especially after a tragic accident that killed their little boy. Before that, Lacey tells us that Sue Jack was the best Taxi Dancer in New Orleans because she was not only the most beautiful woman, but knew how to hold a man's interest by carrying on a witty conversation. Cassidy Smith confides in Turnip Moss (a 20 year old who's Hooker's right hand man) that she wants Hooker to get his divorce from Sue Jack as soon as possible so he can marry her, as he promised to when he put a rope ring around her finger, so her child won't be born illegitimate. She leads Sue Jack to believe that her husband wants her back by saying he's the one who called for her and that's why she's on her way to The Lucky Spot. Cassidy is a gullible, pretty, uneducated girl whose family died of diphtheria leaving her orphaned at the age of five. Although it is clear that Hooker is not in love with her and we later learn that Cassidy seduced him and that's why she's pregnant, she still wants Hooker to marry her.

Hooker sets off after his dancers in hopes of catching them before they board the train back to New Orleans. Once he's gone, Sue Jack makes her entrance. Sue Jack is only a woman in her thirties but from the looks of it, the bloom is off the rose. Lacey and Turnip barely recognize her and Cassidy says she thought she was the beautiful one. She admits herself that three years of prison and grief have left " a mile of hard road on her face". Once she finds out that it wasn't Hooker who sent for her and he tells her he wants her gone since he considers her his " bad luck charm", it isn't long before she's drinking gin and blasting up his place with a shotgun. Carmichael is also stirring up trouble with the townsfolk telling patrons to stay away from

The Lucky Spot and alerting Hooker's murderous thugs he owes money to of his presence. Once Hooker returns from the failed mission of rescuing his dancers, he is assaulted by them, the surprise of Sue Jack and the damage she does to his place, especially his treasured jukebox, with 12 new songs on it, that is now broken.

By the time The Lucky Spot opens Christmas Eve in Act Two, Hooker is down to one dancer and a record player with old, scratched records. There is a little hope when Sam, a farmer in his late sixties whose wife just died, buys tickets for a few dances. Over the course of the remainder of the play Sue Jack, feeling responsible for death of her son, tries to buy redemption from Hooker by gambling with Whitt Carmichael to win Hooker the price of The Lucky Spot. Although she loses the game, she wins in the end because Cassidy realizes she only wants a husband who'll love her for her, and Sue Jack and Hooker each realize, despite all their hardship and loss, they are still in love with one another and make up. Christmas Day is spent by all with nothing much to share but oranges and peppermints and their love and need of one another. For all its material losses and tragedies, The Lucky Spot ends on an up note with the message that hope, resiliency and the faith that your next lucky break is just around the corner will prevail above all, a theme that was essential to the American Dream at the end of the Great Depression.

Beth Henley said in an interview about her inspiration for The Lucky Spot, " Ever since I heard Ruth Etting singing 'Ten Cents a Dance' I've been fascinated by the idea of Taxi Dancers. There seems to be something heartbreaking and wondrous about a

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human being paying another human being for the short pleasure and romance of a dance." 1

This Pulitzer Prize winning dramatist is a gem at creating a fascinating, flawed characters

who find love and belonging in their search for love and redemption in the rural south.

#### Works Cited

1. Beth Henley, " Introduction," in *Collected Plays, Volume 1: 1980-1989* (Lyme, N. H.: Smith and Kraus, 2000), xv-xvi.