

# **After You Study Guide**

## **After You by Jojo Moyes**

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# Plot Summary

The following version of this novel was used to create this study guide: Moyes, Jojo. *After You*. London: Penguin, 2015. Kindle AZW file.

*After You* picks up soon after *Me Before You* ended. *After You* opens with the protagonist, Louisa Clark, working in an airport in London. In the time since Will Traynor's suicide, she has bought a flat with her inheritance money from Will but has been stuck in an unfulfilling job at an Irish-themed bar.

One night after work, Louisa drinks a lot of wine and climbs up onto her apartment building's roof, while thinking about her grief over Will's death. She is startled by a girl's voice causing her to stumble and fall two stories down her building. Paramedics take Louisa to the hospital and her family comes to visit her. When she is discharged from the hospital, Louisa returns to her hometown of Stortford to live with her family. Once she is feeling better she decides to move back to London and her family agrees on the condition that she attends grief counseling sessions.

After a counseling session at the Moving On Circle, Louisa bumps into Sam, one of the paramedics who saved her life after she fell from the roof, and they start dating. Sam is there to pick up his nephew Jake, but both Louisa and the reader mistakenly assume that Sam is Jake's father. In the counseling sessions, Jake speaks about his father engaging in a series of casual sexual affairs as a result of his grief over Jake's mother's death. This leads Louisa to mistakenly think of Sam as a womanizer.

One night at her flat, Louisa is visited by a teenage girl named Lily Houghton-Miller who claims to be Will Traynor's daughter. Louisa visits Lily's family and discovers that her mother, Tanya, never told Will that he had a daughter. After seeing how selfish and unkind Lily's mother is, Louisa invites Lily to stay with her for a while. Louisa makes attempts to introduce Lily to Will's family while Lily's behavior becomes increasingly erratic. Lily arrives drunk in the middle of the night, borrows items of clothing with sentimental value from Louisa without asking, and invites strangers back to the flat for a party without Louisa's permission. When Louisa discovers that her grandmother's jewelry has been stolen, she kicks Lily out of the flat.

Meanwhile, Louisa confronts Sam about his womanizing behavior and discovers that he is Jake's uncle, not the man who Jake talks about in the counseling sessions. After this misunderstanding is cleared up, their relationship becomes more serious and Louisa worries that she is betraying Will. Louisa discovers that Lily has planted a garden for her on the roof of the building. Feeling guilty about their argument, Louisa visits Lily's family home in order to apologize, only to discover that Lily has gone missing.

In a chapter told from Lily's perspective, the reader discovers the explanation for Lily's erratic behavior: Lily is being blackmailed over a sexually explicit photograph. With Sam's help, Louisa finds Lily and she explains about the blackmail. Sam and Louisa help Lily by threatening the man who is blackmailing her and destroying the phone that



has the only copy of the photograph on it. Louisa is offered a job in New York but she turns it down in order to take care of Lily. Shortly afterwards, Will's mother, Mrs. Traynor, enrolls Lily in a new boarding school and Lily moves out of Louisa's flat.

Sam is shot in a gang-related incident in London and the prospect of his death makes Louisa realize how much she loves him. She is offered another job in New York that she plans to turn down in order to be with Sam, but Sam tells her that she has to take the job and that they can be in a long-distance relationship. In the final chapter, Louisa catches a flight to New York to begin her new life.



# Chapters 1 – 6

## Summary

After You deals with the aftermath of the assisted suicide of a man named Will Traynor in the earlier novel *Me Before You*.

In Chapter 1, the narrator – whose identity is not immediately revealed – is working at an Irish-themed bar in an airport. As she prepares to close the bar for the night she discovers a man hiding in the men's bathroom because he is scared of flying and cannot face the prospect of getting on his plane, even though he needs to attend an important meeting for his job. The narrator reassures him that there is nothing to be afraid of and that for many people flying is a daily activity. The man asks the narrator her name and she responds that it is Louisa: the narrator is Lou Clark, the protagonist from the first novel, *Me Before You*. Louisa convinces the man to catch his flight and then she goes home to her flat in London.

At home, Louisa drinks a lot of wine and climbs up on the roof terrace, mulling over her grief about the death of Will Traynor, the man she loved, who committed suicide at the end of the first novel. Louisa unexpectedly hears a girl's voice that causes her to stumble and fall off the roof.

In Chapter 2, Louisa wakes up in severe pain. She has fallen two stories. She asks the paramedic if she is paralyzed and he tells her that he thinks she will be ok. The paramedic is very kind and reassuring. Louisa's parents come to visit her in hospital while she recovers and she realizes that everyone believes she jumped off the roof to commit suicide. When Louisa is discharged from hospital she goes to stay in her parent's home in Stortfold.

In Chapter 3, Louisa recalled what had happened to her during the first nine months after Will's death. She had worked in a bar in Paris and travelled alone around Europe, before returning to England and buying a flat in London with the money she inherited from Will.

