

Drinking: A Love Story Study Guide

Drinking: A Love Story by Caroline Knapp

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Plot Summary

Drinking: A Love Story is the powerful, truthful memoir of Caroline Knapp. In the novel, Knapp details her long, involved, and tortured love affair with alcohol. She describes the effect of alcohol on her relationships, emotions, and thoughts. The addictiveness of drink impaired her ability to grow emotionally and personally. Professionally, Knapp was smart, productive, and always willing to work. Personally, she was spiraling out of control from her drinking.

The entire novel is told through the point of view of Caroline Knapp, a successful writer who was also a raging alcoholic. In the memoir, Knapp explains her descent into alcoholism as well as her struggle to get better. Knapp explains that she was first introduced to alcohol by her father. Every night he would come home and drink to relax. At the time Knapp did not know that he father was leading a double life—he was trying to maintain the appearance of a normal happy family and professional life while also having an adulterous affair. Knapp explains that she always felt drawn to her father. There was some unspeakable strong bond between the two of them. Knapp felt that she could never connect to her father because he was always probing into her thoughts. The only way she could be around him comfortably would be to drink.

Knapp explains alcohol's addictive nature. In her twenties, Knapp was an anorexic. She denied herself the right to food so that she could control something in her life. After she got help with her eating disorder, Knapp increased her drinking to cope her feelings and allow herself to express her true emotions. Drinking made things easier because Knapp did not actually have to live through her problems or challenges. Always seeking acceptance and love, Knapp enters into a long, unhealthy relationship with a man named Julian. While she thought he would improve her life, he criticized her and desired for her to change. Right after breaking up with Julian, Knapp meets Michael, a caring, sweet man. Michael showers Knapp with tenderness and love she has never known. She is torn between the need to be accepted by Julian and the love that is given freely to her by Michael.

Knapp continues this double life for some time. Fueled by alcohol, she cannot let go of Julian or Michael. As the book progresses, Knapp explains that she thought that alcohol was the only way to cope with those two relationships as well as the deaths of her mother and father. By the time her mother has died, Knapp gets black-out drunk every night. She only seriously considers to give up drinking when she drops and almost severely hurts her best friend's daughters. Knapp then describes the hard, long road to sobriety. She goes to rehab and then begins attending AA meetings every night. Knapp says that she can only think of sobriety one day at a time. Every day is a struggle, but she can now live her life fully.



Prologue

Prologue Summary and Analysis

Drinking: A Love Story, is the powerful, truthful memoir of Caroline Knapp. In the novel, Knapp details her long, involved, and tortured love affair with alcohol. She describes the effect of alcohol on her relationships, emotions, and thoughts. The addictiveness of drink impaired her ability to grow emotionally and personally. Professionally, Knapp was smart, productive, and always willing to work. Personally, she was spiraling out of control from her drinking.

As the novel opens, Caroline Knapp explains that she fell absolutely head over heels in love with alcohol. But the love she had for the drinking ruined everything she actually cared about. Knapp says that she did not give up drinking until she almost seriously ended the lives of two people she loves. She was visiting her friend Jennifer for Thanksgiving. After drinking too much, she began to play games with Jennifer's two young daughters. She put one child on her back and the other around her front. Knapp, now weighed down by 130 pounds worth of children's weight, runs up and down the street. She trips and comes crashing down onto the pavement. Thankfully, Knapp does not harm either of the children. She lands on her knee, which she severely injures.

Knapp admits that even after she dropped her best friend's children, she still does not give up drinking for another three months. The process of getting sober was one of the hardest things she will ever do.



Chapter 1, Love , (pg 1-10)

Chapter 1, Love , (pg 1-10) Summary and Analysis

Knapp opens the chapter explaining that on every occasion she could imagine, she drank. She drank Fume Blanc, Johnnie Walker Black, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Toward the end of her drinking, she kept two bottles of Cognac in the house—a bottle for show and the real bottle, which was hidden in the back of her cupboard. Knapp admits that she drank when she was happy, sad, anxious, or bored. She drank when her father was dying of a brain tumor. After her father's death, Knapp's mother found an empty bottle of Old Grand Dad that Knapp had hidden behind the toilet. Knapp thought she had gotten rid of all her bottles. When her mother confronts her with the bottle in hand, Knapp lies about the bottle. She says that it was from before her father had died. She has promised to cut down on drinking, but this is not the case. Knapp's mother is extremely upset because she knows her daughter is lying. She tells Knapp that she is extremely worried about her and Knapp promises that she will get her drinking under control.

After the talk with her mother, Knapp explains that at the time, she did really want to quit. The next day, she tries to prove to herself that she can make it without a drink, but fails miserably at the attempt. Knapp explains that alcohol had simply become too important in her life. She would rationalize her drinking or promise to cut back, but could never follow through.

Her relationship with drinking developed gradually over many years. At first, Knapp's relationship with drinking only occupied a small portion of her life. But it was as if one morning she woke up and her love for the drink became all consuming. Knapp confesses that she loved everything about drinking: the rituals of opening a bottle of wine; the camaraderie she felt while drinking; the warm, melting sensations that drinking aroused.

In her late twenties, Knapp recalls that she would drink with her friend Elaine, a forty-year-old, divorced, messy drunk. Elaine was embroiled in a dysfunctional relationship with a married man that caused her to drink obsessively, gain weight, and have breakdowns. Whenever Knapp would spend time with Elaine, she was relieved that her problems weren't as bad. It simply justified her reasons to continue drinking.

Liquor seemed to always be in her life—at her parent's house, parties, and eventually at college. By the time Knapp was old enough to legally drink, drinking was as normal as breathing.

Like many alcoholics, Knapp does not understand how she became one. How could a smart woman from an upper class family who attended Brown and Harvard and was an accomplished writer become an alcoholic? But Knapp realizes that no one can pinpoint what makes an individual an alcoholic. To simply deal with going home, Knapp had to

sneak bottles of wine and Scotch in her weekend bag to make it through her visit. When someone loves alcohol as much as Knapp did, it is hard to notice things like this.



Chapter 2, Double Life I, (pg 11-27)

Chapter 2, Double Life I, (pg 11-27) Summary and Analysis

The day after Knapp busted her knee carrying her friend's young daughters while drunk, she hobbled into work. When her boss asked what was wrong, she told her she was chasing after kids. Knapp did not include that she was drunk.

Knapp says that she was a high functioning alcoholic. On the outside, everyone thought her life was organized, calm, and sophisticated. On the inside, Knapp was a ball of chaos and instability. While she was powerful, smart, and successful, her emotional and physical health were very poor. Knapp explains that these alcoholics are everywhere. You would never know that they were alcoholics because they productively work beside you and meet you after work for one or two drinks. They aren't belligerent drunks, but they are alcoholics. Knapp had several friends that that worked their ways through law school and Ph.D. programs while actively drinking. While recovering, Knapp often realized that heads of law firms and CEOs were all in her AA meetings.

