

LIFE'S SECOND CHANCE

BIOGRAPHY

Gabriel Alexander was born in Paris, raised in a modest working class family, experienced hostility in a poor neighborhood, had a sensitive and emotional personality, while experiencing many painful moments of distress and depression. He learned a new way of living and started his own business career. Through his deep love of all animals and the environment, he created and patented an anti pollution system used worldwide caused by oil spills from shipwrecked tankers. His best victory has been living in peace and happiness from a tormented past. He wrote this book to offer hope to desperate people from his own life story. He shows us with his words that in any situation «while there's life, there's hope and life does not have any hopeless situations».

CHAPTER ONE

WHATEVER DOESN'T KILL ME MAKES ME STRONGER!

The piercing ring of the telephone resounds in my head, but I can't rouse myself out of my nearly comatose sleep. It seems impossible to emerge from the overwhelming stupor that paralyzes me. I feel like I'm being constantly swallowed up whole, wrapped in Morpheus's stifling arms.

My survival instinct is emitting powerful distress signals... Each and every cell in my body is warning me that I must react immediately. I absolutely must answer this call that my brain circuits first registered as a violent assault, long before

it reached my ears. After a prolonged and intense effort, I manage to extend my hand to grasp that hateful telephone and slowly bring it to my ear.

This takes so much energy that I'm utterly exhausted. I feel leaden, encased in my mattress and four times my usual weight... What could have happened to leave me in this state? I'm sure that I am at the gates of Hell! My head hurts so much I can feel my heart pounding from inside as if someone is beating on my skull with a hammer!

Suddenly I recognize my brother-in-law's voice – "Hello Gabriel?" I try to answer but I've lost my own voice. My mouth issues no sound, just raspy breathing as if I have suddenly gone mute.

In a panic, I slam down the receiver. I have to get out of this bed – if I don't, for sure I'll die here like a poor dog, overcome by overpowering zombie sleep! I don't know how many pills or how much booze I guzzled last night to wind up in this terrible shape. I don't really give a damn... I stopped checking my booze and barbiturate consumption ages ago. I need them too much for my day-to-day survival, to help me to survive in each and every moment of the nightmarish existence my life has become (melodramatic situations were my second addiction, with my ego as the orchestra conductor).

Now I'm sweating, dripping buckets... By now I'm drenched. If I don't try to get up right now, I know I may never get up again. All my limbs are stiff; I can't move a single one of my leaden fingers. I try to roll over, to fall out of bed with a single objective in mind... not to go back to sleep; to avoid the fatal shock of sure death.

The best strategy would be to head for the bathroom. I'm convinced that it is my last chance of salvation!

I finally manage to roll out of bed, and collapse onto the floor with the muted sound of a sack of potatoes landing on a thick carpet. I desperately attempt to reach that damned bathroom that seems so far away, and utterly indifferent to my very survival...

Why does everything appear to be against me, why doesn't everybody take care of my needs, after all they should all know who I am? ME! The big ME, the eternal teenager who needs all focused attention from anybody and everybody around (at that time, from my selfish point of view, the needs of others were infinitely less important than my own).

Finally, I inch forward on my hands and knees, like a soldier slithering under barbed wire to escape from the enemy. But here, I am the only enemy; the enemy is my drunkenness,

and my own despair, my own psychological, stoned, deep hopelessness. Terrible but true... I have become my own worst enemy! How can I protect myself against myself? Is such a thing even possible?

My most intimate thoughts conspire to pull me into a dark pit, to drag me into the abyss that houses the hopeless rejects – all those who have not learned to integrate, who have not managed to adapt themselves to the mold that society imposes. A mold that's too rigid, too tight, too confining for some, and certainly for me, and for everyone who like me doesn't know how to communicate, to laugh, to sleep, but only how to barely survive, without the help of a tiny pill or a little drink.

“What matters the flask, as long as the wine is heady?”

This corny cliché from Alfred de Musset is actually meaningful to those of us who have the misfortune to be soul-sick, who are handicapped in the heart, people for whom emotion means frustration.

Constantly living in this condition is sheer misery for me! It feels as if nothing and no one could possibly ever free me. Condemned to death... or condemned to live like this until my last hour - which is even more terrifying... Yes? Death, in certain circumstances, can be liberation, the last step that will transport us to the promise of religious books – eternal rest, eternal peace.

After five never-ending minutes, I finally manage to lean on the bidet and hoist myself up over the sink. I turn on the faucet and see the water run over my hand, but I hardly feel anything. My body is so numb that I can barely tell the difference between wet or dry sensations.

I decide to put my head under the tap. To achieve that, I must make one last, enormous effort to pull myself up. I plunge desperately into the last reserves of my energy and the water finally trickles down my forehead and streams down my face. I have the horrifying sensation that my face is no longer made of the same substance, that it has become hard and impervious to all sensation, insensitive, as if it is covered with a coat of resin, like some strange mask stuck to my skin.

I can't feel anything; I can hardly tell the difference between hot and cold water. Maybe I'm dying... just like that, stupidly, in the bathroom? I who had always dreamed of a fabulous destiny! I don't really know why I put up such a fight to survive now. I've wanted to commit suicide for years. I should almost be content with the way things are going.

But not that day, no way! Dying then was not what I wanted, at least not at that point in time, not in that place, not like that. Someone who wishes to commit suicide desires death on his own terms, when he chooses the time and place; otherwise the instinct for survival will always win out.

Fortunately (or, unfortunately, whichever), I could gradually sense the coolness of water on my skin, on my eyelids and on my lips. I opened my mouth to let in some of that blessed water that by now was pouring all over the place. Little by little, I came back to life (halleluiah).

That was then. I realize now, or rather I feel convinced, that I can make it now. Life, the Gods, the universe, has given me another chance.

Why? Maybe they don't think I'm ready to leave this Earth? Maybe I'm not quite ripe for the final kiss of death, for the crossover to the great beyond and for that confrontation with my Creator?

At least that's what the old gentleman seems to be saying – the one with a long white beard perched up there on a soft white cloud whose sense of humor seems very odd if not downright belligerent or bloodthirsty.

A few minutes after my cool bath, I'm beginning to see through the haze. I decide to go sit on the couch in the living room, across from the family TV set – that stupid screen for wasting morbid evenings, the one that formats and conditions people's very thoughts to control their brains and impose its ersatz desires. I struggle back to my mangy throne, my royal seat for a good-for-nothing, unemployed sleepwalker and pathetic "night clubber".

