



Spent

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A small town girl leaves her troubled family and starts stripping — which introduces her to a community that keeps her sober and saves her life — but a roller-coaster lifestyle ensues. She gets drugged, does enema shows, and unionizes the club. When she tries to quit and go to graduate school, her mother is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Broke and broken, she returns to sex work, which leads to her arrest and a new resilience. *Spent* is a memoir about a woman's journey through the sex industry, but it's also a story of family, community, and our constant struggle against loneliness.

Spent Details

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From Reader Review Spent for online ebook

Alana Voth says

Writing memoir as a woman these days is a dangerous profession as the general reading public is quick to criticize and/or judge women who write about their sexuality and/or their experiences as sex workers. I rank Antonia Crane right up there with Rachel Resnick, Kerry Cohen, Lidia Yuknavitch, and Chloe Caldwell as women who write memoir they way they want to write it without pandering to their audience or trying to pacify or appease the masses.

Spent isn't a happy story. It's not even redemptive, if you define redemption as a sex worker who announces at the end of the book that she married Richard Gere's character from Pretty Woman. As of the printing of the book, Antonia Crane is still working in the sex industry. She hasn't found a "Prince Charming." No one has "rescued" her. She is, however, close to rescuing herself.

Like Rose Hunter, who wrote a story collection called "Another Night at the Circus" that details her experiences as a hooker, Antonia Crane doesn't apologize for her work in the sex industry. Nor does she spend a lot of time psychoanalyzing the reasons she ended up in the industry. We understand the writer doesn't have a relationship with her father. We understand she idolizes her beautiful mother. We understand she dislikes her body, suffers from bulimia, and finds validation, like many young women, in the male gaze, in male approval, in feeling desired by men. Sex work is an addiction just like alcohol or drugs or food, and we understand that, too.

Perhaps the best line in the book is this one, when Antonia Crane speaks of her mother. "She hadn't raised me to sell my body for money, but she hadn't raised me not to sell my body for money either." The reader can interpret that any way he or she wants. It's loaded. It's complex.

Admittedly, I had to set this book a side a couple days because the story was breaking my heart. This isn't a criticism. In fact, it's testament to Antonia Crane's ability as a storyteller. Her narrative got under my skin. Antonia Crane writes without flinching. She also writes with lyrical flair. Her prose mesmerized me the same way she mesmerizes men spinning around that pole.

XO.

James Brown says

A powerful, important story honestly told. Antonia Crane is the real thing.

Jodi Sh. says

"I'd say anything for twenty-five dollars."

Carmelo Valone says

(No spoilers I swear-just a great memoir)

Spent is a wildly bold, unapologetic look at the life of an author. What is an author? William Carlos Williams was a country doctor turned author. My point-there are many varied ways, alleys, country roads and or streets one can walk down to become an author. This particular way/path was a very different way, and a different life. A sometimes sad and then maybe hopeful way-to find the "roses in a field of thorns" so to speak. Then after that, there's a possible re-invention of that life. (No spoilers for you)

Then the question goes: Can this author re-invent herself without abandoning her original world? I wouldn't call this book a memoir about the sex industry/exotic dancing as that's just putting this narrator in a box. I think we do that enough with all people, let alone sex workers. I feel that it's more about recognizing the truth of the self and being who you want to be-judgement or not. Sometimes our own narrative, is the true poem that we are afraid to write down and examine.

And yes, at times these pages will be uncomfortable to read-as that's what good writing does. I felt the allure, pain, joy, empowerment, and powerlessness in there. Life isn't just black and white. And I more so felt the author's POV in many instances-which I felt was a stronger way to tell this narrative, as just being the simple 'voyeur in the room' would have been an easy way out. I also really felt, and appreciated the tough, complex relationship she has with her family and that whole idea of 'home.'

The list goes on-it's all of that which is what makes this memoir an important read. It finally asks-what makes a person a person? Can't we be many things? Even when society judges us (and we judge ourselves) so harshly that-those other possibilities can become difficult. Difficult, but not impossible.

I am giving five stars as this is pure literary (and real life) bravery. Five stars for those narrative moments that turn into lovely poetic waves-they'll move you right into the sea.

