



# Everything You Know

*Zoë Heller*

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## Everything You Know Zoë Heller

Willy Muller is an embittered writer of celebrity bios and an equal-opportunity misanthropist. At the age of fifty, he has survived imprisonment for murdering his wife, years of venomous hate mail from the British public and, most recently, the suicide of his daughter Sadie. Willy needs a rest, but he's not going to get it. While recuperating from a heart attack in a Mexican resort with his magnificently silly girlfriend Penny and his vodka-drenched friend Harry, Willy finds himself drawn into a troubling confrontation with his past. He should be working on the screen adaptation of his infamous hack memoir, **To Have and to Hold**, but instead he becomes engrossed in Sadie's tragic diaries. Reluctantly, he considers his chaotic family history and the notion that "only when you die do you run out of chances to be good."

Set in Mexico, Los Angeles and London, **Everything You Know** is a story of love and loathing, sex and death, and filial relations gone horribly awry. Acidly funny and deeply affecting, it marks the debut of a brilliant and immensely stylish young writer.

## Everything You Know Details

Date : Published September 26th 2006 by Vintage Canada (first published January 1st 1999)

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Author : Zoë Heller

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# From Reader Review Everything You Know for online ebook

## Dorothy says

I always find Zoe Heller's books about redemption of sometimes disgusting characters intriguing. The characters have got just a crack of goodness in them somewhere, and that's enough. The books usually end with the character taking just one step toward the better part of themselves, and it's up to you to imagine the rest. She really knows how to describe the sometimes ugly nitty-gritty of humanness though. Not all the characters "see the light" either.

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## Judith says

I really enjoyed Heller's other books, including "Notes on a Scandal" and "The Believers", so I assumed I would also enjoy this one. And I am very impressed that a young beautiful woman like the author can write so realistically a story narrated by a prickly old guy who is recovering from a heart attack and reminiscing on his past mistakes as a drinker, womanizer, and absentee father. However, I am tired of the genre of the old guy seeking redemption for his atrociously bad conduct, while still actively seeking sexual activity from every young thing in his path. It should have died with John Updike's rabbit series.

There were still interesting bits in the book and I really liked this passage wherein he is pondering morality. "It's like when you see the news reports about men who go rushing into burning buildings to save their kids or whatever. And think, okay, so that man's a hero---but what is the man who didn't rush in? Is he a coward? Because it seems like there should be more options on the moral menu. If doing the thing is so bloody extraordinary, then not doing it should just be considered regular."

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## Laura says

Heller's freshman effort, Everything You Know, shows what would happen if she'd never learned to dial back some of her baser instincts: unbelievable pairings, absurd situations and characters too wrapped up in their own drama. The choice of protagonist alone takes getting used to: Willy, a curmudgeonly writer, follows up a health crisis by reading through his daughter's journals, the only connection left months after her suicide. Willy and the type-ridden supporting cast has a lot of implausible and deeply personal emotional ground to travel. When I say "deeply personal" I use it in the "potentially boring," sense, and good chunks the novel are boring. The degree of implausibility lies behind these events leads me, reluctantly, to label this as a first novel of little value to readers now that Heller has found her voice. It's out of print in the US, but the link on the title will take you to the Powell's website, where you can pick up a UK copy. Often, as with Richard Yates (Revolutionary Road), the first novel will be a pinnacle; luckily for us, Ms. Heller seems to find more skill and voice with each story she tells.

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## Emma Williams says

I absolutely loved this book. My only concern was at one point the echoes of the following excerpt from a

letter by Evelyn Waugh were so close that it did make me wonder ... however knowing Heller's excellence as a writer I believe that this is either a coincidence or an unwitting echo from something she read a long time ago and had forgotten.

"In the hope of keeping him [= Winston Churchill's son] quiet for a few hours Freddy and I have bet Randolph £20 that he cannot read the whole Bible in a fortnight. It would have been worth it at the price. Unhappily it has not had the result we hoped. He has never read any of it before and is hideously excited; keeps reading quotations aloud: 'I say I bet you didn't know this came in the Bible ... or merely slapping his side and chortling 'God, isn't God a shit!'" Evelyn Waugh, letter to Nancy Mitford.

