



The Diving Bell and the Butterfly

Jean-Dominique Bauby , Jeremy Leggatt (Translator)

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‘Locked-in syndrome: paralysed from head to toe, the patient, his mind intact, is imprisoned inside his own body, unable to speak or move. In my case, blinking my left eyelid is my only means of communication.’

In December 1995, Jean-Dominique Bauby, editor-in-chief of French ‘Elle’ and the father of two young children, suffered a massive stroke and found himself paralysed and speechless, but entirely conscious, trapped by what doctors call ‘locked-in syndrome’. Using his only functioning muscle – his left eyelid – he began dictating this remarkable story, painstakingly spelling it out letter by letter.

His book offers a haunting, harrowing look inside the cruel prison of locked-in syndrome, but it is also a triumph of the human spirit.

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly Details

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From Reader Review The Diving Bell and the Butterfly for online ebook

Muhammad Shakhawat Hossain says

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Alistair says

this is quite an achievement .

the writer a quadraplegic with locked in syndrome who died shortly after the publication of this book manages to make himself into a totally unsympathetic character .

i really disliked this book i suppose because it has gained such an good reputation . this is mis-lit at its worst .

the author is completely self obsessed perhaps unsurprisingly and the profundity is not much above that found in a Hallmark card . it seems that the things the author misses most are his trips to Hong Kong , his BMW , his phone calls to important people and generally the go-go life of a magazine editor . one of the worst chapters is when he describes his selfishness towards his girlfriend or wife and manages to turn it into a piece of self glorification . she loves him anyway because he is such a brilliant and incorrible man . well so he thinks . the smugness is unbelievable .

it is all very pollyanerish and trite really . his realationship with his children and their mother seems superficial and distant .

with the recent revelations about false memoirs in this mis-lit genre i am very suspicious as to how much of the writer's story is true and how much of it was written by someone else . he supposedly set up an organisation to support those with locked in syndrome , just as Bob Geldof has supposedly saved the world . the Guardian said " everyone in the country should own at least one copy " . why would anyone want more than one copy . I only own one copy of " The waste land " , so why should i or anyone buy 2 copies of this rubbish ?

Like many books the marketing story is more important than the book itself .

Harsh but fair !

Gregory Baird says

“Does it take the harsh light of disaster to show a person’s true nature?”

The situation is unimaginable: waking from a coma to find yourself trapped in your own body, able to think clearly and understand what is going on around you, but unable to partake in any of what transpires. It’s called “locked in syndrome,” and Jean-Dominique Bauby finds himself a victim of it when he awakes from a coma following a serious stroke that damaged his brain stem and left him almost totally paralyzed; he has only limited facial movements, slight control over his neck, and use of only one eye. It is with this single good eye that Bauby is able to communicate with the world, using an excruciatingly slow code of blinking that requires time, energy, and a great deal of attention and patience. And it is also thanks to this one eye that we have this first-hand account, dictated by Bauby from his hospital bed, recounting the details of his life in the wake of tragedy.

Far from being restricted by his condition, Bauby unleashes the full force of his literary capabilities (which were quite estimable, considering that he was the editor of French Elle), leaving us with a wry, touching, and deeply affecting memoir that shines with descriptive flourishes and deep insights. His perspective in the wake of tragedy is awe-inspiring and leaves the reader with a deep respect for his fortitude; truly, this is a

man I would have loved to have had an opportunity to have a conversation with, just to try and absorb a small degree of his wisdom and experience. "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" has moments of regret, frustration, sadness and aching loneliness, but curiously absent are anger and self-righteousness. Bauby never curses his misfortune but focuses on getting by with the hand he was dealt. To read his memoir is to get to know a truly extraordinary man whose spirit refused to be crushed and whose mind and imagination allowed him to survive in the most constrained of circumstances. To say that "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" is about the triumph of the human spirit is a sorry understatement, and does little to pay tribute to an amazing man.

"The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" is a slight volume, to be sure, but it feels wrong to criticize it for that when one considers the conditions under which it was composed. And considering that Bauby packs a hefty punch in such a short page count, it is well worth the experience.