Patrick O'Neil says

Antonia Crane strips, lap dances, executes hand-jobs, and grieves over the death of her mom like a real pro in her debut memoir *Spent* – which is absolutely true if you're only looking at the veneer of what she presents. Because there's a darkness Crane sometimes tends to gloss over; as if going to a stranger's hotel room on Christmas night to pull a rubdown a la ménage à trios and along with her co-sex-worker discovers the stranger's feet and genitals are rotting off his body – but they still pull it off (pun intended) because she's short on rent. This is not the story of a high-end \$3000 a night call girl that makes it out by getting married and turns into a soccer mom in Brentwood. Crane's world is the preverbal blue-collar stripper working her way through grad school fraught with self-doubt, negative body image, messed up relationships, financial woes, and then of course the underlining narrative of her mother dying of cancer. If you're looking for a happy airhead stripper memoir, well, this is not the book for you. But if you want the inside skinny on what sex-work is really like – then you should definitely read *Spent*.

Debbie says

Very entertaining, interesting memoir. Dirty and gritty. Loved it.

Julia says

Antonia Crane opened "Spent" so strongly, it felt like I had something alive, like a beating heart in my hands. It's intense, reflecting the pace and promises of a life led in the industry. I appreciate this book because I can vouch for it. There are places she wrote about where I have been as well; her descriptions are exact, an even clearer mirror of my own memories.

The strength of her narrative is her mother, and their relationship, punctuated by embellishments of spaghetti squashes and busting tomatoes. "Spent" reaches beyond the stage; the men and their wallets, and into spaces of care-giving, family relationships/responsibilities, and into the questioning space of validity in "the straight world." What is it like, to be addicted to the ritual of sex work? Read "Spent," and learn.

I did not expect to hear about the Tenderloin and The Lusty in this book, and this was a fantastic surprise, as I am researching as I write about the people I knew back when I lived in California.

I loved this book, I couldn't put it down! I read it in the bath-tub, with my body aching, and her words made just so much sense...

Fascinating, eloquent and raw; a beautifully-designed book about world in the rose glow.

Mary says

It took a little while for this memoir to win me over. The prose was more flowery and dramatic than I generally like ("We held the night up by our arms as the hours collected lint in our pockets; black swollen pupils big as walnuts, locked in a trance. Everyone else fell away like burnt sun.") After 50 or so pages, though, I really began to fall in love with the story and the author, her bravery. I also realized that the prose is an important part of the telling of her story and it worked, adding to the narrative instead of detracting from it.

I'd definitely recommend this book. I want to be friends with Antonia Crane.

Oh! And the book is gorgeous, really beautiful.

Brittany says

I have to admit I am a sucker for the sort of 'bad-girl memoir', probably because I figure that were I more attractive, I would quite possibly have been a stripper or sex worker at some point in time.

The great thing about this particular memoir is that, not only is it very readable, but the author does not get into the trap of so many of her partners in crime; so many people who have done sex work tend to try too hard to sound 'learned' in their memoirs, or 'so much more' than the profession they are/were in, which really just makes a lot of them come off as either full of themselves or total hypocrites--but this book does not do that.

In fact, it serves itself well as simply a memoir. The stripping is a harsh counterbalance to an even harsher part of Crane's life--the fact that her mother is dying of a very painful form of cancer, she is a former addict, and all those other cards that can line up for a pretty shitty life. But, she also admits the allure of sex work in a way that does not make it feel like a last-ditch attempt for love, as so many others wish to view it, but as a personal choice, which it is. If more people read books about sex work like this one, that basically just sees it as a yes, seedy and sometimes disgusting job that still makes money due to high demand, perhaps people would not be so quick to judge those who do sex work or to say that the only people who do it are horrible and broken or those kind of blowhard ballbusters who get off on controlling people. Sometimes people do choose those professions for themselves, for a variety of reasons; and it was refreshing to hear someone in that line of work that was not trying to use it to forward an agenda one way or another, just simply tell her story, and the story of the mother who loved her.

Andrea says

I'm finding it hard to articulate the way Antonia Crane inspires me with this book. We are close to the same age (I'm a little older) and we have some things in common, but I think what I found most encouraging was her grit--she just keeps going and does what she has to do. She doesn't seem to feel sorry for herself and shows an always evolving self awareness. And she doesn't give up. SPENT is authentic and courageous and honest.

Rebecca Scaglione says

Not for everyone!!! A detailed look into the world of a sex worker, and I assume there are some exaggerations in it as well. But it's intriguing and gripping to see inside a "hidden" secret world and that's what I liked about it.