I drag myself along as best I can in that direction, and finally succeed in collapsing on the cheap, brown leather sofa, designed in an admirable imitation of a fake English style. Everything in this apartment is in poor taste: flashy, eccentric colors, green and blue gondolas in cheap kitsch, a pink doll bought at a cheap Italian market, gold-plated candlesticks, a baroque chandelier with imitation crystal, a phony Louis XIV living room set at odds with the room's ultra-modern television.

Nothing goes together!

An apartment in the purest 'working class style', in the meanest sense of the term. The walls are as thin as the paper we use to roll joints, which gives one the dubious advantage of letting you hear the neighbors flush the john, make love, and – ironically – whisper their little secrets to each other! This cheap cardboard decor is my parents' apartment, where I was raised and spent my very painful teenage years; where my existential anxieties were most intense.

Five sisters, three brothers and my parents: more than ten people trying to find a way to live under the same roof, where every square inch served the interest of the family group... For someone like me who had always wanted to be 'an only son', cherished and cared for like a King baby, so that everybody would take care of me and pay attention to what happened to me only – I could hardly

dream of a worse scenario! What I got back in spades was just the opposite of what I wanted. I'm the son of that 'woe-is-me' family, which inevitably resulted in my being self-centered and egotistical, much like everyone who is an unhappy and neurotic person.

Now sitting on that royal sofa, my mind gradually begins to clear, which doesn't mean things are improving. An alcoholic is extremely poor company for himself, especially when his mind is clear. In fact, the problem is that an alcoholic only feels good when he's drunk enough not to see reality, not to be weighed down by the pressure he imagines in his daily life. So if there's one thing he really does not want, it's a clear head!

In this particular case, however, just this once, I must admit I am not sorry to be coming back to reality. It means I wasn't going to die, or at least not right away.

But what the hell happened yesterday or maybe the day before, to leave me in this deplorable condition of extreme distress?

I'd been asleep for nearly 48 hours straight... Okay, now I'm beginning to remember! It's gradually coming back to me.

Of course, I had decided to kill myself. Nothing else, just a simple, yet clever, elegant and beautiful suicide, as demanded

by my ego. My ego is determined to be oh so special and oh so smart. Even during those most dramatic moments, my ego wanted to exert itself by requiring the most touching and melodramatic suicide ever.

Suicide – ME – wanting to put an end to myself – I never thought I would finish so pathetically and idiotically... Yes, indeed, I just wanted to disappear whilst also having everybody miss ME! Though for right now, I couldn't cope for another minute, pretending to be happy any longer, pretending to be normal. So, after a particularly rough patch, when I felt less and less human, and more and more like a zombie, I decided to put an end to my mental anguish. To achieve that objective, quickly and simply, there was only one solution, put an end to the endlessly lingering countdown that would take me to the crucial fatal moment, the time for lights out and for final, eternal rest.

When you're living in an illogical vacuum, what makes more sense than finding an illogical solution to your irrational problems?

During that memorable night as each second flashed through my mind, I ransacked the house to find my little survival pills, my little white pills that I suddenly wanted so desperately. None, zero, zilch, my box was desperately empty... zero - a number that wrecks havoc with your evening

in no time flat and makes sleep impossible! It was Sunday, and my stock of that sweet legal drug ‘Xanax’, (sold by my two favorite dealers-pushers, my doctor, and my pharmacist) was entirely gone.

That night, as I writhed in my bed, I started into withdrawal – everything was immediately blown all out of proportion. Sleep was out of the question: leaving more room for anxiety and panic, I was sweating heavily. I tossed and turned continuously in my hot, sticky sheets while staring at the ceiling hopelessly to try to calm my anxieties, which is the last thing you want to do to feel better!

After a few hours of sweat-dampened treatment that would destroy the morale of the gayest good time Charlie (which I certainly was not), with no way of dealing with my anxiety, totally unable to haul myself out of the titanic depression that was engulfing me, I drafted a radical plan to get rid of my cruel mistress - my suffering. I decided once and for all to be done with my faithful companion, that unbearable daily pain that had blown up to gigantic proportions that night!

My reasoning was this: The best way to get rid of the enemy who lives inside is to destroy it's housing.

The plan was simple and clear: a handsome suicide, a goodbye letter, as touching as possible and intelligent too, to be

sure that everyone finally realized how sensitive and refined a spirit I had been. (After all, if I'm going to die, let's have everybody admire both the actor and the act itself).

All I had to do the next morning was make the rounds of the local doctors, telling them that my family doctor was on vacation, and that I was about to leave for the USA for three months, so I needed my usual dose of tranquilizers, and blah blah blah...

Early that morning, I got up from my bed-prison, that had trapped me, that was suffocating me like a strait-jacket, although no one had forced me to sleep there... but by some subtle evil, I felt drawn to the mattress as if by a magnet,... that night, I believe that bed to be my sorry and poor destiny.

I remember clearly that I pulled my jeans on noiselessly to keep from waking my little brother, Michel, a brother with whom I didn't get along with then and still don't today, 20 years later. Over time, I've come to understand that there are people who aren't necessarily bad, they may even be good souls, but you'll never get along with them.

Once I was appropriately clad for a trip down death row, I headed to the street with a lump of sadness in my throat, overcome - After all I had decided to kill myself!

I kept telling myself sorrowfully and with a touch of nostalgia: Hey, this is the last time I'll see that neighbor, the last time I'll go past that café, that I'll see the concierge, and all those kinky neighbours of my childhood!

I was sure of one thing – they wouldn't miss me. Nobody misses a person who is hopeless because he makes everyone uncomfortable. You don't know what to do around someone who is depressed. If you're too happy, you feel bad about showing it in front of him; if you feel blue, you don't want to show that either, for fear of mocking his chronic genuine distress. Admit it, go ahead, it's true, depressed people are a pain, particularly those with chronic depression, who are constantly unhappy and at odds with the world and their own shadows.

That was exactly what was happening: I had become a nuisance. Me, with all my grand dreams for the little Gabriel:

“When I grow up, I'll be a singer, a film director, a captain of a boat, I'll be, I'll be...”

All kids dream like that, don't they? But enough of that, this is the end (my friend) for me: no more dreams, no more plans, and no more grand voyages. This will be the end of everything; I was going to put a definitive, final stop to any idea of future reveries!

I spent a fair part of the night imagining my funeral. The way I planned it, everybody will be crying: my parents, my brothers and sisters, my friends. They will all be greatly saddened about not understanding earlier that I needed a helping hand, some charitable, generous and sympathetic support.