Grade: A-

Steven Godin says

Anyone that is able to get through this without showing the slightest bit of emotion is not a human being. A remarkable story of a remarkable man, so full of life one minute and reduced to movement in one eye the next, a haunting, harrowing look inside the mind of a person with locked-in syndrome you would think this would end up as a rant of anger and "why did this happen to me", but his dignified manner and spirit was truly inspirational and caught me out at just how uplifting it would turn out to be, although of course it still remained very moving. Two days after the book was published, Bauby was to die of pneumonia, but this is a lasting tribute that is definitely worth reading.

Adriana says

O carte scris? liter? cu liter?, unde fiecare liter? reprezint? o mi?care de pleoap?. O singur? pleoap? spune povestea unui om zidit în propriul trup, al c?rui suflet evadeaz? în imagina?ie ?i în amintiri. Un suflet viu într-un trup (aproape) mort, afectat de locked-in syndrome.

Recomand această carte tuturor celor care se simt locked-in. Bloca?i în propriile vie?i, incapabili s? comunice cu cei din jur, care sunt la rândul lor prin?i în capcan? de propria existen?ă, de propria rutin?. Pentru c? autorul ne arat? cum a continuat s? trăiască ?i s? simt? în ciuda nenorocirii care l-a lovit. Ne poveste?te totul cu inteligen?ă, deta?are ?i un strop de autoironie.

De ce avem nevoie de astfel de exemple care s? ne aduc? aminte s? trăim mai mult, mai bine, mai intens?

Fabian says

Prognosis: Man can be inspired and find beauty even at his own death bed.

But there is a question even Bauby asks himself: Does all of this a novel make?

No. (Not even a decent...anecdote?)

It is, however, testament of the prognosis which questions the central Meaning of Life question. Bauby finds personal beauty, even if he cannot do anything with it but blink it in code to his nurse since he is absolutely paralyzed.

But this is no Anne Frank, however. This is no beauty pertaining to a person trapped. I feel some (but not complete) pity for Mr. Bauby. The tale this man tells is one of robbed mobility, but not of robbed dignity... or money. It bothered me a little that the editor of French Elle magazine, rich and powerful as he was, still alludes to and rubs in our faces his superiority, his nouveau riche lifestyle (cars, trips, experiences...). Even though it did not answer the central What is Life About? question, it did made me ponder something perhaps even more interesting: Can a healthy individual truly envy a "vegetable?"

Greta says

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly

Locked-in-syndrome: totally paralyzed, unable to speak, but completely conscious.

I find it hard to imagine a condition that's worse than this one.

People who suffer a stroke, are at a risk to suffer from this condition (luckily, mostly not this bad).

Is there still dignity in a life like this?

The writer of this memoir, suffered from this condition, and was only able to move one eye. His left eye.

Needless to say this was a powerful read. Its popularity is partly due to the fact that this book was made into a successful movie.

However, there's a similar memoir that is not as well known as this one, and which I thought was much better and more powerful : Only The Eyes Say Yes: A Love Story.

If you liked The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, I highly recommend *Only the eyes say yes*.

Yulia says

I just saw the movie adaptation last Friday, the day before my father-in-law passed away: perhaps not the best time, but I'm the type of person who refuses to get myself out of my mood, but prefers to dwell on my feelings. I actually found the movie much darker than the book itself, which I read when it first came out in English. As the book's from his perspective, we are spared the experience of the silence and loneliness he is encased in. The movie, in contrast, depicts just how terrifying and isolating locked-in syndrome is, how claustrophobic and powerless the person who is afflicted becomes despite no deficit in cognitive ability, how he must have yelled inside only to appear silent and unresponsive. Truly a living hell. So it was interesting to compare the vivid, active, articulate world he presents us with in his book with the walls he faced in connecting with others who simply lacked the patience to "listen" to him and see he was still so much present.

Perhaps the most powerful contrast in the movie, which I don't remember but may be depicted in the book, is the polar responses of the mother of his children, who visited him almost every week and loved him despite

all the pain he'd caused her, and his lover just before his stroke, who never had the courage to visit him in his enfeebled state, but said she was always "with him" in spirit, though he was able to communicate to her, "chaque jour j'attends": each day I wait. I knew then that I would choose to be the kind of person who was there for those I loved despite my fears and stress, not the one who was there in spirit but not in person. The lover was a coward. Her selfish desire to cling to the healthy Bauby was, for me, inexcusable. He behaved as if he'd already died, when this book clearly shows he was perhaps never more lucid about his connection to the world.

