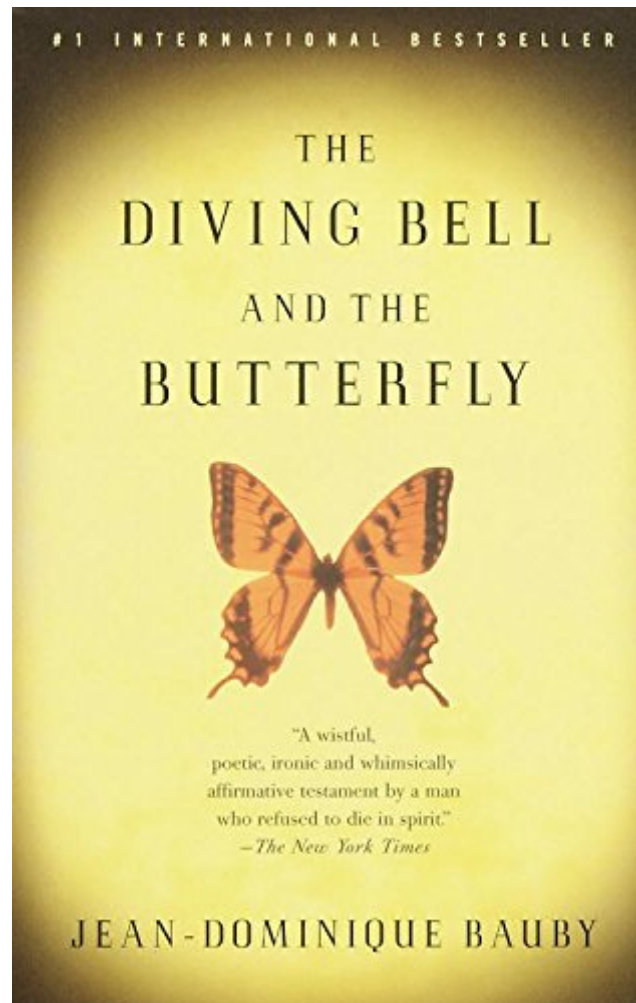




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The Diving Bell And The Butterfly



Synopsis

In December 1995, Jean-Dominique Bauby, the 43-year-old editor of French Elle, suffered a massive stroke that left him permanently paralyzed, a victim of "locked in syndrome." Once known for his gregariousness and wit, Bauby now finds himself imprisoned in an inert body, able to communicate only by blinking his left eye. The miracle is that in doing so he was able to compose this stunningly eloquent memoir. In a voice that is by turns wistful and mischievous, angry and sardonic, Bauby gives us a celebration of the liberating power of consciousness: what it is like to spend a day with his children, to imagine lying in bed beside his wife, to conjure up the flavor of delectable meals even as he is fed through a tube. Most of all, this triumphant book lets us witness an indomitable spirit and share in the pure joy of its own survival. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I finished this book, but not because of the tragedy of Bauby's illness. I was filled with gratitude for the loving gift to the world that this slim book is. It is not at all

what I expected after seeing Julian Schnabel's movie. Which is not to criticize the movie, but the book itself is something very different. It is a sensitive, humorous, and beautifully written reflection that conveys Bauby's appreciation for life--before his illness and even after it. His quick and nimble mind, the butterfly, roams freely, lighting on his memories, his loves, people who touched him, evoking the preciousness of experience.

A very quick read. I read it in two days. Then, a few weeks later, I read it again. A very inspiring story. Completely engrossing. Considering Bauby's condition, there is a surprising amount of humor in it. And, although you cannot help but feel sympathy towards him, this is not a pity party. It is an appreciation of life. The movie is nearly as good as the book, and is very faithful to the book. I highly recommend both.

"A testament to the human spirit" is a hackneyed, cliched, descriptor. In this case, however, apt in that the author of the book was quite literally a human spirit, having lost all motor ability (save for blinking motion of the left eye) due to a cerebrovascular accident affecting the brainstem. Ironically, at least some sensory input stayed intact allowing him to feel pain and discomfort. The author is Jean-Dominique Bauby, one-time editor of French "Elle", dictated laboriously with the use of the above-mentioned left eye and an alphabet board. The title refers to the dichotomy of body and mind. The content of the book includes memories and escapist fantasies (the "butterfly") and descriptions of a life locked inside one's own body (diving bell) in language that evokes such vivid imagery it seems that the reader is inside Jen-Do's head, sharing his leaden, useless limbs--a feeling that can almost be disturbing. In spite of the gravity of his situation, he conveys humor ("if I must drool, I may as well drool on cashmere"), dignity and above all, gratitude. With empathy and affection, he portrays fellow patients (little packets of life turned in on themselves), friends, family, hospital staff, giving particular reverence to the speech therapist who initiates the alphabet board system. The book almost has a stream-of-consciousness feel in that it is no way linear or chronological, but somehow every part fits into a coherent whole. At 132 easily readable pages, this book is a small time commitment with innumerable insights to the reader. Even if you've seen the Julian Schnabel movie, read the book.

A testament of our will to find meaning in life, regardless of our circumstances. It will make you long for life, and then remind you how lucky you are to still enjoy yours. A courageous look at self when that is all that is left. Read it and be reminded how blessed we are that fate dealt us a gentler hand.

At least, hopefully, so far. Beautiful memoir.

Can you imagine what it would be like to have locked in syndrome? Not being able to move or talk but your mind is fully there?? Well Mr. Bauby finds a way to communicate by blinking and tells us exactly what it feels like. He tells us how healthcare professionals treat him because he can't speak and if you are a healthcare professional then this puts things into perspective. Doctors, nurses, ect all need to consider patients feelings and treat everyone equally with compassion. This book is definitely an eye opener and really makes you question how you would handle what Mr. Baby went through.

My son started reading this to me while I was in the hospital with a massive brain hemorrhage. Mine was luckily not in the brain stem so I do not have locked-in syndrome. At any rate, it was too soon for me, too close to the uncertainty I was facing in my own life. Now, after a year and a half, I came back to it and, luckily, I was able to read it for myself and not rely on others. The book is amazing. Bauby is a much stronger and more philosophical person than I am. He has a rich internal life that he uses to sustain himself, along with vivid memories, the love of his family, his children, and his friends. The book is not a chronological telling of a story. It is a series of thoughts and events, things that stuck in his mind, things that elucidate his condition. They are often touching, frequently depressing, but always enlightening. The book is a quick read, but not a light one.

One of my favorites of all time! I'm a senior who has read a ton of books, and this was one of my favorites, Life is so fragile, it should be enjoyed every possible moment.

Powerful story. I read it after my son suffered a massive stroke and was diagnosed as locked-in. I did feel hopeless for a long time after reading it, fearful that this could be my son's future. Thankfully, my son has improved over the past 2 years and is now able to eat and talk, and now has partially mobility.

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