

Books+Publishing

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The Watchful Wife is the latest novel by the author of *The Deceptions* and *The Teacher's Secret*, Suzanne Leal.

It follows the life of its narrator, Ellen Wells, the daughter of a 'very godly family'—her father is an elder of the Free Church. Ellen lives in an austere world free of dancing, socialising and fun. (Think *The Handmaid's Tale* but without the female camaraderie.) But then her English teacher introduces her to books, friendship and a teaching career.

Things get twisty when 29-year-old Ellen plots her escape from her inevitable future as the primary carer of her parents. She is expelled from their life and church community, and soon meets and marries extroverted fellow teacher Gordon. It's the stuff of fairytales, until one pivotal day when the police appear at Ellen and Gordon's front door. Gordon is suspended from his teaching job due to an allegation of aggravated indecent assault against one of his female students. With Gordon put to trial and eventually convicted and imprisoned for four years, we find ourselves joining Ellen in questioning the verdict. But nothing can prepare you for the final pages.

At first, *The Watchful Wife* doesn't necessarily scream bestseller. It's only in retrospect, when you are wowed by the final sparkling plot twist, that you realise how masterfully the author has manipulated her audience, lulling the reader into complacency with her gentle narrative.

Another name for *The Watchful Wife* could have been *The Blindsided Reader*.

Books+Publishing reviewer: Michelle Atkins is a communications professional and published educational author. *Books+Publishing* is Australia's number-one source of pre-publication book reviews.