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### **Johanna says**

Heller is a beautiful and very talented writer and story teller. And her ability to write such a complex main character, who's male, is exceptional. But despite that I struggled to completely enjoy the book as it's just so depressingly sad and the characters are not hugely likeable (that normally doesn't bother me) but the combination of the hopelessness and darkly sad characters makes it a book that I struggled to really enjoy. In saying that I read it in 24hrs. This however does not put me off reading the one other of her books I haven't read - The Believers - as she's an excellent writer!

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### **Camille says**

I love the way Zoë Heller writes her characters. Her first person narratives really dig into the character's psyche and showcases all the warts, immoral thoughts and true dichotomy that lives within all us.

This novel follows a couple weeks in the life of Willy Muller. A British man acquitted of killing his wife years ago, living in LA who just received noticed that his daughter committed suicide. We watch Willy recover from a heart attack, cheat on his girlfriend, attempt to reconcile with his family, and have general contempt for the world. I know this might sound as a downer, but don't be mislead it was a good read.

It's interesting to know this was the author's debut novel and of course she followed up with one of my favorites, Notes on a Scandal.

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### **Joan says**

I enjoyed this book - although the narrative voice of the self centred central character wasn't likeable I thought it worked well the juxtaposition of his trivial and pointless existence with the intimate diary written by his daughter who had recently committed suicide. I wanted to hear more about her life, I felt like reaching out to help her.

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### **B the BookAddict says**

The first Zoe Heller novel I read, *The Believers*, left me manically scouring the library for more of her work. I found *Everything You Know*; a novel with characters easily as cringe-worthy as the Litvinoffs who feature in *The Believers*. It is the story of Willy Muller whose life has a delightful awfulness about it. Written in the first person narrative, Heller treats the reader to Willy's sarcastic, witty outlook, his superbly droll thoughts and wry observations. He has a dim-witted girlfriend, one daughter just wants to fleece him, the other has recently posted him her diaries and then committed suicide. He's been commissioned to write the screenplay for his book based on a most unfortunate incident in his life and to top it off, he's just had a heart attack. Willy deals with all these trials in a manner which is comically unrelenting: he has some truly memorable experiences in Mexico to where he escapes to write the aforementioned screenplay and some equally sad and pathetic moments in London when he visits to attend the funeral of his German-born English-resenting mother.

Some of Willy's observations of his fellow characters were uproarious and had me laughing out loud:

*“The first person to greet us was Sissy Yerxa, looking like a lipsticked ferret in a very short skirt and an electric pink halter-neck.”*

*“He had a long arrow mouth and almost no lips – his mouth was just an unannounced slit in the final third of his face, like a muppet's.”*

Belatedly, Willy is offered the thought: *“Only when you die do you run out of chances to be good. Until then, there is the possibility of turning yourself around”*. And this is indeed a thought that Heller poses for the reader to consider. Even if your life situation is not as precarious as is Willy's, just when do your chances to redeem yourself run out? Ostensibly, I love Heller's warts and all portrayal of her character and that she provides no pretty window dressings in her novel. *Everything You Know* is indeed a tragi-comedy; a story which charmed me and made me wince in equal measures. A definite 4★.

Note: my copy was Large Print.

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## **Ian Mapp says**

Zoe Heller is one of my favourite authors. She really needs to pull her finger out. On completion of this, her first book, I have now read everything that she has produced.

Her last book, *the believers*, was six years ago.

This book is short but perfectly formed. The construct works well. Willy Muller is in hospital, looking back on the women in his life.

This includes two current lovers, an ex-wife - whom he accidentally killed in an accident with a fridge, one daughter who hates him - Sadie - and one that has committed Suicide - Sophie.

And it's Sophie's voice we hear of most in the book, through her journal that has been sent to Willy. Each chapter starts with an excerpt, as we move through her teenage years, from the seventies and into the eighties.

Although, with the content of her diary, its unclear as to why she would of sent to her father.

Zoe has a way of turning phrases that resonate and make you smile. All those years after notes on a scandal, I am still fearful of youths with one sinister grey tooth. In this book, she has Hippies with their rabbity teeth. Maybe its just dental descriptions that do it for me.

