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Hide & Seek: How I Laughed at Depression, Conquered My Fears, and Found Happiness

Wendy Aron
Kunati Press (October 2008)
Unknown $14.95 (256pp)
978-1-60164-158-8

There's no lack of self-help books aimed at people who suffer from depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, or neuroses. Nor do we face a dearth of memoirs by people who have been through the excruciating hoops of misery and treatment. So why does the world need Wendy Aron's *Hide & Seek*, which combines her personal story with advice from various professionals she meets during her year of discovery? The answer is simply good medicine: she makes her readers laugh—at the world of self-improvement education, at spiritual gurus, and at ourselves. Learning how to cope with hopelessness has never been so fun.

Aron smartly avoids revealing too much of her emotionally fraught past. After ten years of therapy and a short stint in a mental institution, she knows why she suffers from depression, low self-esteem and a tendency to overeat—growing up in the shadow of a sick sibling with two critical, emotionally distant parents might do the trick for anyone. Now, at forty, she focuses on change. She wants to find a healthy romantic relationship, succeed at her career, and appreciate her friends. To this end, she signs up for a plethora of workshops with titles like "Self-Esteem and the New You" and "Humor and Learned Optimism." Speed dating, a weekend seminar in creativity, and a Weight Watchers membership round out her attempt to create a life of serenity and productivity.

What does she get out of these classes? For one thing, a delicious assortment of one-liners that have a good chance of reducing even the most down-and-out into fits of giggles. But her humor isn't directed solely at the teachers or the other students (she's never cruel)—her funniest moments, and her most touching, come at her own expense. After learning about the "misery gap," the difference between one's real and the ideal selves, Aron observes, "My gap is as wide as the earth's distance from the moon."

Her classes are good for more than just entertainment, however. By the end of the year she realizes she isn't alone in feeling unhappy, that many people are worse off than her. This epiphany carries her a long way toward gaining control over her own perceptions. Aron serves herself up as an inspiration, made easy to swallow with a good laugh.

(August 15, 2008)

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