me before you

by Jojo Moyes · Language: EN

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Overview

Jojo Moyes's "Me Before You" tells the poignant story of Louisa Clark, a quirky and directionless young woman from a working-class family, who finds herself unexpectedly employed as a caregiver for Will Traynor. Will is a wealthy, once-adventurous man who became a quadriplegic after a devastating motorcycle accident two years prior. Bitter, cynical, and deeply depressed, Will initially makes Louisa's job challenging, but her unwavering optimism and unique personality slowly begin to chip away at his hardened exterior.

Louisa soon discovers the true, heartbreaking reason for her employment: Will's parents have agreed to his plan to end his life at Dignitas, a Swiss organization for assisted suicide, in six months. Determined to show him that life is still worth living, Louisa embarks on a mission to inject joy and new experiences into Will's confined world. Their journey together, filled with unexpected adventures and profound conversations, blossoms into a deep, transformative love. However, despite their growing bond and Louisa's desperate efforts, Will remains steadfast in his decision, believing he cannot live a life without the independence and adventure he once cherished. The novel explores complex themes of love, sacrifice, personal autonomy, and the definition of a meaningful life, challenging readers to confront difficult ethical questions about the right to choose one's own end.

Key Takeaways

- Embrace new experiences and step outside your comfort zone, as they can lead to unexpected personal growth and profound connections.
- True love can mean supporting someone's difficult choices, even when those choices cause immense pain and heartbreak.
- The definition of a meaningful and fulfilling life is deeply personal and varies greatly for each individual.
- Don't let fear of the unknown or societal expectations prevent you from pursuing your own dreams and living life to the fullest.
- Sometimes, the greatest act of love is letting go and respecting another person's autonomy and their right to choose.
- Life's greatest challenges can lead to unexpected personal growth and profound connections, even in the face of tragedy.

Chapter Summaries

A New Beginning for Louisa

Louisa Clark, a vibrant but unmotivated young woman, loses her job at a local café. Desperate for work, she reluctantly accepts a position as a caregiver for Will Traynor, a wealthy, intelligent, and once-adventurous man who was paralyzed in an accident two years prior. Their initial meeting is tense, with Will being withdrawn and cynical, making Louisa question her suitability for the role.

Struggling to Connect

Louisa struggles to connect with the embittered Will, who is openly hostile and resistant to her attempts at cheerfulness. She learns about his past life as a successful and adventurous businessman, which only highlights the stark contrast with his current, confined existence. Despite the challenges, Louisa's quirky personality and genuine care slowly begin to break through Will's defenses, though he remains deeply depressed.

The Unveiling of a Secret

Louisa overhears Will's parents discussing his plan to end his life at Dignitas, a Swiss organization for assisted suicide, in six months. This revelation profoundly impacts Louisa, who realizes her true purpose is to show Will that life is still worth living. She begins to research and plan various outings and experiences, hoping to reignite his passion for life and change his mind.

A Deepening Bond

As Louisa plans more activities, from attending a classical concert to a horse race, she and Will gradually form a deep and unexpected bond. They share intimate conversations, and Will begins to open up about his frustrations and fears. Louisa's world expands through Will's intellect and experiences, while her warmth and humor bring moments of genuine joy back into his life.

Love and Lingering Hope

Their relationship blossoms into love, and Louisa takes Will on a beautiful tropical holiday. They share profound moments, and Louisa believes she has finally convinced him to choose life. However, despite their shared love and the happiness they find together, Will remains resolute in his decision to go to Dignitas, explaining that he cannot bear to live a life dependent on others.

The Unavoidable Choice

Louisa is heartbroken by Will's unwavering decision. She pleads with him, expressing her love and her belief that they can build a life together. Will, however, explains that his choice is not about her or their love, but about his inability to accept a life where he cannot be the man he once was, or the man he wants to be for her.

A Heartbreaking Farewell

Despite her profound grief and desperate hope, Louisa ultimately chooses to honor Will's wishes. She accompanies him to Switzerland, staying by his side until his final moments. It is an act of immense love and sacrifice, demonstrating her respect for his autonomy, even as it shatters her own world.

Life After Will

After Will's death, Louisa receives a posthumous letter from him, along with a significant sum of money. In the letter, Will encourages her to live her life to the fullest, to be brave, and to embrace new experiences. Louisa, profoundly changed by her time with Will, begins to follow his advice, starting with a trip to Paris, ready to embark on her own journey of self-discovery.