The book pokes plenty of fun at the left, the idle rich and Britain in particular. Willy has to come back for his mother's funeral and this provides the best section of the book, as he meets up with his daughter, her drug addled boyfriend and has to deal with transport, hotel and food.

Exceptionally funny, with a great supporting cast of characters. The drunk actor who comes to visit in mexico, being a favourite.

Till the next time then.... should she get her pen out.

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### **Jacqueline says**

I loved the descriptions, really original, wish I could write like it. Interesting that the author writes as a older man and yet is so convincing. Perhaps though if I were an older man I would think differently and feel that the author has got us all wrong!

A difficult read at times but I enjoyed it.

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### **Siria says**

I read this book thinking it was a new one from Zoe Heller, but *Everything You Know* is in fact her first book, written before *Notes on a Scandal*. It's not as well-crafted an effort—the structure not quite strong enough to sustain it even over just 200 pages—and I'm not sure that her main character (Willy Muller, a philandering fiftysomething writer best known for the book he wrote in the aftermath of being acquitted of his wife's murder, who lives in self-imposed exile from the UK and has nonexistent relationships with his two daughters) is ever sympathetic enough to engage the audience fully in his character arc. However, Heller shows a gift for character voices and for dialogue, and her prose is descriptive and original without being florid.

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### **Slávka says**

Moja prvá ozajstná recenzia, ak by bol niekto taký dobrý a chcelo by sa mu to pre?íta? a poveda?, ?o si o tom myslí, budem rada :)

Everything you know - Zoe Heller

Hodnotenie : 3.5/5

Cover : 2.5/5

Dátum ?ítania : 5.4. - 23.4. 2011

Chudák Willy má ťažký život. Jeho nevestu priťožlivá priateľka Penny ho neustále štvie svojou hlúposťou. Po finančnej stránke to veru nie je bohviečo (ak možno takto označiť dlžobu cca. 200 000 \$). Ak chce svoju situáciu zlepšiť, musí knihu o manželkinej smrti, ktorú nezapísal (alebo snáď áno?), a jeho živote pred aj po nej, ktorú napísal, prepracovať do filmového scenára. To by hľadám nebolo až také zlé, keby mu z vyšších miest nekázali pridať zopár “vylepšovacích” scénok, aby bol film síce menej pravdivý, ale o to zaujímavejší. Veď koho už dnes zaujíma nejaká nudná životopisná dráma bez štipky akcie?

Navyše mu zo starostí neuberajú ani jeho dcéry Sophie a Sadie. Prvá žije s drogovým závislým bláznom a Willyho skontaktuje, len keď potrebuje peniaze. Tá druhá, Sadie, je už po smrti. Tesne pred ňou Willymu poslala svoje denníky. V nich rozoberá svoj osamelý život od útleho detstva bez matky, cez problémy s jej prvou večkou (teda prvou) láskou až ... až po samovraždu, ktorú spáchala.

Z knihy som mala najprv dosť zmiešané pocity. Čítanie mi trvalo neskutočne dlho, ale nemyslím, že kvôli angličtine.

Knihu možno rozdeliť na dve časti: Súčasnosť, kedy Willy rieši svoj milostný život, scenáre, cestuje z LA do Mexika a z Mexika do Londýna a naopak. Čiže práve tá časť, ktorá ma v čítaní toľko brzdila. Potom tu ešte máme minulosť, zápisky zo Sadiinho denníku, Willovo rozprávanie o mŕtvej manželke Oone, o tom, ako sa spoznali a o tom, ako sa niečo v ich vzťahu strašne pokašalo. Jeho rozprávanie ma zopárkrát dosť dojalo, najmä ku koncu. Túto časť vidím ako veľký pohľad dopredu.

V posledných stránkach autorka prechádza do prítomného času, samotný koniec vnímam dosť vlažne.

Knihu som čítala v podstate len kvôli zdokonaleniu sa v angličtine. Môžem povedať, že sa mi celkom páčila, aj keď je to niečo úplne mimo môjho obľúbeného žánru kníh.

