

# A CONVERSATION

Maureen Johnson

## Questions & Answers

Author of  
*Suite Scarlett*

**Q: Are any of the characters in *Suite Scarlett* based on people you know?**

Very loosely. Spencer is sort of based on some actors I have known, as is Eric. Maybe the most direct connection is Marlene. When I was little, four or five, my best friend was the poster child for a major disease. Literally. She was on the poster. She was on TV. She used to go and hang out on the sets of shows and meet celebrities. She met the president. Which means that when I was four or five, I thought the very best thing that could possibly happen to you was to have a major disease. My friend turned out to be a lot more well-adjusted than Marlene.

**Q: Do you have a favorite restaurant, shop, and/or park in New York City?**

I've always liked cities. When we would drive to see my grandmother, who lived in a not-very-nice section of Philadelphia, I would stare out the car window in absolute wonder, looking at the graffiti and the sneakers hanging from the telephone wires . . . and I would say to my parents, "I want to live here! In the city! It's pretty!" And my parents, who intentionally left the city because of these kinds of things, said, "Of course, small, dim child of ours. Whatever you say." Then they took me to New York for my seventh birthday, and I was done. Done. I knew where I wanted to live.

I don't have a favorite part of New York. I love the city as a whole. I never get tired of living here. I guess I could name a favorite park...Central Park. That's easy. But as for shops and restaurants, there are way too many.

**Q: Scarlett and Spencer spend much of the summer working on a performance of *Hamlet*. Do you have any acting experience?**

I do. I spent a lot of time in college being in shows, which isn't the same thing as saying that I was good at it. My specialty was playing crazy characters. This is a surprise to no one who knows me, really. I can stare for two to three minutes without blinking or moving my face, and this is sometimes a very useful skill.

I did go to theater school for graduate school, but as a dramaturge not a performer. Still, my services were occasionally required. I make a very good "person in back of room who knows all the light cues."

**Q: Where do you like to write?**

I tend to like large, light, airy spaces, with loads of windows. (But then does anyone like small, cramped, stale spaces with no light? Maybe they do....) I also like them kind of empty, with lots of wall space to put things on. I tend to cover my walls with notes, pictures, ideas. All my walls. All over my apartment. And I tend to paint the walls in fun colors—lavender, or yellow, or tea green, or pink. It's like I'm in kindergarten.

In my ideal writing space, I'd like tables—maybe four or five. Nice, big tables. Someone told me about going to the Bertolt Brecht museum in Berlin, where they have his old office still set up . . . and it's full of tables. A table for every project. I like tables.

I don't know what you'd call a room like that, except for "mj's big room with all the tables in it." Hopefully it would not be mistaken for a restaurant.

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**Q: Did you ever have a summer like Scarlett's, filled with excitement and romance, when you were younger?**

Nothing quite THAT exciting. When I was seventeen, I had a big summer of boyfriendyness. But I never took over a theater company. I would have liked to, though.

**Q: At what age did you realize you wanted to become an author?**

Pretty young. I think I sort of officially declared it when I was eight or nine, right after I gave up eating crayons.

**Q: What advice would you give to someone interested in becoming an author?**

The advice is always the same. Read and write.

**Q: What is in store for Scarlett in future books?**

It's hard to say without giving spoilers. I can say that things continue right from where they left off. *Scarlett Fever* picks up four weeks after *Suite Scarlett*, and *Scarlett three* (it doesn't have a name yet) picks up just a few weeks after the end of book two. All the characters reappear in books two and three, and the cast expands.

As for Scarlett, her life gets a lot more complex. In *Scarlett Fever*, things get a lot more...public. Spencer's work once again becomes an issue. And there is one major development in the Martin family that really will change things. Big things are coming.

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