Themes

- Love and sacrifice
- Right to choose
- Quality of life
- Personal growth
- Embracing life

Frequently Asked Questions

What is me before you about?

"Me Before You" is about Louisa Clark, a young woman hired to care for Will Traynor, a wealthy quadriplegic man. Their relationship evolves as Louisa tries to convince Will that life is still worth living, while he grapples with his desire for assisted suicide and the profound impact his condition has had on his sense of self.

Is me before you worth reading?

Yes, it's a deeply emotional and thought-provoking novel that explores complex themes of love, loss, and the right to choose. It offers a poignant story of human connection and challenges readers to consider difficult ethical questions about life, death, and what truly constitutes a meaningful existence. It's a powerful and memorable read.

How does me before you end?

Spoiler: Will ultimately chooses to go through with assisted suicide at Dignitas in Switzerland, despite Louisa's love and desperate efforts to change his mind. Louisa accompanies him, honoring his final wish. He leaves her money and a heartfelt letter encouraging her to live her life to the fullest, to be brave, and to embrace new opportunities.

Who should read me before you?

Readers who enjoy emotional contemporary romance, stories about overcoming adversity, and those interested in exploring ethical dilemmas surrounding end-of-life choices. It's a good fit for fans of character-driven narratives that provoke thought and evoke strong emotions, and those who appreciate a blend of humor and tragedy.

How long does it take to read me before you?

On average, it takes approximately 6 to 7 hours to read "Me Before You." This estimate is based on an average reading speed of 250 words per minute and the book's typical length of around 368 pages, making it a manageable read for most.

Best Quotes

“Just live well. Just live.”

Epilogue

This is Will Traynor's final instruction to Louisa in his letter, urging her to embrace life fully after his death. It encapsulates the core message of the book: to seize opportunities and experience the world, rather than settling for a comfortable but unfulfilling existence. It's a powerful call to action for Lou.

“You only get one life. It's actually your duty to live it as fully as possible.”

Epilogue

Another profound statement from Will's posthumous letter to Louisa. He emphasizes the preciousness of life and the responsibility to make the most of it, encouraging her to break free from her small-town comfort zone and explore the world he can no longer experience. This line is central to his legacy.

“Some mistakes... just have greater consequences than others. But you don't have to let the mistake be the thing that defines you.”

Chapter 2

Louisa's father, Bernard Clark, offers this wisdom to her after she loses her job at the buttered bun. It's a comforting and empowering message, acknowledging her past struggles while encouraging her not to be limited by them. This advice helps set the stage for Lou's personal growth throughout the story.

“I don't want to be the man who just... is.”

Chapter 14

Will Traynor expresses his deep despair and rationale for wanting to end his life. He feels his current existence, confined to a wheelchair and dependent on others, is not truly living but merely existing. This line highlights his struggle with loss of autonomy and identity after his accident.

“I know this isn't a life. I know it's not even a half-life. This is an existence.”

Chapter 14

Will Traynor articulates his profound unhappiness with his quadriplegic condition. He differentiates his current state from what he considers a meaningful life, emphasizing his feeling of being trapped and unable to participate in the world as he once did. This statement underscores his determination to choose his own end.

“You are not a bad person, Clark. You are a good person, but you are a terrible waitress.”

Chapter 1

Mr. Traynor, Will's father, says this to Louisa when he first interviews her for the caregiver position. It's a humorous yet poignant observation of Lou's previous job performance, highlighting her endearing clumsiness and setting a lighthearted tone for their initial interactions. It also shows his perceptive nature.

“I just want to be a man who has been to a concert with a girl in a red dress.”

Chapter 20

Will says this to Louisa after she wears a striking red dress to a classical concert they attend. It reveals his desire for normal, romantic experiences, even small ones, despite his physical limitations. The red dress becomes a symbol of beauty, joy, and the fleeting moments of connection they share.

“I will never, ever regret the things I've done. Because most of them led me to you.”

Epilogue

This line from Will's letter to Louisa expresses his deep affection and gratitude for their time together. Despite his decision to end his life, he finds solace and meaning in the relationship they built, implying that meeting her was a profound and positive experience that he cherishes.

“Push yourself. Don't settle.”

Epilogue

Will Traynor's advice to Louisa in his final letter encourages her to step outside her comfort zone and pursue a life of adventure and fulfillment. He wants her to challenge herself, explore new

possibilities, and not be content with a mundane existence, reflecting his own adventurous spirit before his accident.

