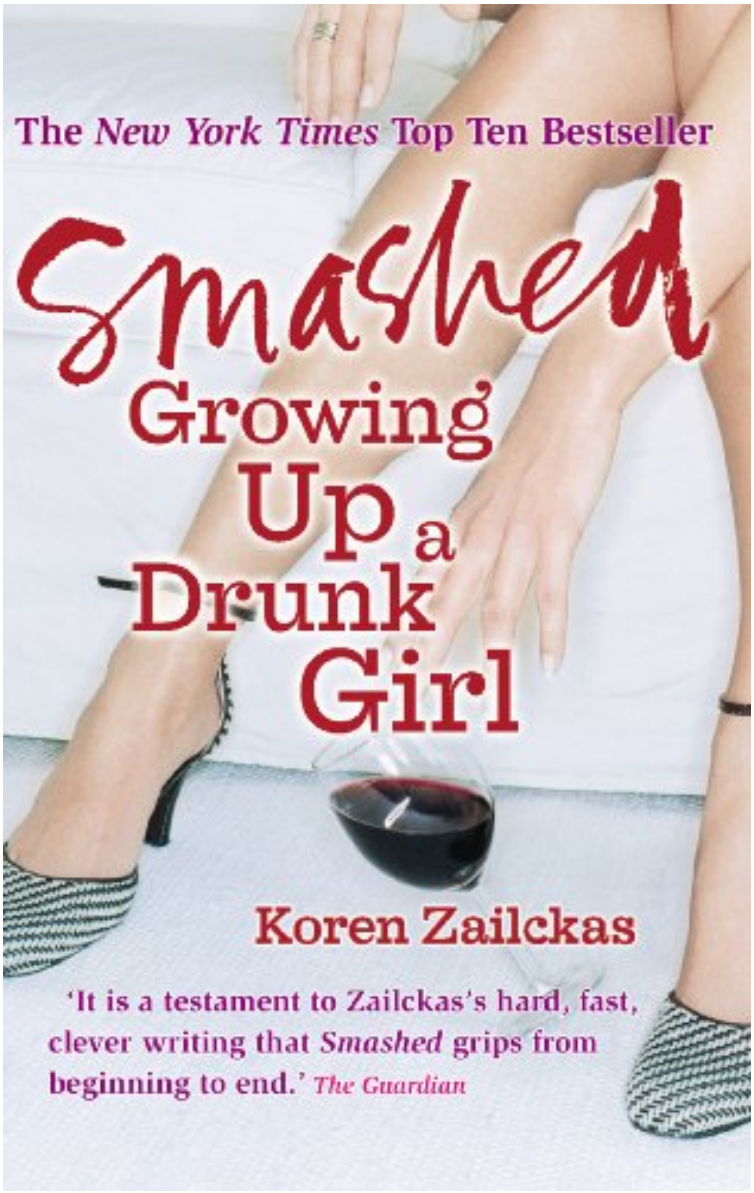
Smashed: Growing Up A Drunk Girl



Par Koren Zailckas
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(Free read ebook) Smashed: Growing Up A Drunk Girl

Par Koren Zailckas : Smashed: Growing Up A Drunk Girl before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Smashed: Growing Up A Drunk Girl:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe day Koren turned fourteen she tasted alcohol for the first time. At fifteen she was piecing together forgotten fragments of drink, men and misplaced clothes. At sixteen she was being carried through hospital doors unconscious. And so it began...Brought up by loving parents in a stable middle-class home, Koren was a sweet and altogether normal child. Yet from her mid-teens until her early twenties, she thought nothing of regularly drinking herself into a state of amnesia. Alcohol became her safeguard and prop, providing her with a self-confidence she couldn't otherwise feel. And whilst drinking to excess was perfectly acceptable, even actively encouraged, amongst her friends, it quickly reached a destructive

monotony that bordered on dependency. It took a number of terrifying incidents - from stumbling home alone covered in vomit to waking up naked in bed unsure of whether she had lost her virginity - before Koren could finally say to herself enough was enough and seek help for her problem.Smashed is the shocking but all-too-recognisable story of a young woman coming of age within a society that finds it easier to turn a blind eye to binge-drinking than address the problem head on. Beautifully written and brutally honest, compelling without preaching, this is a book that demands to be read.ExtraitHenceforth, my mother will refer to it as the time I almost died. We'll be sitting in the kitchen, both four and seven years from now. My dad will extend the leaves of the kitchen table to accommodate whatever college boyfriend I've brought home for the weekend. And my mom, while spooning out three-bean salad, will turn and ask him, "Has Koren told you about the time she almost died?"I'll never know how much of that assertion accounts for melodrama.Sure enough, it feels like death. On November 9, 1996, I wake up between the Tide-stiff sheets of my childhood Banister Bed and one thought occurs to me: I'm not wearing any underwear.This is all the information I need to know that something horrendous has happened. At sixteen, I am never naked, save for ten minutes a day under the stream of a morning shower, and even then, I turn away from the bathroom mirror before I drop my towel to step in. Even alone, I am ashamed of the arcs of my own pale skin, particularly in the whitest part that spans between my hips. Given my tendency to thrash in my sleep and kick down sheets, I would never sleep without underwear.My bed looks like it's been made with me in it. There's not a wrinkle in the comforter; its patched pastel pattern is pulled smooth and tight, clear up to my neck. When I start to unroll my arms and legs from the folds of the sheets, I feel a sharp pain in my elbow, like I've been sleeping on it, and I stop for a moment, trying to decide if that position is physically possible.I decide to fold back the comforter from one corner, the way someone might diagonally halve a dinner napkin. I do it slowly. It's like opening a hand-addressed letter with no return address; I have a feeling I could find just about anything inside.What I find under the covers looks like someone else's nightgown. It is a thin, white, cotton smock, stippled with green, and it cuts off at my knees. I can't imagine who I borrowed it from, since my friends and I all sleep in nylon shorts and our dads' XL T-shirts. When I feel around to the breach of cloth above my own pink ass, it dawns on me: I'm wearing a hospital gown.I'm immobile in the face of my panic. I'm stunned to the point that I don't dare breathe or kick my feet in a way that would make even the faintest sliding sound on the starched sheets. I don't know how many minutes I lay like this, motionless in the small sag that my body makes in the mattress, barely breathing. I can't get out of bed until I've figured out what emergency landed me in this green and white gown. My room is directly above the