When Knapp wrote her column for the The Boston Phoenix, her readers loved her honesty and sincerity in her column. Knapp admits that she was writing about her life, but only a portion of herself that she could express. She could write about her struggles with her parent's deaths, anorexia, and her relationships with men. She also wrote about Alice K, her alter ego, who was constantly anxious, obsessed with men, and stuck in a rut. Knapp says that they were essentially her two selves. While her readers knew it was a part of Knapp, they had no idea how severe her depression actually was. She had succeeded in compartmentalizing her life into two sects: the working version and the alcoholic.

Knapp insists that at a party she was not the person falling over themselves, drunk. Only her closest friends could tell when she was plastered. Knapp was in her twenties in the 1980s when drugs, sex, and drinking were done in excess. As the nineties rolled around and the excess stopped, Knapp continued drinking. Toward the end of her drinking, Knapp realized that work was the only part of her life not falling apart because it was the only time and place she did not drink. During the last six months of her drinking, Knapp began to deliberately schedule her drinking, leading her to realize that writing was occupying less and less time, while drinking consumed more time.

After being hung over at work all day, Knapp looks at herself in a bathroom mirror. She can barely recognize herself and knows that it is drinking that is doing this to her, but drinking is too much of an award for making it through each day. So after work that day, Knapp goes to get a drink with a co-worker at the Aku-Aku Lounge. This was a common practice for Knapp, who would consistently ask co-workers if they wanted to "grab a quick drink" after work. Even when no coworkers would join her, Knapp would sit alone and drink, all the while concentrating on every sip of alcohol.



Chapter 3, Destiny, (pg 28-55)

Chapter 3, Destiny, (pg 28-55) Summary and Analysis

Growing up, Knapp would hear stories of alcoholism affecting whole families. For example, Knapp's friend, Abby, had raging alcoholism in her family—her mother, cousins, aunts, uncles, and siblings. Knapp had another friend growing up named Lauren, whose father drank. Whenever Knapp went over to Lauren's house, she was careful not to be alone with Lauren's father. It was families like this that were whispered about and has members who were "alcoholic", not Knapp's family.

After Knapp joined AA, she became closer with Abby, who further revealed that she had a schizophrenic brother. Her other brother had tried to molest Abby. When she refused him, he killed himself two days later. Knapp always joked with Abby, saying that she should write about Abby's story and not her own. But Knapp would insist that she has her own problems. She was the nice, quite alcoholic. Knapp explains that the first time she got drunk, she was sixteen years old. She realized that a boy she had been dating was losing interest in her. She stole a bottle of wine from her parents' wine cellar and drank the entire bottle of wine. Previously, Knapp had her first drink at the age of twelve or thirteen. From there, she just began experimenting as other young teenagers do. But through the experimenting, Knapp had begun to form a connection between liquor and anxiety and sadness. Liquor seemed to ease both. Knapp says that she learned this behavior from her family.

Knapp's father was an esteemed, famed, and distinguished psychiatrist. He was well admired by his colleagues and students at Boston University Medical School. Because of his intelligence and insight, Knapp grew constantly anxious around him—she was always afraid she was not smart or good enough. Due to some core unknown shared kinship, Knapp always knew she was her father's favorite child. She could not, however, find the ease with him that she suspected of other fathers and daughters. Because of her father's profession and constant piercing, disquieting questions, Knapp always felt like a subject instead of simply his daughter. She just simply wanted to be loved.

From early on, Knapp learned that alcohol could offer protection. It could lighten things. Every night, her father would return home after work, take a bath, and then head into the living room for a martini. The ritual was comforting for him. He was never belligerent, but after one or two drinks, he would loosen up and listen to his wife and listen calmly about her day. For some reason, Knapp could sense the ease that overtook the room once his drinking had begun. Her father also introduced her to wine, Scotch, and Sherry. When going out to dinner with him, there were always drinks. It allowed Knapp to open up and experience temporary closeness with her father.

Growing up, Knapp always felt a sense of disconnection and lack of tenderness with her family. Of course, because she came from a wealthy family, she was given music, art, and writing lessons. She attended the best schools and never lacked for anything



material. Knapp acknowledges that she had many great opportunities growing up, but she lacked love and tender gestures. There was no hugging, kissing, or public displays of affection. She never heard "I love you", either.

She also noticed that while many people on her mother's side of the family (including her mother) rarely drank, almost all of her father's relatives did drink. It was common to be invited over to her grandparent's house for cocktail hour and drink bottles and bottles of wine at dinner. Knapp never felt comfortable around those people and drank to get through gatherings.

During her father's sickness, Knapp explains that she would drink to get drunk and go to visit him. It was only then that she felt like she could caress his damp, struggling forehead, and lay with him in his hospital bed and hug him. She did this almost every night. On the night of his death, it was one of the only nights that Knapp did not spend with him. She went over to her boyfriend's house and got so plastered that she could barely move. She made it to her father's house two minutes after he died.



Chapter 4, Hunger, (56-62)

Chapter 4, Hunger, (56-62) Summary and Analysis

Hunger is essential to alcoholism. Sometimes, Knapp would ask herself, "Are you driven by a feeling of hunger and need?" She did indeed feel this way. Whenever she would drink, she would carefully measure how much drink was poured into her glass. If there was not enough, she became frantic for how to obtain more. A little was never enough. In fact, Knapp never knew when enough was enough. She would always get blind drunk. She did not mean too—it just happened.

Knapp recalls that a few months after her father died, she went out to dinner with her boyfriend, Michael, and his parents. Because Michael's parents were not big drinkers, they only ordered one bottle of wine. The thought of one glass panicked Knapp. To get through dinner, she excused herself from the table, claiming she needed to use the ladies' room. Instead, Knapp went to the bar at the restaurant and ordered a glass of wine. She chugged the entire glass. Later, back at Michael's apartment, instead of making it through the rest of the evening with Michael and his parents, Knapp says she has to escape to her car and take shots of Scotch.

Knapp explains that she always had a constant yearning or want for something she could not grasp. There was not a time when she did not crave for this thing she could never identify. She easily became obsessed with things—wanted new shoes, befriending new people, getting a certain grade in a class. If she did not get what she wanted she became extremely depressed and bereft. Knapp also says that when she was younger she began rocking herself. For years she rocked herself at night. Her parents had to put a mattress up against the wall so she would not hurt herself. She did this for along time and most of the time, it was done in secret. Knapp only reveals this because she thinks it began her addictions. She did this until she was sixteen—the age she began seriously drinking.



Chapter 5, In Vodka Veritas, (pg 63-76)

Chapter 5, In Vodka Veritas, (pg 63-76) Summary and Analysis

Liquor eases, soothes, and protects. This was Knapp's mantra. It melted down the hurt and distress. Knapp describes herself as being version A and version B. Knapp describes another man she met in AA named Alex, who described himself a gregarious introvert. When he found alcohol, he felt like it was his new elixir. He could talk to anyone at any party. It transformed people into someone that they actually like and can stand to be. Alcohol can feel like the path to one's true self.

