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## ***WELL-BEHAVED WOMEN***

### **A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES**

**BY EMILY PAULL**

#### **SUMMARY**

*A woman grapples with survivor's guilt after a body is found in her garden bed; an ageing beauty queen contemplates her past; a world champion free-diver disappears during routine training...*

In moments disquieting or quietly inspiring, this collection considers the complexity of the connections we make—with our family, friends and neighbours, and with those met briefly or never at all.

In her timely debut, Emily Paull voices a chorus of characters that reveal and re-evaluate the expectations of women in Australia today—after all, well-behaved women rarely make history.



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Emily Paull is a former-bookseller and future librarian from Perth who writes short stories and historical fiction. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies as well as *Westerly* journal. When she's not writing, she can often be found with her nose in a book.



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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### General

The collection is called *Well-behaved Women*—do you think the women in this collection could be described as ‘well-behaved’? Do you think they would want to be so-called? Several of the stories, such as ‘Pretending’ and ‘A Moveable Farce’ are told from the points of view of male characters. How do you think these perspectives relate to the central theme overall?

What are some of the other themes of this collection that stand out to you?

Do you think the characters in these stories are likeable? Does that matter to you as a reader?

### The Sea Also Waits

The narrator of this story has an understanding that his mother’s relationship with the ocean meant it was always going to claim her at some point. What do you think happened to Katerina? Did she drown or did something more magical happen, perhaps?

What kind of statement does this story make about the relationship between mothers and their children? Did Damian see his mother as a person in her own right before she disappeared, or did he only see her as his mother?

### Miss Lovegrove

Do you think Nicole is an especially vulnerable character? Why/why not?

Stories about people performing in plays often highlight the ways in which backstage behaviour is distanced from the rules of the real world (such as in *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen, where the young ladies and gentlemen get up to all sorts of mischief and begin affairs). Do you think this atmosphere has led to the incident that occurs in this story? Who do you think is the real attacker in this story, Miss Lovegrove, or Phillip? Why?

Why do you think Miss Lovegrove is the way she is?

### Crying in Public

What does this story say about the way our relationships with our grandparents change once we reach adulthood? Why do you think Sara is hesitant to tell her grandmother about the end of her relationship in the first place?

Is sugar really good for heartbreak?

### A Moveable Farce

What do you think of when you think about Paris? Have you been to Paris? Is this image accurate?

Do you think Michael’s romanticising of the city and the people around him have contributed to his writer’s block?

### Sister Madly Deeply

Candace has a very complicated relationship with Josephine but she’s very protective of her. The force of her love sometimes manifests as an almost violent feeling. Do you think this is common to most relationships between sisters?

Josephine’s break up with her boyfriend seems to mirror Candace’s unwillingness to let a new person into her life romantically. There is hope for Josephine and Anthony at the end of the story—do you think this means that Candace and Nurse Jason might have a happy ending too?

### Dora

What is the narrator of this story’s relationship with food?

Do you think Lola has learned anything from Dora that she might take into her next relationship? Or will she continue to make the same mistakes?

Was Alex a good boyfriend to Lola? Why/why not? Why did their relationship end?

### A Thousand Words

Jack thinks he is a nice guy, and that ‘nice guys finish last’. Is this true? Is he being treated unfairly by the women around him? Is Cam sometimes complicit in the casual misogyny of his friend?

Do you think Jack will change the way he treats women after Kira called him out on his behaviour?

Do you think Amy was jealous of Kira? Why/why not?

### Down South

How has Caitlin’s relationship with Margaret River changed over the events recounted in this story? Do you think she will ever return there in the future?

Why was Caitlin hoping to see Aaron when they hadn’t spoken in such a long time?

The two characters have very different reactions to Caitlin’s pregnancy—are these the reactions you would have expected them to have? What other factors in their lives do you think influence this?

Do you think Caitlin’s ambivalence about motherhood is related to the death of her own mother?

### From Under the Ground

Why do you think the media is so fascinated by murdered women?

Maggie Turner feels connected to the body in the backyard because of a girl from her high school who was abducted. Do you think that she was as connected to the Louisa Jones case as she thinks she was?

### Nana’s House

The narrator likes to ride past her grandparent’s old house to reassure herself that it’s still there, even though her grandparents have both passed away. Why do you think it upsets her so much to see it demolished?

Why do you think she thinks of it as Nana’s house even though both grandparents lived there?

How do you feel about the way she treats her friend Andy? Why do you think she uses him in this way? Will her behaviour change after the events of the story?

### Picnic at Green’s Pool

Our main character’s parents send their daughters far away because they don’t want to have to acknowledge that the two



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girls are in a relationship. Tegan's parents want to pretend she doesn't exist, while the narrator's parents say they need time to come to terms with it. How does this relate to what happens at the beach?

What links can you see between this story and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*?

This is the second story in which a character disappears into the ocean. What is the significance of that to you?

### Font de Gracia

The concept of a young impressionable woman having an affair with an older teacher has become a bit of a cliché—do you think Grace is aware of this? Do you think her mother is? Why does Joana dislike Grace when she arrives in Barcelona? Laura and Sofia have very different approaches to dealing with their daughters. Which one do you think is more effective?

### The Things We Rescued

What would you rescue if you were fleeing a bushfire, and why?

What is this story trying to say about the lives of homeless women?

Why do you think Sadie is reluctant to talk to or make contact with Rob, considering the two of them have never met before?

### Pretending

Is Thomas's relationship with his step-daughter inappropriate?

What do you think will happen next in Thomas and Jasmine's marriage?

What role does music play in this story?

### The Settlement

Why does Jenny really begin to put on weight while she is married to Peter?

Is it fair that Peter now owns the holiday house they used to share?

Why do you think he has moved to Margaret River when he knows that she lives there?

Is Peter a bad person?

### Versions of Herself

Why do you think Shirley has really never married?

Was Cecil Partridge worthy of Shirley's devotion?

Does the presence of his grandson in Shirley's life indicate that Shirley and Cecil were never meant to be?

Why does meeting Lucas prompt Shirley to begin painting?

What might this symbolise?

### The Woman at the Writers Festival

Everyone experiences jealousy at some point in their careers.

Do you relate to Peggy's feelings, or do you find her comical?

Do you think Jessie Oliver is aware of what Peggy thinks of her? Do you think she knows that she is impersonating her dentist? At what point do the tables turn?

Has Peggy always been the way she is, or has something made her behave the way she does?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS BOOK, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE...

*A Constant Hum* by Alice Bishop

*Little White Slips* by Karen Hitchcock

*This Taste for Silence* by Amanda O'Callaghan

*You Know You Want This* by Kristen Roupenian

## COMMENTARY

'In *Well-behaved Women* Emily Paull expertly conveys the small but cumulative acts of emotional repression women endure in order to keep the peace. With great skill and poetry, Paull draws our attention to the psychological toll that such daily concessions take. These fabulous stories will make you smile and cry but most of all, will make you angry—on behalf of all these quietly suffering and "well-behaved" women we all know so well.'

—Melanie Cheng, Victorian Premier's Literary Award Winner