dining room, and the littlest thump on the carpet can shake the chandelier; I don't want anyone downstairs to see it swinging and know I'm awake.I feel like I'm arriving at the scene of an accident, like my physical self has been creamed in a hit-and-run and my mental self is the first one to find it. All I can do is run through the basic first-aid checkpoints, the first of which is: Can you move?I pull my knees into my chest and wrap both arms around them with no problem, aside from the throbbing deep in my elbow. The back of my head is tender against the pillow, and my neck moves in a succession of arthritic-like cracks. But my joints move. I'm not paralyzed.There are no clues in the form of a cast or a bandage or stitches. Lying down, I can't even make out any discernible bruises. Later, I'll be able to make out the purple impressions of fingers around my biceps, plus a golf ball-sized bruise on one ass cheek, a sort of yellowed half-moon around a raised, blue bump. But for now, the only visible signs that I'm injured are the hospital gown and a pink, plastic wristband that reads zailckas, koren.The house is filled with the sounds of Saturday morning in motion. Bear is barking to be let in through the side door. There is the sound of coffee mugs clinking on countertops, and I detect the faint smell of bagels burning in the oven. I might even hear the far-off sound of my mother's whirring laughter.My room appears equal in its sameness. There are dirty socks on the floor and stacks of Seventeen on my desk. On my bureau, there are notebooks on top of snapshots, necklaces on top of notebooks, and dust over just about everything, ever since I barred my mom from my room. Fall light filters through the window blinds and casts sunny stripes across the carpet. I can see my back-to-school sweaters brushing elbows in the closet; the price tags are still stapled to some of them, and I can make out the orange half-off stickers from Filene's juniors' department.Mentally, I retrace my steps from last night to try to find this dropped memory.As far as Friday nights go, it was typical. I spent it with my new friend, Kat Caldwell. She is a girl I made friends with a few months ago for no real reason other than we both drink and we're both sensitive. The first night I'd slept over at Kat's house, I saw that her sheets were streaked with mascara, and her Laura Ashley pillowcases retained the outline of her whole face: half-moon of foundation, faint ring of lip stain, black strokes from the flurried beating of her dripping eyelashes. She'd opened the drawers of her bureau to

show me the old liquor bottles she hid under her childhood ballet costumes, and I'd laughed at dozens of tiny Lycra bodices, net tutus, and loose sequins that smelled of Tanqueray.Kat came with a silver cord to more friends, like Abby and Allen, and I'd gone with all of them, plus my childhood friend Claire, to a Friday-night get-together near the lake in the next town over.A girl whose parents were away in Vermont for a wine-tasting weekend threw the party. Her parents must have warned her not to have friends over while they were gone because she wouldn't let any of us inside her house to mix drinks properly, in cups. Instead, about a dozen of us -- friends, and friends of friends, and neighborhood kids who'd heard that someone's parents were out -- were in the backyard, slugging rum, tequila, and Kahla straight from their bottles. At one point, when I asked the girl if I could go inside to use her bathroom, she suggested that I drop my pants behind the hedges across the street.The whole ordeal hadn't been the least bit thrilling. I'd sat beside Kat on a splintering dock. Our bare feet dangled over the edge of the black, rippling water, where we could occasionally hear fish jump, making plopping sounds like tossed coins. The wind propelled dead leaves across the lake's surface. The clouds swirled themselves around the moon.I started by taking small sips from the communal bottles. I knocked back a few sips of generic rum, which tasted strong and acidic, and bit my throat. I soothed it with candied gulps of Kahla.I also drank from a thermos filled with vodka that Claire had filched from a bottle in her parents' liquor cabinet. It was the same gallon-wide jug of