

Dear Mr. Knightley: Interview with Katherine

Are there many similarities between you and Sam?

That's a tough one because I think so many struggles are universal, perhaps made larger by the history I gave her. No, our backgrounds are not at all similar and any mistakes in the logistics of Sam's childhood are my own. I spoke to so many people and read so much, but I know there is much I couldn't capture.

Is there anything autobiographical in the story?

Very little, but I did attend Northwestern and I have run a marathon – and I do have a black belt in tae kwon do. Hmm... That sounds like a lot. There is another incident that cracks me up: The scene when Sam corrects Alex and Professor Muir on their Shakespeare is from my life. I am sure many of you recall a similar moment in the wonderful 1995 movie, *Clueless*, but, as my husband can attest, it happened to me first – on the night I met my future in-laws. I was so nervous that I said nothing until I opened my mouth and set their *Othello* straight. Humiliated, I then closed my mouth for the rest of the evening.

What was your inspiration?

In 2009, I was seriously injured and while most people receive flowers in the hospital, my friends brought me books. I left my three-day stay with over thirty titles – and a bit of time on my hands for recovery. Yet, despite all these new stories, I wanted to spend time with old favorites – including *Daddy Long Legs* by Jean Webster. The idea grew from there. As for Sam's hiding behind characters, I do not do that, but I have been known to belt out song lyrics when someone conversationally uses a phrase. It's highly embarrassing for my kids, but don't let them fool you... They do it too.

What is the story behind Sam's faith? You bring many themes into the book, primarily forgiveness.

Forgiveness is paramount. We can think of it writ large in terms of our relationship with God and Christ or in terms of our daily interactions with friends, family and ourselves. Now that said, I did not feel led to finish Sam's journey in that regard. She forgave Alex, but there is still much more for her to lay down. Great people surround her though, so I'm not worried.

I mentioned that the book came from a time of recovery: It also came from a wonderful time of prayer. And while I wouldn't want to be in such physical pain again, I feel blessed it happened because of all I learned from it and all that came from that entire experience – including this story and the extraordinary opportunity to write another.