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Fifteen million Americans a year are plagued by alcoholism. Five million of them are women. Many of them, like Caroline Knapp, started in their early teens and began using alcohol as liquid armor, a way to protect themselves from the difficult realities of life. In this extraordinarily candid and revealing memoir, Knapp provides important insights not only about alcoholism, but also about life itself and how we learn to deal with it. The complete audiobook is here = > by Caroline Knapp. New York, Random House, 1997, 304 pp., \$16.00 (paper). Alcohol-related disorders constitute a behavioural health epidemic. According to the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 6.8% of Americans over the age of 18 suffer from alcohol abuse disorders (1). Unfortunately, only about 8.9% of these Americans will receive specialized treatment (1). Patients in remission from alcohol use disorders carry high relapse risk and can pose significant challenges to even the most experienced provider. Understanding the patient's experience can be crucial in developing the report and formulating an appropriate treatment plan for such complex patients. With this goal, Caroline Knapp's memoir, *Drinking: A Love Story*, may have no equal. In Knapp's words, an addict is a person seeking physical solutions to emotional or spiritual problems (p. 58). She describes a powerlessness experienced by the active alcoholic, a kind of passive self-hatred. Personifying alcohol, Knapp emphasizes his ability to act as a companion and in turn temporarily reduce the experience of social isolation in drunken moments. This type of validation is by definition transient: the dependence on this external authorisation is fuelling a cycle in which the abuser will surrender [the sense of self] (p. 91). Knapp describes that as her alcohol addiction progressed, denial and the construction of alternative identities offered comforting defenses: we hide from others (and often from ourselves) the truth about our real selves (p. 16). She regrets that many alcohol addicts use this denial to avoid substance abuse treatment for years. Knapp valiantly recounts the troubling progression of alcoholism from her teenage years to her eventual sobriety in her mid-thirties. In chapters with titles such as *Love, Sex, Addiction and Denial*, she gives a compelling portrayal of her relationship with alcohol and how it invaded every aspect of her life. She conveys decades of wisdom from her observations of her fellow Alcoholics Anonymous members. She also draws on experiences in therapy and with her father, a Harvard-educated psychoanalyst, to examine the dynamics behind her romance with alcohol; she suggests understanding alcohol both as a mechanism for dealing with intolerable affects and a transitional object (2) in a way that lay people and similar. After a series of tragic events, Knapp credits her own desperation as a driving force for recovery. Nevertheless, she admits that even after years of sobriety, in the place where a wine glass, my pulse still lives, and I find myself seeing it woefully, the way you can look at a photograph of someone you loved deeply and painfully and then lost, (p. 105). *Drinking: A Love Story* artfully explains the power of a patient's attraction and struggle through a harmful relationship with alcohol. It provides valuable insight into the denial and resistance a provider may encounter when treating alcohol use disorders. Knapp's well-crafted prose presents an enjoyable read as an excellent, easy-access guide to the psychological and emotional experience of alcoholism for any behavioral health provider. Dr. Flinton is a second-year resident of the National Capital Consortium Psychiatry Program, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Md. The views expressed in this book review are those of the author and do not reflect the official policies of the Department of The Department of Navy/Air Force, Department of Defense, or U.S. Government. Administration of substance abuse and mental health services: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Rockville, Md. Google Scholar2. Johnson B: Three perspectives on addiction. J Am Psychoanal Assoc 1999; 47:791-815 Crossref, Google Scholar Click on a thumbnail to go to Google Books. Loading... 1.1302812.677 (3.93)29It happened this way: I fell in love, and then, because love destroyed everything I cared about, I had to fall out. So begins drinking: *A Love Story*, journalist Caroline Knapp's brave and powerful memoir about her twenty years as a functioning alcoholic. Knapp writes that she loved spirits the way she loved bad men, and like all tragic love stories, hers is a tale of seduction and betrayal, a testament to the enticing but ultimately destructive powers of addiction. Fifteen million Americans a year are affected by the disease of alcoholism. Five million of them are women. Caroline Knapp, for example, started drinking at the age of fourteen. She drank through her years at an Ivy League college, through an award-winning career as a lifestyle editor and columnist. Publicly, she was a dutiful daughter, attentive friend, sophisticated professional. Privately, she drank herself into oblivion, trapped in love affairs that continued to undermine her self-esteem - until a series of personal crises forced her to confront and eventually break free of the liquid armor she had used to protect herself from the complicated struggles of growing up. Caroline Knapp's ruthless soul-searching, moral courage and unique abilities as a writer tell this remarkable memoir with many new insights about alcoholism, but more importantly, with many deep insights about life. No library descriptions were found. Average: (3.93)0.51 61.5 12 112.5 33 483.5 134 924.5 165 75 Become LibraryThing Author. 385315546 I wanted to avoid this, just to judge this touching book and be done with it. I wanted to just ignore my compulsion toward emotionally disemboweling myself on the internet. And I've never really been one to write an autobiographical book review, but... Here we are, or here I am. Here I am, in my claustrophobic space; books spread over, televised based on the main menu of Oshima Nagisa's *Three Resurrected Drunkards* (the irony there is very accidental), dim lamp lights, Beethoven sonata renditions of Andras Schiff murmur in the background, and at the end of my evening maternal approaches. Here I am. I'm sober. Now. I hate it for a number of reasons. The first and foremost reason is that I am in my element, my room room much like the inside of my head. Every activity that I can think of to participate in right now involves some process or relative amount of reflection and deep thinking. If I pick up that *Isozaki* book (which I must because it's due back at the library tomorrow), then my head will swim all night, trying to imagine what Katsura village really looks like, and also what the hidden process of rebuilding and moving the Ise shrine actually looks like, as very few people in the world