



Taming the Beast

By Emily Maguire
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Introduction

Sarah Clark is an intelligent, unconventional, lively young girl whose life is changed forever at the age of fourteen when her teacher, Mr. Carr, seduces her. And here is the key question of this brilliant debut novel: Does he seduce her, is this in any way mutual desire, or is this criminal abuse? Emily Maguire does not provide easy or simple answers, and is not afraid to ask shocking questions.

Sarah falls through life with violence and tenderness, cruelty and vulnerability. Her friends want to help her, but are confused as to what form the help should come in. When is a victim of abuse also the victim of free will, of pride and stubbornness? Sarah's story is haunting and compelling as it veers between the erotic and the most intense suffering when, years later, Mr. Carr reappears in her life. Does she learn? Can she change? Should we want her to? Maguire looks into suffering, love, and obsession with a clear-eyed bravery and searing honesty in order to simply tell the truth, even though

the truth is far from simple. Beautifully written with penetrating vision, *Taming the Beast* is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand abuse, its consequences, and the life-long web of influence that it spreads.

Questions for Discussion

1. Mr. Carr is described as a man who is active in his church and who loves his family. What happens to him? Do you see him as mentally ill or as a criminal, or a combination of both?
2. How do you feel about Sarah?
3. In what ways does this novel draw a thin line between eroticism and abuse, pleasure and pain?
4. How would you describe the kinds of addictions that this story reveals that do not involve alcohol, drugs, or any substances? Are Sarah and Daniel in love?
5. Sarah seems to provoke both desire and anger in every man with whom she comes in contact. Why do you think that is?
6. Sarah, aside from whatever else she is, lives in a reality that is unconventional. Do some of her friends judge her morally, from a more conventional point of view? Are there some parts of Sarah's behavior that are not dangerous or wrong? Do you think Sarah's lifestyle give her power?
7. What does this novel have to say about female sexuality? Is Sarah's sexual behavior about pleasure? Can she be seen as a feminist?
8. Discuss the characters of Shelley and Jess. Is their sexuality and their behavior in relationships healthier than Sarah's?
9. The last word in this novel is "hope." Did you find any hope in the ending?
10. If you could enter this story as one of the characters, what would you do?

About the Author

Emily Maguire is the author of the forthcoming *The Gospel According to Luke*. Her articles on sex, religion, culture, and literature have been published in newspapers and magazines including *The Observer*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *Good Reading*. She has an MA in English Literature and divides her time between teaching English and writing. She lives in Sidney, Australia. *Taming the Beast* is her first novel.