



In the Drink

Kate Christensen

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In this compassionate, wise, and comical debut, Kate Christensen gives an engaging and authentic voice to a new generation of single urban women.

Claudia Steiner never intended for her life to become such a disaster. At the age of twenty-nine she finds herself serving as secretary to an insane, aging socialite who barks orders from her toilet, specializes in devastating backhanded remarks, and expects Claudia to ghostwrite her best-selling novels. Her job pays enough to keep her in overpriced cocktails, cabs, and take-out but doesn't cover the rent on her roach-infested apartment or keep her creditors at bay. Her romantic prospects are no better. She's hopelessly in love with her best friend, a corporate lawyer who may or may not be gay, and she's still relentlessly pursued by her ex-lover, a married unpublished epic poet. All Claudia can rely on--aside from her wry sense of humor and her faith in the medicinal properties of whiskey--is a persistent little flame of belief in herself, which gives her the glimmer of a chance for a happy ending.

In the Drink Details

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From Reader Review In the Drink for online ebook

Allison says

She's the friend of a friend and that friend sort of recommended this to me. It depressed me because it described my life at the time perfectly and it was like reading my own journals. Which either means that I should be making whatever money she made off of this piece of crap or that she's awesome (and I'm a total slacker for getting my journals published). But I didn't really feel awesome after reading this. Depressing.

Bobbi Woods says

While procrastinating on *Devil in the White City*, I picked this book up at the library on my friend, Bridget's stellar recommendation of the author, Kate Christensen. Christensen is indeed a "writer's writer"--I thoroughly enjoyed her style and array of colorful characters in this book.

It's the story of a New York woman, Claudia, who works as the personal assistant and ghost writer for a rich older socialite author who somewhat mistreats her. Claudia is also at fault because she is disorganized, careless and not the best secretary. She is also in love with her best friend, William.

The story title implies that the main character is an alcoholic. However, drinking wasn't really the focus of this novel and I am not so sure she really had a drinking problem. There was definitely a lot of social drinking going on with the group of friends but it didn't seem to impact their lives too much. Claudia is on the brink of bankruptcy because she is disorganized AND doesn't make enough money to live in NYC--not because she drinks too much.

Anyway, a great diversion from my other book, which I don't think I will finish. On to next month's book about a girl in Hawaii with leprosy. :-)

Laurel-Rain says

Claudia Steiner's life is like a train wreck. She has a dead end job as a secretary for a crazy and aging socialite who is a bestselling author; in actuality, Claudia ghostwrites the books for a mere pittance. She doesn't make nearly enough to pay her numerous bills, including her rent in a ridiculously roach-infested Manhattan apartment. At twenty-nine, it is starting to look as if she won't make it after all. Her own writing dreams might not come true.

She struggles to get through her days, barely managing to escape the constant yelling and criticism of her demanding boss, so she buries it all at night by visiting various clubs and drinking excessively. Her colorful friends are all staving off their own drudgery in the clubs at night, and I felt like I recognized a few of them from my own days in this scene.

Her life does have one bright spot: her lifelong friend William, whom she has known since they were classmates in a small town in Arizona. But she is also in love with him. What will become of her? How will she get him to reciprocate her feelings when she can't even tell him how she feels?

Claudia's first person narrative has a wry humor to it. She seems to be laughing at herself and her many

foibles as she shares what life is like for her. As much as I cringed whenever Claudia made still another error in judgment, I also smiled inwardly and with fondness. There is something so appealing about this young woman that made me root for her.

In the end, when her life seemingly implodes and lies around her like so many broken eggshells, she still manages to pick herself up and figure out what to do next. I loved "In the Drink: A Novel" and enjoyed reading every page. A definite five star read from an author who has rapidly become one of my favorites.

Elyssa says

When I read this in my early thirties, I could still relate to the struggles of a young, single woman finding her way.

Sarah Robarge says

There was a woman-child who drank too much and ruined her life, the end. There, I just saved you six hours of reading. (Is there some hidden meaning behind the Italian model who comes to visit and takes care of the cat the main character abandons? Maybe it went over my head.)

Robert says

A friend of mine from business school gave me this book just after graduation. She was moving back to New York and was apparently trying to get rid of some bulk before the drive. Maybe she didn't have room to pack it. I don't know. Anyway, that was 14 years ago and I had not opened the book until a couple of days ago when I started to read it. I noticed that there was a dedication from one of her friends who had given her the book as a going away gift. It made me feel bad that I had this book that might have had some sentimental value, but I have completely lost track of her and her name is one of those names that makes it impossible to find her on Facebook - think Jane Jones or Patty Johnson or Brianna [anything].

Right, so the book; it wasn't horrible. It was nicely written; no sentence fragments, no starting paragraphs with "And". Not much of a plot though - just a string of chronological episodes, with no real build up or denouement. I don't know this to be the case, but I imagine that the book is semi-autobiographical and her story is just not as interesting as all of her friends led her to believe. It was Will & Grace without the sass. It was A Confederacy of Dunces without the lovability.

2.5 stars. I wanted to tell the protagonist to get her act together, but I didn't really care.