When Knapp was younger, she used to meet her friend Sam for drinks after work. They would always go somewhere fancy, like the Ritz. Knapp would have a glass or two before Sam even arrived. There was always an awkward thirty minutes until the drinks kicked in. Finally, when her buzz was going, Knapp felt like she was "really there" living in the moment with Sam. All the self-consciousness and anxiety finally floated away.

As a child, Knapp was painfully shy. At family gatherings she would hide behind her sister or mother. When she could no longer sit in her mother's lap or be with her twin sister, Knapp felt insecure and unsafe. Alcohol finally drove out the feelings of uncertainty. She could sit with family and not care what any of them thought. There was never an environment at home to express her feelings. She and her siblings were told to write it down and tell a therapist their feelings, not share with their parents. Knapp was always holding back. With drinking she no longer had to hold back.

After AA and years of therapy, Knapp finally realizes that drinking didn't give her truth, it actually stunted her personal growth. It stops you from experiencing fearful events. Your relationships with the world become very unclear. She says that you are actually just drinking to be someone you are not.



Chapter 6, Sex, (pg 77-101)

Chapter 6, Sex, (pg 77-101) Summary and Analysis

As the chapter opens, Knapp explains what it is like to wake up hung over and in bed with a stranger. With many alcoholics, this is a common occurrence. Snippets of the night come back to you, but you are haunted by what you don't remember. Did he enjoy it? Did you enjoy it? Did you use a condom?

Knapp talks about her friend Meg who would get completely wasted and go to bars and go home with random men. The sex was completely anonymous. At the time, Meg was in her late twenties and thirties. The sex gave her the illusion of intimacy without really having to make herself vulnerable. The next morning, Meg would feel nothing but regret and sorrow.

Knapp also experienced this feeling many times. She did not purposefully try to go home with random men, but the lines between yes and no became very blurry while she was drunk. As a sophomore in college, some friends through Knapp a large birthday party. At the party, she drank too much and ended up in a male friend's bed the next morning. She had no memory of what happened and was too embarrassed to find out.

Both Meg and Knapp grew up in a time when women were not told to embrace their bodies. Both women, like many, were afraid of their bodies and their sexuality. Alcohol was, again, a way to let go and try to enjoy sex. It was not enjoyable, however, because they could not remember what happened. All through high school, Knapp could not experiment or feel comfortable with sex until she was drunk. Drinking became an integral part of her own sexuality.

When Knapp was nineteen years old, she fell in love with David. He was the first man she had ever loved. Looking back on their relationship, she realizes that one of the main things she loved about David was the fact that drinking was very important to him. It helped them reach intimacy in their relationship. It also aided in blurring the facts of the relationship.

Knapp was not a raging alcoholic when she met David, but she was on her way to becoming one. While she was with him, her drinking increased to cope with the intense feelings she had for him. David seemed to be the complete opposite to her up-bringing. He was uncomplicated, simple, and caring. At the beginning of their time together, it was a long distance relationship. Once David graduated from college, he moved in with Knapp. Although this should have been a happy time, Knapp felt like she had to keep her life with David (simple, neat) separate from her Brown life (intellectual, sophisticated). She did this by compartmentalizing her life—in which she thinks alcoholics succeed.



Knapp personal life became defined by David and her time spent with him. This also happened in her academic life. Roger was the head professor of the academic program that Knapp decided to enter. It was a very small major and she excelled under his guidance. He gave her the brand of approval she desperately needed. Under his direction, Knapp ended up completing her senior thesis and graduating with honors. Two days after graduation, Roger invited Knapp out to lunch. At lunch, they drank a lot. In the car, Roger came onto Knapp and began to kiss her. Because she was drunk and didn't know how to handle the situation, she let him fondle her.

The lunch dates with Roger continued and Knapp allowed Roger to continue to kiss her while she said nothing in silence. She was furious at him. She also never told David about the lunches. When David decided to move to Chicago, Roger told Knapp that he thought they should become lovers. Knapp was so upset that she felt sick. Knapp did not know how to handle her anger or her guilt. She started to blame all her feelings on David. Was there something missing with him? Why wasn't he enough for her? What Knapp did not realize was that there was probably something wrong with her.

It turns out that alcoholics are really good at keeping secrets. Knapp's father also kept secrets. Her father had an affair with a woman for seven years. While Knapp was angry for her mother, she was relieved that she had learned something more about her father. When her father was younger, his own dad flaunted his mistresses in front of Knapp's grandmother. To get back at him, Knapp's grandmother flirted with other men in public. Peter lead a double life so that he would never have to embarrass his wife, but could not leave his mistress. It finally made sense. This is why her father always seemed so preoccupied.



Chapter 7: Drinking Alone, (pg 102-120)

Chapter 7: Drinking Alone, (pg 102-120) Summary and Analysis

After David moved to Chicago, Knapp served ties with Roger, and graduated from college, she moved into her own apartment in Providence, RI. Knapp says that alcoholic drinking is by nature a solidarity activity. When she began living by herself, she did not have to hide her drinking from anyone. She also reveals that she was a white wine junkie. She absolutely loved taking a bottle of Chardonnay out of the refrigerator and drinking it by herself - savoring every sip.

Living alone, Knapp felt very intimidated. She would shut herself up in her apartment and drink and sink deeper into depression. She would make lists of things to do: take writing workshops, makes contacts, call Brown Career Services. Each day she would face endless hours of nothing to do. To cope with being alone with her thoughts she would sit and drink alone. That first year was very depressing for Knapp . She could not find a job, she was fragile, angry and sad at feeling unsafe. Without liquor she did not know what to do with herself. To escape from her apartment, Knapp would go to the pizza parlor across the street and order a pizza so that she could sit at the bar and drink more.

Frequently during this time and long into the future, Knapp began to call people drunk. She would call her sister, mother, and friends and remember nothing of what was said the night before. Drinking let Knapp feel sorry for herself and voice the sorrow. The late night phone calls continually worried Knapp's love ones, especially her mother. The next day, Knapp would always promise to quit, but she never did.



Chapter 8, Addiction (pg 121-132)

Chapter 8, Addiction (pg 121-132) Summary and Analysis

Knapp begins the chapter by listing her answers to a quiz administered by the Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. She took the quiz several weeks before she quit. Of the 26 questions, she answered yes to 19. Knapp was considered to be in the final stage of alcoholism. The final stage of alcoholism can kill a person. It causes liver disease, cardiovascular disease, cancer, brain cell dysfunction, and infertility.

Knapp cannot fathom the damage she did to her body while she was an alcoholic. But she could not give up the drink. Drinking artificially activates the brain's reward system. The alcohol makes the brain feel good, so it releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that gives the feeling of pleasure. The artificial stimulation leaves the brain working overtime to decrease the dopamine. So by drinking too much, you diminish your body's ability to create feelings of calm and well being. But alcohol is also thought to be a physical illness in some circles. While a person's physical being might be impaired at the time of use, most people can function with hangovers. There is no concrete proof either way.