Absolut that we always stole from, and then added water to, in an effort to recover the stolen inches. After months of adding and subtracting, the vodka had reached a diluted state that rendered it tasteless. It was as cold and wet as springwater, and we drank it fast.The last thing I remember is telling Claire about the poet Frank O'Hara, the way he'd said that after the first glass of vodka you can accept anything about life, even your own mysteriousness. After that, my own mystery opens up.There are only so many calamities that could have warranted this hospital gown. My first thought is that I lost my footing on the path leading up from the dock and cracked my knee in the place where it still wasn't fully healed from the surgery. One would think I'd remember that kind of fall, but perhaps the pain of it blacked me out.For one horrible moment, it also occurs to me that Allen, who had driven, might have had too many sips of straight rum and veered the car off the road on the way home. It was only a month ago that a boy in our class got drunk and drove his car into a lake, where it sunk like an old tire, and he had to unroll the window to swim out. For a moment, I think whiplash could be responsible for my lumped head and stiff neck, not to mention the amnesia. But then I decide I'd surely remember something from the moments before we crashed: gasping, blackness spreading across the windshield, the sound of pine branches scraping the flanks of the car.I should call one of the girls who'd been with me, to see if they can fill in the gaps. But when I look for the portable phone, someone has removed it from its cradle on my bureau, as if to prevent that from happening.I step softly to my full-length mirror, using the ballet-walk where you stand only on the balls of your feet.The image reflected back at me makes me cup my mouth with both hands: I look like a woman in a zombie film from the 1950s. My hair looks like it's been replaced with a Halloween wig; it is teased into a high pile of knots and dusted with dirt and leaves, and something sticky has lacquered the ends together. From this position, I can make out a whole range of fingerprints that wrap around my forearms in shades of brownish-blue and yellow. A cat-scratch is carved into the corner of my eye; aside from that, my face looks slack and pasty, but unmarked.I can see now that I'm wearing hospital booties with my gown. They are blue ankle-socks with plastic beads on the soles, presumably so you won't slip on the linoleum floors while you're fleeing the ward.I add another item to the list of possible accidents: psychiatric emergency.My alarm clock says it's 10:30. That tells me that whatever happened must be serious because no one has bothered to wake me for my poetry workshop. I was scheduled to spend the weekend at a conference for Worcester County's most promising young writers, and it started more than two hours ago. The workshop is one of those college rsum padders that my mother would send me to in any state short of death. (Just two months ago, she forced me to spend a week at diplomacy camp at Washington, D.C., and just to spite her, I'd skipped the lectures on youth leadership to buy forties of beer and drink them with local delinquents on the hill behind the dorm.)I would stay in my room all day, trying to figure out what happened, if I didn't desperately need a glass of water. My throat is so parched it feels raw, and each swallow is arduous.I keep the hospital booties on because the morning has the cold nip of fall, but I trade the gown for a sweatshirt and a pair of flannel pants. I try to brush my hair, and realize with one painful stroke that the task could take all afternoon, so instead I wind the whole snarled mess into a lopsided bun. I look at myself in the mirror and wince before heading downstairs to meet my parents with the premonition that I am fucked.It is my first blackout.I will never again experience one so comprehensive. I get the details first from Claire, who I find pretending to sleep on the couch in the living room. My parents will rehash them with me