Once I had done a few full rehearsals of my heart-rending funeral scenario, I was ready for the acts that would seal my fate that morning, to forever join the destiny of all the accursed artists – who are misunderstood, overly sensitive, too clairvoyant, too realistic. Verlaine, Rimbaud, Proust... and me!

“But, I was proudest of all, and I was still pretending to be myself,” as sung by my adoptive godfather Jacques Brel*. (The adoption was all one way and completely imaginary, because unfortunately he’d never heard of me).

I had long since identified the local doctors I would visit. None of them opened before 1:30 p.m., so I was forced to linger a little while before I could end my pitiful existence.

In the meantime, I loitered in a noisy, smoky café. Surrounded by all the impersonal meaningless clamor, I sat observing all the local proletarians and bureaucrats who came to wolf down a little lunch with a beer – the beer they didn’t have to apologize for, since it was lunchtime.

A perfect empty atmosphere for my last minutes on earth, don't you think? I ordered a coke because I couldn't force booze down my throat without my daily dose of pharmaceutical drugs. In fact, although I didn't realize it, I was suffering from withdrawal, physically and mentally. I needed my anxiolytics!

My desert-dry mouth and a lump in my throat caused by my perpetual anxiety, I raised a stupid toast to myself 'my last coke...'

To make matters worse, my mouth was so dry I couldn't get the liquid down. I couldn't drink a drop of that wonderful brew (as bad as it is strangely habit-forming).

Insane as it was, it is at that point I started to cry. My body was in so much distress; it couldn't even take in any food or drink.

I felt really sad, with tears running down my cheeks. No one was looking at me, and no one could see me. I was alone in the middle of a noisy, turbulent sea of people where I had nothing to say to anyone and no one had anything to say to me.

There's no worse solitude than being lost in a crowd of our peers, our so-called human brothers, feeling as lonely

as someone shipwrecked and solitary, like a sailor in the middle of the ocean.

Well for someone like me who loves melodramas, this was tailor-made and is just what I needed!

I dared not make eye contact with anyone. I had the impression that I looked so sad, so scared... that I was bound to upset all these good people! I stared at the table in front of me to keep from disturbing them, all those real human beings, who seemed happy to live despite their stupid, monotonous lives...

“Happy are the shallow-minded” thought I condescendingly.

I was too intelligent to be happy. My mind had already understood it all. I couldn't be satisfied with the absurd little pleasures that seemed to content most of these silly, naïve and insignificant people.

Aren't I ridiculously proud? But when you're in that condition, you don't even realize that pride is the cause of the loneliness and most of the problems.

And, after all, if you are genuinely unhappy, it helps to believe that it's because you're too intelligent, rather than just

the opposite! (Insert here a slap in the face to Verlaine and the accursed modern day poets, myself included, who believe they are too intelligently unhappy and painfully misunderstood). The truly clever minded people, put ego in its minor place which leaves no room for its cruelty, but only a big place for kindness and understanding to others.

At 1:25 p.m., I rise from my seat and quietly ask to pay for my coke.

In my paranoia, I thought the barman was throwing hard and guilty looks at me and that everyone resented me for feeling permanently out of place. As if I was revealing to people a hidden aspect of themselves that they did not want to acknowledge. By denying this universal aspect, we can all pretend that loneliness may forget us; that we can parry it until we grow old and death provides the ultimate escape. Poor unhappy, make-believers lost in a confused life of pretexts, with camouflage a chameleon would envy.

But I had lost my protection, I was being flayed alive. Little by little I'd lost every layer of skin, from the epidermis down to my very flesh, skin stripped off by vodka, whiskey, barbiturates, and soft drugs. (Oh! Marijuana... So gentle, but so all-inclusive that it takes you to a world where paranoia reigns unrivalled as a Queen).

I felt that my body, my soul, my organs, my cells hated me desperately for this wretched condition I had brought upon them and in which they are forced to stew day after miserable day.

In revenge, they decided to make me pay the price – slow torture! The objective: self-destruction. Like the delete key on a computer: when you hit the button, that's it, everything is irrecoverably destroyed.

When I finally left that charming café, I had a pounding headache and my ears couldn't identify the sounds of life around me – the sound of footsteps, of cars... I was losing more and more of my basic animal instincts, the natural instinct for self-protection, and the indispensable instinct for survival.

I make my way to the lobby of the doctor's office building, keeping my head low so I wouldn't make eye contact with people passing by, to keep from upsetting them with my discomfort. I didn't dare exist too loudly. My constant depression forced me to be discreet. However, like all alcoholics, as soon as I got my dose, I'd become loud, rude and rowdy.

I entered the doctor's office and found an unfamiliar pot-bellied, round-faced little man, who is probably from North Africa. He didn't look like an Arab, more likely a pied-noir

(“black feet,” the name given to French ‘colonists’) and no doubt Jewish, like me. But today, I wasn’t a Jew or a pied-noir; I wasn’t French. I was no longer part of the human race – I now counted myself among the living dead who had lost their minds in the bottomless black hole of eternity.

When you are hopeless, you have no religion, no nationality, no life, and no utility... You are essentially OUT OF SERVICE...! Useless to yourself and others!

I didn’t dare look straight at the doctor. I mumbled a few words, stuttering and sweating with nervousness. I even tried a clever little buddy-buddy smile when I talked to him, but it didn’t look like he was going to buy my story.

He stood contemplating me with apparent concern, and suddenly, out of the blue, he asks if, by any chance, I was Martine’s brother – the wife of one Simon B.

Unbelievable! Just when I want to be totally anonymous, (because, when you are committing suicide, you want a little privacy at least), the first doctor I consult for my death preparations is a friend of my sister and my brother-in-law!

Why is there always some burlesque detail, even in the most dramatically tragic situations that breaks up the solemn aura of the moment? I wanted at least some melodrama! This is not a circus, not a stupid soap opera TV show – I’m literally playing for my life here, for Christ’s sake!

In retrospect, I must admit, at that point, I didn't really think it was funny. I was actually perturbed and embarrassed about having entrusted my desperation to this doctor who had gone from being a total stranger to a friend of the family in just a few seconds.

I appreciate the joke, whoever you are up there. It's very funny, but if you don't mind, could you please cut the humiliation for a while!

Even when I want to commit suicide, I get no respect; no one takes me seriously. I get the impression that people think of me as one of the pathetic protagonists of a Woody Allen movie!

