

X That Ex: Making a Clean Break When It's Over

Kristin Carmichael

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Salvation isn't just about the leaving, it's about the staying gone. This fundamental truth is at the heart of domestic violence specialist Kristin E. Carmichael's debut work, a book focusing on the aftermath of abandoning toxic relationships.

This guide fills a gap that Carmichael has noted through years of counseling women through difficult breakups. There's plenty written on how to leave a bad relationship, but then general silence ensues. And yet, *X That Ex* asserts, a person's vulnerability is never as heightened as it is post-breakup. Too many women are able to do the difficult work of saying "it's over," only to return to the sites of their abuse after a bit of calculated cajoling from those they left.

Much of the work is spent detailing what Carmichael calls an ex-boyfriend's playbook—essentially a list of popular strategies employed to lure in women who have left their relationships. The most outwardly appealing lead the list. These are what the author calls "defensive" tactics, and they involve convincing a liberated former partner that things would be different a second time around. Carmichael quotes "I can't do it without you," and "I'll change!" as two among the litany of trite "sweet nothings" which exes are apt to make use of—and promptly abandon once they've again secured their partner's affection. These misleading seductions are dangerous but of a different variety than "offensive" tactics the author lists. The latter encompass a range of acute manipulations, from using a partner's deepest insecurities against them to outright stalking and threats.

Carmichael employs affirmations and warnings to help women resist the pull of all such plays. She encourages women to be proactive in the wake of a breakup, and so middle chapters include prompts ranging from taking account of information an ex may use to emotionally preparing oneself for the fallout that may follow a relationship's end. Chapters on staying resolute and on reclaiming independence and a sense of self-worth conclude the book. An appendix for the loved ones of those facing such battles is also provided.

Carmichael's vast experience undergirds this sympathetic and compelling guide, and the array of real examples and learned projections provided throughout create a space for genuine reader introspection. Carmichael approaches those emerging from detrimental situations with no judgment or blame, which may be a refreshing change, considering the alienation abused women often face in society.

X That Ex is certain to reinforce resolve, particularly in the moments of weakness Carmichael so intuitively anticipates. This book is essential reading for those emerging from codependent or abusive relationships as well as for those who seek to be understanding sources of support.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March 4, 2013)

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