are able to witness it. If I go, I go with a head full of thoughts about tomorrow, about wanting a female presence in my life, about the future, and most importantly about the moment and how I destroy it with self-destructive doubt and endless questioning. Okay, I'm starting to sound too heavy here. Sorry, it's only been a week so far. I mean, I've gone six months in the past, just started last July actually, relapse in December. God, has it already been six more months? And what did I miss? I missed being suicidally paranoid, out of shape, financially distressed, and just generally miserable? Really? But throughout this lapse of debauchery, I had been able to temporarily stun myself with booze. I always felt like shit the next day, not to mention inevitably depressed, but I managed to put off these horrible feelings for a while, to drag time out actually confronting them and solving them in a healthy way. And they're pretty awful. Kate Gompert, one of the characters (my favorite) in *Infinite Jest* describes something similar in the early part of the book, *Over it all. My head, my neck, ass. In my stomach. It's everywhere. I don't know what I could call it. It's like I can't get enough outside of it to call it anything. It's like horror more than grief. It's more like horror. It's like something terrible is about to happen, the most horrible thing you can imagine - no, worse than you can imagine, because there's this feeling that there's something you need to do right away to stop it, but you don't know what it is you have to do, and then it also happens all the horrible time it's happening and it's happening too - all at the same time. Earth-shaking hangovers always equal suicidal depression in my world. Depression is an uneffable feeling for me. I could, if you asked me to, quote a few external stimuli that make me sad. I could tell you why I cried if I did it in your presence. I could also confidently chart the ups and downs of the cyclical pattern of chemicals in my brain throughout a given week, and the way in which they are changed by drinking, and the time it takes for guilt, anxiety, remorse, self-hatred, and... Well... depression to bear. Usually two days after a bender, or a night of heavy binge drinking. Oh, I have it yet? The term casual casual is not in my lifestyle dictionary, anywhere. A theatrical way of saying it, sure, but I can't remember the last time that I just had a few beers. I drink cheaply and I drink with clear intentions. I drink to deliberately get dark drunk with such self-destructive power and determination that I scare myself the next day when I wake up sober. In a matter of seconds I can go from quietly reading a Pynchon novel at the bar, to a raving lunatic throwing drinks at passing cars, and spitting in people's faces (lucky for me, actual physical struggles are more or less non-existent in Portland). It hasn't always been that way. Then again, about four years ago, when I was twenty-three, I was still enjoying my life, having fun sleeping around, telling stories and meeting people. These days I actually prefer to drink alone at bars. Whisky and beer are really the only combination I drink. And it's like bottom shelf, rot-gut bourbon, and basically just PBR (or Hamm's, or Rainer, or Olympia). I mean, I like my Johnny Walker Black, and my Glenlivet as much as the next guy, but I'm just too poor to drink like that. Too bad to drink the way I do as it is anyway. I come to the bar and order a shot and a beer (referred to in some corners of the world as a boilermaker, in others, as an ex-husband). I really love this combination. And I won't start talking, or doing anything really, until I've taken my shot and chased it with beer. This distinctive whisky burn is bliss really (in the case of Wild Turkey, not so much, but hey, it's still bourbon), followed by that's the feeling when booze hits my stomach. Any anxiety that I might have felt all day - whether it stemmed from the hangover from the previous evening, or that general sense of existential malaise that was mentioned earlier - is now gone. And I'm animated, so exuberant, just happy to be alive. I can play a game of pool, talk to women, discuss movies by Jacques Tati (I love him)... Something. Of course, it is all very temporary. This first sense of excitement and general enthusiasm for life distracts me from paying attention to how much I consume, and from there out, it's just mindless drunkenness. Static bliss. And then the reality hits the fan. I could regale you all with stories here. I didn't even really want to know where to start. I would tell a few about my drinking habits during last summer, a point where I really hit rock bottom, but I fear they may incriminate me in ways that might threaten my livelihood. Sounds melodramatic, I know, but believe me, that's probably a bad idea. So why am I telling you all this? It's weird. I don't consider myself brave such a thing to do it and I am like an awkward open person against friends, colleagues and family anyway, so it is more or less typical that I would throw up my crimes and out on the interconnected canvas of voyeurism that is the Internet. I just don't have anything to hide. Also, because I had to tell the stories that I've just alluded to, to a room full of recovering alcoholics. The truth is, I'm just not ready to take this step yet, but I know at this point that alcohol, in any form or form, is basically detrimental to my livelihood, and the concept of moderation in this context is a damning joke. That's the part that really sucks, the last one about moderation just not being an option. This complication pops up in Knapp's book (yes I finally mentioned the book that I'm supposedly writing about), as well as in a few of the other recovery memoirs that I've read. You listen to adult adults - some journalists, some lawyers, and every other time in life you can imagine - talk about how hard it is to live with the fact that they can't just relax and have a good time having a drink like the rest of the world. They are broken and damaged people who sweat bullets every time their sober-ass sits in a room with four walls and even a drink in it. Oh, and how we mourn this reality. Oh, how I'm doing it right now. This little rant is living proof of how badly I want a drink right now. Quitting last time was a game. This time, no joke, I can't think of anything else. So I thought I'd write about it. It's not like I'm going to utilize Goodreads as a platform for my own personal recovery blog, but I just needed this one time to just gut me in front of everyone. Also Knapp's book was really moving and it helped to remind me of exactly how unwieldy my life is right now. That part really hit home; the idea that when one drinks so often that they begin to basically ignore their entire lives and the rational and responsible choices that sustain such a life. This I understand and I'm really not articulating it too well right now. But I feel like I'm at least suggesting it pretty well. And it was just pretty much cathartic. Cathartic.*