I wanted to shout to the sky "There are people who are trying to kill themselves here, can't we even get a little bit of respect?"

Like the bicycle delivery boys in Paris who have been shouting the same thing at drivers for years, "Hey, there are people working here, show a little respect, will you!"

At long last, the doctor understood that I absolutely needed those drugs. He prescribed a few boxes for me, but he was still not really convinced – he would have liked me to start psychotherapy right away.

"Sure, sure," I said agreeing with him in order to curtail any further discussion.

I could hardly tell him that the only reason I had come was to get my hands on as many anxiolytics as possible, so I could quietly kill myself by falling asleep in a happy haze, without making any noise and without too much physical suffering?

What I really wanted to do was to scream at him: psychotherapy isn't what I need! I need a new brain, a trade-in for a brand-new, standard brain, like swapping the engine in a car! Throw the other one out in the trash or send it back to the main factory. There must be dumpsters for brains that don't work properly; the ones that have a bug from the factory... Even the best manufacturers are humble enough to recognize that sometimes things can go wrong. Every week on the radio, I hear, "Please bring back all vehicles of so-and-so trademark... serial numbers beginning with... they will be exchanged for a new vehicle."

So, why doesn't God do that?

I wanted a new brain, with no ghosts, no anxiety, no fears, and no invisible, diabolical enemies in the form of my own thoughts. A brain whose only objective is to prevent me from landing in a psychiatric hospital, clad in a first-class straitjacket, surrounded by padded walls to protect me from myself and from my own sick mind, poor ass that I was!

By the end of my visit, the doctor had also prescribed a little bottle of medicine to help me sleep. I was cautioned to take

eight drops only, not one more, before going to bed. He didn't need to remind me of this because I had no intention of heeding his warning. This little bottle would serve a great and noble cause for my last trip to the kiss of death! Thank you, little local doctor; you've done a great favor to a man who is great in his suffering and in selfishness. My friend, you are doing the entire country a favor and General de Gaulle himself thanks you personally and salutes you on my behalf!

I left the doctor a little worse than when I came in. I headed for the pharmacy across the way. The woman behind the counter observed me with a half-sad, half-disgusted look. I hate the kind of false compassion, when someone looks at you with a distasteful expression that means, "Oh, that poor dear... Thank God, I'm not like him."

To hell with all of you and your bogus pity!

I bought the prescription medicines and hurried off to tell the same story to the next GP. Earlier that morning, I had chosen several doctors to ensure I would get enough drugs to successfully carry off my suicide.

I arrived at the office of the second doctor - an easy mark, well known for his less than thorough consultations and easy-to-get certificates for a few days off work. I'm ushered into a dingy waiting room where a lot of people, mostly North Africans, are waiting. Are they more fragile or sic-

ker than others? Or are they special friends of the neighborhood doctor?

(Me, I'm a Jew from North Africa – does that mean that I should have all the same diseases as these people? Is that why I feel sicker than others, why I spend so much time in doctors' waiting rooms? Finally, I've got an explanation...).

It's funny how I write 'North Africans!' Here I am using a geographical term... so I can talk about Arabs without sounding racist. Is it racist to say Arabs?

The same holds true for the word Jew – it sounds like an insult. That's why some people say Israelites, Israelis, or 'of Jewish persuasion.'

But I'm not a racist. Or maybe I am, but against all the fascists, the pigs, the bastards who want to impose their ideas, their viewpoint on others. I can't abide by men who beat and harass women, children, and animals to underscore their own dominance and thereby feel stronger than others. Oh, I am prejudiced against those people! I don't like Arabs who act that way, it's true. But I don't like it when Jews, or Frenchmen or anybody else does the same!

Moreover, whatever my origins, there are some Arabs that I like a lot and some Jews that I don't like at all (and vice

versa)! Most of the Arabs I knew were sensitive, sympathetic, humane people. One of my closest friends and someone whom I really consider to be like a brother is named Samy El Ouardani. He is a Tunisian Arab and a Muslim. And he is one of the gentlest and kindest people I have ever had the good fortune to meet.

I personally don't have the impression that I really belong to the Jewish community. I feel that I'm a citizen of the world, and also of the universe! We have no idea how many planets there are out there. Billions probably. How many of those planets are inhabited by sentient beings like us, who are more or less evolved? For that matter, why should we care about the origin of the beings we have met or will meet? What matters is their capacity to understand and to love others, whether they are part of the human or animal race or any other! Kindness and humor take precedence over any other criteria for me.

What's important cannot be seen by the naked eye. What's important is the soul – the intangible is what makes us love or hate someone, as demonstrated in Saint-Exupery's wonderful book "Le Petit Prince".

I love people for their sensitivity and their inner beauty; the rest doesn't really interest me, whether they are Jewish, Arab, English, American, or Martian.

I maintain and reserve the right to say that I don't like certain types of behavior that are typically Arab or typically Jewish or typically American, without worrying about being called racist, anti-Semite, or anti-American. In any case, I have something of all three cultures in me.

I don't care for religious people. I don't like fanatics either. But religious fanatics are the one category that totally exasperates me! They often take advantage of a misinterpretation (or their own interpretation) of holy books to dominate and manipulate their wives, their families and their social sphere.

It has taken so much courage and tenacity for women to gain their independence and their freedom, that it truly saddens me to see them demanding the right to revert back because of religious traditions and practice, family constraints, or some need to highlight their differences! And these religious practices only correspond to the trappings of religion! Religion is something that must be lived from inside.

The difference can be seen from the interior to the exterior, not the other way around!

The women I feel the worst about are those who blindly obey these rigid constraints, who completely cover their heads and bodies with scarves, wigs, and other symbolic tokens of submission (standard practice for Orthodox Jews and Muslims). It's like seeing a crocodile in a leather workshop

or a beautiful stag surrounded by a horde of thoughtless hunters, for whom the only goal is to impress their barbaric friends by hanging the beautiful head of this majestic animal on the wall above the fireplace!

There are some things I simply don't understand in this world, the main one being why all these people act against their own interests, their own sensibilities and fighting their own intrinsic freedom!

Those are the people who seem to me to be from another race, another religion, rather than people who originate come from different countries or have different traditions.

(Here ends my first crisis of ideology about a better world, based on my teenage understanding...!)

I waited impatiently for my turn in the second doctor's waiting room where the atmosphere was hardly pleasant. Whispering, noises, coming and going, and unwelcome smells that remind me more of a Social Security Office (as Jacques Chirac so elegantly put it) than a doctor's waiting room.