What is known, is that once a person as become an alcoholic, the percentages are not in the drinkers favor. If they decide to quit, there is no safe way to enjoy drinking again. After Knapp joined AA she would listen to other people's struggles with alcoholism. One man she knew from AA decided to conduct an experiment to see if he could control his drinking. He had one drink, and then another, and then another. He could not resist the drink, To Knapp AA offers some help with this. Through constant support and meetings, members can learn from each other's stories and support each other through weak times.



Chapter 9, Substitution, (pg 133-148)

Chapter 9, Substitution, (pg 133-148) Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Knapp explains how alcohol became a substitution for bulimia and anorexia. Janet is a friend that Knapp met in AA. Janet is a thirty-seven year old, tall, beautiful woman. At the age of seventeen, she went to college and went crazy. She would over-drink and overeat compulsively every day. Soon, her weight ballooned, then came crashing down. The only way Janet knew to deal with the pain she was feeling was to throw up. She would eat nothing and then go on day-long food and alcohol binges. When she was done, she would hate herself and purge. She would then repeat the cycle. When Janet graduated and settled down in a new city, her bulimia slowly lessened. As it did so, her drinking increased.

A year after Knapp graduated from college, she moved to into a different apartment. At that same time, Knapp's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. David, who had moved to Chicago a little while before, came to visit Knapp. He was supposed to stay for the summer, but then decided to go to Europe for the summer. Knapp was furious, but instead of voicing the anger and pain, she told herself she would not eat. This continued on. She could control the food, but not what was happening around her. Knapp also began to work out obsessively. She lost so much weight that she looked like a cancer patient. Knapp's new skeletal form made her feel safe because she had nothing for men to desire or obsess about. She felt like she could go through life not being harassed.

Anorexia worked like alcohol in the sense that they both kept her away from discovering her true feelings. When she was starving she couldn't think about her emotions or motives. Same with being drunk. While she was anorexic, Knapp drank a lot, but only in small spurts. She would eat nothing for long spurts, but then go on huge drinking and food binges. Although everyone saw that she was wasting away, no one but Knapp's sister said anything. Secretly this infuriated Knapp. Two and a half years went by before, Knapp got help. She began to see a therapist who she stills sees today.

When the anorexia began to end, drinking and eating increased, but the emphasis was still on the drinking. While Knapp had put one dangerous pastime behind her, alcohol was an addiction also. Knapp just traded one addiction for another.



Chapter 10, Denial, (pg 149-166)

Chapter 10, Denial, (pg 149-166) Summary and Analysis

In AA, Knapp and other recovering alcoholics learn that denial is essential to alcoholism. She then tells the story of Tess. Tess had gotten really drunk one night in Boston. She ended up going home with a man she didn't know. The next morning she woke up in a hotel room beside the man she had slept with. Embarrassed, Tess got all her things together in a hurry and left the room. After driving in her car for a little while, Tess realized that she was bleeding from between her legs. She realized that she was having a miscarriage. Instead of going to the hospital, like she knew she should have, Tess stopped at a liquor store. She could not handle the situation and had to continue drinking to cope with it. When she finally got home, Tess went to bed. The next day she began drinking again because she felt better.

Knapp says she was just like this; she knew something was wrong but she always felt better so she continued drinking. She justified the drinking because she seemed like she was so entirely put together. Because nothing bad was happening, there was no reason to stop. Sure, she drove drunk, but she never killed anyone, or her herself, so she continued.

Knapp explains that she knew a man named William, who was also a raging alcoholic. He had promised to quit for years but never did. Once Knapp was sober, they met up to talk. She explains that AA tells her to take everything one day at a time. Knapp would share some of her stories. All William could think was that at least he was not as bad as Knapp had been. William was still encased in denial of his disease.

Alcoholics tend to focus on the bad things that happen to them. They never associate the drinking with the reason why bad things might be happening.



Chapter 11, Giving Over, (pg 167-187)

Chapter 11, Giving Over, (pg 167-187) Summary and Analysis

When Knapp was twenty-eight years old, she met Julian. Julian was supposed to make Knapp a better person. He was the intellectual, refined, sophisticated person she wanted to be. When she first met Julian, Knapp thought he was a complete jerk. She assumed she had displayed her dislike for him, but he asked her out a few days later. From the start, Julian and Knapp drank together. Julian introduced Knapp to different types of alcohol she had never tried before. It made her feel grown, smart, and sophisticated.

Julian was an art dealer. He was young, urbane, and appreciated very fine things. When Knapp looked at Julian, all she could see was a new life for herself, a way to improve everything. She has always coveted approval from the men in her life, so Knapp naturally wanted Julian's acceptance and approval. Soon after they began dating, the two decided to move in together. Knapp thought she was in heaven. They celebrated the decision with wine, but soon after they moved in together, things began to go horribly wrong.

A year after they started dating, Knapp's sister got married. At the wedding, Knapp cried. She was happy for her sister, but also miserable with Julian. By that time, they were both trapped in the miserable relationship. Knapp hated being at the wedding because it reminded her of how she was failing. Her relationship was a mess, she hated her job, and she was drinking too much. Her sister, on the other hand, had graduated from medical school and was now getting married. She also hated the dress she was wearing that day. It was a small, spandex, black dress that Julian had insisted she wear. After they moved in together, Julian wasted no time telling Knapp what he hated about her. He wanted her to highlight her hair, get a new coat, change her wardrobe. Julian had many doubts about Knapp and she was afraid that he was right to have them.

Knapp had become very scared of Julian. Julian thought she had a large amount of "potential", but he did not know if he could stick around long enough for her to realize it. He loved her but saw her as being a fragile, desperate creature, and hated her for that.

Julian would constantly buy Knapp new clothes. Often they never fit, or were overly sexy and not her size. He would make her read Vogue magazine and tell her she should look like the over sexualized, thin, large-breasted models. At least once a month, Knapp would call her sister drunk and in tears, telling her that she and Julian had had another fight. Rebecca told Knapp that she would never get out of the relationship until she stopped drinking. Her sister was right, as she stuck around for five more years. Like the drink, Julian kept Knapp from understanding her own sexual identity. She could not define herself at all. She was defined by another man in her life when drinking was not helping her.



To Knapp, her relationship with Julian was just as, if not more, addictive than drinking, Knapp became obsessed with Julian. To make him happy she would try to do small things to show she cared. It was never enough for Julian. He would find some way to berate her. Knapp would hold in her feelings. They would then come exploding from her when she got drunk. This cycle would repeat over and over again. Knapp would bottle in emotions and then explode at Julian. After a large fight he would threaten to throw her out.



Chapter 12, A Glimpse, (pg 188-191)

Chapter 12, A Glimpse, (pg 188-191) Summary and Analysis

The last time Julian attempted to kick Knapp out, he practically had to pry her fingers from the furniture. She did move out, but made sure that her apartment was close to his—it was actually sixty-five steps away from his house. A few weeks after the move, she went to meet with her therapist for an emergency session. She was still drunk when she went in. She kept talking to him about drinking and he recommended that she go to an AA meeting.

When Knapp arrived, she watched the entire meeting. Instead of giving it a chance, she completely rejected it. She thought that there was no way she could belong there with "those people"—the addicts. The minute she left the meeting she promised herself that she would stop drinking. That was the only night in the next five years that she successfully abstained from alcohol and Julian.