again later, as will Kat and Allen and Abby when I see them Monday morning at school. The remaining gaps I'll fill in years later, when I get the courage to ask my father more questions, and when I see my emergency file.I passed out on the dock in a puddle of my own vomit. I imagine it was mostly liquor because my dad told the doctor I didn't eat dinner that night. Before that, I pulled my shirt up over my shoulders to show my bra to someone's brother because, knowing I was slipping into oblivion, he'd asked me what color it was. I'd also professed a soul-shattering love for an older boy who had taken me for a drunken walk in the woods a few months earlier -- a boy who had pushed my back into the cragged banks of a stream and called me a baby when I wouldn't let him pull off my underwear.After I tottered and fell sideways onto the planks of the dock, nobody could wake me. Allen, Abby, Claire, and Kat carried me up the hill to the road by my arms and legs, which is why my body bears what look like forty finger-shaped bruises. They dropped me a few times, too, which explains the raised bumps on my butt and the back of my head.When they tell me this, I envision a dead body -- not my body, but the body of someone in a thriller movie who has just been clubbed with a paperweight and dragged in a bloody streak across the floor by her feet. When I ask them why they didn't roll me up in a rug, no one finds it funny.The girl whose house we were at brought out a pair of pilled sweatpants because I'd retched all over my jeans. I can't imagine that she would have let me inside, given that I was liable to puke over all manner of Venetian rugs and calico curtains, so I'll come to imagine that they pulled off my jeans outside on the porch, leaving my underwear fully exposed while they struggled to stick my feet through the sweatpants' elasticized legs. Then they draped me across the backseat of Allen's car and drove me to Abby's house.From what I can tell from the medical records, this whole ordeal took at least an hour. It was around 12:30. Abby's parents were asleep when my friends lugged me in through the front door.They tried to give me a shower, to clean off the combination of liquor, vomit, dirt, and leaves that was adhered to me. I'll never know if I was fully naked or if they left my under-things on because I am too embarrassed to ask. Nor will I know if Allen was there while they did it, though I don't know how they could have held me under the showerhead without his strength. Afterward, they must have put me back into the sweatpants because they are there in the plastic bag that my dad carried home from the hospital, and they are all but crusted with vomit. My mom will wash them and insist that I return them, in a most undignified moment, to the girl at school on Monday morning.By the time I was showered, I had already missed my curfew, so Abby called my father to tell him not to worry. She said I'd fallen asleep while we were watching a movie and asked if I could stay the night.My father hadn't believed her. He asked to speak to her parents, and when she said they were sleeping, he asked to talk to me. I was dangling over the edge of her brother's bunk bed, getting sick again. In a second-long flash of memory, I recall someone shaking my shoulders and telling me to pull it together for two minutes, probably so I could ask my dad if I could stay the night. When they held the receiver to my ear, I slurred, "I'll be home in fifteen minutes, Daddy."Years later, he will say it was one of those pivotal moments -- he sensed that the whole world swung on whether he went back to sleep or drove to me.Claire went to the hospital with my father. She was an emergency medical trainee and knew how to calculate heart rates and breaths per minute, which she did throughout the thirty-minute drive.After everything, it is the thought of Claire answering my dad's questions that makes me feel most guilty. He is intimidating when he's not trying to be, and bloodcurdling when he is. If he puts the full boom into his voice, he can make boyfriends tremble and customer-service reps cry. When he asked Claire what happened, she told him nearly the whole truth. She injected fiction only when he asked where we got the vodka -- she said older boys from the neighborhood brought it, instead of admitting that we poured it from her parents' depository of Absolut jugs.When the car pulled up in front of the emergency room, my