I was feeling increasingly ill, queasier every minute. I was very uneasy and tried to avoid eye contact with the people around me.

It had been 48 hours since I'd taken an antidepressant or any other of my myriad survival tools, so I was in withdrawal and it was horrendous.

Suddenly, I got a very practical idea: while I was waiting to swallow my 200 anxiolytics to implement my pre-planned passing, nothing was stopping me from going to the toilet and slipping down a well-deserved dozen or so. That way, I will feel less anxious and a little less stressed about talking to this good conciliatory doctor!

By the time it was my turn to see him; the antidepressants had begun to go to work on my body and mind. Suddenly I felt more relaxed, more easygoing, I wanted to enjoy myself, to laugh – I was almost euphoric.

The doctor kindly bids me to come into his office and, with a serious and grave look, asked what the matter was.

I tried to explain as best I could but... all of a sudden, I started giggling under the effect of the drugs. I'd get out a few words, try to be serious and get caught up in my giggles again. Then I'd apologize stupidly as I broke out laughing again... It was almost enough to make me cry.

The craziest, most ironic aspect was that I was trying to explain my black, desolate mood to the doctor facing me and, telling him that I needed antidepressants urgently to keep

from falling into a deep depression... but I couldn't stop laughing, that was very embarrassing, but so funny!

He gawked at me wide-eyed without smiling, actively ignoring my fits of laughter as if he hadn't noticed. Then he complacently gave me the prescription I needed for my cherished suicide. I scurried out of his office, as I tried clumsily to hide my giggles. Even today I wonder what that doctor thought on seeing me in that state. My behavior was in total contradiction to my 'patient-in-distress' story, but probably he'd seen worse.

“Who's next? ...” (Jacques Brel*).

After a quick run to another pharmacy with my prescription in hand, to fulfill my needs and complete my script, I finally got back to my parents' house with a shopping bag full of my delightfully fresh and nourishing pills. Fortunately, no one was home: my family had gone on vacation and my brother Michel only showed up for a few hours every other day or so between visits to various nightclubs.

When half stoned, I'm not even depressed. I now feel more playful, delightfully intoxicated by my earlier excessive consumption of pills.

But at the bottom of my heart, however, I knew very well from long experience that this condition was not going

to last. Once the idyllic effects of the drugs wear off, my existential fears and anxieties would overwhelm my mind again. This I knew because I had been through this circle hundreds of times before. Why would my demons ever stop tormenting or give up such easy prey as they find in me? Like the AIDS virus: it's practically for life... or more accurately until death!

I upended all the boxes of Xanax onto the table and made a lovely little pile of pills shaped like a pyramid as if the aesthetic presentation mattered at a time like this. Then I took a bottle of crystal clear vodka, and poured myself a full glass. I placed a dozen pills in the hollow of my hand and swallowed them in one big swig. Then I did the same twice more in my determination to have done with my grim, wretched existence!

On my fourth handful, the phone began to ring. At first, I let it ring two or three times and then finally decided to pick it up, not so much to answer the phone call as to stop the damn ringing that just kept jangling my brain circuits. I was getting groggier from of all the crap I had just swilled down by the end of that crazy morning.

I heard the voice of my friend Edouard, emerging from some kind of radio static.

“What are you doing tonight?” he enquired.

What could I possibly reply?

“Nothing special, just a little suicide, and you what are you doing, buddy?”

So I answered him in a very groggy voice (not surprisingly after swallowing more than 50 Xanax) saying that I was busy with lots of little things. He wanted me to join him at the jewelry store because he was with two cute girls, one of whom had apparently seen me before and she seemed interested in meeting me. She must have been impressed by my looks because we had never actually spoken.

“I can’t, I absolutely have to finish something I have started,” I told Edouard.

A little later he quite cleverly asked whether I might be able to postpone what I was doing, which makes something click in my head.

“Why not, after all,” I told myself, “I can round off my suicide tomorrow! There’s no hurry, nobody’s waiting for me up there, and even if someone is, there doesn’t seem to be any special emergency! I’ll still be alive enough to commit suicide tomorrow (not less than today in any case) and bring an end to my miserable life! So why not enjoy this lovely evening that chance has put my way, to have a pretty blonde on my arm one more time? It would be crazy to refuse. I had such a terrible time last night that I deserve a little fun!”

My mind was now completely hazy from all the drugs I had taken, but I get into my cute white convertible car and drive through Paris at more than 178 km/hr. The police photographed me, and the ticket I was issued later attested to my state of madness – a folly that was as dangerous for me as it would have been for any unlucky pedestrians who might have crossed my path.

Edouard and the two girls were waiting for me in front of the jewelry store. Polite introductions were needed, but very short... I was so stoned from my booze-drug concoction that I couldn't really see the features of the blonde girl's face – she might as well have been wearing a veil!

All four of us took off in my glamorous convertible, hair blowing in the wind. (For my part, my sick brain blowing in the wind). “La dolce vita” was my main stupid thought!

We decided to set up in a pizzeria near Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where I drank wine and strong drinks all through the night. I barely touched any food because eating would sober me up, and I was feeling too good to make that kind of mistake! Can you imagine? For once, I had gotten rid of the pesky ghosts that were eternally badgering me, and who delighted in injecting negative thoughts in my neurons. I was in pure bliss!

Later, we went into a fashionable nightclub to round out the rest of this incredible evening. I ordered a bottle of a good vodka brand.

“Nice and cold, please, with ice.”

I just wanted to show off like a would-be connoisseur. I was well past the point where I could tell the difference between vodka and or other booze!

I drank nearly the entire bottle myself, pretending to be having a terrific time, but I was so drunk that I stretched out on the bench after kissing the poor girl, who seemed relatively unconcerned or not even upset by my condition.

To this day, I have no idea how I managed to drive through Paris in that state, drop the girl off at four in the morning and return to my home. I remember that my eyes were mere slits and that I could hardly tell the difference between stoplights and neon lights.

I finally got back to my apartment; 11, rue de l’Ourcq in the 19th district - a place in a low working class neighborhood for people like me! My neighbor’s dad was a garbage man, and mine, whom I adored, pumped gas.

I pulled up erratically in front of the entrance to my building, I opened the car door, got one foot out and then the other, and then realized that there was no way I could stand up.

So, I decided to crawl on all fours, but even that was too hard. I began to slither on my belly like a snake and found myself dragging my semi-comatose body more like a crocodile dancing walk. Luckily I lived on the first floor – like any self-respecting drunk, it took me a good 20 minutes to insert the key into the lock.

