

[PDF] What A Girl Wants: A Novel (An Ashley Stockingdale Novel)

Kristin Billerbeck - pdf download free book

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Description:

About the Author

Kristin Billerbeck is a Christy Award finalist and two-time winner of the ACFW Book of the Year award. Her books include *A Billion Reasons Why* and *What a Girl Wants*.

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Chapter One

This is Rick Ramirez, reporting for Entertainment This Evening." The announcer rolls his "R's" to emphasize his Latin heritage; he's a cross between Ricardo Montalban and the used car salesman up the street.

"We're live in Silicon Valley at the celebrated wedding of Ashley Wilkes Stockingdale to the world's most eligible bachelor, John Folger, heir to the coffee fortune. Not since JFK, Jr. have the world's single women mourned a wedding as today, but Ashley is the woman who stole his heart-the woman who left the sworn bachelor no other option but marriage. And we hear the ladies cry, Who is this woman? For more on Ashley, we go to Jen Jenkins in 'copter 7."

"Rick, we're live over the Stanford University chapel, awaiting the much-anticipated arrival of the enigmatic Ashley Stockingdale: A woman who brought Manolo Blahnik, shoemaker to the stars, all the way to California to design her diamond-encrusted bridal slippers. Who is this Ashley?" Jen leans into the camera's lens, "I'm glad you asked.

"Ashley Wilkes Stockingdale came from humble beginnings, and grew up in a quaint California bungalow. The child of a homemaker and a carpenter, Ashley always knew she was destined for something great. Although there was time for frivolity, like high school cheerleading, Ashley was a serious student, passing the California bar her very first time out. And she hasn't forgotten her roots; when asked if Franklin Graham might perform the ceremony, Ashley declined, choosing her beloved pastor instead. Rumor has it she'll arrive in a cream-colored, body hugging Vera Wang gown. The world waits . . . back to you, Rick."

Yes, the world waits. And so do I. There's single for a season, and single for a reason. My singles' pastor used to say that and laugh like staccato Spongebob. I remember thinking it was hilarious until the day I turned thirty. Then my thoughts turned much darker, like hey, maybe I am single for a reason. That's a depressing day, when you realize Prince Charming isn't riding in on a white horse, and J. Vernon McGee is starting to sound awfully handsome on the radio.

I gaze around the singles group and it's rife with its reasons. Tim Hanson has those hair plugs that look like he's sprouting rows of corn on his head. Jake Henley has been pining over an ex-girlfriend that no one's ever seen, for going on three years now. He still talks to her on the phone, and I just want to say, "Wake up, dimwit! She's moved on!" To waste your life on an emotional relationship that is going nowhere is such an easy out, don't you think? It makes him unavailable, and avoiding commitment is now that much simpler.

There's Kay Harding, resident organizer and anal-retentive of the group. She can run everyone's life perfectly and is content to do so. The sad thing is we all go along, without enough will of our own to plan our social lives. Kay does a fine job, and we always have something to do on Saturday night, so who's complaining? Kay's home looks like Martha Stewart lives with her, but she's alone. Just like me. So here I'm left to wonder, if all their reasons are so blatantly obvious, what's mine? And why can't I see it when I see everyone else's so clearly?

When I graduated from law school from Santa Clara University and became a patent attorney, I thought the world was my oyster. My head had a hard time fitting through the doorway, it was so grossly oversized. It's been shriveling ever since with the daily rejection that is my reality.

My mother told me that no man wanted to marry a lawyer. "You're too educated," she'd say. Like I was supposed to dumb myself down for Mr. Right. I laughed at such a ridiculous concept. After all,

I'd dated plenty in college, but I waited on real romance because I knew there was someone out there who would make my feet tingle and my brain fog. Alas, I'd settle for a phone call at this point. My mom's intellectual theory is starting to gel like her aspic. But I live in Silicon Valley-it's not like intellect is a bad thing here-so where's my knight in shining silicone?

Family support is everywhere. Besides my mother, there's my brother who calls me "bus bait"-as in, I have more chance of getting hit by a bus than married after thirty. They've proven that study is totally bogus, but does that mean anything to my brother? Absolutely not. I just pity the poor woman who eventually gets stuck with him. He's a bus driver, by the way. And probably the one to run me down just to prove his point.

