



## Bedelia

*Vera Caspary , A.B. Emrys (Afterword)*

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**Bedelia** Vera Caspary , A.B. Emrys (Afterword)

Long before *Desperate Housewives*, there was Bedelia: pretty, ultra femme, and “adoring as a kitten.” A perfect housekeeper and lover, she wants nothing more than to please her insecure new husband, who can’t believe his luck. But *is* Bedelia too good to be true? A mysterious new neighbor turns out to be a detective on the trail of a “kitten with claws of steel”—a picture-perfect wife with a string of dead husbands in her wake.

Caspary builds this tale to a peak of psychological suspense as her characters are trapped together by a blizzard. The true Bedelia, the woman who chose murder over a life on the street, reveals how she turns male fantasies of superiority into a deadly con.

**Femmes Fatales** restores to print the best of women’s writing in the classic pulp genres of the mid-20th century. From mystery to hard-boiled noir to taboo lesbian romance, these rediscovered queens of pulp offer subversive perspectives on a turbulent era. Enjoy the series: *Bedelia; The Blackbird; Bunny Lake Is Missing; By Cecile; The G-String Murders; The Girls in 3-B; In a Lonely Place; Laura; Mother Finds a Body; Now, Voyager; Skyscraper; Stranger on Lesbos; Women's Barracks.*

### Bedelia Details

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Author : Vera Caspary , A.B. Emrys (Afterword)

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## From Reader Review Bedelia for online ebook

### Tweety says

What a book.

Bedelia is the perfect wife, who makes the perfect home life and can do no wrong in her husband's eyes. Everyone adores her. So why is it that things don't add up? She tells her past in little stories scattered throughout the years, each of them outstanding tales of the poor Bedelia who has lead a sorry life. Until she met her present husband who believes the sun doesn't shine without her. And now she claims she leads a lovely life and couldn't love him more or be happier. Her husband is completely happy, even though he has been strangely ill lately. Just like all Bedelia's mysterious husbands before him....

So, who is Bedelia? Is she the sweet housewife she seems? Is she just an unfortunate member of a tragedy or is she the tragedy? Did she kill her husbands, and will she do it again?

This book really stuck with me, I'm still puzzling everything out in my head, trying to find out who Bedelia truly is and why tragedy followed in her wake. And the more I think about the ending, the better I like it. Any book with such a perfect ending deserves five stars. Recommended 100%!

**PG** Some murders, a few swears nothing else.

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### John says

Architect Charlie Horst went on vacation to get over his grief after the death of his beloved mother, and while away fell for the beautiful widow Bedelia, whom he married and brought home to Connecticut with him. He's still besotted with her, as are some of the locals. Even journalist Ellen, who's loved Charlie since childhood, admits that Bedelia's a paragon. One person who seems especially interested in her is artist Ben Chaney, who's rented the neighboring house for a few months in order to do some painting of winter scenes.

We discover long before Charlie does that his supposedly ideal wife is capable of deception and manipulation. And we soon learn that Ben isn't an artist at all but an insurance detective on the trail of a Black Widow character who has engineered the "accidental" demise of at least four previous husbands . . . *after* they've taken out massive insurance policies, of course. Charlie's in line to be her next victim.

The book's not a mystery novel but a suspenser (the section where Charlie and Bedelia are snowed-in alone particularly so), and also a character study of especial interest because, however devious and murderous Bedelia is, at the same time Caspary manages to make us feel a sneaking admiration for her -- or at least some sympathy. Bedelia has, in a sense, merely devised a means for a woman to get ahead in a male-dominated world where wives are possessions and chattels. Milksop mommy's boy Charlie has preferred what he assumes to be a malleable doll over the far more independent, intelligent Ellen; it's difficult not to think meanly that he kinda deserves whatever ill fate might befall him.

A few years ago I watched the movie adaptation -- *Bedelia* (1946), with Margaret Lockwood in the title role -- so that I could write about it for my *Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Film Noir*; it's not a noir itself but is of definite associational interest, being a sister to the noir classic *Laura* (1944). Recently I realized I'd

managed not to read either of the two Caspary novels upon which the movies are based, and decided it was time to redress that situation. I'm very glad I did; it won't be long, I think, before I read *Laura* and *Evvie*, both of which came in the same omnibus edition as my copy of *Bedelia*.

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### **Dorcas says**

This was such a fun book! It reads like an old b&w suspense film (actually this was made into a movie in 1946), and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Basically, we have a Black Dahlia type woman who has already buried four or five husbands, now contentedly married to her latest and acting like the all-doting, butter-wouldnt-melt-in-my-mouth, if-you-ever-leave-me-I'll-die, Suzie Homemaker.

Which really makes the story all the more chilling. Her husband can only see her sweet dependence and childish attractiveness even after being confronted with the truth. And then a heavy snowstorm blocks all roads, downing power lines and bringing both suspicions and opportunities to their inexorable climax...