I was finally home, no... In my parents' home, in that 'wonderful cozy setting' for third working class families. Before going to bed, I suddenly remembered that the good neighborhood doctor had said, "Before going to bed, my dear sick friend, take eight drops of medicine from this miracle bottle. Eight drops, not more...!"

After doing so, apparently, I would sleep like an angel.

I grabbed the magic potion but was too tired and too drunk to count drops, so instead I just took a clumsy swig, and almost finished the bottle. It doesn't matter anyway, thought I, I'll sleep that much better and I have a whole night of sleep to catch up on! (There is no limit to folly!)

That is the true story of what had really happened 48 hours before I woke up so sluggishly in my parent's apartment, and that's why I had slept so much!

So there I was, draped in the armchair, waiting for the effects of the various drugs I'd taken two days ago to wear off so I could finally get up.

I have since talked to a doctor about this episode. He told me that with everything I had shoved down my throat, I surely had been on the verge of death and was lucky to be here today to talk about it. Many people in similar circumstances weren't so lucky! Suicide is the primary cause of death among young adults. At the time, I was just 20 years old!

I vegetated there, sprawled out in the armchair like a deposed king. I couldn't move – I could hardly breathe properly. I let my life flash before my eyes, dwelling on everything I had done – or not done, for that matter – that had brought me to this point, completely lost, facing total defeat of my existence.

For me, the question was not why I drank, but how I managed not to drink all the time.

To function with my diseased brain, I had to be doused in alcohol and drugs from morning to night! No one can live with so many inner ghosts in his head without turning to tranquilizers and other forms of relief! I was excessively emotional and fragile, so easily dragged from one to the other, from euphoric moments to wholly suicidal ones.

There is no pain in alcohol. Suffering, to me, was a product of not drinking. Without booze, I felt empty, stupid, uninteresting, and void of personality, with no depth and no soul. Alcohol was a vital force, like sap to trees or a blood transfusion to the sick patient. It brought me back to life, as it spun through my body, my veins, my brain, my soul, and my poor long-suffering heart.

With alcohol, all my organs felt alive again and could be able to move in harmony with life, like muck to a rusty engine to which you add a drop of oil, and that does the trick to get those pistons to start moving again! Thanks to this wonderful liquid of salvation, my body can be revitalized and could come back to life, my joints could swing freely again, and my organs could fulfil their normal functions and my smile slipped back on my face. Finally, I had rhythm – I could dance well and smoothly coordinating my moves, like a dim-witted dandy!

Many of my friends asked me why I became an alcoholic. I didn't really know what to tell them. It was simply maybe in my genes – I didn't want to be myself; I wanted to be someone else. In fact, I was too shy, too sensitive, and too susceptible with too many complexes.

I drank because alcohol had a strongly positive effect on me. After one or two drinks, mixed with a few anti-depressants, I would be so high that I inevitably wanted to drink more, to maintain that surreal, mystical condition in which my neu-

roses floated away. Actually, I would switch instantly from an inferiority complex to a superiority complex. This fast transformation destabilized the people around me who couldn't tell whether I needed affection or a good kick in the ass.

I've been told that an American scientist apparently has discovered that the existence of a gland that reacts differently in different individuals in the presence of alcohol, from one person to another, just as sugar affects diabetics in a specific way. If these same people are a fertile ground because of a weak or destabilized personality, they will try to leverage the lack of inhibition that comes with alcohol, to create another personality all together. But the foundation of this new self will be based on this outside element, this chemical element... Without which nothing changes. This element must be absorbed (example: Gabriel + nothing = nothing; Gabriel + booze = Mr. Hyde, super cool).

That was exactly my case. I was chronically unsure and booze provided me with the courage I lacked to express and affirm myself.

Without alcohol, I felt excluded from the human experience and was full of complexes, pretending to be happy because I was afraid that people would run away from me. In real life, my timing was always off: my jokes fell flat, I became indignant at the wrong time, I was a ridiculous clown, a joker with no sense of humor who made everyone feel uncomfortable by acting like an ass!

I had real difficulty with silent pauses. I had to add something to fill in the blanks, and I'd always take it too far. I felt like the bad moderator of some television game show clumsily trying to justify his pay scale by adding another stupid and unnecessarily joke.

I tired the people who loved me and I annoyed those who didn't appreciate me.

I've always had complexes. I wanted to be blonde with blue eyes and straight hair. I wanted people to say "look, what an angel," to be as blonde as a little angel.

Instead of that, I was dark with curly hair, and it was easy to see that my origins were from the Middle East. I wanted to look like a Westerner, French, and English or better still Swedish... but I was a Jew born in Tunisia! What a paradox for a little 'pied-noir'! And I hated that word 'pied-noir'. To my child's mind it meant that my feet were black and dirty!

At that stage, the comment that really irked me the most was when people said pejoratively: "pied-noirs" – they're just like Arabs aren't they? (I tried to find a way of getting around that Arab origin).

No, dammit! 'Pied-noirs' are colonialists; we are French – we came from France to occupy the colonies that had been conquered by soldiers in the name of France! "We were

there to serve France” Why is it that no one understands? That was what truly annoyed me and got on my nerves.

I love Jacques Brel, Jean Ferrat, Léo Ferré, Georges Brassens, Barbara, Jean-Paul Sartre, Stendhal.* I knew all the songs of ‘le grand Jacques’ by heart. I could recite entire songs from his repertoire if prompted with a single word. I love literature, poetry, opera, exhibits, impressionistic and surrealistic painting, Van Gogh, Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne, Salvador Dali...

It would be hard to get further off track – a hypersensitive, tormented soul who looks like an actor from the ironic and satirical movie “La vérité si je mens” (Means, “The truth if I lie”) that shows Jews making money from others in comical ways.

You must admit, this was yet another little joke from my guardian angel, who has a strange sense of humor!

I was so shy that in certain situations, when someone stared at me or made a comment about me in public, I would blush beetroot red. I could feel the blood pounding in my cheeks. I had the impression I was scarlet-faced, and I would stutter and sweat – the feeling was horrible! At times like that, all I wanted to do was to run away, to escape as fast and as far as I could, to go hide in a corner somewhere... anywhere, as long as no one could see me!

I really had complexes about everything. I dreamed of being part of a bourgeois family, with a father who was a doctor or a lawyer. We would be French, English or Swedish nationals, whatever, but not “pied-noir”, not Jewish “pied-noir”, for pity’s sake... please!

