

The Two Shadows of Success

Andrew Spriggs

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This authentic account of living with bipolar disorder is a testament to the fact that progress does not always come in a steady climb.

In *The Two Shadows of Success*, Andrew Spriggs aims to help those with bipolar affective disorder by presenting an unflinching account of his own experiences with the condition in a work that is sure to strike a chord.

At nineteen, Spriggs embarked on a gap year, working in a Paris hotel restaurant. His year was fraught with difficulties: finding a suitable place to live, dealing with an unfamiliar culture, finding friends, and getting along with coworkers and neighbors. With the help of friends and coworkers, he coped with those challenges and returned to England feeling confident and mature.

This picture of a young man dealing with the common challenges of living abroad becomes the baseline for understanding Spriggs after his mental breakdown. The narrative is organized to show the difference between a functioning and nonfunctioning individual, with early chapters setting up the contrast. Spriggs then exposes the inner workings of a manic-depressive person, relating in detail the swings in his moods and thoughts.

He describes an early psychotic episode at university, in which he believed he “could see who was evil and who was good.” He also describes his feelings of elation, thinking he was able to survive without sleep or food, followed by extreme fatigue. He talks openly about his hallucinations, including seeing people as objects, and his paranoia, feeling friends were conspiring against him. Rambling sentences and paragraphs reflect the confusion and chaotic pace of his actions and thoughts.

In other places, Spriggs uses figurative language to convey his condition, writing that everyday living “felt like climbing Mount Everest,” and that he started off to work “like a gibbering wreck.” Rhetorical questions become a means of revealing faulty thinking, and open discussions of suicidal tendencies, sexual identity issues, and damaging errors in judgment make the work authentic. Prose is straightforward and honest throughout.

The narrative is often interrupted to give advice to the audience, particularly those suffering from bipolar disorder themselves, and encourages others to learn from the author’s mistakes, to seek professional help, and to follow professional advice. Everyone needs help from friends and family, it asserts. The work is a testament to the fact that progress is not always a steady climb, but can be a trudge up and down hills. Failing and learning are the “shadows of success” referenced in the title.

The Two Shadows of Success is a work that assures those struggling with mental illness that “if we never fail, we never learn and then go onto succeed.”

GERALDINE RICHARDS (November 3, 2016)

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