



## Fishing for Tigers

*Emily Maguire*

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Six years ago, Mischa Reese left her abusive husband and suffocating life in California and reinvented herself in steamy, chaotic Hanoi. In Vietnam, she finds satisfying work and enjoys a life of relative luxury and personal freedom. Thirty-five and single, Mischa believes that romance and passion are for teenagers; a view with which her cynical, promiscuous expat friends agree.

But then a friend introduces Mischa to his visiting eighteen-year-old son. Cal is a strikingly attractive Vietnamese-Australian boy, but he's resentful of his father, and of the nation which has stolen him away. His beauty and righteous idealism awaken something in Mischa and the two launch into an affair that threatens Mischa's friendships and reputation and challenges her sense of herself as unselfish and good.

Set among the louche world of Hanoi's expatriate community, *Fishing for Tigers* is about a woman struggling with the morality of finding peace in a war-haunted city, personal fulfilment in the midst of poverty and sexual joy with a vulnerable youth.

## Fishing for Tigers Details

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Author : Emily Maguire

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## From Reader Review Fishing for Tigers for online ebook

### Rhoda says

Firstly I would like to thank Hayley for the opportunity to read and review this book, as I won it on First Reads.

What I absolutely loved about this book were all the wonderful, colourful descriptions of Vietnam. The author's words just brought Vietnam to life completely. I haven't been there, but feel that I have had a real taste of it through this book. The author has really captured the noise, the tastes, the people, the culture and the seasons beautifully. It was all so descriptive and captivating!

What I didn't like about this book were the characters. Both Cal and Mischa were such irritating characters. Cal was immature, arrogant and plain unlikeable. Mischa was just vacuous! Not to mention selfish and directionless. The scenes between these two were just cringeworthy to read, but more than that, age difference aside, I just could not fathom how these two got together, as although I knew enough about the story to know they would end up together, I got absolutely no chemistry between them, which therefore just made it all the more appalling when they started a relationship. I have no idea what Cal saw in Mischa and can only presume that Mischa must have been hard up for attention to hook up with Cal. Sorry, I just saw no attraction or anything appealing about these characters, which just made them getting together about as appealing as watching your grandparents getting it on :/-

I would have given this 3.5 stars if that were possible, as whilst the characters really missed the mark for me, the parts about Vietnam were outstanding, which is why I've rounded it up to 4 stars.

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### Theresa says

3.5 stars. It was quite good, in a read-in-one-day sort of way. The expats (maybe more aptly called migrants) often made me cringe, which I guess was the point. The two main characters had more depth and backstories that kept me interested.

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### Bree T says

Six years ago Mischa fled an abusive husband, leaving California for her family in Sydney and then on to Hanoi, Vietnam. She moved there with no job lined up, no real plan for what she wanted to do but things fell into place for her – she met an Australian ex-pat and became part of a tight-knit group and got a job editing translated pieces to make them more cohesive and natural sounding.

She loves Hanoi, with its vibrant, dirty, crowded streets and steamy heat. She's happily single, having dated only a couple of people since coming to Vietnam. Asian men aren't interested in Western women and it seems most of the ex-pat Western men prefer the local Asian women as well, leaving slim pickings for the ex-pat women. Then one of her friends, Matthew, introduces his young teenage son Cal, a Vietnamese-Australian, to their circle of friends. Matthew left his wife and children in Australia some years ago and previously any meetings between him and his son have occurred elsewhere. Matthew's mother, a

Vietnamese refugee, has been in no hurry to allow her oldest child to visit a country that brings about so many painful memories for her.

Cal and Mischa begin a friendship that turns quickly into an affair as Cal seems to pick Mischa to show him around parts of Hanoi when his father works. Mischa finds herself revelling in the fact that this beautiful, young man who could have any number of equally young and gorgeous girls, locals or holiday-makers, has chosen her. She experiences a sexual freedom that she hasn't encountered before as they secretly meet up and also openly socialise as no one within the group suspects anything is going on.

I'm not an adventurous traveler, nor an experienced one. I'm more likely the girl who books an apartment in a high rise in Burleigh or something, because I like creature comforts. I have no desire to backpack around Europe or hike through Asia. But Fishing For Tigers took me to Hanoi and I loved it.

I think Maguire's love of Hanoi shines through brilliantly in this novel. Every part of it is so lovingly described, but in a no holds barred, no rose-tinted glasses kind of way. The poverty and vastly different standards of living are not ignored nor is the lack of reliable power, air conditioning and sewage system. Hanoi is a living, breathing character in this book, from the crazy anarchy of the roads to the women chopping vegetables in the street, the pounding tropical rain, the steamy nights and the beauty of the Temple of Literature. It's a city of over 1000 years of history with the bloodshed of the Vietnamese war still fresh. It is a place where Mischa has been able to find peace, to find herself after a long marriage to an abusive man. In Hanoi it seems, Mischa has found a way to be.