There must’ve been a cosmic slip-up! Hey, you up there... You’ve got it wrong, completely wrong, bro! Mistakes can happen, no problem – I’m not mad at you or anything. We’re still good pals! Just admit it and then correct this glitch fast! I can’t stay like I am, you’ve got to help me, and get me out of here! Don’t leave me like this, looking like a total loser!

But no way was provided, nothing said, no echo, no response, total silence... I reasoned that they were probably all self-conscious about the situation, ashamed at having to face the problem they had created, their colossal mistake.

In the meantime, I was suffering. I wasn’t in the right body and I didn’t have the right brain, the right community, or the right family.

I longed for somebody to help me, to put an end to this stupid joke, please! But nobody seemed to give a damn.

So I would drink to drown out the unbearable pain, and I kept drinking to become someone else, until eventually I wound up creating two personalities – becoming a schizo-

phrenic, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. There was the one who was too shy to speak out, who didn't know how to laugh or enjoy life, was always clumsy, tense and anxious. The other me arrived on the scene after I drank the magic potion. Once he had slaked his thirst and fulfilled his quota need for drugs, Mr. Hyde would make his entrance and take over. This wonderful Mr. Hyde knew how to look people straight in the eye and respond to their sarcasm in the same tone – no blushing, stuttering and sweating for him. He even made everyone laugh when he got started. Boy, I truly loved that guy, and even admired him at times. He knew how to talk to women, to engage with them, and lure them to him with the smiling glance of an accomplice.

He was also learned. He knew what needed changing to improve the world; he could talk about philosophy. He gave me a chance to expound on all the books I'd read and all the poems I love! I could finally express my sensitivity without coming across as a clumsy, blushing clod spoiling everything!

That was in the beginning, when alcohol was my friend, my accomplice, and my crutch. Alcohol that makes you feel like you can take on the entire world; that there is nothing you can't do! For example, it would be no problem for me to explain to the President of the Republic how to run the country. He would be lost without my input. Everything seems accessible and acceptable! The downside, you naïve pack of blind, narrow-minded drunks and druggies, is that when alcohol sets a trap, it doesn't show you the dark side on your first date! It first seduces you,

taunting you with the power you will acquire free of charge with its support and companionship! A bit like the old Michel Simon - Gérard Philippe film, *La Beauté du diable* (Beauty and the Devil), which seemed to apply so well to me when I saw it again, not long ago.

When I first saw the movie I had no understanding of the meaning of life – I didn't see why the hero refused the Devil's proposal 'to be powerful, strong and envied', even if others were to suffer! Suffering, after all, is part of life, and not really a problem, although, of course, it is unfortunate. What is more, I wasn't the one who was going to suffer; the burden would be on others. And it was all for a good cause, the only important cause to my mind: ME! Me, my happiness, my hunger for power and recognition were all that mattered! I needed and deserved to be loved, to be admired, see people acquiesce in my intelligence and be jealous of my exceptional sense of humor.

At that time, I would have jumped at the chance to accept that fantastic, generous proposal: This is the beauty of the devil, the offer of being strong and powerful, to walk ruthlessly over others. Come to think of it, that's just what I was trying to do with the help of booze.

There is no need to enumerate the times I slept in the beds of women I have totally forgotten – their faces, their names, and even their existence after just 24 hours! All the vomiting in

nightclub restrooms, the little accidents on the road, the losses of memory, the crying fits and the hideous mornings when I felt so shameful with a pounding head and aching soul, that I would rather be dead! Frustration, anxiety, fear, tears, lies... I knew them all as I ran through every kind of mental state: anxiety, paranoia, schizophrenia, megalomania...

By now you, dear reader, have some better idea of why I was ready to do away with my futile existence.

My life had no content, no integrity, and no authenticity: it was empty and phony—so much hot air! A passing breeze had more substance. At times, I felt more useless than a fly!

Sometimes, when my anxiety was in a full rage and so strong, I could hardly breathe without feeling a stabbing pain in my lungs and sternum. My throat tight and my mouth dry. However familiar it may have become, I don't believe that it's possible to get used to agony. I really don't think so. Personally, I never could, I have always tried to resist, to struggle, to sell my skin dearly, to be a hard prey to overcome.

I became so empty that I thought it would be better to disappear, than to continue to pollute the lives of the people around me.

I remember a Pakistani artist who showed his paintings in Boulevard Saint Germain. He displayed them with a sign bea-

ring a slogan that hurt every time I saw it: “If you are not in tune with the world, then you are getting in the world’s way!” I had the impression that it was written for me personally!

I constantly felt out of tune with the world and couldn’t really communicate effectively with anyone. I was afraid to talk to my friends about my anxieties, for fear they would flee. My brain wasn’t working the way it should. I didn’t have the right instructions; I had lost the manual of life. Although I love life, but couldn’t manage to live with my fellow men without bumping into them and upsetting them, without saying the wrong thing and acting like a jerk!

When I finally managed to haul myself out of the chair after several hours of semi-consciousness, with bloodshot eyes, and my face and my mouth still numb (much like the dentist’s novocaine injection), I took a few steps in the living room, massaging my thighs to get the blood moving. Finally, I thought, I’ve done it – I’m back in the world of the living! “Welcome back, my friend!” the good life is about to begin again, just like before, not to worry, nothing changed while you were away. What great news! All your fears, your anxieties, your terrors, your apprehensions, your bad vibes and your ghosts... They are all still here, all your friends are on the scene to celebrate your homecoming, they are so happy to see their stupid, egoistic prey again! Magnificent, eh? Isn’t life great? If that’s not love, what is?

The telephone rang (thank God for telephones!) I answered with a shaky voice – I hated answering a telephone sober. A woman’s voice was saying: “Are you okay? I was worried. I’ve been trying to get in touch with you since yesterday.”

It was Sylvie, the charming blonde from the day before yesterday. She wanted to invite me to dinner at her house that day if I didn’t mind the company of her four-year-old daughter. When you are desperate, you don’t mind anything. You are more afraid that others will mind your lack of substance, your inner blankness, your empty, off-track soul and personality!

Having nothing else to do, I stopped by her house around 7:00 p.m., putting on a frozen smile on my face as I went in. She said kindly that I didn’t look as if I was feeling very well. I tried a second awkward smile, stuttered a few words of apology, and sat down at the table. She tried to make conversation and I tried to answer as best I could: in fact, my mouth was shaking every time I said a word. Her daughter was gawking at me, surprised and upset by this strange adult so unsure of himself.