Don't get me wrong. I live a full life as a Christian single, and I'm not waiting for life to start when I get married. I just can't stop wondering, what is my reason? Do I have some glaring flaw that I cannot be witness to? This kind of thing just drives me crazy, like when men my age marry twelve-year-olds fresh from college. Okay, so they are in their early twenties. But I remember rooting for The Bachelor when he chose a woman twenty-seven. Finally, a man who saw a little age like a fine wine, rather than vinegar past its prime.

Yet here I sit, with all the same single people I've been sitting near for years. Once in a while, we'll get some cute young thing in her twenties and some single guy swoops out of nowhere and whisks her away. Leaving us "reason" people wondering what strange scent we give off. Maybe it's desperation.

I don't feel desperate. I sing in the worship band, I work at the homeless shelter, and I'm busy nearly every night of the week. Granted, my busyness translates into which reality television show is on that night, but I still have my routine.

Kay Harding has taken the podium and her familiar voice breaks into my thoughts. "Saturday night we're going to the local Starbucks for a talent night. If anyone wants to sign up, please see me after Sunday school." Kay takes the pen from behind her ear and attaches it to the clipboard. "I'll send the sign-up sheet around, but see me if you're performing."

The thought of invading a local coffee house and humiliating myself sends my stomach surging. At the same time, I know I'll be there. What else do I have to do? I'm in such a rut. It's like when an engineer tries to explain a new segment of technology to me. I know I'll eventually get it, but the early frustration leaves me wondering why I do what I do.

Jim Henderson is clapping. I call Jim "Wild at Heart Man" because he can't seem to say a thing without quoting John Eldredge. Trouble is, I think Jim missed the message of that book because he's not more masculine, just more annoying. Of course, I'm not one to judge because I've been sitting here, same as him, waiting for someone to bear witness to my feminine wiles.

Seth Greenwood stands up. Seth is the one anomaly in the group. He's handsome, albeit bald, but that doesn't bother me. He has crystal blue eyes and a heart as big as the San Francisco Bay. He's a programmer-read: Geek. But who isn't in the Silicon Valley? He's thirty-four-granted his baldness makes him look a little older-but he's always there for anyone who needs him. Including me. Right now, he's got an out-of-work salesman friend living with him. And that guy brought two cats along. Seth's "reason" is probably just fear of commitment, the universal fear of single men everywhere, but something tells me he won't stay in that trench forever. So I guess maybe he's a "season" man. Time will tell.

Seth takes center stage over the rickety music stand. "On Wednesday night, after Bible Study, we're watching Notorious. It's an old movie with Cary Grant," (the women coo here) "and Ingrid Bergman," (now a few guys whistle). "Anyone interested"- Seth looks over at Kay and her organized clipboard and winces just a bit. "Well, anyone interested can just show up on Wednesday night. We'll know why you're there. Bring a snack, or be at the mercy of my fridge." Seth sits back down, and I feel my smile break loose. Seth encapsulates an invisible charm, like Fred Astaire. You can't really see his attractiveness in a Hugh Jackman way, but there's something about him that throws you off, in a good sort of way.

The singles' pastor stands up. "If that takes care of all the announcements, I have one of my own." Pastor Max Romanski is dreamy to look at, sort of a cross between the quarterback in high school and the president of the student body all grown up. Not the cool guy who peaked in high school, but the one whose gift transcends adolescence.

Max is tall and radiates this vibrant love for the Lord. Just by the way he looks at his wife-all googly-eyed, like a lovesick teenager-makes you appreciate him. And maybe covet just a little bit.

Max's wife, Kelly, is a beautiful, blond, doe-eyed princess. Sweeter than caramel, there is no mistaking why Kelly married. She was the girl in high school we all wished we could be, with the right clothes and the stylish haircut. I can't imagine Kelly ever not knowing how to look.

Max beams a grin, ideal for one of those BriteSmile ads. "Kelly and I would like to announce we are expecting a baby, and we're due in July."

Everyone claps. A polite round of applause that implies joy for the new gift of life, yet an irritable jealousy that no one wants to feel, but who can help it? Every time someone gets pregnant it's just another reminder: There's Absolutely No Chance of That Happening in My Life Anytime in the Near Future. Unless God is planning another Immaculate Conception, and I'm thinking He's done with that kind of miracle.

So I clap a bit more than the others, and smile. It's one of those plastered, fake smiles, but it's all I can manage. I am happy for them, really I am, and I know that envy is a sin, so I force such feelings away. But when I help throw another shower, and when I hold their perfect bundle of joy, it will hurt-and I hate that I feel that way.

I notice that I do better at reacting than Kay Harding. I can't imagine what it's...

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