Back to the original owner of the book, it was suggested to me that maybe she was not just simplifying. Maybe she had plenty of room in the car for a 280 page hardback book. Maybe she just thought it sucked. I am guilt free.

Katie says

After Maud Newton came down heavy this summer on Kate Christensen book recommendations, and because she's coming to read soon, I decided to give her a whirl by reading two back-to-back. With this one, I was hoping for something light but well written and addictive that I could ingest in a couple days. Didn't really grab me at first - par exemple, a whole page on the cockroaches in her character's Manhattan apartment? and do we have to follow her through every nap and walk across the park? - but soon enough the whole self-destructive character capable of change thing sucked me in. Even if it's cheesily implied that she went on to write this very book.

Erin Eileen says

I have no idea why I read this book.

ITD is the ideal "treadmill book" as I like to call them--books that you can read while focusing a majority of your attention on something more important. Claudia, the whiny protagonist is a pain in the rear, managing to be both inappropriately aggressive and spineless at the same time.

I think the author really wanted to address Claudia's glaringly obvious alcoholism but wasn't sure how to, so she sprinkled in a few flippant remarks suggesting that Claudia might have a substance abuse problem but maybe not but maaaaaaaybe (probably) she does.

I would recommend this book to someone who is just learning to read because it is only about 200 pages long and even has a cat in it.

Sarah B. says

There's always room in my life for a deeply flawed main character. Are you probably (possibly?) a talented writer who is ghost-writing a useless semi-autobiographic genre novel for someone else? Come sit here by me. Are you responding to your boss's breakdown by becoming less and less effective until she has no choice but to let you go? Tell me. Sleeping with a married man? Honey. Treating yourself to dinner out even though you only have \$34 in your bank account? Mmmm hmmm. Drinking a little or maybe a lot too much? I want to hear your whole story; start at the beginning.

Christensen perfectly captured that careful boozy balance of white-knuckling it and grim denial that is the first ten years after school. This book brought back memories for me (though Claudia Steiner is both more talented and tougher than I was at her age). Specifically, it made me think of my own bug-infested first apartment, which was nasty but at the same time, something I managed to perpetuate with my own tiny paychecks. I adored Claudia, with all her mistakes, self-sabotage, bad clothes, and denial. I really wanted her to find her way, as unlikely as that seemed for most of the book.

At first I was worried that this book was going to resolve into a simple genre novel, but after the first few chapters, the plot began to get more nuanced. Other characters filled out Claudia's story and gave her depth, and even during flashbacks I felt like the pace was quickening. By the end, I was staying up late because I couldn't wait to see which way Claudia would break. I wasn't disappointed.

Ellen says

Like many first novels, *In the Drink* feels a little formulaic (just a tiny bit) and a little less accomplished than later works by the same author. That said, even here Christensen creates a strangely sympathetic, chronically down-on-her-luck heroine and recreates a lovingly and closely observed New York City in the sunset days of the 20th century. As Claudia Steiner struggles with a hopeless mountain of debt, soul-sucking underemployment, unrequited love, and, yes, a creeping but unmistakable drinking problem, she finds herself wondering how *this* became her life and what she is going to do about it.

The novel never flags--which is one of my frequent complaints about first novels--and the ending is winsomely and delicately ambiguous. Where a lesser author would have reached for a neat, packaged, even deus-ex-machina resolution, here there are no magical, romantic solutions for the mess Claudia has made of her life. And yet somehow there is a buoyancy to this narrative and a core of resilience in its protagonist that keeps you reading and makes you like Claudia, in spite of her many flaws.

Allison says

I actually really liked this book, but mostly because I could so easily relate to it at this point in my life. It was one of those "perfect timing" books. The protagonist, Claudia, is frustrated with her life in NYC. She lives in a shanty of an apartment; she eats, drinks, and spends money irresponsibly; she is pining after her male best friend who she is sure does not feel reciprocal interest; and most of all, she is terribly dissatisfied with her work. Her feeling of futility with life comes through Christensen's words like a disease, and it is a disease I fear I have caught at least once-a-week. She feels better than her current station in life--or, rather, the workforce--but she also feels trapped within what she is able and permitted to do.

Honestly, I can imagine the frustration of ghostwriting someone else's novel, which is why I would never agree to do it. Claudia is trapped in the cloak of invisibility, and that cloak easily translates itself into insignificance. The most poignant scene in the book is one in which she leans out over the subway tracks and imagines invisible hands pushing her in front of the oncoming train. Anyone who says they haven't experienced a moment like this would be lying.

All in all, the book is no literary feat of excellence; the plot lacks "drive" and the characters (except for Claudia's employer Jackie, who is quite distinctive in a love-to-hate-her kind of way) are not particularly memorable. Still, I related to this book, and all of the setting details that placed it in NYC were spot-on. It's worth a look for anyone intimate with NYC or who feels frustrated with his/her station in life.

Ronald Wilcox says

Fun look of life in New York in the 1990's for a young woman who has minimal career aspirations who is currently a secretary and ghostwriter for an older socialite. Kind of fluff but nevertheless an enjoyable read.

