



The Tender Bar

J.R. Moehringer

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A moving, vividly told memoir full of heart, drama, and exquisite comic timing, about a boy striving to become a man, and his romance with a bar. J.R. Moehringer grew up listening for a voice: It was the sound of his missing father, a disc jockey who disappeared before J.R. spoke his first words. As a boy, J.R. would press his ear to a clock radio, straining to hear in that resonant voice the secrets of masculinity, and the keys to his own identity. J.R.'s mother was his world, his anchor, but he needed something else, something more, something he couldn't name. So he turned to the bar on the corner, a grand old New York saloon that was a sanctuary for all types of men—cops and poets, actors and lawyers, gamblers and stumblebums. The flamboyant characters along the bar—including J.R.'s Uncle Charlie, a Humphrey Bogart look-alike; Colt, a Yogi Berra sound-alike; Joey D, a soft-hearted brawler; and Cager, a war hero who raised handicapping horses to an art—taught J.R., tended him, and provided a kind of fatherhood by committee. When the time came for J.R. to leave home, the bar became a way station—from his entrance to Yale, where he floundered as a scholarship student way out of his element; to his introduction to tragic romance with a woman way out of his league; to his stint as a copy boy at the New York Times, where he was a faulty cog in a vast machine way out of his control. Through it all, the bar offered shelter from failure, from rejection, and eventually from reality—until at last the bar turned J.R. away. Riveting, moving, and achingly funny, *The Tender Bar* is at once an evocative portrait of one boy's struggle to become a man, and a touching depiction of how some men remain lost boys.

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