



The Butcher Shop Girl: A Memoir for Misfits & Mavericks

Carmen Kissel-Verrier

FriesenPress (Nov 4, 2020)

(286pp)

978-1-5255-8820-4

The Butcher Shop Girl is a memoir about how grit and persistence can lead to success.

Carmen Kissel-Verrier's impactful story of personal growth, *The Butcher Shop Girl*, moves from the Canadian plains to the international stage and back again.

The memoir begins like a suspenseful novel, with a dramatic escape from a cartel compound, securing attention. The chapters that follow, though, are set in the past, during Kissel-Verrier's upbringing on the plains of Alberta. She reveals that her mother, Francoise, was the daughter of a wealthy farm family, and was only seventeen when she got pregnant and married Kenneth, the son of a nearby rancher. Their marriage foundered, and Francoise took off with her two children in the middle of the night.

Kissel-Verrier woke up in a new house, cut off from her affectionate, albeit heavy-drinking, father and his extended family. She describes her mother as bitter after—too busy heading a meat-packing plant to give her daughter the love and attention that she craved. Forced to make her own way, Kissel-Verrier ended up getting into some trouble.

Kissel-Verrier's tales of underage driving, animal husbandry, and partying are breezy and conversational, made more intimate by revelations that confidences were withheld from the adults in her life in the moment. Some bad choices are included, like a fight on the school bus, deceitfulness toward her grandparents, and dropping out of high school; these are relayed in a more abrasive tone, absent remorse.

Information on the finer points of butchering and thermal oil harvesting is shared in detail, at times slowing the pace of the narrative. The procedures are explained in layperson's terms, making them easy to understand. Some of the graphic depictions of the slaughter of animals invoke queasiness. However, there are also moments of beauty. In discussing welding, Kissel-Verrier mentions the sound of blue jays, a country radio station, beads of sweat running down her skin, and water drunk from a canteen, creating an immediate, visceral experience.

Tension increases when the enterprising Kissel-Verrier takes a job as an exotic dancer, forging a new identity that impacts her relationships with family members, oil-field coworkers, and romantic partners. The job also leads to adventure and travel, leading to the book's climactic scene in South America.

In spite of an unstable family life and naive decisions to quit school and give up promising jobs, Kissel-Verrier shows that grit and persistence can lead to success.

A memoir and a cautionary tale, *The Butcher Shop Girl* is set in the farms, oil fields, and strip bars of North America.

SUZANNE KAMATA (December 7, 2020)

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