She has embraced a great life there – working gives her satisfaction as she edits a collection of stories about powerful and influential Vietnamese women from the course of history. She has a close group of friends that she meets up with regularly, enjoying a fairly busy social life. She lacks romance, but unlike several of her fellow ex-pat women, Mischa doesn't really seem to be looking for it. When Cal arrives, eighteen and fresh out of high school from Australia, Mischa seems taken by his passionate ideas and enthusiasm as well as his firm opinions. At times though, he's still very much a sulky 18 year old boy muddling his way through something he doesn't quite understand and often his treatment of Mischa borders on cruel as he seems to seek to get a reaction from her. Cal is struggling with coming of age and identity, accepting his father who left him, his sister and their mother behind in Australia to come and live in a place that Cal's mother and her family fled in horror. His mother can now, barely manage to speak of Vietnam and was horribly against Cal going there and it seems as though his mother worries that Cal will stay there for good. He's straddling that line between childhood and adulthood and sometimes he says profound, meaningful adult things that suggest maturity and at other times he sinks into cheap insults, a child once again. I found Mischa pretty tolerant of Cal's words, she seems to be mostly the one making the apologies, whether or not this was because she'd been previously abused and was a peacemaker or whether or not his words didn't really bother her, I found it difficult to ascertain.

I found the folklore stories interwoven in the story to be beautiful, especially the ones that Mischa is editing and falling in love with for her work. It's a project that speaks to her, it seems to be the thing that stirs up the most amount of feeling within her. The writing is so amazingly beautiful throughout this entire book, even when the characters are being horrible and selfish and terrible I still just loved this story. It's the second book I've read by Emily Maguire now and although this one is very different to Taming The Beast (and far less challenging to read in terms of content) and I couldn't put it down. I've just ordered Maguire's 2 other fiction books that I don't have and I can't wait for them to arrive. I know that I'll lose myself in her writing and end up somewhere else entirely than my little reading room!

This one is definitely one to put in the re-reading pile. I think it'll be even better the second time around.

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## Sonia says

This was originally posted at my blog <http://ifnotread.wordpress.com>.

There was a time when all I read was non-fiction, there was the time when I only read plays. Then there was the time when I never read contemporary fiction. I'm not so extreme in my reading behaviour any more but I'd thought I'd elaborate on my anti-contemporary fiction phase – I didn't read what fell into this category because I thought most of it would be rubbish and so I didn't want to waste my time (you know, the old adage of 'short life, too many books to read'). If I'd kept to that then I would have missed out on 'The Book Thief' and 'We Need To Talk About Kevin' and 'Things We Didn't See Coming' (but then again, I would have thankfully missed 'Freedom' and 'Water For Elephants').

Fishing for Tigers is overall a great book. Maguire was very good with many aspects – the mood of the book, the setting, the complexity of human nature. No it's not a life-changing book – and why I expect every book to do that is beyond me – but it's an entertaining story and a well-written one, too.

The setting is Hanoi, Vietnam. Macguire must love this place because she captured its unbearable heat: "It was lunch time, which, I had already learnt, meant that within an hour the city would be stiller than at midnight. Shop-fronts would close and street vendors would drape their carts or baskets with towels and find the nearest patch of shade in which to sleep. Even the xe om drivers would stop their smoking and touting and curl into commas on the back of their motos."

Mischa, thirty-five and originally from Australia, lives in Hanoi after escaping a violent marriage. She hangs out with other ex-pats in a seemingly responsibility-free lifestyle. She is then introduced to a friend's son, eighteen-year-old Cal who is Vietnamese-Australian. They start up an affair which you can guess is fraught with danger.

Now is the part that I've been reluctant to talk about because I struggle to find the right words and probably can't clearly explain. Sex scenes. With contemporary fiction comes detail in sex scenes that do not need any imagination. And I'm not crazy about it. Love scenes, sex scenes that leave something to the imagination, no problems by me. But I'm not crazy about reading detailed sex scenes. There, I said it. But this is not a fault of Macguire's by no means. The scenes seem to require that rawness because it's all about lust and flesh.

This story allows the exploration of heritage and belonging and history. Cal struggles with his family's past in the violence of Vietnam's history as well as dealing with his father who seems to be a misfit, living in Hanoi being his saving grace, and Cal's mother who can barely speak of the place.