Chapter 13, Double Life II, (pg 192-211)

Chapter 13, Double Life II, (pg 192-211) Summary and Analysis

After moving out of Julian's apartment, Knapp met Michael a few months later. He was completely Julian's opposite. Michael appealed to the part of Knapp that wanted a kind, loving, uncomplicated man. He filled a completely different set of needs than Julian. Knapp had two completely different men and drank way too much to hide the guilt of being with both.

Knapp soaked up all of the affection and love that Michael was ready to give. He seemed so thrilled and happy to be with Knapp that she could not believe her luck. For so long, she had been starved of a relationship like this. The first time they slept together, Knapp spent the entire day with Michael. Instead of being comfortable with this, she obsessed over whether she should leave. Shouldn't she be home waiting to see if Julian calls? Knapp explains that when you are drinking, you cannot tell when a good thing is right in front of you.

Michael did not drink much and had no idea how much Knapp really drank. She would frequently hide it from him. She also hid her relationship with Julian. Michael knew they had a history, but he did not know how involved it had been or that Knapp was still seeing Julian on a regular basis. Knapp yearned for Julian's approval and Michael's love. Knapp lied to both men for a very long time. The lines of Knapp and Julian's relationship were very blurry. They did not ask each other about their significant others. Knapp would not tell Michael she still thought of Julian a lot and saw him even more. She also drank to make herself more comfortable with the guilt and pain, lying, and pain she was causing. She was plotting and scheming so that she would not get caught.

About a year into seeing both men, Knapp got pregnant. She did not know whose the baby was. She told both men about the baby and her decision to get an abortion. Michael went with her to get the pregnancy test while Julian went with her to get the abortion. Neither men knew about the other's involvement in things. Shortly after that, Knapp stopped sleeping with Julian.

About a year after the abortion, Knapp's father got sick and she began spending almost every night at Michael's apartment. She still hid her drinking from him and still saw Julian very often. While taking out her latest stash, she got locked out on the back porch with a bunch of bottles. She was supposed to meet Julian in an hour for his birthday and worried how she could explain everything to him. She also did not know how she would tell Michael about the bottles. Again, Knapp's longing to compartmentalize herself is seen. Her desire for mess and disaster are fueled by the drinking she cannot control. She cannot get in touch with her feelings, and therefore was unable to see that Michael was a good relationship to be in while Julian just clouded her life. She was always plotting, second guessing herself, and feeling like she would get caught.



Knapp finally got off of Michael's porch by unscrewing the slats of the windows and squeezing through the glass. She was terrified that she would have to explain everything to Michael and tell Julian why she had been late. Her life became unmanageable. Instead of realizing that drinking was making everything a mess, she blamed Julian and Michael. She never blamed the drinking. She could not understand how she had gotten herself into such a mess. While in AA, she heard the same stories from other alcoholics. The addictions to both men were as strong as alcohol, or bulimia and anorexia. It kept her from the truth.



Chapter 14, Hitting Bottom, (pg 212-241)

Chapter 14, Hitting Bottom, (pg 212-241) Summary and Analysis

One question that Knapp and other alcoholics ask themselves is "How bad do things after to get?" What has to happen for them to finally stop drinking? Does someone have to die in a drunk driving accident? Or embarrass their loved ones? Knapp says that hitting bottom is followed by a very slow fall into alcoholism. For her friend, Abby, it happened after she was raped. For Janet it was when her husband left her. From there, both women spiraled into a drunken mess until they hit bottom. For Knapp's friend Ginny, hitting rock bottom was crashing headfirst through a windshield after driving drunk.

When Knapp's father died, she went off the deep end. During his sickness, she would leave work early to drink and then go and visit him. During his final months, he confessed that he had lied to Knapp's mother and continued the affair after he told her he would quit. Her mother was humiliated and furious. Knapp and her sister tried to fix the situation. While Knapp spoke with her father, he told her that she must find a way to mend the split within her. Even then, he was probing. He could, again sense her tendencies were just like his own.

Because Knapp drank so much, the last months of her father's life were a complete blur. She only has images of sadness and horror: her father's last days of consciousness and the hate and tension that encircled the house due to her mother's rage. Knapp can remember crawling into bed with her father and hugging him. This was one of the only times she was able to embrace her father. The day of his funeral, she chugged beer and cried. Getting drunk was the only way Knapp could ever cry. While it allowed her to have a physical release, she was not really coping with her emotions.

Six months after her father died, Knapp's mother was again diagnosed with cancer. Within seven days, the entire cancer had spread all over her body, causing vital organs to shut down. Soon after that, her mother passed away. After that, Knapp tried to be productive and work while raging at night. She would black out almost every night and scare Michael with her behavior. He finally blew up and told her that she needed get help. It would still be a long time before Knapp would give up drinking.

But drinking was not working as well as it used to. Drinking was no longer fun. Knapp was now desperate. She still drank to try to feel or release some emotion. Her sister became increasingly worried about her. Knapp would call Rebecca late at night. She was so drunk that she never remember calling. Rebecca knew her sister could not help it, but she could not bear to see this happening to her. A few months later, Knapp drove drunk and blew out her mother's front tire. After that, on Thanksgiving she dropped her best friend's kids in the street and busted her knee. During Christmas time,



Knapp went to a party with Julian. She promised she would not get drunk, but she inevitably did. She embarrassed Julian and herself and the two of them fought bitterly.

Knapp had hit such a low that she finally considered she needed to stop thinking. Finally it dawned on her that drinking might be the problem, not everyone else. Finally Knapp asked her sister to find her a rehab program. It took so long for Knapp to listen and understand to herself and her body that she damaged many of her relationships. Finally after death and guilt and lies she was ready to give up on drink—the only constant taking her down.



Chapter 15, Help, (pg 242-256)

Chapter 15, Help, (pg 242-256) Summary and Analysis

From the day that Knapp stopped drinking until her arrival at rehab, Knapp drank. She thought that her life was essentially over. Two months before she was to go to rehab, Knapp had gone to visit the facility, Beech Hill. While she realized that this gave her a lot of time to change her mind, there was no way that she was going to give up. The night before she left for rehab, she invited friends over to Michael's apartment. For the last time, Knapp got completely hammered. She ended the night by chugging an entire bottle of red wine and passing out in Michael's bedroom.

The next day, Knapp drove herself to Beech Hill. She arrived hungover and surprised that no one was expecting her. It turns out the Beech Hill is always ready to accept anyone. Many times people are dropped off by family or police. Knapp shared a room with a crack addict and another alcoholic. Knapp insists that rehab was a great place for her. She never considered quitting without going to rehab. During the day they went to lectures and information session and at night they attended AA meetings. She felt happy, relieved, even glowing. She was happy she could finally think and write clearly.