(Pozn. - Úplne prvá kniha, ktorú som čítala a úspešne dočítala v angličtine, kto zdieľa moje nadšenie? :D)

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## Erika says

Willy Muller is a truly horrible person. His wife died from a fall that may, or may not, have resulted from him shoving her. One of his daughters won't talk to him, and the other one, also estranged, committed suicide. One of her last acts before ending her life was to send Willy 11 years of her journals, and he responds to the posthumous package with deep callousness. “*She had succumbed to the sentimentalities of leave-taking,*” he says. “*Christ, isn't life hard enough without that sort of hokey melodrama?*”

Yet Willy's very horribleness is part of what makes this novel so entertaining. He walks through the world in a haze of self-absorption, making mean-spirited observations about the people around him that are also quite funny.

*He had a long arrow-nose and almost no lips—his mouth was just an unannounced slit in the final third of his face, like a muppet's.*

Or

*She was flushed and fat and she wore a big, peasant style dress that looked as if it had been blown on to her*

*by chance during a violent storm.*

He doesn't even spare himself from his own cruel wit.

*I have grown obsessed with my withering body...My belly, oh God, my belly. I have noticed it swerving away, settling in a puddle of flesh at my side. In the mornings, I wake to find it lying next to me, gazing up at me, like an affectionate haggis.*

Willy's curmudgeonly rantings might get too one-note if it weren't for the novel's other protagonist: his deceased daughter Sadie. As Willy reads her journals, we see someone as shiny and innocent as he is jaded. In later entries, she begins making the series of choices that will lead up to her suicide, and the tension between Sadie's guileless optimism and the death that we know is coming gives the novel a lot of its momentum.

Zoe Heller is a powerful writer with a gift for creating unsympathetic characters moving toward imperfect redemption. *Everything You Know* is her first novel, and while it lacks the depth of her later work--*Notes on a Scandal* and *The Believers*—it's a highly enjoyable read.

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## **Martin Boyle says**

This is not as good as Heller's *Notes On A Scandal*, which was an effective look at manipulative relationships: perhaps far-fetched, but believable for all that. This is funnier, but just less believable, and that is probably what makes this a less good book. It is readable and enjoyable, but fails to quite find the ethical dilemmas that made "Notes" so much fun to read because of the depth they added and by making the book thought provoking.

Am I saying, this book is too shallow? Perhaps! There is some evidence of the acute observation of dysfunctional personal relationships that "Notes" uses so effectively, but this novel plays them more for laughs.

This is an acceptable, even quite entertaining read. It makes some good points, but never really gets up much above the level of farce. I'm not sure I'd recommend it, except with the suggestion that "Notes on a Scandal" is much better!

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## **Jayne Charles says**

One of those books in which not a great deal happens, but the writing is of such a consistently high standard, as well as being very funny, that it hardly matters. Like Zoe Heller's other novel 'Notes on a Scandal', this features a dislikeable narrator and a lot of sniffy commentary, and aside from a slightly curious ending, I enjoyed it. What I was most impressed by was the creation, by a female author, of a male narrator who is most definitely, unquestionably, a Bloke.

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## John says

Willy Muller is a great character, the anti-hero at the diseased heart of Zoë Heller's debut novel. What makes the book so satisfying is not its originality; rather, it is the delicate and wickedly funny way that Heller makes her germophobic protagonist sympathetic even as the situation gets worse.

Willy might have been gleefully played by Jack Nicholson in his prime. We cringe to watch him, but we peek through our fingers to see what he will do next. Also, we hope against hope that he might suddenly find redemption -- which he does, perhaps, in his own Willy way. Like Martin Amis, Heller's worldview is brilliantly scathing. You might not want to live there, but it's certainly worth the visit.

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## Flipperty Gibbert says

'Give a book 100 pages before you give up on it' someone once told me, 'then you will be really connected to the characters...' At 196 pages, once I had got to 100 I thought I may as well go the whole hog. Turns out I will not be following that piece of advice again. I don't think 1000 pages could have connected me to Willy Muller in any sense, and Willy himself seems utterly disconnected from every other character in the book, even those he has chosen to share his life with.

