



Modern Manners for Your Inner Demons

Tara Laskowski

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Tara Laskowski explains, “There are many etiquette books from Emily Post and others that tell you what to do when attending a wedding, setting the table, asking for a promotion, introducing yourself at a party. What I became interested in is the darker side of etiquette—the way people conduct themselves in situations that Emily Post would never write about. This book started with the story ‘The Etiquette of Adultery.’ I loved that title and all that it suggested. Was there an etiquette, a set of unwritten rules, for a situation that seemed to break all the rules of a ‘decent’ society? From there, the collection grew—exploring the etiquette of obesity, dementia, infertility, arson, etc. These stories were really fun to write for two reasons. One, they allowed me to experiment with form, writing in small sections, chapters, definitions and other pieces of a suggested larger text. And two, I loved seeing how the characters emerged from each story. Each person in these ten stories ends up writing their own codes of etiquette, which I think is actually true in life. We all have our rules, our moral codes, our lines that we won’t cross. It’s when we cross those lines that things get really interesting.”

Modern Manners for Your Inner Demons Details

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From Reader Review Modern Manners for Your Inner Demons for online ebook

Molli says

Wanted to give this book 1 1\2 stars but I just could not give it 2 stars. It was funny to start but then I could not figure out if the author wanted the narrator to be male or female. The book got boring and long winded. I did finish it but will not read it again.

Alex Appelbe says

Darkly comedic. Often hard to follow, easy to read in small amounts here and there.

Allison says

I won this book in a Goodreads Giveaway. It was a lot of fun and the author has a great imagination, but ultimately it felt like a lengthy creative writing assignment. I wish there was more of a narrative or maybe a greater expansion on what the book already is. It's a good book to pick up here and there, but hard to take in one sitting (even if it is only 90 pages).

Laura Ellen says

I was fortunate enough to have read this in its final draft form--a zippy, provocative collection--just as wicked as the cover art suggests.

Kathy says

Sly, clever, original take on the sad, bewildering, dead-on truths of being human. A terrific read. Also love the cover art by Brandon Wicks.

Gay says

I love Tara's work. In *Modern Manners for your Inner Demons*, she gives us "etiquette for life." My favorite is "The Art of the Public Restroom." You get a story we've all lived and makes us smile. She manages to balance traditional story-telling with a modern sensibility. She writes with humor of the very best kind, just a little devilish (see that cover?) and is dead-on when it comes to observing human nature.

Jeanette says

I just didn't get it. It was funny at times, but really choppy and no flow. I read it super quickly, but at times it was annoying and painful. Not something I'd read again. So glad it was free.

Tara says

"They try to love. They try their best." These simple sentences to me sum up this wonderful, satirical collection of flash pieces. Highly inventive, but underneath, highly empathetic. Laskowski knows the human heart. For behind the devilish humor is raw emotion, even in such unsympathetic narrators as a pyromaniac. Normally I prefer to read writers whose style matches mine, but I was totally taken with the voices in this collection and filled with admiration. And as someone who was in book production, I can't help but admire the design, cover and interior. Matter Press is turning out some wonderful work!

Margo says

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

I was torn on how I felt about this book. It felt dry and slightly choppy. But it was also pretty darn insightful and funny in many parts. Well written, but ultimately not for me, I suppose.

Amy Bartholomée says

Cheeky and moving!

Thomas Pluck says

this was a fun quick read and deserving of the praise it's got. sharp and funny.

Roxanne says

Each story in this collection begins with the concept of etiquette of a negative situation (like adultery, obesity, infertility), and out of the format of an etiquette handbook, real characters emerge, each with their own specific story to tell. Ordinarily you wouldn't look for a book of etiquette to elicit any emotional response, but these stories move you, stick with you, and make you wonder what etiquette rules you observe. This book is a fast read but a worthwhile one.

Raima Larter says

I loved this short little book, a collection of flash pieces that are simultaneously funny and profound and inspiring. Each one is a little gem of a character sketch, organized around strange sets of etiquette rules for topics such as "Insomnia," "Arson," and "Adultery." Great insights into what it means to be human in this world.