But Beech Hill was not only fun. She and other recovering alcoholics and users had to listen to the lectures about how low the success rates were. Many times, people relapsed and did not ever get sober. The chronic relapsers frightened Knapp. Her friend Tess was one of these. After leaving rehab with Knapp she again relapsed. Knapp tried to keep in touch with her, but Tess called her a month later to let her know that she was back in rehab. All of Knapp's other friends in rehab also relapsed. While she also tried to keep in touch with them, she was afraid that their setbacks would affect her. Sometimes, when they no longer wanted her support, it was a better idea for her to keep her distance from them.

To Knapp, rehab was great because there was constantly something for her to do. She did not have to look for ways to entertain herself or distract herself from drinking. Once she was out of rehab, this was not so easy. One of her first days alone at Michael's apartment, the day seemed to stretch before her. She had to learn how to just sit with herself and watch TV, or to finally experience some real emotion. At work, she felt more productive, but dreaded going home because she was faced with hours of solitude that had previously been dedicated to drinking. Sometimes she would want a glass of wine so badly she could taste it on her lips. The desire to drink, to numb the fear and pain and anxiety was so great she thought she would crack.

This is when Knapp is grateful that she fully utilized the benefits of AA. As the day came to a close, she knew that she would have her meeting at night to help get her through the night sober. She did not have to worry about wanting a drink because she could go somewhere that people would listen to her and understand her. She reveals that what helps to keep her sober is her quest to know what it actually feels like to be alive, to live

and have a body and mind that is full of emotion. The reader sees that the hunger that Knapp always talked about is finally satisfied with those emotions she was always too afraid to experience.



Chapter 16, Healing, (pg 257- 281)

Chapter 16, Healing, (pg 257- 281) Summary and Analysis

About a year into her sobriety, Knapp met with Jack, one of her father's closest friends. She asked him if he thought her father was an alcoholic. Jack said yes. He also told Knapp that her father knew he was an alcoholic. After the meeting, Knapp felt lighter. She felt like mysteries had been answered about her father. In a way, his death was liberating for her. It was only in death that she could discover anything about him. It was also the only time she finally felt enough courage to quit drinking. Everything was clear now, no longer blurry from drinking. She cried herself to bed that night, hoping her father was finally proud of her. It is interesting that Knapp combated the one struggle her father could never beat. His lies and drinking followed him to his grave, while Knapp finally became free of them.

Sobriety is never easy. For former alcoholics, the simplest tasks are very hard to complete. This is probably because alcohol always makes one choose the easy route. Knapp explains that there is the alcoholic choice and the healthy choice. The healthy choice makes you in charge of your life and opinions, but the alcoholic choice ruins personal growth.

Knapp explains that self pity drives her cravings for alcohol. When visiting family, she feels like she just wants to disappear into the wall instead of deal with her relatives. She drank to forget the feeling, but got sober so that she could actually deal with her anger and feelings. Knapp and other alcoholics have to make the choice not to drink every single day of their lives. Knapp realizes that alcohol is what kept her from growing up. Knapp let Julian, her father, and other men give her a taste of sophistication, but Knapp needed to find that for herself. These men and drinking were keeping her from growing.

Knapp still thinks about drinking. She assumes that she always will. On the days where the self-pity is thick and biting, she hates herself for the feelings. Knapp has accepted this fact. She knows a part of her will always yearn and desire the alcohol. Currently she thinks of herself as divorced from drink. It was a messy break-up, but her ex will always be around because it is ever present in our society.

Knapp's friend Abby came over one day, screaming about how much sobriety "Sucks". Knapp calmed her down and talked to her. They discussed how sobriety can only be taken one day at a time. Instead of becoming bored with sobriety, Knapp realized that she was even more bored when she was drinking. Now her days are filled with working, spending time with people she cares about, and AA meetings.

In her third month of being sober, Knapp also ended her relationship with Julian. She could no longer stand what she was doing to him and Michael. Knapp can now look at their relationship clearly. She can appreciate everything that she and Michael have

together and love him for every minute they are able to spend together. Michael is patient with the new Caroline who is piecing her life back together.

A year after her one year anniversary, Knapp sat at her AA meeting listening to a man named John recount his story. John's emotions and feelings really greatly affect Knapp. She looks around the room and sees everyone's supportive, happy faces. She imagines everyone getting into bed, clean and sober. This fills Knapp with many warm emotions: appreciation, admiration of their courage and strength, and affection. Later one, Knapp realizes that this is love.



Characters

Caroline Knapp

Caroline Knapp is the narrator and protagonist of the novel. Throughout the entire book, she details her struggle and love story with alcohol. Knapp is a sophisticated, pretty, and smart young woman who seems to have the world at her feet. She is from a wealthy family, extremely well educated and working on improving her professional life. While Knapp seems to be thriving on the outside, she is actually spiraling out of control. The reason for this is her addiction to alcohol.

Knapp explains that she feels her father was a large part of the reason that she became an alcoholic. As a child, she started to watch his drinking patterns and noticed that they would relax him and allow him to be with his wife and family comfortably. Later Knapp discovers that he was actually leading a double life. Whenever Knapp tried to spend time with him, she felt uncomfortable and unable to relate. They had a connection, but could not figure out a way to relate to one another. Knapp began to drink to feel at ease with her father. This behavior and longing for acceptance, love, and tenderness follows Knapp for a large portion of her life. As different men enter her life, Knapp seeks their approval and love, the way she could never gain it from her father or family.

Knapp begins drinking to become secure about herself. Instead of growing as a person, she is stunted sexually and emotionally. Alcohol becomes the easy answer for Knapp. She cannot deal with men, her parent's deaths, or other relationships, so she drinks to forget or to try to feel anything. Eventually, after many years of destructive, hard drinking, Knapp decides to get sober after dropping and almost seriously injuring her best friend's two daughters. Knapp's recovery was not easy. She goes to a rehab center named Beech Hill to begin the process of recovery. Knapp then joins AA to continue her recovery.

Michael

Michael is Knapp's long term boyfriend. She describes him as being kind, forgiving, and caring—all the things that Julian never was. Michael is very supportive of Knapp when she finally decides to quit drinking. He also supported her during her father and mother's deaths. Knapp does not go into serious detail about Michael. She only really describes herself when she is around him. Because Michael is so caring and loving, for a time Knapp becomes clingy and needy. She attempts to seek out the tenderness and love she never received from her own parents. While Michael could be very sweet, he also got fed up with Knapp when she began completely destroying herself. He began to demand that she get herself together so that he could finally help her and really become close with her.



Father - Peter Knapp

Peter Knapp as a distinguished psychiatrist who was deeply admired by others in his field. It is interesting to note that throughout the entire book, Knapp never gives her father's name. Knapp was always his favorite child. There always seemed to be a very strong, unspoken bond between the two, even though they could never find a way to communicate. In the novel, Knapp reveals that she and her father were so much alike because they were both alcoholics. He compartmentalized his life so that he could drink, have a successful career, have an adulterous affair, and also have a family. This is why he always seemed so emotionally unavailable to Knapp.

Knapp also says that it is her father who introduced her to drinking. Every night when he would come home, he would take a bath and then have one or two cocktails in the living room with his wife. For some reason, everything about him seemed to ease with alcohol. Knapp mimicked this behavior whenever she felt uncomfortable in social situations. She also drank so that she could cope with her feelings while she was spending time with her father. Peter's sickness and slow death caused by a brain tumor caused Knapp to drink even more.

