

The Bachelor Chapters: A Thinking Woman's Romance

Vicki Marie Stolsen

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Steamy escapades reveal one woman's perspective on romantic love and its purpose (or lack thereof) in our modern world.

If men can be bachelors, why can't women? This is the central question Vicki Marie Stolsen poses in her rambunctious memoir, *The Bachelor Chapters: A Thinking Woman's Romance*. Part *Sex in the City*, part *Fifty Shades of Grey*, this narrative chronicles the author's sexual revolution, beginning with her first lesbian encounter in college through her escapades in her late forties. Determined to challenge the sexual double standard, Stolsen presents an alternative lifestyle, one in which women can be sexually free and unattached without being shamed.

The memoir captures a series of Stolsen's relationships that range from one-night stands to ten-year affairs. She begins with her first long-term lover, Toni Rey, whom she refers to as "mischievous" and someone with whom she created "nightlife adventures and sexual theater." As they frolic about in Paris, Stolsen's carefree, playful personality comes to life. "We were out and sexy," she writes. "I could play the sexy-femme and inspire her savvy-butch."

Like all of Stolsen's relationships, however, this whirlwind affair fizzles out, and, as she ages, the author begins to reassess her faith in and need for committed, monogamous love. "By now it's clear I'm not a fan of romantic love," Stolsen writes. "The mystery is: why does that seem to be so bloody radical?" This question recurs throughout her memoir, haunting her as she repeatedly encounters criticism about her bachelor lifestyle from her friends and family.

Just as the reader begins to trust Stolsen as a narrator, she diverges from what she does best (writing tantalizing, steamy descriptions of her sexual encounters) to espouse her beliefs, which feel forced and defensive at times. There is a tonal shift halfway through the book when love becomes the enemy, and Stolsen begins to break her narrative flow to profess her hatred for the concept.

"Love is not healthy; love is an infection, a virus that feeds on your good sense, clouds your clear vision, and disrupts the peace that is essential for a healthy heart and mind," she writes. Sentences like these diffuse the intensity of her crisp, candid language. They read like diatribes, and as they increase with frequency, she distances herself from her readers, forcing them to question their sympathy for her.

Stolsen is a master at building suspense as the chapters progress, however, which makes for a captivating read. Anyone who is curious about women, love, lust, and romance will gain plenty of insights from Stolsen's adventurous, bold approach to a female bachelor lifestyle, which she argues might be the best cure for modern love.

JACQUELYN LAZO (August 9, 2014)

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