Lori says

This review originally ran in *The Collagist*: Imagine if the instruction manual for your Ikea chair had been written by someone with a bad attitude who is privy to the intimate details of your personal life. The stories in Tara Laskowski's *Modern Manners for Your Inner Demons* are not told by the kind of people interested in turning lemons into lemonade. This slender little book with a cartoony cover drawing of the devil bowing to kiss the hand of a ladylike character promises sarcasm and plenty of it. I know these cynical narrators and I like them. If you can't say anything nice, come sit next to me.

The distance between the narrator of each etiquette lesson and the stressed out receiver of that lesson is approximately the same as what lies between the left side of the brain and the right. It is the person receiving the instructions who emerges as a fully formed character by the end of the story. The anxiety-ridden instructees of Laskowski's stories tap dance their way through various awkward situations ranging from adultery to dementia. It's fun to laugh at them, but by the end of each story, you can't quite remember why you thought they were so dumb in the first place; these characters have problems and deal with their problems with dignity. Each of these stories start out in a sarcastic vein, yet the problems they address are heartbreaking, and each and every one of them realizes a protagonist, fully formed, with a past, a present, and a future.

In "The Etiquette of Obesity" the narrator starts out—as all the stories do—with that jokey imperative voice: It is best to plan ahead. You can say, "I will order a salad." But then you may get there and find the salads have mushrooms on them. Then you will want a cheese steak with grilled onions and peppers and those amazing steak fries the restaurant has. Order it, but swear to yourself you will stop at half, you will only eat just a few of those fries.

The promise to eat only a few fries is embarrassingly familiar. There's authenticity here, and it doesn't take long for the man being addressed to engage the reader's sympathy. This obese fellow is shunned by the world and he longs for companionship. He's vulnerable. Even though the reader is in on the joke from the beginning, it gets more and more difficult to laugh at him. By the end, a lovely uplifting bit of prose sneaks in and when it's over, you're left blinking your eyes and sucking in your breath. How to pull off a sweet ending after so much sarcasm? Like this:

Offer her one of your donuts if you still have some left, and when she looks at you, really looks at you for the first time, breathe out, your chest expanding, and watch in amazement as she leans in, not out, as she brushes a bit of white powder from your lips and smiles.

"The Etiquette of Eloping" is provided for a none-of-the-above kind of girl who wears a non-diamond engagement ring and wants to skip the storybook wedding and elope to Las Vegas. It's a riff about the groom's annoying parents and their friends. It transforms from a story about the girl who doesn't want the wedding that's expected of her into a story about the girl who loves her daddy, about a celebration of a sacred event and the depth of emotion attached to an event of this stature. The story ends in a poignant place: a father-daughter dance in the bride's father's kitchen, dishrag slung over his shoulder.

Perhaps, the most touching story in the book, "The Etiquette of Infertility," addresses the pain faced by a woman who longs to be pregnant and suffers insensitive relatives and hair dressers and the humiliation of

children's birthday parties. She tries to playfully navigate a marriage now fraught with the pressures of infertility. The section of "Statistics and Factoids" would be funnier were it not so bizarrely believable: "98% of women who are addicted to crack will get pregnant the first time they have unprotected sex."

In a flood of language, the final paragraph recounts the would-be mother's mournful recall of a sexual encounter with her husband in the days when a menstrual period was a gift:

Later you would replay it all in your head, the torn condom, the praying, panicking, worrying while you waited for It, willing It to come, and then finally when It did come, that delirious love for life, the shots of tequila, you and he dancing late in a bar, relieved your mistake hadn't cost you anything. But there in that moment that day, while the mud pooled around your back and your future husband hovered above you panting, thrusting, you let it all expand inside you, you let the rain pitter all over your face and the cold wind goosebump your arms and you wondered, crazily, delightedly, what the odds were of getting struck by lightning.

These endings land softly and with subtlety. At the beginning of each story, the reader starts out in an intellectually superior position to the main character. Somewhere along the way there is an astonishing reversal. In the best tradition of story: the reader becomes invested in each of these stories only to find that the story she thought she was reading was not the story the writer has told at all.

Jen Michalski says

Smart without being gimmicky or too clever, these stories read quickly and yet linger for much longer. Tara Laskowski's humor has a gentle and teasing bite. In fact, if she could be carried in one's shirt pocket to jury duty or the doctor or the DMV, we would all be better people. At least we can take along *Modern Manners*. Laskowski and Matter Press have published a very tender collection of human frailty and failings.