father says, he carried me through the doors the way he used to carry me to bed.The doctors tested my urine for drugs. According to the doctor's notes, it was the only time I showed signs of life. When the nurse was trying to insert a catheter I kept muttering, "Stop, it's embarrassing," proving that even semiconscious, I was self-conscious. In my chart, there are ten pages of lab results, including all sorts of decimal numbers and strands of letters that I don't understand, but really don't need to. Alcohol alone was responsible for knocking me out, a combination of rum and vodka and coffee liqueur. On one page there is a long list of chemical compounds for which I came up nondetect.Claire tells me the doctors seemed certain they would find some substance, besides alcohol, sweeping through my system. It is the year that everyone first read about Rohypnol, the brand name for flunitrazepam, the tranquilizer used to treat sleeplessness, anxiety, convulsions, and muscle tension. Four months earlier, two women who had been raped after someone slipped them Rohypnol testified before Congress to urge them to take action against the vast numbers of people who were smuggling the drug into the United States. One of them said of the man who raped her,

"This guy could have sawed me in half and I wouldn't have known the difference." A classification known as "date-rape drugs" had emerged. And everyone in the ER thought I was on them.My dad will say later that the doctors were far less compassionate when my test results revealed I was just another teenaged girl who'd nearly poisoned herself by drinking. I will always wonder, though, if the staff's lack of sympathy had more to do with another brief flash of a memory, in which I clawed at the tubes tethered to my arm and screamed at the faint impression of a woman, maybe a doctor or nurse, calling her a "dumbass bitch."No one could imagine that I'd done this to myself. My dad, particularly, was convinced that someone held a gun to my head. It was beyond his comprehension that I'd willed myself to this level of past gone. I was an A student in English, psychology, and art. Sure, math and science were touch-and-go, but that just meant I was right-brained. As far as he knew, will was what I reserved for the PSATs and ballet auditions. It was what I used to solicit cash for the mall.My charts say my skin was cold and clammy, which is one of the signs of alcohol poisoning, as is the fact that I was only semiconscious. When my tests came back they showed my blood alcohol content to be 0.25. A 0.4 BAC is considered lethal for the average person, but it can take less for young people and first-time drinkers.At sixteen, I'm 5'2" and 105 pounds with a ski parka on, which means it would take about one hour of downing eight to ten drinks to kill me. Claire told the doctors I'd been drinking for an hour and a half. I'd had half a thermos of vodka, plus immeasurable sips of rum and Kahla, straight from the bottles. As the doctor told my father, a few more drinks and I'd have fell into a coma or died right there on the dock.No matter how many ways I go over the story, I'll never know if some part of me sought that kind of close call. A good bit of it was inexperience; it was not waiting for all those gulps of liquor to absorb into my system, but just expecting to feel them right away. But I also wonder if that night wasn't the first glimmer of a budding death drive, what Freud called the instinct we all have to return to the perfect stillness we felt before birth. Other girls my age steered into that urge with starvation diets or razor blades, but I chose alcohol because it seemed far less fanatical. On nights when I felt sad, particularly, I could feel my drinking accelerate.I'd been saddened a lot lately, and stressed. Even with new friends like Kat, high school was a nightmarish system of checks and balances. It required observing yourself constantly, making sure you distinguished yourself enough to be accepted, but not to the point where you might garner resentment. Schoolwork required inscribing index cards for hours, all the while maintaining the illusion that you didn't give a shit about the decimals of your GPA. Getting a date required acting just disinterested enough to make a boy