



## Emily Maguire

**Taming the Beast**  
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**Q: Novelists throughout history have spoken about the ways in which their characters become real to them and take over their minds in a way. Did this happen to you? What was it like living with Sarah?**

A: Sarah did take over for a time. I only wrote at night, but all day she was on my mind. I tried to really see the world through her eyes. Whenever I heard a song on the radio or read a novel I would think about what she would say about it. I had fun wondering what Sarah would think of the people I came across at work or on the bus.

I know it sounds odd to say I enjoyed living with Sarah—given how destructive and messed-up she is—but I really did. I'm nothing like her and I know if we were to meet in life we would not even be friends, but she lives her life with the kind of dumb-blind-thoughtless daring that I am only brave enough to express on paper. It was exciting and liberating to be inside her brain.

**Q: Did you consider more than one possible ending for *Taming the Beast*?**

A: The ending was always clear in my mind. I see it as quite a hopeful ending—if ambiguously so—but I've not heard anyone else describe it that way. The ambiguity is important, though. I hate neat, clean endings to stories about messy people and events—they can make a realistic, affecting story suddenly feel like a fairy tale.

**Q: This novel could be read as an uncovering of the politics of abuse, in which the arguments are written on women's' bodies. Do you think so? Do you see the story as political?**

A: That is a legitimate reading, but it's not what I intended. I didn't intend the book to be a statement of any kind—I meant only to write a story about obsession and love and where the line lies between the two. Having said that, the events take place within the context of the society in which I live and it would be disingenuous for me to claim that my observations about gender and power in that society have not influenced my writing.

I do think Sarah's story shows how dangerous it can be to censor or ignore the sexuality of teenage girls. A 14 year-old girl who looks around her and concludes she is the only girl to feel sexual desire is so vulnerable. The first man who comes along and encourages her sexuality will have all kinds of power over her. If girls felt there already was approval for them to feel sexual, the move into real, live flesh and blood sexual relationships would be much more satisfying, much less likely to damage the girl emotionally. She would be entering that first sexual relationship knowing that her desire is normal and natural and that she owns it and can choose to share it or not.

**Q: Do you see the relationship between Sarah and Daniel as symptomatic of illness, or criminality, or both, or neither?**

A: The relationship begins with an act of criminality—the seduction of a schoolgirl by her teacher. Many people would hesitate to describe what ensues as a love affair, believing that the damage sustained by Sarah as a teenager is behind her later self-destructive behavior and behind her devotion to Daniel. But although Daniel Carr is unquestionably a predator and at the outset he wields considerable power over Sarah, her feelings cannot be dismissed as caused by a type of Stockholm syndrome. Sarah feels a deep connection with Daniel; she feels more fully herself with him than with anyone else she has come across.

Many people would say that the less powerful person in any relationship is vulnerable to harm, and so in a situation like this where the power difference is enormous, then it is inevitable that Sarah is going to be hurt. But I think relationships are far more complicated. Can somebody be harmed without knowing it? I'm not sure we can answer that question definitively. When Daniel Carr physically hurts Sarah she has bruises and other marks on her body and we can point to that and say he harmed her, but when we're talking about psychological harm it's all guesswork./p>

**Q: Which writers have most inspired your own writing?**

A: I'm inspired by writers who manage to write about deeply serious subjects without becoming preachy or overly-somber. Graham Greene, Nadine Gordimer, A:L.Kennedy and Mary Gaitskill are particularly brilliant, I think.