



The Scandalous Summer of Sissy LeBlanc

By Loraine Despres
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*Welcome to Gentry, a twisted southern town where the good girls follow the rules: RULE NUMBER TWENTY SEVEN
A girl doesn't have to give in to temptation,
but she might not get another chance. RULE NUMBER SEVENTY NINE
The best way to get a boy to follow you
is to walk out on him. RULE NUMBER ONE HUNDRED
An uppity woman, with enough research,
will find a way.*

Introduction More than a rip-roaring good read about a feisty Southern girl tearing up her hometown, *The Scandalous Summer of Sissy LeBlanc* is a poignant story about innocence lost and hope regained, about the dangers of taking a risk -- and playing it safe, about wresting control of your life before someone does it for you. Shifting back and forth in time, Loraine Despres limns an utterly captivating portrait of Sissy LeBlanc's tumultuous coming of age and her struggle to break free from the loveless,

stifling marriage it led her to. Sissy's downward spiral began in the fall of 1941. Her brother's death was still a fresh, painful reality. As her mother's illness worsened, Sissy's father disappeared emotionally from his family. Her boyfriend Parker Davidson's attention wandered to girls Sissy imagined were more "mature" than her. Desperate for affection and anxious to explore her nascent sexuality, she delves into a dangerous, obsessive affair with Bourrée LeBlanc that ends in rape and pregnancy. With one of Aunt Sarah's dirty, back-alley abortions being Sissy's only alternative, she bucks up and relies on her wits to create the best life she can. Fifteen years later, Sissy is married to Peewee LeBlanc -- Bourrée's son -- and the mother of his three children. She's bored, dissatisfied and scared that her life might never change. And when Parker blows back into town, she's petrified that her life will never be the same. As the illicit couple burn up Gentry's phone lines with devoted whisperings, readers learn that in this eccentric Louisiana town, nothing -- including family lineage -- is what it seems. **Discussion Questions**

1. Which summer do you think *The Scandalous Summer of Sissy LeBlanc* refers to -- the summer she became pregnant, or the summer that Parker returned to Gentry?
2. How do you account for Sissy's attraction to Bourrée? Did their affair shock you?
3. Compare and contrast Sissy's relationship with her mother versus her relationship with her grandmother, Belle. Marilee, Sissy's daughter, has a minor role in the novel as an adult. Through her interactions with Sissy, what -- if anything -- did you construe about their relationship?
4. Is Sissy's *Southern Belle's Handbook* merely a primer on manipulation, or is it a defensible and legitimate guide for relationships between men and women? Do you believe that game-playing is a part of most relationships?
5. How does *The Scandalous Summer of Sissy LeBlanc* celebrate the ties that bind women across generations? Discuss the legacy Belle and her daughter left Sissy, and how each woman influenced the outcome of her life.
6. Did you feel sympathy for Peewee? Why or why not? Is it true that Sissy drove Peewee to murder?
7. Belle Cantrell is portrayed as being a liberated woman for her time. Both Sissy and Clara also stood out in Gentry as particularly strong-willed. Was it difficult to reconcile these qualities with their fixation on men and romance? Why or why not?
8. If you had to pick a rule from *The Southern Belle's Handbook* that you thought was most useful, which one would it be? Why?
9. What makes a southern belle a southern belle?

About the Author: 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.