So I was vacillating between a four and a five for this, but I think I'll give it a five because for its genre it really was perfect.

CONTENT:G

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### **``Laurie Henderson says**

Classic pulp fiction.

Don't expect to get any sleep till you're finished reading this one - impossible to put down thriller.

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### **Carla Remy says**

I loved this. I couldn't stop reading it. As far as I can tell, this state of sublime reading happens to me at most twice a year. There were many moments in this which reminded me of my beloved *My Cousin Rachel* by Daphne Du Maurier. And *Bedelia* is from several years before. Just saying. The more you know about the past, the more you see that nothing exists in a vacuum, that everything has precedents.

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### **Carol Masciola says**

Charles, a dry, upstanding New England architect, cannot believe his good fortune in having married the stylish, sumptuous, dimpled *Bedelia*, a young widow he meets by chance on a trip to Colorado. The two settle into Charles's old family home in Connecticut, and *Bedelia* succeeds in charming the town and impressing everyone with her style and domestic flourishes. Charles is googly-eyed with adoration of his new wife, who to him is like a warm little animal, or a piece of ripe fruit, or a piece of decorative china.

(book written in 1942) She can do no wrong in his eyes. He can't think straight when he's in the same room with her. However, after a few months of marriage, Charles becomes more aware that aspects of Bedelia's background don't add up. Was she, or was she not, married to a well-known painter who died of appendicitis? Was her black pearl ring fake, as she claimed, or was it actually REAL!? Is that powder she gives him for his indigestion really what she says it is? Small inconsistencies turn into bigger ones as the two become snowed in during a long Connecticut blizzard. A terrific example of 1940s noir fiction, and a real page-turner. By the author of *Laura* (upon which the famous film with Gene Tierney was based)

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### **Jim Dooley says**

As the story opens, we are introduced to a young couple who are so obviously head-over-heels in love, only to meet a second man who is assiduously feigning his disinterest in them. Of course, since we are reading a Vera Caspary novel, this can only mean that one and all are headed for trouble, and somebody will turn up dead.

BEDELIA is "the other famous Caspary novel" after LAURA. Like that other work, it is filled with twists and turns that cause the reader to wonder who is really guilty...and if the guilty party had any other choice in a world of limited options. And not unlike LAURA, the reader is put in the position of empathizing with the killer and understanding the motives. Sympathy is shed, though, when we realize that the killings may not have ended.

This is a very difficult book to review without giving away essential plot details. Like LAURA, many readers may already know those details going in. I cannot say whether that detracts from the enjoyment because I did not know them, and I had a great deal of fun as the story unfolded. This one would have been right at home as the screenplay for a Hollywood Pre-Code movie from the early 1930's. (There was a version made in Great Britain in 1946. I haven't seen it, but I understand that the updating to a contemporary setting hurt the story a bit.)

The pace is very brisk and the characters are particularly memorable. The plot may be a bit overheated, yet there is a plot point allusion to romantic thrillers that justifies this approach. This is also one of the few times that I exactly guessed the ending. That is not to say that it is inappropriate or overly obvious...but, I was surprised!

As much as I enjoyed this one, Caspary's EVVIE remains my favorite. Still, I haven't found one of her novels that I haven't liked. She has a unique style that is a real pleasure to read.

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### **Gabrielle Friesen says**

I bought this book purely on the strength of the cover and the tagline: "She Seduces Men...But Does She Kill Them?" Which is amazing to think that that marketing is still working seventy years later. While I thought the tagline was funny, like an elitist I thought "This book is probably garbage, I'm so above pulp fiction, but maybe it will be interesting to read in a historical sense." What a fool I was. As soon as I started reading this book, I could not stop. I haven't finished a book this quickly in years. I was so engrossed in the "mystery about the wickedest woman who ever loved." The writing was so much fun to read, and even as the clues fell into place and the reveal became increasingly obvious, I still kept bouncing back and forth between thinking Bedelia definitely was a killer, or that Bedelia was just a victim of circumstance, just on the strength of the character writing.

The ending is a bit of a let down, but I think in this case having some historical background might be helpful - I'd be interested to know if the ending was just a convention of the time that sort of had to happen, possibly due to editorial pressure.

On top of the core story of Bedelia being just an all-around fun read, the Feminist Press' reprinting of the story also comes with a historical intro that gives a brief and informative overview of pulp, as well as the mission statement of the "Femmes Fatales: Women Write Pulp" line of reprintings. At the end of the book they also feature an Afterword talking about the author, Vera Caspary, and detailing her life and other publications, which was super interesting. More than anything, the author history at the end convinced me to look further into the "Femmes Fatales" series, and I'm looking forward to reading the other books that The Feminist Press has done reprintings of.

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### **Kat Rocha says**

definitely belongs on any shelf with Double Indemnity or Nightmare Alley. It's a shame the film doesn't exist anymore.

