

# Downtown Disaster

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CAT MARNELL'S MEMOIR OF DRUGS, MAGAZINE JOBS, AND FASHION.

**C**at Marnell—the popular drug-addicted beauty editor and blogger—has written the kind of '90s-era junkie memoir that lends itself to the morbid curiosity we reserve for anyone who dies before we discover their work. Like Anna Kavan, a lifelong imbiber of heroin, Marnell published her first piece of writing as an addict. (When Kavan died, her friends found forty different shades of lipstick in her apartment.) Marnell's story does not veer into the kind of self-mythologizing that occasions armchair fact-checking. In fact, it's a departure from a career spent transmogrifying her troubles for an eager audience.

I was full of secrets: I was an addict, for one. A pillhead! I was also an alcoholic-in-training who drank warm Veuve Clicquot after work, alone in my boss's office with the door closed; a conniving uptown doctor shopper who haunted twenty-four-hour pharmacies . . . a salami-and-provolone-puking bulimic who spent a hundred dollars a day on binge foods when things got bad . . . a tweaky self-mutilator who sat in front of *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, digging gory abscesses into her bikini line with Tweezerman Satin Edge Needle Nōse Tweezers; a slutty and self-loathing downtown party girl fellatrix rushing to ruin.

Unlike the occasional bohemianism of weekend warriors, her drug intake is the kind that keeps you indoors, serially unemployed, with the blinds drawn and the candles lit. I'm putting it lightly when I say that Marnell's lackluster attempts at rehabilitation put a new gloss on carrying coals to Newcastle. Hers is a life lived—selfishly, wildly, and (mostly) unapologetically—without responsibility, or relationships burdened by traditional directive controls, like those with boyfriends or best friends. She is a loner surrounded only by stalkers, drug hustlers, clueless bosses. It is worth reading a book by a woman who gets as sick as Cat does. Marnell defies, consciously or not, the social structures that keep women behaving well in private. "There's a bottle of Adderall right next to me," she writes in the afterword. Marnell has cleaned up *just enough* to come clean in ***How to Murder Your Life*** (Simon & Schuster, \$27): "For now, just know that in April 2013, I signed my contract. . . . In September 2013, I overdosed on heroin; by December, my agent was sending a ghostwriter over to gather my 'notes' and piece everything together for me (I scared him away); by February, I was suicidal—texting with dealers to buy Oxycontin. . . . In March 2014, I did what all despondent addicts who are about to be sued should do: bought a one-way ticket to Bangkok [for rehab] . . . I started writing."

I don't get the impression that Cat wrote the book she set out to write, and it isn't the most literary of contributions to the addiction genre ("I have tried to cut this chapter out twice! My editor keeps making me put it back in"). I am, however

herself. What to wear to an abortion? "I changed out of my white Daisy Duke shorts and McQ by Alexander McQueen rib cage baby tee and into a gown." Yes, a ball gown. (One of the many freeloading minor characters, "The DJ from LA," has raped her while living at her house gratis.) What to wear to buy "four ten-dollar baggies of brown flakes that had been drizzled with phencyclidine, then left out overnight to dry"? "I was full-on homicide-victim chic in a Tsubi minidress covered in laser-cut stab holes and fake bloodstains." When



Shara Hughes, *Here and There*, 2007, oil, enamel, acrylic, pen, and charcoal on canvas, 32 × 32".

you have your first job as an associate beauty editor at the now defunct *Lucky*? "I had a chic lavender pedicure—Versace Heat Nail Lacquer V2008—and I smelled obscure and expensive, like Susanne Lang Midnight Orchid and Colette Black Musk Oil." When you're on your way to the psych ward? "I arrived at Payne Whitney . . . like I'd just walked in from sucking dick on Skid Row in black Minnetonkas, a shredded Misfits T-shirt, and neon-pink streaks in my ratty hair."

It's a bit like being on drugs. The details snag the eye and catch the light. The living room in her grandmother Mimi's house "was full of orchids and tiny sterling silver spoons and teensy demitasse cups and saucers, and peacock feathers and mother-of-pearl binoculars and *juno volupta* seashells." (Mimi is just one of many family members routinely getting her granddaughter out of hot water, paying Marnell's back rent and wiring her money when she's abroad.) Of the uterine lining shed during a false miscarriage, she tells us, "Imagine a jellyfish as big as an ashtray." Even when Marnell is home alone, you get the sense that she's curating a shoot you might find in the last ten years of *Italian Vogue*: "I stubbed out my cigarette into a seashell."

the Eastern Euro were from Iowa: names: In high school New York she de To the extent tha stunning details it said: *THINNER*—about my moth 'Bones.'" Unab matrix," Cat de pounds. In colle dogs chilled on l per day." Just li views! (She shou

When she's f practicing psych sends in the mail month after mo envelopes; my c bottles inside." demic *domestiq* adopter and ab always strung o Enough Adder Pharmacy insta especially delig Sidwell Friends Tiffany charm n and things." (N dollar-a-day rel And jokes that more transform school, and ever It's through ac internship after tually job-man girls posed on M Avenue bedro Spence uniform Couture-sweat

Cat doesn't "Glamour was shiny hair, hea tea and pulled cold." She's too a star quality ne or bloggers, w name for them wedding band brand. "I'd bee life: my image couldn't contr