Kristina says

Brutally honest and beautifully written.

Petra X says

This woman could really write. She makes you feel along with her. I can't say I'm enjoying the book. Her end of the sex trade is sleazy and her mother's dying but I feel it too. Disgusted and sad, like she did. I wish more authors could write like this.

Another drug addict makes the most of her looks by going into sex work and later decides a post grad degree in writing is the way to go. I recently read *In My Skin* by Kate Holden. I thought Kate was pretty graphic with her descriptions of the sex acts she did, but she had nothing on Antonia who really calls not a spade a spade but a big bloody fucking shovel. I wonder how this will develop?

Luke says

This writing is bonkers!! Highly recommend, Antonia Crane has a voice that pierces.

Jim says

Antonia Crane opens her new sex-worker memoir, *Spent*, from Barnacle Books, with one of the least glamorous, non-erotic sex scenes I've read in recent memory.

Recruited as a sensual-massage therapist by her friend Kara, Crane finds herself in a compromising situation. The allure of easy money has brought her to the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills on Christmas Day for a four-hand massage. The client, a widower with a skin condition who is "covered in tiny scabs," predictably wants sex and is willing to double the fee. Are they interested?

With a quick glance from Kara, Crane bolts to the bathroom for condoms, and then they go to work: "I looked into Kara's blank blue eyes and our tongues met in circles around the latex condom. I tasted the sour plastic of new tires, party balloons, and hospital gloves."

What's remarkable about the scene isn't its lack of eroticism; it's how quickly Crane slides down sex work's slippery slope. All it takes is a glance from Kara for her to go from happy-ending masseuse to prostitute—an ugly word that comes into play only when the police get involved—and I don't think I'm giving much away by revealing that Crane eventually gets booked on pandering charges. Johns generally prefer the term "escort services," burying the word "sex" in the language of commerce that reduces the escorts to "service providers," a class of women defined by the needs of the men they serve.

Crane is having none of that. She embraces the term "sex worker," for it defines the work, and it's often hard work that she performs. When you need your car repaired, you go to a mechanic, not an automotive-services provider. For Crane, stripping, lap dancing, performing in peep shows, screwing on camera or providing sexual services of any kind is sex work. This attentiveness to language makes *Spent* an intoxicating read.

Crane's memoir is divided into five sections that explore the various ways a beautiful, intelligent girl from a middle-class family in Humboldt, California, can end up a professional sex worker: Bulimia and body-image issues as a young girl. Divorce and reckless drug use during her teenage years. Relationships scarred by drug addiction and sexual trauma. And years of sober stripping that lead to forays into other kinds of employment before being lured back to easy money and transactions that keep getting darker and darker.

Crane is too savvy a writer to suggest there's a causal relationship between her damaged past and reckless decisions. She owns her choices. *Spent* is neither an explanation nor a mask. Crane is unstintingly frank and often very funny: "She handed me her curly brown wig that smelled like it had been held captive in a bucket of Downy fabric softener since 1985."

While the setting and circumstances are often somewhere between tawdry and lurid, the writing is sharply focused: "A tranny in a wheelchair was bumming change out front while smoking a Pall Mall. 'Nice wig,' she said. I dropped a couple of quarters in her Styrofoam cup. She glared at me. 'You idiot. That's my coffee.'"

Crane doesn't deliver a blow-by-blow account of every phase of her life, sordid or otherwise. For instance, we don't learn about how she came by her elaborate tattoos and are likewise spared the quotidian details of her relationships—romantic or not. In between stripping gigs, she finishes school and gets an MFA. The relationship that frames the narrative is the one she has with her mother and her mother's bile duct cancer, which ultimately proves terminal.

The scenes immediately before her mother's demise, when "[t]he room shrunk with the heat of our bodies waiting for death," are the most harrowing. Because she's always broke, Crane has to hustle for plane fare to visit her dying mother. At the hospital, she's appalled by the poor treatment her mother's receiving and can't escape reminders of the strip club where she works. "The hospital looked shabby and unkempt, and this pissed me off to no end. Her room smelled like Pleasures: bleach and air freshener." As her mother nears the end, Crane makes a shocking decision that left me stunned.

If you're looking for cheap thrills or redemption by reconciliation, you won't find it in *Spent*; what you will encounter is the brave, bold voice of a writer who refuses to let the emptiness of her past get in the way of living life to the fullest.