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### **Brianna Kovan says**

Vera Caspary's Bedelia provides the best kind of pulp: murder/femme fatale/deception. The novel is a page turner, but Caspary narrates the story without coming across as trite. This is in part because the dramatized story points at real problems - particularly for women in the mid-1900s.

On its surface, the story follows the newly-married couple of Charlie and Bedelia Horst. Bedelia is the perfect wife: keeping up with the Joneses (and outshining them, quite frankly). She hosts. She smiles. She prepares meal upon meal, always radiating. The other women are jealous - but even they can't hate Bedelia. She's too ... well, perfect. But when anything is perfect, something is surely awry.

And then her murders start surfacing.

Without giving too much away, Bedelia uses the air of domestic femininity to mask her behind-the-scenes scheming. Caspary uses the character's criminal past as a plot device to dig at real issues. How do issues of social mobility and independence manifest themselves for women in this period? There's something very honest and real about Bedelia's struggles. But Caspary never truly lets us into Bedelia's head - we don't know her inner world. Instead, we get swept along for the ride. Will she? Won't she? Bedelia's a toxic mixture of Stepford Wives meet Desperate Housewives, all combined with a campy plot line to add the cherry on top.

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### **Laura says**

Having read Laura I was interested in Vera Caspary's other books. When I saw that Bedelia was about a woman who killed her husbands (aka a Black Widow) I was immediately intrigued because that kind of mystery is right up my alley.

I really enjoyed reading this book, and I really like Caspary's style. She writes very intense scenes that aren't necessarily right in your face frightening. They're a subtler intensity and there's a sense of the sinister to even

a seemingly mundane conversation.

What I liked about Bedelia was that Bedelia herself is a femme fatale. She's a fascinating character and she uses her "feminine wiles" to trick men into thinking she's harmless, sweet, and loving. And then she poisons them. She's a ruthless character without being overtly cruel. She's not exactly sympathetic, but you do want to find out what happens to her (and her latest victim).

The story moves fairly quickly, and you get sucked in, and want to find out what's going to happen to Bedelia and Charlie (her husband), and whether or not Bedelia is going to get away with what she's planning. I really enjoyed the way Caspary built up the tension between Bedelia and Charlie, and I liked the way she brought it to a conclusion. It wasn't a super satisfying ending, but I still enjoyed the book immensely.

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### **Ben Winch says**

At first pretty great; after 150 pages slightly trying. Caspary is a natural writer but not much really happens: a lot of intense repressed-husband and maybe-psychotic-wife conversations and a climactic twist that I found neither thrilling nor convincing. Psychologically nuanced though it is, and possessed of some nice storm-whipped-country-house-in-harsh-northern-winter atmosphere, it's a little turgid as a thriller, and not quite well-wrought enough to stand up without the genre scaffold. I liked it – the characters are fresh and alive and Bedelia herself is chilling – but it goes on too long and harps on the same things and doesn't quite sparkle enough to get me to love it. A piece of history that nearly, but only nearly, speaks direct to today.

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### **Mel says**

I ordered this book shortly after finishing *Laura* because I loved that so much and I have to say I may have liked this even better. It was very short, but such a lovely paranoid claustrophobic book. The act of a perfect submissive, bouncy, loving housewife who secretly was a homicidal manic, but never let her mask slip. Bedelia was exactly the type of woman character I'd normally hate but in Caspary's hands she was great. The book was set at Christmas during a snowstorm so this was the perfect time to be reading it. While everything was made a little too obvious from the cover of the book it was enjoyable, though I think it would have been more so if I'd known nothing about it when I picked it up. There was a nice lot of gender issues in the book. There are independent women who work (the book was written in the 40s but set in 1913) who discuss how men don't respect women's independence and just want someone submissive. In fact the murderess is set up as the perfect wife, which is how she gets away with her crimes. I love the idea that the "weaker" woman is the one you should be afraid of. The independent intellectual woman who works at the paper is dismissed as an old maid, despite being the same age as Bedelia when she marries (in her 30s). She is criticised for being old fashioned and frumpy even though in the 19th century she would have been considered a pre-raphelite beauty. I thought it was interesting the way the "modern" working woman was given the "old fashioned" aesthetic. The ending of the book did make me feel sad. I really wanted some escape. It was really very good though and I definitely want to find more books by this author.

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### **Ceejay says**

One of the most famous film noir movies of the 1940's was *Laura*, based on the novel by Vera Caspary. It made her famous. *Bedelia* was written a few years later, and also filmed. *Bedelia* is an amazing

psychological thriller. The tag line for this book was: She Seduces Men...But Does She Kill Them? And there you have your plot. I was surprised by the actions of one of the main characters. I was surprised by a major plot twist. And I was surprised by the ending. What more can you ask from a novel? If psychological suspense is what you crave, then read this book and see how it is done.

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### **Bethany says**

I love the Femme Fatale series, but was disappointed with Bedelia--it's not "bad"--just not as good as I'd hoped. Then again, once you've read "Laura" can any of the author's other books ever measure up? Only three stars, but still a good read.

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