Elizabeth McNair says

I really wanted to like this book-the writing was well done, enjoyed the main character somewhat, but I wanted her to grow up, make good choices, etc. The ending really disappointed me. I was like-this is it?

Jennifer Sullivan says

I had high hopes for book on drinking. It really fell short.

Teresa says

I found this book to be frustrating. I'm not sure if the author wanted us to feel sorry for the main character or not, but I definitely didn't. She obviously had a problem with alcohol which caused her to never achieve anything in life. Throughout the entire book she bemoaned her "fate" while watching those around her succeed, yet she never once did a thing about it. I thought there would be a breakthrough in the end, but the vague and weak ending left me feeling like she hadn't learned a thing. A depressing look at a life being wasted by alcohol abuse, laziness, and a sense of entitlement. It wasn't worth the time I put into reading it.

Susan says

In the Drink by Kate Christensen is set in late 20th century New York City. Claudia is a young woman who had great hopes of becoming a novelist, and found the reality of big-city life quite different than her dreams.

Although the jacket synopsis describes a protagonist at a downward spiral in her life, I was attracted by the Kirkus review, which calls it 'rollicking fun'.

After just a dozen pages, I was repelled by Claudia's (evidently routine) morning status meeting in the boss's bathroom, with the hag 'starkers' on the toilet, alternately insulting Claudia and carrying on a cell phone conversation (yuck).

I wondered if Claudia eventually made a cathartic turn-around, digging herself out of her misery for an uplifting or inspiring ending...so I checked Goodreads reviews. Apparently the ending is not much of a resolution, and a reader enjoys the story only if he/she is or was in a similar life crisis.

This is one of the few books I abandoned without finishing.

Lauren orso says

this book is about everything being terrible and the 90s and nyc in the 90s, which are three of my favorite things, so.

certainly, it was written neither for the hopeful, nor those who never checked their answering machine from a pay phone, but i'm sure those people (YOU PEOPLE) have their (YOUR) own little "books," but for the rest of us--those yearning for the female followup to 'joe's apartment'--there is this, and it is great.

Jen says

I read the whole book, so that says something. The narrative is enough to keep you in the book, but the characters were flat and cliché and the story has been done. It was interesting that the end doesn't really resolve anything. But, by halfway through the book I was so tired of Claudia (the main character) and her sorry for herself self that can't pull it together I wanted to slap her. Those are not the kind of young, urban female characters that I want to see.

Muffy Kroha says

Didn't do justice to one of my favorite subjects- Booze- And I like cheezy chick books- but I can say not so in this case.

A says

Your likelihood of enjoying this book seems fully predicated on whether it happens to be the right book at the right time for you. A good test is to skip to a seminal moment of crisis in the novel, about 200pp. in: the main character has had a truly awful day, and then comes home to find that she's run out of toothpaste, shampoo, toilet paper, and coffee -- all at once. It's not the life changes that break her but that sudden, stupid, annoying coincidence that leads her to faceplant in her bed and decide the terrors of the day will be faced at another time. How does that make you feel? If you (A) throw the book across the room in complete and total sympathy, you should put your wine glass down, pick the book back up, and read on. If you (B) throw the book across the room in complete and total fatigue regarding this preposterously immature girl, leave the book where it is and go balance your checkbook.

I think it's obvious that I chose option (A). Yes, I'm a once bright-eyed and bushy-tailed New Yorker currently at a bit of a romantic, financial, professional, and real estate low point, whose tools of choice for sanding down the rough edges are booze, solitude, and awkward afterhours encounters. As such, I raised up Claudia Steiner as something of a godsend/patron martyr, letting her show me that I'm not alone in my overeducated and overanalyzed anxiety but also letting her show, at her most extreme moments, that maybe I need to chill the fuck out a little bit. To me, the novel's resoundingly clear point is that Claudia (read: I) may have her own issues, yes, but what's really grinding her into dust is the relentlessly cruel rat race of cutthroat life in New York (or really any urban setting), a place whose rickety scaffolding of success is built strictly out of luck, coincidence, and your family's net worth and on which the tattered rags of a desiccated corporate-driven culture are hung out to dry.

Phew. That said, I can also see just as easily how, to a reader with a less existentially contorted outlook on city living, Claudia could come off as a whiny brat. She pushes away her friends, the support system she surrounds herself with is toxic, she seems physiologically incapable of making even the most trivial decisions, she's actually quite bad at her job, she's clearly much too entitled, etc. etc. etc. And perhaps that's what makes this book worth 4 stars: The reader's love/hate relationship with the troubled protagonist is really, writ small, a reflection of the entire book's constant, adroitly dissected sense of ambivalence about life -- its highs and lows regarding character, plot, ambition, motivation, tone, and beyond. This is an ambivalence that is thoroughly maddening, yes, but also thoroughly engrossing. You want to hate it, be

above it, walk away, dismiss that whole worldview as entitled and immature, but you realize there is just enough truth in all this chaos that you can't discard it outright. Like the character William's hidden bottle of "expensive yuppie vodka" cut with just enough water and poured into one of the cherished crystal tumblers that become a central symbol of the book, it's bracing and harsh, but just diluted enough that you can't help but swallow it down, again and again, wincing at the taste but unable to stop.
