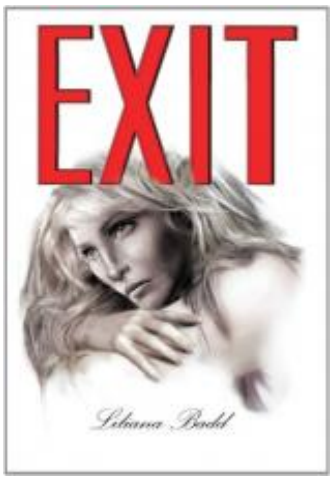
Exit

by Liliana Badd



About the Book

Exit is a compelling story about passion, life, death and the mystery of a woman?s heart with an unexpected twist at the end.

Discussion Guide

1. Exit is the story of Ondine Duquesne-Schmidt, a professor of linguistics, settled in her bourgeois Parisian life. Ondine has always dreamed of becoming a writer. She has never fulfilled her dream and a deep feeling of frustration makes her feel that she has failed her life. Unexpectedly, as it often happens in our fragile lives, when a simple glitch is enough and all turns upside down, Ondine?s life collapses. She is diagnosed with leukemia. It is through her illness she finally valiantly fights that she achieves what she has always dreamt about --- being Ondine. Becoming a writer.

2. When Ondine?s life collapses, the readers will be confronted with her quest, with her depression and some fundamental questions about life and death. What does life mean? What does love mean? What does death mean? Ondine will have the courage to affront what seems to be insurmountable. Isn?t life, from its beginning to its end, a challenge? How do we deal with our daily challenge? Does a terminally ill patient having achieved a beyond medical help stage have the right to end his life and choose the time and date of his or her death?

3. The first part, alternating between present and past is a detailed intimate description of her family, her parents and brothers, how she met her husband, and the ensuing enslaving passion she will feel for him, her life as a wife and a mother. The introspection of her life as a wife and mother culminates in her rebellion against everyone and everything. Ondine says about herself: ?I?ve become the denial of reason.? In the second part, the tone and rhythm of the book changes, becoming as alert as that of a thriller. All the doors shut down in the first part will open, one by one. The book ends with a twist that will surprise the readers.

4. The book is a mine of information --- the readers will learn about Paris, the city or romance and love, about the events of May 1968 that shook France to its foundations, about the tragedy of the street children in Bucharest, Romania - innocent victims of a communist regime, about the Commune of Paris, an historical event that happened in 1871 and has highly impacted the history, about Lourdes --- the city of miraculous healings, and much more.

Author Bio

My life...what a long, terribly exhausting journey. I have traveled for years, thousands of miles throughout the world, and this led me where? To find myself. In 1985, I had the extreme honor to meet Emil Cioran, in Paris. A 15-minute encounter turned into a five-hour debate --- a pure mind-sparkling debate. In the end, he said to me, "You are a rambling soul, a restless mind."

At that time, neither he nor I had the least idea that my life would take shape as an eternal exile.

Sometimes, I enjoy imagining the following scenario: I am dead, arriving at the Heaven's gates and Saint Peter welcomes me. "Here you are, woman. What have you done with your life?" "I have tried hard, Saint Peter. I tried to be a wife, a mother, I passed the turmoil of events constantly doubting about myself, I accumulated emotions and experiences which were to be translated in a couple of novels I wrote, and mostly, I let my soul ramble...." "And now, woman, where would you like to settle? Up or down? I will exceptionally allow you to make a choice." "Do you, really? If so, then, Saint Peter, please let my soul do what it can do best --- just let it ramble."

In 1977, I escaped by miracle from a major earthquake that shook Bucharest to its foundations, leaving behind thousands of innocent victims, the kiss of death. The building I was living in split in two --- seven floors collapsed engulfing with them their inhabitants. I was sitting on a chair watching the walls crack and was calmly thinking that I was going to die alone, and the book of my life would end before even beginning. At that moment, I was oblivious that the earthquake was an omen --- my life did not end; what followed would be a succession of earthquakes that over time would completely collapse my life... and each time, I would obstinately rebuilt its foundations, from scratch.

If I were to pay attention to the old saying "we have seven lives," I could honestly state that I am now beginning my fifth life.

There followed my marriage, my enslaving passion for my husband, a doctor, 16 years older than me, our life under communism, our exile to France, our wrestle to rebuild a new life, the cold war, and other events...at times I was having the weird feeling that the historical events kept mercilessly intermingling with my personal life, making me feel entrapped in their tentacles.

In 1999, when our ship, after a draining sailing, seemed to have reached a port, I was to be abandoned, like the struggles of the waves against the sea. I was shipwrecked far away from the sea, on land. I lost my husband. It was a confrontation with Death --- it was as if Death had seen him, liked him and decided to take him. The circumstances of his death are still extremely painful --- and particularly his last words: "I am ashamed to have belonged to this profession." A terrible, fundamentally awful statement.

February 1999 is another date I will never forget. I had promised him on his deathbed to bury him in Romania, near his parents. Under the impeding circumstances, I could not even let my pain free; I had to fulfill my pledge. I had purchased tickets with Air France --- on the day of the flight, our last journey together, when boarding the plane, I heard a voice in my mind: "Check if I am with you." The plane engines were already turning when the hostess informed me about my husband's coffin having been forgotten in a hangar, some six miles away; he would be on the next flight. I declined any compromise --- I went straight to the pilot and asked him to bring the coffin or I would have no other option but disembark the plane and hold a conference in the International Airport of Paris, for the whole world to be informed on how Air France was treating the customer who had paid the most expensive ticket. That pilot --- what a man. He instantly turned the engines off --- and I will remember forever how the lights at the control tower turned from green to red. It took them 55 minutes to bring the coffin on board; I was to find out that sixteen other international flights had been delayed --- yet, my pledge had been fulfilled.

At that moment in my life, I could have set the destiny straight and live the rest of my earthly days in tranquility, in my parents' house, in Sibiu, my birth town. Instead, an inner restlessness made me leave once more; this time it was a self-imposed exile. I returned to France.

In 2000, fate opened for me an expected window. I flew to Las Vegas, on a vacation...and the desert entrapped me --- a vacation without end. I found work in Las Vegas, without looking for work --- it was as though I was being pushed by some willpower beyond my willpower. Determinism and free will....I began rebuilding my life once more, changing not a city or a country, but a continent, remarrying to a one eyed-artist, whose tormented life is worth a novel unto itself. I loved the desert --- for me it was as pure as oxygen, as safe as a blessed oasis where I could banish the painful memories from my former life... an exile in the desert. I passionately devoted the ten years to come to my work --- I was developing; I was creating; I was producing. In 2010, when I was finishing the manuscript of Exit, my life trembled once more --- a brutal earthquake collapsed again the walls of my newly built edifice --- a decade was being washed out as the sand castles are being washed out by the ocean's waves. I should have felt crushed....

Now, when I write these words, I have literally started my fifth life --- at 57, I am a student again. I have decided to pursue a new career, in the medical field, the only occupation incontestable useful to man...faithfully responding to my altruistic and humanitarian principles...as in time, I have learned to accept and understand myself --- I was born with an immense capacity to love. At times, I think that I am too old and no one will need my services --- always, all my life long, this obsession with time; at other times, I think that there must be a place, somewhere in this world, where my infinite inborn capacity to love, sooth and comfort those who are in real pain will be able to blossom, before my Exit. Always, remembering that the things that happen to us or the things we do, they are never really so important in the end.

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Publication Date: July 8, 2010
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Trafford Publishing
ISBN-10: 1426935870
ISBN-13: 9781426935879