Shovelmonkey1 says

When I first heard about it I did not think it would be the sort of thing I would be interested in reading and definitely not the sort of thing I would be interested in watching (having heard it had recently been turned into a film). One of my best friends, a man who is a great deal more sensitive and open minded than I could ever hope to be asked me if i'd read it. "A book about a man who wrote the book by blinking one eyelid?" I asked. "But I like the Die Hard Quadrology, 300 and Wilbur Smith novels - where do you think this book is going to fit into my world view? It won't fit! It will make me feel bad for hating it too" Anyway after a raised eye brow from my much less judgemental friend and with a view to being open minded I gave it a go....

Taaa-dah!

Open minded enlightenment achieved. This book was interesting and easy to read although if you are feeling a bit depressed then I would suggest avoiding it. Although that said, it is unlikely your situation is going to be worse than that of Jean Dominique Bauby so maybe it'll help you get a little perspective and stop you being such a sad sack.

The lucid way in which Jean-dominique describes what it feels like to be locked into his own body is amazing and the tireless descriptions are even more amazing when you consider how each word made it on to the page. Heartfelt, unique and inescapably sad. If you choose to read this book it will probably be the most unique thing you get to read this year.

Petra X says

Words flow like the images and emotions of poetry. One thought leads to another. The rambling mind touches like a butterfly, just long enough to draw the essence from a story, and then moves fluidly to another. Jean-Dominique Bauby's body was an immobile weighty shell; the diving bell his perfect simile. Yet in his head he roved the world and composed the words that would let us in. Intent on looking for the cure to let him move again, he moves forward in his final words "We must keep looking. I'll be off now", and six months later he was dead.

Jasmine says

This book involves 28 short stories, or you can say, pieces of memory from the former editor of French *Elle*

magazine, Jean-Dominique Bauby, who was permanently paralyzed after a severe stroke. His only way of communication was by blinking his left eye and that was how he patiently spelled this book out. As he put it, and I firmly believed in him, that his main task was to "compose the first of these bedridden travel notes so that I shall be ready when my publisher's emissary arrives to take my dictation, letter by letter. In my head I churn over every sentence ten times, delete a word, add an adjective, and learn my text by heart, paragraph by paragraph."

There was no particular order for the topics in this book, nor was there any certain connection among them. What made it precious for me is how detailed Jean-Dominique depicted of what he saw, what he heard (despite his serious hearing disorder), and most important of all, what he felt. He was suddenly forced to embrace his "new life" after the misfortune, but it's rather impressive that he didn't think so sometimes.

Although I could feel the helplessness in his voice and the eagerness of freedom when he was confined to an unfamiliar wheelchair--just like a **diving bell** waiting to be opened up--there were times he really enjoyed himself in spite of his disability. In a nutshell, he chose to be a carefree **butterfly**, making his spirit live on forever without burden and pain. What's more, this book/his words made me **realize how blissful I am because I can live out loud, do whatever I want, go wherever I desire, talk and hang out with friends/family whenever we're available...etc.** Therefore, he kind of reminded us to know and cherish such blessing since we never know how precious it is until we lose it.

Lastly, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* is definitely a must-read in life and I highly recommend it to everyone. The original version is in French, *Le Scaphandre et le Papillon*, and I found the translation one captured his meanings pretty well. By the way, I can't put an end to this review without quoting something worth valuing, so here it is:

"Capturing the moment, these small slices of life, these small gusts of happiness, move me more deeply than all the rest."

Duane says

****spoiler alert****

In 1995, Jean-Dominique Bauby, the editor-in-chief of French *Elle* magazine, suffered a massive stroke to his brain stem which left him totally paralyzed and in a condition called locked-in syndrome. He could only move his left eyelid. For my part, I would have preferred to have died instantly than to have suffered what Mr. Bauby suffered. But we don't always get to choose, and to his credit he seems to have made the best of his situation. He did write this book after all, but only by dictating it one letter at a time by blinking his left eyelid. You can find inspiration in this book, you can find beauty; it just doesn't mask the tragedy and the suffering.

Craig says

I know I will likely get flayed alive for rating this one so low, but I just can't see the worship behind it...

