

Vow of Celibacy

Erin Judge

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Vow of Celibacy is a funny and smart exploration of sex, love, and every woman's road to body-positivity.

In Erin Judge's *Vow of Celibacy*, heroine Natalie is a woman on a mission: she is abstaining from sex until she can figure out why her many partners never seem to satisfy her. To understand, she recounts her sexual and romantic history from high school to the present predicament that caused her to make the decision to vow celibacy in the first place.

Vow of Celibacy is both engaging and sex-positive. Natalie is bisexual, plus-sized, and relatable as she talks through her past partners and, most importantly, what it was that drew her to those people. Natalie's dilemma works in juxtaposition to her best friend Anastaze's. Anastaze is a thirty-one-year-old virgin and the author of a famous blog, struggling with her identity and the sexual possibilities presented through the head of her fan club.

The novel moves back and forth between Natalie's patterns in the past and the person they shaped her into in the present. After spending much time behind the scenes at fashion shows helping with production, she begins to dabble in the world of plus-sized modeling. Her vow is a personal and difficult decision, but one that ends up being valuable.

In the course of the novel, Natalie moves through body insecurities, and that history highlights her hesitance to be sexual at all. She struggles with her feelings about being plus-sized, which taper off as she becomes bolder and more unapologetic, first in her sex life, and then in her own skin.

Vow of Celibacy is a funny and smart exploration of sex, love, and every woman's road to body-positivity. Its characters are carefully crafted and relatable, whether they have sex or don't. The ultimate message seems to be that growth and self-realization is different for everybody, and that what it means to love and what it means to have sex are relative.

SONYA LOVY (Fall 2016)

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