Mother - Jean

Jean is Knapp's mother. Her name is also never mentioned in the book. Knapp describes her mother as small and artistic, yet reserved. While she is sure that her mother loved her and was concerned for her well being, Knapp never felt the awkward connection to her that she had to her father. Knapp would frequently depend on her mother to listen to her in times of pain and crisis, often calling her when she was blindly drunk. Jean would beg Knapp to get help with her drinking, but Knapp did not quit drinking until well after her mother's death.

While Jean did not show any special tenderness towards Knapp, she often confided in her daughter. Jean Knapp died of complications with breast cancer that caused tumors to develop all over her body.

Andrew Knapp

Andrew Knapp, also referred to as Andy, is Knapp's younger brother. He is hardly mentioned in Knapp's memoir.

Rebecca Knapp

Rebecca is Caroline's twin sister. Throughout the novel, Knapp recounts that Rebecca and their mother were the only two people that continually told her to get help with her drinking. Rebecca is also one of the only people that pressured Knapp to obtain help because of her anorexia.



As a twin, Knapp was sometimes jealous of her sister. While she was trying to figure out what to do with her life, her sister was graduating from medical school, getting married, and having children. Other than this, Knapp does not delve too deeply into the relationship that the twins shared.

Julian

Julian was Knapp's boyfriend. Their on-again, off-again relationship lasted for over five years. Julian was everything that Knapp wanted to become, sophisticated, cultured, artistic and urban. Knapp saw him as a way to improve her life—the man that would turn her around and make her into a put together woman. Julian was not this to Knapp. Julian was judgmental, harsh, and not understanding. He immediately wanted Knapp to change herself. To facilitate this change, he would pick out her clothes, demand that she get highlights in her hair, and dictate her actions. Julian would criticize Knapp and take her for granted, which drove her into a blind rage while she was drunk. Their relationship was a violent, unending cycle that Knapp let herself continue due to her drinking. Alcohol also fueled the fighting. Without it, Knapp could not express her feelings to Julian. Once she had alcohol, all the pent-up feelings and aggressions came flowing out, uncontrollably.

Meg

Meg is one of Knapp's friends that she meets while recovering for alcoholism. While drinking, Meg would have anonymous sex with men. She did this because she could not imagine having sex without drinking. Because she was sexually repressed, she could not embrace or explore her sexuality. Instead of being scared, she chose to drink to forget the pain.

Janet

Janet is a friend of Knapp's that she met while becoming sober. Janet went to college and went completely wild. She began binge drinking and eating to soften the pain she always felt. Janet would start to binge eat and drink. Afterwards she would feel so disgusted with herself that she would purge. Then the pain would begin again and Janet's cycle would continue. After graduating from college, Janet finally gave up being a bulimic. As the bulimia lessened, her desire to drink became greater. At the time, Janet did not realize that drinking became a substitute for throwing up.

Abby

Abby is another one of Knapp's former alcoholic friends. Abby had a "more likely" chance of becoming an alcoholic than Knapp did because she had a long family history of drinkers. She was also traumatized as a child when one of her brothers attempted to rape her and then killed himself the next day.



Tess

Tess is one of Knapp's friends who never gets sober. She is in and out of rehabs all the time. She was also the friend who had a miscarriage. Instead of going to the hospital, she drove to a liquor store and got drunk. The next day, she continued to drink because she did not feel that bad.

Sam

Sam was one of Knapp's friends from her drinking days. She would meet him at the Ritz Carlton to drink with him. She only ever felt comfortable around Sam after one or two drinks.

Roger

Roger is Knapp's college professor who became her academic advisor and mentor. Shortly after she graduated, Roger began hitting on Knapp, hoping that the two would become lovers. Roger's advances seriously upset Knapp. She did not know how to cope with his actions, so she began drinking while in his presence so that she could deal with the horrible, uncomfortable situation.



Objects/Places

Cambridge, MA

Knapp's current hometown. She resides there with Michael.

Providence, RI

Knapp moves here after she graduates from college.

AA

AA stands for Alcoholics Anonymous. It is a support group for recovering alcoholics.

Beech Hill

Beech Hill is the rehabilitation facility that Knapp goes to help her recover from being an alcoholic.

Brown University

Knapp received her undergraduate degree from Brown University.

Martha's Vineyard

Knapp's parents owned a house in Martha's Vineyard.

Psychosomatic Medicine

Knapp's father was a pioneer in the field of psychosomatic medicine. It is a treatment for neurotic and stress related disorders.

Boston Univeristy

Knapp's father's was a professor at Boston University.



Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Quiz

This is the quiz that Knapp takes several weeks before she quit drinking. She was shocked when she realized she had reached the "final stage of alcoholism".

Aku Aku Lounge

One of Knapp's frequent drinking spots. She would go there after work to drink by herself or with friends. This increased when her father became ill.



Themes

Double Life/Compartmentalization of the Self

Throughout the novel, Knapp frequently describes herself as being two different people. She says that this is very common for many alcoholics. They take their lives and compartmentalize them so that they can deal with everything happening around them. This first happened to Knapp while she was dating David. She felt that she could not share her intellectual, hectic, academic life with someone she considered simple and calm. There was Life A: Academia, and Life B: David. The two never intertwined. As Knapp's alcoholic tendencies increase, her need to break herself into pieces grows stronger.

For Knapp, alcohol fueled the desire to experience emotions and feelings. It also increased her need for chaos. When she expressed emotions, it was in a messy, unsatisfying way. Drinking drove her into an unsatisfying, horribly messy relationship with Julian. It also allowed her to become an expert at hiding her guilt and cheating from Michael. Her work life was also segmented. There was the high-functioning, extremely talented writer who would never dream of drinking at work. Her personal life, however, was in shambles. While her hangovers would follow her into work, she made strict rules to never drink at work. Knapp did realize that compartmentalizing could become very challenging when she began to schedule more time for drinking than for her writing, which was supposed to be her true passion.

This theme is not only explored through Knapp, but also in the story of her father. For a significant part of his marriage to Knapp's mother, he was having an affair with another woman. He always seemed so distant because he was leading two lives. To the world, he was an intelligent, distinguished man. At home, he adopted the façade of a happy family, while he could have his affair outside of the home. Drinking also helped him to cope with the tension that was invariably created between he and his wife.

Addiction

In the novel, Knapp does a very good job of showing addiction's role in the life of an alcoholic. Her connections between alcohol and other addictive tendencies such as bulimia, anorexia, and sex show that alcohol was just a substitution for something that was inherently wrong or missing for her and others that were alcoholics. Knapp explains that she always felt some kind of desire or longing for something she could not identify. Now, she understands that it may have been her longing for tenderness, acceptance, and physical contact from her family. When she was at risk of losing her mother and the tenderness she could never gain, she reached out for something to control the emotions and longing. For a time, the control from anorexia and later from alcohol filled that constant longing from which Knapp could never quite escape.