I found very interesting that the narrator, Mischa, struggles with telling the story, constantly confusing what happened with what she thought happened or what she thought should have happened:

"I think the idea that this was no place for a child flitted through my head a moment before Cal started yelling, but maybe I'm misremembering, crediting myself with his sensitivity when all I was really thinking was that it was no place for me."

I relished in the group of ex-pats that seemed like a bunch of misfits. I've discovered I love reading about misfits...

"My Hanoi friends thought what I did with Cal was out of character but how would they know? How would

I? It may have been the first in-character thing I had done in my entire life."

The story does plod along slowly in the first half but I've never had an issue with that. I find good writing keeps me interested. Macguire captures the contradictions of humans so well that I found myself nodding in recognition at times. At Macguires best, Mischa describes the mediocrity of an Australian scene:

"Men with pale chests and red faces mow their lawns while their wives pull in and out of the long, wide driveways loading and unloading children wearing cricket whites or ballet shoes or party dresses, carrying expertly wrapped birthday presents or canvas grocery bags and paper sacks of rapidly cooling burgers and fries."

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### **Anne Treasure says**

I loved this book - I read it over one rainy, freezing weekend in winter, and despite sitting under layers of blankets I felt like I had been transported to steamy Vietnam. Maguire is a writer of infinite skill, and the authenticity of her prose is both jarring and transcendent. Her books make me feel uncomfortable and intrigued at once, and this is her best yet.

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### **Amber Cernovs says**

Emily Maguire deserves a standing ovation for her ability to capture the soul of Hanoi and the world view of her nest of characters. For me, Hanoi was love at first sight and over the years of living there my fascination and adoration for that city only got stronger. Where I have struggled to explain to family and friends how you can actually love a place and that sometimes I miss it so much it actually hurts, Emily has truly been able to convey that sense of wonder and attachment in this book. While many of the characters are not particularly likeable, and don't necessarily represent the full spectrum of foreigners in Vietnam, they are searingly accurately drawn. And while the moral ambiguity of this book may trouble some, I intact found the exploration of love, lust, guilt and conformity without heavy handed judgement refreshing.

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### **Heidi says**

Mischa, a middle-aged woman damaged by the legacy of an abusive marriage, has fled to Vietnam six years ago to escape her past and find a sense of identity and belonging. She spends her time working for an English language magazine and socialising with her expat friends, enjoying a life free of responsibilities. But despite loving life in Hanoi, Mischa has never been able to truly belong or find love again. When her friend Matthew's eighteen-year-old son Cal, who is half Vietnamese, arrives for a visit from Australia, Mischa feels drawn to his youthful energy and his obvious admiration of her. But what starts out as a simple friendship soon turns into a secret love affair, challenging Mischa to re-evaluate her life and her choices.

The thing I enjoyed most about this book were the vivid descriptions of Vietnam and its people, which instantly made me feel like jumping on a plane and travelling there. Vietnam is on my future "to see" list, and the author's evocative descriptions drew me in – the heat, the noise, the smells, the mix of people and cultures in the streets of Hanoi. Maguire insightfully explores the cultural differences between the expats in her story and the Vietnamese people, and the fate of the migrant (Mischa) who tries to fit in but will always remain a stranger. Cal, an Australian-Vietnamese teenager caught between two cultures, also struggles to

find a sense of belonging. Often regarded as a foreigner in his country of birth, Australia, due to his looks, he now seeks for belonging and connection in his mother's country of origin. The author skilfully explores both characters' longing to find their place in the world, which may have created the catalyst for drawing these two very different people together.

Unfortunately I found it very hard to relate to any of the novel's characters, which took a lot of the enjoyment out of reading this book. Although I wanted to feel empathy and understanding for Mischa, she always remained just out of reach, her motives somewhat confusing and her actions and choices inconsistent. Whilst her past is revealed in the form of short flashbacks, the details were too few for me to ever fully understand her, especially the passionate contempt for Australia, her country of birth. Mostly her motives seemed self-centred and selfish to me, especially her decision to engage in a passionate affair with her friend's son, a young man 17 years her junior, right under her friend's nose, knowing it would hurt him deeply. I found it very hard to buy the attraction between these two very different characters, and the steamy sex scenes felt contrived rather than sensuous. Since none of the characters were particularly appealing, I felt very detached from novel's entire cast, and found myself actively disliking many of its characters. Whilst this may have been the author's intention, capturing the seedy element in the country's expat population, it made it somewhat of a chore to finish reading the book. What kept me interested were the vivid descriptions of the country, its history and its people.

With the protagonist's search for love and identity in a foreign land I could not help but compare this book to *Eat, Pray, Love*, which ironically is mentioned in the novel. However, *Fishing for Tigers* may have profited from some of Gilbert's self-deprecating humour, which may have made the character of Mischa more appealing. As a story about a woman's quest for self-fulfilment and identity this novel failed for me, but I truly loved its descriptions of Vietnam and its people.