interested in asking you. Every consideration required reconsideration. I'd begun waking up at 4:30 a.m. so I could reappraise my outfit for the school day; the fate of the next two years seemed to weigh on whether I chose suede cowboy boots or Adidas sneakers.My parents always swore that in my childhood they had to let me win at board games. If, by the lucky stroke of the plastic wheel, my father would accidentally beat me at Candy Land, I would fly into fits of bawling that I'm told would last for hours. If I couldn't triumph, I didn't want to play. I would pack up my toys and go home. This was perhaps how I felt about being sixteen.But I'll never know if I intended to forfeit. They pumped my stomach, and I sprung back to life that morning in my bedroom. I went directly back to homeroom. I did not pass "Go." I did not collect $200.Saturday, at breakfast, my parents seem almost serene. The coffee is still steaming. The Saturday Boston Globe is still spread out beneath us, in sections. My dad is sitting across from me, with his elbows folded on the woven tablecloth my parents bought in Greece early in their marriage. My mom is at the head of the table, with her hands crossed on the paper's business section. Bear is pacing the floor by our feet, hoping for a dropped cube of cantaloupe. The seating arrangement makes me feel like a fox in an English hunting painting. It feels like everyone is closing in around me, and I feel the terror of being surrounded.My mother starts the conversation and I end up turning sideways in my chair to face her. From this position, I can avoid the gaze of my father, which is sterner on account of his being at the hospital. My mom doesn't try to recap the time line. Instead, she says, "I assume Claire filled you in."It makes me wonder if my parents had had Claire sleep on the living-room couch because it spared them the awkwardness of rehashing the gory details for me. In fact, we'd waited to have this discussion until my dad and I had driven Claire home. Even with the babble of NPR, the car was so silent I could hear the engine purring.My mom says the problem is not that I've been experimenting with alcohol; she'd made it clear in Ocean City that I am old enough to do that. In fact, she says, it is probably a good idea for me to toy around with drinking now, while I still live at home, instead of waiting until I get to college, where the environment makes inexperience even more risky.She says she wouldn't have cared if I'd been drinking at home last night. I could have drunk myself into a similar stupor, she says, gone upstairs, and passed out in my bed. At home, she would have known I was safe. But anything could have happened to me on that dock. She says, "What if you fell into the

water and drowned? What if you had been raped?"My dad says hardly anything. He sets his reading glasses down on top of the front page and looks at me with eyes I don't know how to interpret. I can't remember the last time he looked at me this unremittingly. The moments we spend together usually revolve around some type of project. Typically, we talk while we cook, spray-paint patio furniture, or make candles out of melted-down crayons. Those times, his eyes are focused on the peppers in the wok, or the jet from the paint can, or the bottle we fill with hot wax. He is the type of dad who expresses concern by constructing things, or cooking, or shopping for gadgets, by making sure I have a full stomach, a computer Zip drive, and Gore-Tex boots come spring thaw. I've never seen the expression he is giving me now. It's not outrage, really, or disappointment. It is the look of crude disbelief.The only concern he voices aloud is about my missing the young writers' conference. He asks (rhetorically, of course), "Do you see how drinking makes you miss out on other fun activities?"My mother cries a little, which always makes me cry, too. I've always been like a dog in the way that I absorb her moods. I have been listening to my parents speak with a tension like a rock in my throat. As my mother cries, I have to keep swallowing. In the end, I give up and bawl soundlessly. I use the sleeve of my sweatshirt to wipe the wetness from my face.At the time, I think my mother cries solely because I've frightened her. But years