



The Tender Bar - A Memoir

J. R. Moehringer

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"J.R. Moehringer grew up captivated by a voice. It was the voice of his father, a New York City disc jockey who vanished before J.R. spoke his first word. Sitting on the stoop, pressing an ear to the radio, J.R. would strain to hear in that plummy baritone the secrets of masculinity and identity. Though J.R.'s mother was his world, his rock, he craved something more, something faintly and hauntingly audible only in The Voice." "At eight years old, suddenly unable to find The Voice on the radio, J.R. turned in desperation to the bar on the corner, where he found a rousing chorus of new voices. Cops and poets, bookies and soldiers, movie stars and stumblebums, all sorts of men gathered in the bar to tell their stories and forget their cares. The alphas along the bar - including J.R.'s Uncle Charlie, a Humphrey Bogart look-alike; Colt, a Yogi-Bear sound-alike; and Joey D, a softhearted brawler - took J.R. to the beach, to ballgames, and ultimately into their circle. They taught J.R., tended him, and provided a kind of fatherhood-by-committee." Torn between the stirring example of his mother and the lurid romance of the bar, J.R. tried to forge a self somewhere in the center. But when it was time for J.R. to leave home, the bar became an increasingly seductive sanctuary, a place to return and regroup during his picaresque journeys - from his grandfather's tumbledown house to the hallowed towers and spires of Yale; from his absurd stint selling housewares at Lord & Taylor to his dream job at the New York Times, which became a nightmare when he found himself a faulty cog in a vast machine. Time and again the bar offered shelter from failure, rejection, heartbreak - and eventually from reality.

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