“I don't want to die. I just don't want to live like this.”

Chapter 14

Will Traynor explains his decision to pursue assisted suicide to Louisa. This quote clarifies that his desire isn't to cease existing, but to escape a life he finds unbearable due to his quadriplegia. It highlights the distinction between wanting to die and wanting to end suffering, central to the book's ethical debate.

“You're going to be okay, Clark. You just have to be brave.”

Epilogue

Will's reassuring words to Louisa in his final letter. He acknowledges the difficulty she will face after his death but expresses confidence in her strength and resilience. This line serves as both a comfort and a challenge, empowering her to navigate her future with courage and independence.

“You can't change who people are, Clark. You can only love them.”

Chapter 26

Katrina, Louisa's sister, offers this advice when Louisa is struggling with Will's unwavering decision to end his life. It's a poignant realization that love doesn't always mean changing someone's mind, but rather accepting their choices, even when they cause pain. It reflects the limits of influence and the nature of unconditional love.

“I don't want you to miss out on the things that other twenty-six-year-olds do.”

Chapter 26

Will says this to Louisa, explaining his desire for her to move on and live a full life after his death. He recognizes that their relationship, while meaningful, could also limit her future experiences and opportunities, and he wants her to embrace the adventures typical for someone her age.

Questions & Answers

What is Louisa Clark's initial job situation at the beginning of the book?

At the beginning of "Me Before You," Louisa Clark is twenty-six years old and has just lost her job at The Buttered Bun, a local café, which has closed down. This unexpected unemployment creates financial strain for her family, who are already struggling. Her lack of qualifications and experience makes finding new work difficult, leading her to take on the unusual role of a

caregiver for Will Traynor, a quadriplegic man.

Who is Will Traynor and what is his condition?

Will Traynor is a wealthy, intelligent, and adventurous young man who, two years prior to the start of the book, was involved in a motorcycle accident that left him a quadriplegic. He is paralyzed from the neck down, with limited movement in one hand. Before his accident, he led an active, high-flying life, and his current condition has left him deeply depressed, cynical, and determined to end his life through assisted suicide.

What is the main reason Louisa is hired to work for Will?

Louisa is primarily hired by Will's mother, Camilla Traynor, to provide companionship and lift Will's spirits, rather than just physical care. Camilla hopes that Louisa's cheerful and unconventional personality might help Will rediscover a reason to live and abandon his plan for assisted suicide. Louisa's lack of caregiving experience is overlooked in favor of her potential to positively influence Will's emotional state.

Describe the initial relationship between Louisa and Will.

Their initial relationship is fraught with tension and mutual dislike. Will is cynical, sarcastic, and resentful of his situation, often treating Louisa with disdain. Louisa, in turn, finds Will rude, difficult, and intimidating. She struggles to understand his needs and navigate his moods. However, as Louisa persists and Will observes her genuine kindness and unique personality, their dynamic slowly begins to soften and evolve into a deep friendship.

What is Dignitas and why is it significant in the story?

Dignitas is a Swiss non-profit organization that provides physician-assisted suicide to individuals with terminal illnesses or severe disabilities who wish to end their lives. It is significant in "Me Before You" because Will Traynor has made the decision to go to Dignitas in six months to end his life. This decision drives the central conflict of the story, as Louisa attempts to convince him to choose life instead.

How does Louisa try to change Will's mind about his decision?

Louisa embarks on a mission to show Will that life is still worth living. She plans various outings and experiences, including attending a classical concert, going to the races, visiting a castle, and taking a tropical vacation. She tries to reintroduce joy, adventure, and connection into his life, hoping to reignite his passion and convince him to abandon his plan to go to Dignitas.

What "bucket list" type activities do Louisa and Will undertake?

Louisa plans several activities to broaden Will's horizons and show him life's possibilities. These include attending a classical music concert, going to the horse races, visiting a historical castle, and taking a luxurious vacation to Mauritius. She also arranges for him to go scuba diving, an activity he once loved, demonstrating her commitment to helping him experience joy and

adventure again.

Who is Patrick and what is his role in Louisa's life?

Patrick is Louisa Clark's long-term boyfriend at the beginning of the book. He is a fitness enthusiast, obsessed with his training and often self-absorbed. His role in Louisa's life is initially one of stability and familiarity, but as Louisa's world expands through her experiences with Will, Patrick's narrow focus and lack of understanding for her new challenges cause a growing rift between them, ultimately leading to their breakup.

