

Sirens

Joshua Mohr

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Sirens is a dark, urgent, and brutal picture of addiction—but also one that shows that recovery is possible, even if it is a lifelong pursuit.

Joshua Mohr's memoir *Sirens* plumbs the raw wounds and high hopes of addiction and sobriety. This is a revelatory narrative, as fascinating and disturbing as it is necessary.

In relating his young adulthood of addiction, relapse, and eventual, tenuous sobriety, Mohr opts for the uncut truth. Those who have been there before are likely to cringe with recognition: family visits with shocked relatives after all-nighters; tumbles through the city on benders; weekend-long blackouts following the ingestion of unknown substances from strangers. Mohr, in his youth, was called to it all, chasing the music of a perpetual high right onto the rocks. His depictions are graphic, self-aware, and refrain from making convenient excuses.

So, too, are beloved people omnipresent: friends and fellow users he tried to do right by; a first wife whose ultimatum he rejected, and a second whom he subjected to the roller-coaster for longer than he is proud of. He speaks of those he loves with shame, awe, and respect, and it is they—particularly his daughter, Ava—who finally prompt him to seek change. His memoir is self-referential as it details his fears in the midst of sobriety: that he will relapse; that he will let his daughter down; that even the anesthetic that he needs before heart surgery could prove seductive enough to send him hurtling back. For Ava, he presses on. For Ava, he leaves no dark secret unrevealed.

Even when its pages are a “pageant of debasement,” Mohr's work captivates, chronicling the desperate need that addicts feel, their inventive methods of self-sabotage, and the reality that falls off of the wagon are rarely gentle affairs. His is a precarious disease, and his intricate account shows just how vigilant one must be to hold it in remission. *Sirens* is a dark, urgent, and brutal picture of addiction—but also one that shows that recovery is possible, even if it is a lifelong pursuit.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March/April 2017)

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