First, let me say that the "writing" of the book by someone in such a state is an amazing accomplishment and I dare not take that away from him. (For those that don't know, it was dictated by Jean-Dominique Bauby - former editor of the french Elle - who had a severe seizure and after damage to his brain stem, was diagnosed with locked in syndrome. The entire book was dictated, letter by letter, by the blinking of his left eye.)

That said, you would think a memoir like this would at least try to present you with a likeable character who has something to say about life. Now, there were a couple of wistful, almost beautiful passages. But for the most part, I felt a sort of smugness in his attitude (especially towards women) that just pulled me out of any feelings the book tried to well up in me.

Maybe I am a terrible person, but I just couldn't see why anyone would be so impressed by this book. Any time he would start to reel me in, one of his thoughts would throw me right out to sea again.

Will Byrnes says

Jean-Dominique Baube, the forty-something editor of Elle magazine in Paris, husband, father, was stricken by a rare brain disease. After several weeks in a coma he awoke to find that he was a prisoner inside his own body, with control over only his left eye, and motion limited to twisting his head left and right, somewhat. Yet this man managed, with help, to not only maintain his sanity and his optimism, but his appreciation of beauty and his sense of humor. This is a case in which imagination is a critical tool to one's very survival. The guy wrote a book using little more than his left eye blinking code to an interpreter. This is not at all a depressing memoir. It is inspiring. In fact it is one of the most positive, uplifting things I have ever read.

Cassy says

I won't recommend reading this book while signing up for insurance. I started a job recently and was overwhelmed by the different ways I could insure myself and loved ones against horrible tidings. [The following are actual insurance plans. I couldn't make these up.]

Benefits Department: Do you want life insurance?

Me: Yes! Someone should profit from my death. Party at the funeral home!

Benefits Department: Do you want supplement group variable universal life insurance?

Me: I could be worth \$2.5 million? Tell my parents! I am a wild success!

Benefits Department: Do you want life insurance for your spouse?

Me: I hadn't thought of that. Yes! I will definitely miss the cash flow from my sugar daddy once the arsenic kicks in.

Benefits Department: Do you want life insurance for your child?

Me: What a sick question. Why would I care about cash if my child has just died?

Benefits Department: For the funeral expenses.

Me: Oh, okay. Yes.

Benefits Department: Do you want to enroll in the group short-term disability insurance? Group income insurance? Accidental death and dismemberment insurance? Long term care insurance? Group personal excess liability insurance? Business travel accident insurance?

Me: OMG. I have never felt so fragile. I could die or, at least, lose a limb in a thousand different ways. Did you hear about the guy who was decapitated by the elevator doors? Blood and gore splattered all over the other passengers!

Benefits Department: [Silence]

Me: Everything. Sign me up for everything. After all, I ride at least four elevators a day to work. [Imagine I am really good at mental math here.] That's 1,040 possibilities each year to lose my mind, literally. Just from elevators!

Benefits Department: [Pause] I need you to confirm "yes" or "no" for each type of insurance.

Me: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Benefits Department: Do you want to prepare a health care proxy to instruct your loved ones how to care for you when you are too sick to speak and/or have no control over very important medical decisions about life support or pain treatment?

Me: You are the worst, insurance person. Do you derive twisted pleasure picturing me like that?

Benefits Department: [Smug silence]

Me: Yes. I would like a health care proxy.

Benefits Department: Do you want to sign up for...

By the eventual end of this conversation, the Benefits Department informed me that several hundred dollars would be deducted from every pay check to cover these nefarious insurance schemes preying simultaneously on my fear of dying, concern for my family, general risk aversion, and fondness for the mere possibility of large sums of money being transferred to my bank account. I called my husband to discuss my selections. He was aghast.

Husband: Cassy, this seems excessive. We don't need this much coverage. We need some money left over in your pay check to buy food. Or we will indeed die early. Of hunger.

Me: But what if I die? What if you die? What if the baby dies? What if I'm paralyzed after a massive stroke in my forties. I cannot move anything except I can blink my left eyelid. While people treat me like I'm an invisible, vapid vegetable, my mind is as sharp as ever. I could write the most beautiful, poignant memoir packed into a concise 132 pages by blinking that one good eye to select letters when the alphabet is read aloud to me over and over by a very patient soul. What then, husband?

Odai Al-Saeed says

Laurel says

Baker Shahal says

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Abrar Alarjan says

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