from now, more drunken sons and daughters will surface among her relatives and friends. There will be comatose daughters on respirators, daughters laid up in hospitals with broken cheekbones, car accidents, DUI charges, and sons whose early admissions to Ivy League universities are threatened by alcohol-related suspensions. Years from now, my mother will explain more to me. She'll say, "When you choose to stay at home to rear your kids, a dead-drunk daughter makes you question an entire decade's worth of motherhood -- you wonder if the career you gave up made the slightest difference in the personalities you've been shaping."My sister is eleven. As luck would have it, she is spending the night at a friend's house, so she misses all the clues that point to this black crime. My mom won't tell her about it until she's eighteen, when it's used as a cautionary tale to warn her off drinking, and by that time the handles of the liquor cabinet will wear a silver luggage lock. My sister will be appalled. But mostly, she'll mourn the fact that, as the youngest, she's always the last to know.There is not much to say in my defense. There is no point in telling a fraction of the truth because there is no gray area in which to weasel. All the facts of the night are laid out on the table, like plates of fruit and toast.While my parents talk, I nod like a dashboard Chihuahua and say, "I know, I know, I know." I certainly say I am sorry; it's the only thing I can think to say with the hospital bracelet still sliding up and down my wrist.I am hangover-free due to the large bags of saline pumped through my forearm's thin veins. Still, I climb the stairs back up to my room and sleep for the rest of the day. It's like slipping back into the hole of the blackout -- in sleep, I can forget again.Tomorrow, I'll go for the second day of the young writers' conference, telling the tweed-jacketed director only that I've been sick. In a low-lit corner classroom, I'll try to write a poem I decide to call "Lush," but I won't be able to come up with more than a few first words, scarred by cross-outs.I know the whole ordeal needs to be written about. But two days afterward, I am still far too close to the night to see it clearly. I am looking only at the incident, and the result is a lot like the pictures in our biology textbook, taken at microscopic range, the ones that look like billowing clouds until you read the caption and realize you are looking at magnified cotton swabs. Years will pass before I can see the night of my stomach-pumpingFrom Publishers WeeklyStarred . This isn't just one girl's story of sneaking drinks in junior high, creeping out for night-long keg parties in high school and binge-drinking weeknights and weekends through collegeit's also a valuable cautionary tale. At 24 (her present age), Zailckas gave up drinking after a decade of getting drunk, having blackouts and experiencing brushes with comas, date rape and suicide. She weaves disturbing statistics (from Harvard School of Public Heath studies and elsewhere) into her memoir: most girls will have their first drink by age 12, and will have the experience of being drunk by 14; teenage girls drink as much as their male peers, but their bodies process it badly (they get drunk faster, stay drunk longer and are more likely to die of alcohol poisoning); and date rape and booze go hand-in-hand. Zailckas had alcohol poisoning at 16 after a night of downing shots at a party with friends, but having her stomach pumped in the emergency room and enduring a month of being grounded didn't check her desire to drink. Fraternity keg parties led to drunken sexual encounters not-quite-remembered; drinking began to replace intimacy. Alcohol defined Zailckas's adolescence and college years to such an extent that, as she tells it, she lacks the tools to be an adult: she's unsure how to maintain relationships and unclear about sex without an alcohol buzz. Zailckas is unsparingly insightful and acutely aware of what drinking can and does do to girls. She explains that while kids are taught that drugs are always dangerous, alcohol is perceived as an acceptable rite of passage. Her book is deeply moving, written in poetic, nuanced prose that never obscures the dangerous truths she seeks to reveal.