2.5 stars

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### **Jill says**

I inhaled this in two sittings. Atmospheric tale of an expatriate woman losing herself in Hanoi and then being forced to find herself through an affair with a much younger man, which by the sexual standards of the other foreigners in town should hardly raise an eyebrow. I gather that the author only spent a relatively short time in Vietnam, unlike her protagonist, but her description of alcohol-soaked, existentially unmoored and morally skew-whiff expats rings very true. The evocation of Hanoi in all its humid smells, noise and flavours makes me want to get on a plane \*now\*. EM describes how you can fall in love with a foreign city without ever belonging, and how for some people, that's fundamental to the attraction.

If the male-eye perspective of 'The Quiet American' grated, here's a 21st-century female update.

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### **Michael Livingston says**

Emily Maguire has a knack for storytelling - both this and her previous novel *Smoke in the Room* have premises that didn't immediately attract me and yet I read both in breathless binges, unable to stop. *Fishing for Tigers* real strength is its sense of place. Maguire creates a breathless and believable Hanoi, transporting me from Melbourne's grey winter to the humid, crowded streets of Vietnam. The characters are strong as well, with flaws that make them seem like real people, while leaving them likable enough to sympathise with (at least the two main characters - some of the other ex-pats are broad caricatures designed to amuse and

repel). The writing is effortless - no overly showy sentences, just powerfully clear description and deft pacing.

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### **TheSmellOfPaper says**

I was lucky enough to hear Emily Maguire speak earlier this year, and it was her obvious passion for this book, rather than the premise itself, that persuaded me to read it. I also love the title! But once I started reading, things that might have put me off - my idea of a blissful holiday is being on a wild empty beach with no one around, preferably in winter, not navigating the bustling, humid streets of an Asian city - drew me in. I'm not sure I went into this book with an open mind, but I certainly finished it with one.

If I had to choose one word to describe the book, it would be honest. I'm not usually a fan of first person narratives, because I find them cloying and often too clever, but in Mischa, Maguire creates a character who while sometimes unsure of herself, never felt like an unreliable narrator. If Mischa feels bewildered or torn, so do we. Maguire never shies away from tough topics - including the horrors of different periods of Vietnam's history - or explicit explorations of sex (and I do mean explicit).

She creates believable settings, strong dialogue, and deftly teases out her characters' assumptions and flaws. I've only read extracts of her other novels, but my sense is this one also has her best writing. Her use of language is clean and precise. Unadorned yet powerful. Some phrases and passages are just superb. It was a real pleasure to read.

Fishing for Tigers is evocative, confronting, moving, and thrilling. I highly recommend it.

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### **Holly Quin says**

I seriously loved this book. I binge read it in one day and now I'm feeling sad it's over. It transported me back to Hanoi and left me yearning for more. The way the author deals with nuanced issues like gender and race and sexuality and colonialism and ex-pat-ism was really refreshing. I did find the sex scenes a little awkward and forced but overall the book was incredible.

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### **Jessica says**

I've never really thought about going to Vietnam but Fishing For Tigers has certainly changed my mind. It is a very easy, smooth read that touches on hard chringeworthy subjects without making them seem small and insignificant. I have to say I was not a fan of Cal, not because of the relationship or the age difference, I just found him to be very arrogant and also sometimes mean. I don't know if this was just because he is young and feels vulnerable and insecure but I didn't like it. Mischa I found to be a woman I would like to be, able to try anything, able to walk anywhere and be anyone she wants to be. I loved exploring (even though she was only walking down familar paths now) Vietnam with her and I enjoyed her opinions. My favourite thing about this book was the Stories of the Vietnamese Women I only wish there was more but understand why there wasn't. Overall I enjoyed this book and am going to explore more of Emily Maguire's publications as well as book my ticket to Vietnam.

I received Fishing for Tigers for free through Goodreads First Reads

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### **Hayley Crandell says**

I finished this last night and not really sure what to say. Yes, the descriptions of Vietnam are extremely evocative (I haven't been there, but the writing is so sensuous and descriptive that I feel like I have the 'feel' of the place), but really this book is about the characters. Mischa is a very 'real' protagonist, with faults and sometimes poor decision-making skills that make her less hero, but much more human. A true literary accomplishment.

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### **Robin Riedstra says**

"Fishing for Tigers" is a beautifully written book. She captures the cloy atmosphere beautifully, which becomes a metaphor for the main character's state of being. I don't want to give away spoilers but it is fantastically written with beautiful dialogue.

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### **Andrea says**

What sets this novel apart is the peppering of Vietnamese folklore tales throughout.

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