

The
ELEGANCE
OF
SIMPLICITY

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A Wisdom Teacher's Epic Journey to Awareness

Sophie McLean

A PRAYER

I wish to make a deal with you.

I will tell you all.

I will bare it all.

I will be the provocateur.

I will take you out of your comfort zone.

I will guide you beyond the limits of your thinking.

I will even give you answers you understand.

In return, I ask only one thing:

Throw off the unbearable weight of the habitual for the pursuit of the extraordinary.

For the sake of humankind.

Murray,
Mon Cœur,
Forever and beyond.

*There are certain things you can only know by creating
them for yourself.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the myriad of people that have contributed to me:

Lamia, my dear friend

My 'crew+ team', Misha, Donna, Karen, Stephanie and Boaz

My family

My friends

My many students and my many masters

Please let these few lines reach deep into your hearts and
allow yourselves to experience my profound gratitude.

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PROLOGUE

I would have liked so much to be able to write a book beginning with, “Once upon a time, there was a marvelous and beautiful princess,” which would recount the bliss of a life filled with ease and grace. My journey led me somewhere else, though, far away from fairy tales. Yet, in a mocking paradox I did not foresee, the outcome was to become my own miracle. It happened in an unexpected way, in a dimension where my discovery would exceed my wildest dreams.

I was a woman imprisoned in an ordinary and comfortable existence made up of heartbreak and routine, misunderstandings and mundane nights, work and entertainment—a life that was certainly acceptable, but whose lack of passion and meaning suffocated me. At thirty-five years of age, already divorced without children, I worked as a professor of political science at a prestigious university in Paris. I was a dainty-looking woman with short, curly hair, and my small size and delicate features allowed me to outsmart more than one naïve person who mistook my lack of physical stature for a lack of power. There is something to be said for gracile appearances!

Being French and living in France allowed me many advantages, one of which was a quality of life unequaled in the rest of the world. France, the

country of human rights, with its motto of “liberty, equality, fraternity,” has always looked after its citizens, sometimes far too much. We drift toward a culture of demanding, victimized people who are afraid to lose the privileges gained through the grassroots movements in our history. My compatriots were always capable of the best and the worst, and I loved them for it, being myself a product of that same culture.

Our favorite pastime was talking endlessly about life. I never knew if our affinity for long, delicious meals came from the need to create a setting for existential conversations, or if those conversations gave birth to our culinary expertise. Whatever the case, French people can talk. And think. And criticize. And take a stand, when the need arises.

I had a busy social and professional schedule that led me to participate in myriad conversations about what to do, say, change, or destroy in our world to make it more equitable for everyone. Of course, these ideas came from individuals who thought they had the solutions to all the misfortunes of humanity, never considering that their solutions were, in fact, new versions of the problem. In all likelihood, moving forward with these interventions would merely lead to a trap similar to the one in which human beings have struggled since the time of Homer and his *Iliad*.

I heard the good intentions behind these ideas, shared them, even. But I did not fail to notice that my compatriots allowed themselves opinions and offered advice without any investment on their part. I strongly suspected that if my friends were one day in charge of society, these problems would remain. Their relentless criticism of others, who were always wrong and who were to be blamed for all ills, convinced me

that the world was the way it was because of all of us.

At some point, I began to fall silent during these conversations, having lost the courage to endure the sarcasm and accusations of stupidity that burst forth as soon as I expressed my deviant point of view. They could not agree with my belief that only a transformation of our beingness—the state in which we exist—could allow us to create a world that would work for everyone.

One day, abruptly, in a desperate gesture, I decided to escape my agreeable routine, which was becoming less enjoyable by the day. I threw myself into a quest driven by the irrepressible thought that something had to give. I wanted answers. I wanted to find out the meaning of life.

I sold my apartment, gave away my furniture, gifted my delighted girlfriends my designer clothes, and with only a backpack and my passport, I left my life to discover the world. Behind me trailed the shouts of friends and family, warning me of the terrible dangers a single woman would certainly encounter on such a foolish enterprise, and predicting my demise.

I wandered around the world for five years, experiencing highs and lows, unwilling to go back to the familiar life I had left until I found the answers to my questions. The day I met Guà, the woman whose story I will tell, was my moment of truth. Hers was a typical, difficult life that exploded into the extraordinary; a life which made possible the amazing, the exceptional, the impossible, even the improbable. Sometimes, in looking back, I wonder what my life

would have been like if I had not recognized its significance. But I did, and that is what matters.

I encountered Guia during my travels to an African coast, where the inhabitants of a small village welcomed me for a few months. They accepted me into their community with an absence of curiosity or questions. I could not have told them much anyhow, not knowing myself how to formulate the purpose of my journey.

After a few months of sharing their field work during the day, and listening to their stories at night while gathered around the village's central fire, they told me what I first thought was the legend of their people. I later discovered it was not at all a legend, but simply a different and unqualified reality. The villagers never tried to convince me of the truth of what they confided. They spoke to me with simplicity, as one describes the obvious, without the need to persuade.

They told me that they were protected by an eminently wise woman named Guia, who visited them from time to time. She lived in a small house by the sea, but no one could tell me where, because she, alone, chose those who were able to find their way to her. The path was revealed only if and when it was needed. That was all they would say about her. In spite of my insistence, no one was willing to share their personal experience of this woman, nor the miracles she performed, nor the benefits that were generated from her presence. My mind took hold of this legend with as much doggedness as a thirsty person looking for water after crossing the desert, and I never stopped searching for her until I met her.

I spent weeks praying and wandering the African countryside and deserted beaches, inexplicably certain of the wise woman's existence. I am now convinced that this very lack of doubt is what ultimately led me to her. One day, suddenly, she was in front of me, silent and smiling. Then she told me she was Guia, and she offered to talk—if I would do something for her, in return.

She asked me to write her story. She made me promise to tell everything because, she said, newcomers to life needed a guidebook, so they could learn faster. It was high time, she added, for humanity to awaken.

Her story belongs to all of us, men and women who are called to live for a time on our Earth. Her story is that of human beings since the beginning of time, with their concerns, their hopes, and their battles. Her story is about the miracle of creation.