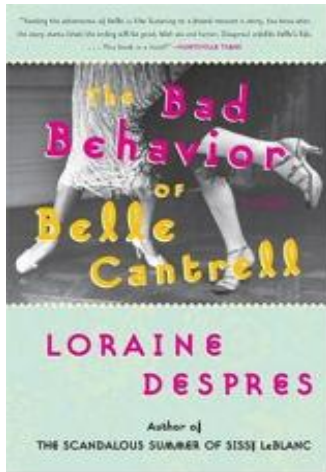


# The Bad Behavior of Belle Cantrell

by Loraine Despres



## About the Book

Belle Cantrell felt guilty about killing her husband and she hated that. Feeling guilty, that is. A lady shouldn't do something she's going to feel guilty about later was a rule Belle kept firmly in mind.

Welcome to the world of beautiful, irrepressible Belle Cantrell, years before she becomes grandmother to Sissy LeBlanc of Loraine Despres' bestselling **The Scandalous Summer of Sissy LeBlanc**. It is 1920, prohibition is in full swing, women are clamoring for the vote -- and in the little town of Gentry, Louisiana, narrow-minded intolerance is on the rise. Sent to jail for swimming in an indecent bathing costume with a group of suffragists, Belle Cantrell knows her behavior broke the rules. But sometimes -- most of the time -- she has to twist the rules a little, because they all say the same thing: "Don't."

A sexy, sassy story of murder, adultery, romance, bigotry, and regular church attendance, with laugh-out-loud humor and a cast of zany, endearing characters you won't forget, **The Bad Behavior of Belle Cantrell** is a big comic love story . . . and much more.

## Discussion Guide

1. The book opens with the words: "Belle Cantrell felt guilty about killing her husband and she hated that, feeling guilty, that is." You might say the theme of the book is Belle's search for her moral center. Do you view her as moral? Rate her morality on a scale of one to ten. What do you think is most important, chastity or putting yourself on the line for a friend?

2. I spent many, many hours in historical research. What, if anything, was the most interesting thing you learned about life in 1920? Did you learn anything you didn't know about the day women got the vote, the Ku Klux Klan, old cars, how our morals have changed?

3. Did you enjoy reading the historical aspects of the book or would you have preferred to skip that and concentrate on the love story or Belle's bad behavior.

4. In 1920 a wave of narrow-minded intolerance was sweeping the world. Do you feel that time has resonance for our time? How?

5. Which scenes did you find the funniest? Which moved you? Was there a section you couldn't put down? If so where? Did you put down the book and have trouble picking it up? If so where?

6. *The Bad Behavior of Belle Cantrell* celebrates the tie between women of different generations. Discuss the relationship between Belle and Miss Effie. How did it change? What was Belle's relationship with her own mother? How did it change? Do you think their relationship affected Belle's relationship with her own daughter?

7. How did you feel about Belle buying an illegal birth control device and giving it to her unmarried daughter?

8. How does her relationship with Bourrée LeBlanc change during the course of the novel? How does her relationship with Rafe Berlin change?

9. Do you think Belle was foolish or wise to risk so much for love?

10. When the book opens Belle tries to follow the rules of the Primer of Propriety, with her own particular caveats, of course. Plenty of women broke these rules, but they were the standards women worthy of admiration were supposed to follow. They were the "shoulds" of 1920. What are some of the "shoulds" society, fashion magazines, parenting books, health journals, schools, churches, or bosses lay down for women today? Are they more or less onerous?

11. Belle makes up her own rules for her "Girl's Guide to Men and Other Perils of Modern Life." If you had to pick one, which rule did you find the funniest? Appropriate for our time? Would you like to make up your own rule? Would you like to share it?

12. What do you think happened after the book ends? Does Belle stay in Chicago? Does she marry Rafe or return to Gentry and run the farm?

## Author Bio

Raised in Louisiana, Loraine Despres brings her small-town magnolia-sweet charm, cynical humor, and experience growing up as a daughter of the South to this irresistible debut novel. A popular and prolific screenwriter, international writing consultant, and teacher, Despres now lives in Beverly Hills with her husband, Carleton Eastlake, who 15 years ago succumbed to the charms of this southern belle.

## Critical Praise

"In the magnificent Belle, Loraine Despres has once again created a character to delight, entertain, and inspire us all, even those of us a few generations further along. Despres has a talent for cooking up plenty of sensual southern sultriness --- and a sharp eye for memorable period detail --- but what captivated me most was her ominous portrayal of just how easily petty greed and local resentments can fester into home-grown evil. Belle's story, in the end, is more than a saucy romp; it's a cautionary tale for our own uneasy times."

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### **The Bad Behavior of Belle Cantrell**

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**Publication Date:** June 13, 2006

**Paperback:** 352 pages

**Publisher:** Harper Perennial

**ISBN-10:** 0060515260

**ISBN-13:** 9780060515263