For others, like Knapp's friend Janet, bulimia was a way to control pain. The pain she felt was also associated to some strong unknown want that she as an inexperienced, sheltered young girl could not explain.

Sexuality/Personal Growth

Like many other alcoholics, Knapp claims that alcohol allowed her to become a different person. She let go of everything and felt she could actually "experience" life. In actuality, alcohol does not do this. It stunts one's personal growth because the person is no longer challenged. Getting through death, sex for the first time, or confrontation, for example, by using alcohol was an easy way out. There is no personal growth.

Knapp especially brings to light the presence of alcohol in women's sexual/personal awakenings. Instead of embracing their own sexuality, Knapp and her friend Meg felt threatened, scared, and confused by it. The only way they could messily, blurrily explore themselves and their sexual feelings and desires was to be drunk. This behavior increased the risk of pregnancy and contracting sexually transmitted diseases (which Knapp does not really mention). This behavior also did not allow for sexual growth and led to feelings of disgust, loneliness, and sorrow. By not letting anyone in, the women severely inhibited their ability to become vulnerable and truly have honest feelings for someone else.



Style

Perspective

The memoir is told from the perspective of Caroline Knapp. She uses a first person narrative to truthfully unveil her long and tangled relationship with alcohol. It is very hard for someone to be so honest with their own addictions and descent into self destruction. Knapp is sure to reveal everything to the reader in the way that she thinks is honest. The reader can appreciate the frank point of view that Knapp presents throughout the novel.

Knapp also tells other alcoholic's stories. In this case, the perspective of the novel can change into a third person narrative. Knapp can relate what the person was thinking and feeling if they told her, so that narrative almost becomes omniscient. One thing to consider is that while Knapp does tell their stories, her friends might not have been honest with her. They may have omitted pieces of the truth. She could only write what they chose to tell her.

Tone

Knapp's tone is very open and honest throughout the entire novel. Because it is a memoir, she is not only being honest with the reader, she is also telling the truth for herself. The reader can tell that Knapp's open, frank tone has allowed her to almost come clean in a sense. She holds nothing back about her strained relationship with her father, her unfaithfulness to the men in her life, her battle with anorexia, and her father's adultery. She also reveals her own deep, carnal fears that haunted her and led to her eventual alcoholism.

While the tone of the book talks about the seriousness and problems of drinking, it is not necessarily a dark tone. Because Knapp wrote the book as a reflection on her time as an alcoholic, the tone is more remorseful and seeking for truth than trapped in a dark, solitary, stagnant voice.

Structure

The novel is structured into individual, named chapters. While the name of the chapter is usually the topic of the chapter, most of the time Knapp's themes and explanations overlap. For example, in the chapters Double Life and Sex, the discussion of compartmentalizing one's life and leading double lives is discussed in both. While she has many themes, her main ones reappear constantly in the novel (Double Lives, Addiction, Stunted Sexuality/Personal Growth).

There is no over-arching flow to the narrative. Rather than have the story flow chronologically, Knapp tries to stick with certain chapter themes and place pieces of her

alcoholic experience as well as other people's stories into the chapters. While this is effective at times, it also allows for confusion. Knapp constantly has to remind the reader of where in time a certain event took place. When she forgets to, the reader becomes confused by her story's timeline.



Quotes

"Craziness, dark secrets, alcoholic furies, that's how you become an alcoholic, right? It's encoded in your DNA, embedded in your history, the product of some wild familial aberration. There was always an undercurrent of moral failing in the stories I heard about alcoholics: they were unstable, unwell, irresponsible, and if they were parents, they tore through the lives of their children like tornadoes, drinking and divorcing, screaming and raging." Chap. 3, pp. 28-29

"My father had a probing manner, an analytic intensity tempered by a vague detachment, and whenever I sensed him turn his attention to me, the feeling on my part was instinctual and claustrophobic." Chap. 3, pp. 33-34

"But drinking was so much more effective, its comfort so much more reliable. Over time, over many, many drinks, that knowledge is incorporated, the lessons folded into the soul: Liquor eases. Liquor soothes and protects, a physic balm." Chap. 5, p. 63

"Alcohol drinking is by nature solitary drinking, drinking whose true nature is concealed from the outside world and, in some respects, from the drinkers as well. You think you're drinking to have fun, to be sociable or more relaxed. But you're also drinking to shut down, to retreat." Chap. 7, p. 103

"I am consistently amazed to hear women talk about their multiple relationships with addictions, the way they combine two or three, the way they shift from one to another, so naturally and gracefully you might think they were changing partners in a dance." Chap. 9, p. 137

"Hitting bottom is generally preceded by a long, slow fall. This may be a semiconscious process, an almost deliberate decision to leap off the deep end. The invisible line, crossed over and back so many times already, shifts into focus for a moment, a day, a certain defined period, and we look at it, and we jump, holding any prior sense of restraint in our arms plunging downward." Chap. 14, p. 213

"A few weeks after I quit drinking, I walked into Michael's house at the end of the day and sat down on the sofa. I wanted a drink, a single glass of white wine, so badly I thought I'd cry." Chap. 15, p. 255

"If you both long for intimacy and fear it, if you feel unworthy of it and ill equipped to receive it and ashamed of yourself for wanting it, alcohol becomes a most useful tool, a way of literally drowning the conflict." Chap. 6, p. 81

"Alcohol, of course, coursed through our romance like a river, providing the undercurrents. I wasn't aware of this at the time, but one of the things that attracted me so deeply to David was the role liquor occupied in his life." Chap. 6, p. 87



"That morning, lying in bed with a hangover, it occurred to me that I'd been out with friends all evening and hadn't really made eye contact with any of them, hadn't really had a moment of conversation that felt genuine or connected." Chap. 7, p. 119

"As happens with most addictions, life took on a blank sameness, each day ritualized and invariable, barely distinguishable from the day before." Chap. 9, p. 142

"At the time the relationship felt more addictive than the drink: my world got smaller and smaller; Julian occupied more and more space in my head, eliminating room for days writing him letters, long, anguished tomes trying to explain how I felt." Chap. 11, p. 162



Topics for Discussion

In the title and first chapter of the novel, Knapp assert that she was in fact in love with alcohol. How does love turn into addiction for Knapp? How does this happen with other people/materials in people's lives?

Do you agree with Knapp's assertion that people with addictive and obsessive tendencies tend to substitute one addiction for another? Explain.

What do you think of Knapp's relationship with her father? Do you think that she over exaggerates her inability to feel comfortable around him? Do you think she wrongly blames him for her alcoholism?

Do you think that alcohol stunts personal growth? Discuss this with the theme of sexuality.

Do you think alcohol kept Knapp in her relationship with Julian? Or do you think it was an excuse to continue the relationship?

Is Knapp's choice to not have the book chronological a good one? Do you think that the chapter themes were helpful in understanding her story? Or did you feel as if it became repetitive?

Was Knapp's inclusion of other alcoholics' stories helpful to the telling of her life? Did they detract from her own story? Do you think that these anecdotes should have been left out? Explain why or why not.