

Dying for a Drink

Amelia Baker

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Dying for a Drink is an addiction and recovery memoir that functions as a cautionary tale.

In her brutally honest, disjointed memoir, *Dying for a Drink*, Amelia Baker works to make sense of her slide into alcoholism and prescription drug abuse with hope that her story will help others facing the same demons.

Baker, a stay-at-home mother and a wife to a successful pioneer in the cellular phone industry, tells her story of losing her family's trust, her sanity, and nearly her life in her memoir. Though she was only a social drinker in her thirties, Baker crossed the "invisible line" as she got older. Her drinking became a disease that trumped every other part of her life. The book includes story after story about lying, betraying family, and drinking into abject misery and self-loathing.

Through multiple rehab programs and eleven medical detoxes, the book describes twelve years of Baker increasingly drinking more and more, despite declining health and injured relationships. It relates in detail her multiple alcohol-induced injuries, trips to the hospital, a suicide attempt, and daily life inside rehabilitation facilities in the United Kingdom and Australia. It is a terrifying account. Baker nearly lost her life, but her book also focuses heavily on Alcoholics Anonymous, declaring that faith finally helped her break the cycle of addiction.

The language is matter-of-fact; its lack of emotion becomes a detriment. Declarations about feeling shame or devastation don't fully convey the feelings they're referencing. The tone is erratic—alternately lighthearted, dark, and dry. Accounts of drinking are borderline cheeky, and they come to undermine asserted feelings of regret.

The book moves chronologically, from Baker's early days of drinking to her most recent stint in rehab and subsequent sobriety, but its stories still feel muddled. One story blends into another, even without clear ties between them; they are often presented without ending or resolution. Vital concerns beyond addiction—information about how Baker maintains her financial stability, for instance—are left out. Seemingly crucial moments, including extramarital affairs, are thrown in almost as afterthoughts; they are never fully explored.

Following its first account of rehabilitation, the book becomes repetitive, following a narrative pattern in which Baker leaves rehab only to fall back into drinking and dangerous behavior; interventions and hospitalizations are many, but they ultimately read as indistinct. There's not a strong sense of progression. The ending reads as preachy, and it falls flat in its explanations of AA.

Dying for a Drink is an addiction and recovery memoir; though disorganized, it functions as a cautionary tale.

ANGELA MCQUAY (August 21, 2018)

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