

BOOK REVIEW

Scared-straight tale of rich kid tumbling to the bottom

By **K.L. ROMO**
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Addiction trumps privilege in Carder Stout's vivid memoir "Lost in Ghost Town: A Memoir of Addiction, Redemption, and Hope in Unlikely Places." Written with excruciating truth and visceral fear, desperation and despair, Stout takes us into the incapacitating stranglehold of addiction and the battle to overcome it.

Son of an heiress, he'd lived in a four-story mansion in Georgetown, then a penthouse in Manhattan, "had climbed Himalayan peaks in Nepal, swum with sharks on the Great Barrier Reef, and watched The Stones play a free concert to the newly liberated citizens of Prague." But that life was a fairy tale and a distant memory when he later lived on the murderous streets of Ghost Town — the dangerous Oakwood neighborhood of Venice, California — and became a driver for Flynn, known as the "underground mayor of drugtown," a venerated former member of the Shoreline Crip gang.

"I had arrived in the city years earlier with a bachelor's degree in nothingness from an expensive liberal arts college in New England. It took me four years to realize that I had learned very little."

Emotionally neglected by his socialite mother and workaholic father, Stout's biggest fear was being left behind. More than happy

to experiment with his older brother, he believed drugs transformed him into a lovable person, like James Bond or the Six Million Dollar Man.

After a platinum-spoon education, Stout's trust fund and breeding led to lavish drug-filled parties for the famous in his New York City penthouse and, later, his Hollywood Hills home. He was an opportunistic host to future Oscar-winners, lost in the wake of their career trajectories.

His life morphed from impostor to junkie when he tried crack cocaine, his new mistress. His identity soon disappeared with his grandmother's silver, both sold to support his habit.

Crack made him forget he was just a wannabe, with no skills and no one who loved him. His intense craving for the euphoric rock landed him in "the Ghetto by the Sea." Junkies, scammers, hustlers and dealers became his tribe, and taunting "voices" attacked him from every direction.

"It was like a sinister cocktail party was happening inside my head, and the guests pointed their fingers and chased me down the hallways under my skin."

With passages like these, it is easy to see why Rolling Stone calls the way in which he tells his story "upsetingly beautiful."

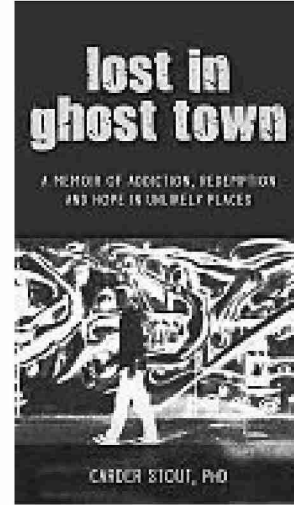
After becoming a "human tumbleweed — a cross between Raggedy Andy and the Scarecrow

from Oz," Stout spent his days satisfying the crack demon while evading the danger of being a white man in a Shoreline Crip neighborhood. He knew his days were numbered: He either had to give up crack and drug dealing, or give up his life.

As his friendship with the charismatic and empathetic drug dealer, Flynn — "part preacher, part therapist, and part giant" — became stronger, Stout's outlook changed. Their relationship, and the care and love from Flynn's gracious grandmother, gave Stout a reason to get up in the morning, and surprisingly, the loving family he'd always coveted. They gave him a way out.

Stout's realistic depiction of the terrors of living on the street in a drug- and crime-ravaged neighborhood puts the fear of both failure and drugs into his readers as we consider life in his threadbare shoes.

In "Lost in Ghost Town," we spiral downward with Stout, falling from a Soho penthouse to the streets of the walking drug-addled dead. But even amid terror, craving and misery, Stout proves there is hope to quell our inner demons and find light through the darkness. Stout has been sober for 13 years and a "therapist to the stars," and his fall from grace and scary-as-hell escape from death will make even the boldest of us think twice.



'Lost in Ghost Town: A Memoir of Addiction, Redemption, and Hope in Unlikely Places'

By Carder Stout, 304 pages, **HCI**, \$16.95