Sylvie was trying to keep up a conversation when suddenly I could take no more – and I broke down crying, sobbing buckets, choking on my tears like an unhappy child. She took me in her arms, more motherly than sensual, in an effort to comfort me. Then she asked me to wait in her room while she put her daughter to bed... and I complied.

When she came back in the room, she put her arms around me again as I cried softly for a few minutes, and then spent the entire night curled up in her lap like a child too scared to leave his mother. She actually had to break my hold on her in the middle of the night to be able to use the bathroom.

For a while, I was so starved for tenderness that I moved into her place and almost became her second child for a few months, just long enough for my inner wounds to heal. Then I ran away. As soon as people got too close to me I would feel stifled and couldn't stand it, so I would leave... I couldn't love myself, so how could anyone else love me? After leaving Sylvie's, I spent some months pretending that I was normal like everyone else. The role was a hard one, but fortunately, booze and pills made it possible and helped me a lot!

Some days, I would wander all day long, choosing isolated, well-to-do neighborhoods in Paris where I would be sure not to bump into anyone I knew. But when I did meet someone, as my inevitable bad luck would have it, and they asked: "Hey, how's it going?" I didn't know what to say. I believed my unhappiness was so visible that I couldn't hide it.

For that matter, what could I honestly say? "Well actually, I'm a mess, thanks. I try not to think about suicide too much, but it's hard. I have an ache in my life, and my anxieties keep me from breathing right."

That was the truth. Although I categorically did not have the courage to admit it to anyone! So, if I happened to meet someone by chance, I would stutter a few embarrassed words with a silly smile, apologising like Jacques Brel* for not being further away! People would look at me with a pained expression in a combination of disgust and pity. These accidental meetings were very painful for me – I hated being what I had become, a stupid, insipid, colorless, odorless buffoon, the epitome of nothingness, a puff of hot wind, a poor lost soul wandering through the streets of the city!

I felt disconnected from every other human being. I couldn't identify with anyone, and I thought I was the only person in that condition, suffering this way! It never crossed my mind that other people might experience the same feelings, the same suffering from existential crisis (the King baby pathology).

I envied everyone else, even the sick, especially the sick, even those with cancer, because they had the right to be recognized for their suffering. Not me! I had no visible disease, which no doubt was why, ironically, most people looked at me with revulsion and shame.

But I was sick, seriously sick. My soul was suffering, but it didn't show in an open wound or an identifiable virus. Depression is a disease that is only really recognized when the visible symptom is expressed in the most ghoulish way... when the person suffering from depression tries to commit

suicide – or better still, when he succeeds in the major feat of ending his poor, miserable life! Then everyone pipes up like a choir “oh the poor thing, he must really have been hurting to be driven to that – the poor little dear, I would really have loved to comfort him, to take him in my arms, to give him love and affection.”

They should have done it long before it was too late! Afterwards, he doesn't give a damn about your love and your compassion: he's dead, disappeared, gone, nothing left... Nada. So, get the bandages out when he's still just injured... not later, when it's too late! A dead person does not feel your love, does not want your support or the so-called affection that you had to give him before the ultimate act!

People should be taught to recognize the symptoms of distress, depression, anxiety and inner isolation!

How can we help young people whose lives are a burden, whose souls are bleeding while the hemorrhaging gradually drains away the invisible substance that forges the soul, the spirit that gives the soul density? I felt empty, just a breath of air, with no consistency, no density. I hardly dared to say hello for fear of disturbing people who seemed to live normally.

As my soul was gradually leaking like a wounded body oozing out its life force, my body also became more and more empty, but unfortunately, for me, it wasn't visible like a bo-

dily injury... The only one who was really able to see my pain was my mom and my dad, who were feeling very sad to see me like that.

I felt so helpless, so alone, so disconnected from others, that I envied the entire world, everyone who didn't have the bad luck to be me!

*PS: *Jacques Brel, Jean Ferrat, Léo Ferré, Georges Brassens, Barbara, Jean-Paul Sartre, Stendhal, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Proust are famous french singers, philosophers, poets and writers.*

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READER COMMENTS

★★★★★ Wonderful..

What do I say about this wonderful book? I always love to read and am a voracious reader. I am always reading a book. But never has any book made me cry so much. Attention is not that it is depressing, on the contrary! The author has a lot of humor and to talk about a subject as serious as depression and suicide, it's so nice to have this little touch that makes it less cumbersome, but no less important. The story of his life is simply wonderful. His honest, funny and touching way of writing so simply but so telling and so honestly... well it's adorable. I thought reading this book a rather nice change, to put a little light in my life, but what a slap I got! I still have the trace of that slap on my cheek. Truly to all of those who will take the time to read this absolutely magical work, you will not waste your time. Above all, it can make you think and become aware of a lot of things. I must say that after this intoxicating reading, something at home has changed profoundly. To read reality, real life it absolutely makes a lot of extreme words become a new life, a new way of thinking. I cannot help but use them so much I was touched and transformed. Francoise Lebernier

★★★★★ Radio VIVACITY Belgium

What could be more enjoyable than to read a book that can change your daily life, and that finishes almost like a true, real fairy tale. This book pushes you to make big changes in your life, and mostly gives you a big breath of hope. I have to say, that having this book to read before bed time, is better than having a lover in your bed. Nathalie De Wulf

★★★★★ A must read

A book full of hope, which I highly recommend! Easy to read and captivating. Thank you so much for this new breath of hope Gabriel.

★★★★★ Beautiful story

Hello, I just finished your book, the first book I have ever read. Yes I have never read a book until this book! Your book is so captivating, it's breathtaking. I am very happy for this beautiful ending, almost like a fairy tale. You have risen up despite all your difficulties. I wish you so much happiness and success. Your book is full of life and happiness... It has made me want to enjoy every moment of my life. Best regards, Gabriella

★★★★★ To absolutely read

I read it over one night; can't stop reading it! This book is so very overwhelmingly, captivating and realistic. A beautiful lesson of life and hope. The beginning is very strong and very emotional, and the rest is a real fairy tale true story. A must read book! You will not be disappointed!

★★★★★ Captivating book

When I started this book, I did not think it would have such an impact. A few days of a passionate read, with such truth, a whole true and sincere testimony upset me positively. The resonance with the experience of some close friends moved me and several weeks after the end, I keep thinking several times a day and it makes me strong. Thank you GA for all this hope. Carine Biton

A COMPELLING BOOK BASED ON A TRUE STORY