To be fair, his perceptions were possibly coloured by the fact that everyone in the book was either naked or dressed in orange- that's bound to get on your tits after a while eh?

Heller's protagonist is a deeply unpleasant, antisocial misogynist, and he is fat and grey too, we are told, yet strangely alluring to various younger and better looking women. It makes no sense. A womanising, selfish, lazy turd of a man, who spends 196 pages judging absolutely everyone around him as ugly... and SPOILER ALERT we are supposed to care whether he finds redemption or not at the end. I'd have preferred him to follow his daughter's suicidal example and do the world a favour.

The biggest surprise in the whole book is that it is penned by a woman. There is no roundedness to any of the female characters, no back stories, no insight- they are purely ornamental and viewed with utter disdain and pity. I get that this is possibly for effect, but seriously, would a little insight have done any harm?

More infuriating than any of it though, are the entries from his daughter's diaries. I'm all for suspending disbelief in literature, but this 9 year old writes about concepts of immorality, judgement and infatuation but can't spell Doctor or use capital letters.

Will Self proclaims on the back cover that Heller is 'among the most interesting and exciting of new British writers'... which serves as a useful warning not to read any of Self's work

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## Girish says

*"Only when you die do you run out of chances to be good. Until then, there is always the possibility of turning yourself around"*

Zoe Heller's debut book has a pretty tried and tested concept of parental/old age remorse handled with

freshness and fiestiness of her prose. There were places, I rued the fact I was reading a hard copy because I can't highlight a quote for future reading. Not her best, but can't help feeling the need for a fan club for Heller (both of them, why not?) after finishing the book.

Willy Muller is in an unenviable spiral in his old age with the women in his life, dead and alive, haunting him. Muller is brash, unapologetic, wallowing in self pity. He managed to accidentally kill his first wife Oona, estrange his two daughters to lives of misery and berates and abuses women(!) who love him. His life as a ghost writer is a farce and his friendships shallow. First comes the journals of Sadie, his second daughter who committed suicide, followed by a heart attack.

Every chapter has one entry from the journal, the chaos of Willy's present spiral from where he looks at his past episodes and the tingling of remorse. The first person narrative is moving in it's measured reluctance to open up. The book tugs a few chords of the heart with Willy's emotional ramblings on his failing as a son, husband and father. You hate him but he keeps stooping further with every chapter. The sharp writing as well sexist thinking too fits in with the profile of Willy Muller.

A short yet satisfying read.

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## **M M says**

Pleasure was had from Zoë Heller's first novel *Everything You Know*, which has one of the most acerbic misanthropes I've encountered in the past year or so. His hatred of London and New York is so intense and so exquisitely described that any reader who hasn't been to these cities would probably never want to visit. He has a troubled relationship with his daughters (one of whom kills herself) and in his youth had served time for the murder of his wife (acquitted on appeal). Despite his dislike for people in general, and contempt for the women in his life, he occasionally does feel pangs of sympathy for them, and he tries to do the right thing. Of course, his good work is invariably thrown back in his face. No wonder he staggers through life despising everyone. Heller does like an optimistic ending, though. I'd have preferred the man to die filled with his bitterly dark humour.

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## **Kurt Douglass says**

I think Zoe Heller may be a one-hit wonder. "Notes on a Scandal" is one of my favorite novels, so I wanted to read her other books. "The Believers" was underwhelming, but far better than "Everything You Know". Frankly, EYK was boring: the plot was very minimal, and the characters were superficial and unlikable. Based on the reviews and the marketing, it seems EYK is supposed to be a dark comedy; however, the tone is too flippant to be dark, and too cynical to be comedic.

My greatest vexation with EYK was the anachronisms. The novel is set in 1981, yet cell phones, laptops, satellite television, and personal computers are commonplace. Tom Cruise and Madonna were just starting out, yet they are referenced as though they were household names. And generally the story does not feel like it was set in the early eighties, but more like the late nineties when it was written. It seems like Heller was either misremembering and/or didn't do her research.

I was tempted to give EYK one star, but I have too much admiration for Heller to do that. I love her writing

style, and although it is not as polished in this novel, its presence still buoys the tedious narrative.

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