What is the significance of the red dress?

The red dress holds significant meaning in the story. Louisa wears it to a classical concert she attends with Will, a gift from him. It's a vibrant, elegant dress that makes her feel beautiful and confident, a stark contrast to her usual quirky, mismatched outfits. For Will, seeing Louisa in the red dress symbolizes a moment of shared beauty and normalcy, representing the kind of romantic experiences he longs for but can no longer have.

What is the central ethical dilemma explored in the book?

The central ethical dilemma is the conflict between an individual's right to choose their own death (autonomy) and the desire of loved ones to preserve that life, believing it still holds value. The book explores the complexities of assisted suicide, questioning whether it is ever justifiable to end one's life due to suffering, and the emotional toll it takes on those who care for the individual making such a choice.

How do Will's parents feel about his decision?

Will's parents, Camilla and Steven Traynor, are deeply conflicted and heartbroken by his decision to pursue assisted suicide. Camilla is desperate to find a way to make him want to live, which is why she hires Louisa. Steven, while equally devastated, eventually comes to accept Will's choice, understanding his son's desire for control and dignity, though it causes immense pain and tension within their family.

What does Will leave for Louisa in his will?

Will leaves Louisa a significant sum of money in his will, along with specific instructions for her to use it to pursue her dreams and live a full, adventurous life. He encourages her to travel, study, and experience the world, specifically mentioning a trip to Paris. This inheritance is his final gift, empowering her to break free from her small-town existence and embrace the opportunities he can no longer enjoy.

Spoiler: What is the ending of "Me Before You"?

Spoiler: Despite Louisa's efforts to show him the joys of life, Will ultimately goes through with his plan for assisted suicide at Dignitas in Switzerland. Louisa is with him during his final moments. After his death, Louisa receives a letter from Will, along with a substantial inheritance, instructing

her to use the money to "live boldly" and pursue her dreams, particularly by studying and traveling in Paris. The book ends with Louisa in Paris, beginning her new life.

What message does Will convey to Louisa in his final letter?

In his final letter, Will conveys a message of profound love, gratitude, and encouragement to Louisa. He thanks her for the joy she brought into his last months and urges her to "live boldly" and "push yourself. Don't settle." He leaves her money to facilitate her travels and studies, wanting her to experience the world he can no longer, emphasizing that she only gets one life and it's her duty to live it fully.

How does Louisa's life change after her time with Will?

Louisa's life changes dramatically after her time with Will. She is profoundly impacted by his death but also by his legacy. She breaks up with Patrick, leaves her small town, and uses the money Will left her to travel and pursue further education, starting with a trip to Paris. She becomes more confident, adventurous, and open to new experiences, fulfilling Will's wish for her to live a life beyond her comfort zone.

What does the title "Me Before You" signify?

The title "Me Before You" signifies the profound shift in Louisa's perspective and priorities, largely influenced by Will. Initially, her life revolved around her family's needs and her own comfortable, if unfulfilling, routine ("me"). However, her relationship with Will forces her to confront difficult choices and consider his desires and well-being ("you"), ultimately leading her to prioritize his autonomy, even when it means immense personal pain. It also implies Will putting Lou's future before his own desire to keep her.

What is the role of Nathan in Will's care?

Nathan is Will's primary medical caregiver and physiotherapist. He is a highly competent, compassionate, and professional individual who manages Will's complex medical needs, including his physical therapy, medication, and daily routines. Nathan provides a stable and reliable presence in Will's life, offering both practical support and emotional understanding, and often acts as a bridge between Will and his family.

How does the book explore themes of choice and autonomy?

The book deeply explores themes of choice and autonomy through Will's unwavering decision to end his life. It highlights an individual's right to make fundamental choices about their own body and existence, even when those choices are painful for others. Louisa's struggle to accept Will's decision underscores the tension between personal autonomy and the love and desires of those around you, forcing readers to consider the limits of influence and the nature of self-determination.

What impact does the book have on readers regarding disability and quality of life?

The book sparks significant discussion among readers about disability, quality of life, and the right to die. It challenges perceptions of what constitutes a "full" life and raises questions about societal attitudes towards severe disability. Many readers empathize with Will's struggle for dignity and control, while others debate the ethical implications of his choice, prompting reflection on personal values concerning life, suffering, and the definition of a meaningful existence.