Back in the present day, Louisa realizes that her ex-fiancé Patrick is hanging around outside her house with his new girlfriend. Louisa confronts him and criticizes him for selling her story to the papers after Will's death. Louisa reads some newspaper coverage of Will's suicide and worries that she has done nothing with her life in the 18 months since he died. Louisa decides to move back to London.

In Chapter 4, Louisa begins attending grief counseling sessions in London, named The Moving On Circle. She meets the other group members, including a teenager named Jake who is upset that his dad is sleeping around so soon after his mum has died. Louisa does not feel comfortable sharing the real details of what happened to her and tells the group that the man who she is grieving for was named Bill.



Louisa returns to work at the airport where she meets her new manager, a critical and unpleasant man named Richard. She has to start wearing a garish costume that makes her look like an Irish dancer.

After another grief counseling session, Louisa speaks with Jake about the death of his mum. She meets a man who is picking Jake up from the counseling and he recognizes Louisa as the girl who fell off the roof. The man, Sam, was the paramedic who took her to hospital that night.

In Chapter 5, Louisa speaks on the phone with Nathan, a physiotherapist who also used to work for Will Traynor and who now lives in New York. Their call is interrupted by Louisa's doorbell ringing. Louisa opens the door and is confronted by a teenager named Lily Houghton-Miller who claims to be Will Traynor's daughter. Lily's mother had never told Will about Lily and the Houghton-Miller family had found out about Will's death when watching a TV program about assisted suicide. Lily googled Louisa and hunted her down so that she could find out more about her biological father.

In Chapter 6, Louisa attends another grief counseling session and Jake speaks about how upsetting he finds his father's behavior. Outside, Louisa speaks with Sam again, who is there to pick up Jake. Sam invites Louisa for a coffee and she tells him about Lily Houghton-Miller.

When she gets home, Louisa finds Lily drunk and slumped in front of her apartment building. Lily is being accosted by a man across the street so Louisa lets her come inside and stay the night.

## Analysis

The airport where Louisa works is a symbol for her having become stuck on the verge of beginning a new life. This theme is explored in Chapter One, during which Louisa coaches an anxious businessman into overcoming his fear of flying and taking the next leap in his career. Ironically, this is precisely what Louisa is unable to do in her own life.

In the first novel, Louisa's options in life were limited by her background and her financial dependence on her family. Although the inheritance she received from Will at the end of the first novel lifted the financial burden that stopped her from progressing with her life, at the start of *After You* Louisa is being held back by emotional burdens that keep her on the cusp of her new life rather than fully embracing it. This state of being on the cusp of a new kind of existence is symbolized by the airport itself, a location that is in between people's ordinary existence and the new location to which they are travelling. Over the course of the novel, Louisa must learn the lessons that she teaches the businessman in the opening chapter: it is normal to be afraid, but risks are worth taking if they move you closer towards changing your life and achieving your dreams.

Chapter 2 appears to offer a catalyst for the events of *After You* when Louisa falls from the roof and seriously injures herself. Because the first novel revolves around an



accident that led to Will Traynor being paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair, Louisa's accident in Chapter 2 leads the reader to suspect that she will be confined to a wheelchair in this novel, and that events from the first novel will repeat themselves. However, this is not the case and Louisa slowly recovers from her injuries and is still able to walk and work. The central theme of suicide from the first novel is less present in the sequel, but echoes throughout the narrative because of the suspicion of Louisa's friends and family that she deliberately jumped off the roof in an attempt to end her own life. However, the reader is always aware that this is not the case.

The author uses Chapter 3 to fill in the background details of everything that has occurred between the end of the first novel and the beginning of the second. The first novel ends on an optimistic note, with Louisa in Paris about to begin a new and exciting chapter in her life. Chapter 3 reveals that it was not so simple, and that Louisa needs to heal from her grief over Will's death before she can truly start a new life. At this stage in the novel it appears as if most of the narrative will take place in Louisa's home town of Stortfold, as was the case in the first novel. However, in the following chapter Louisa returns to London, which is where the story really begins to get going.

Chapter 4 introduces the Moving On Circle. Louisa's character arc in the novel involves her gradually overcoming her grief and beginning to take steps towards building a new life for herself in the aftermath of Will's death. Her progress in this goal throughout the novel is shown through her interactions with the Moving On Circle. In Chapter 4, Louisa is still too fragile to share even the most basic details of her bereavement – such as Will's name – with the group. Over time, she learns to open up. The group also provides the opportunity for Louisa to reconnect with Sam, the paramedic who saves her life after her fall, and the love interest in the novel. By juxtaposing Jake's discussion of his father's behavior with the introduction of Sam as a character, the author convinces the reader that Sam is Jake's father, meaning that the reader continues under the same misapprehension as Louisa.

Having provided the false catalyst of the fall in Chapter 2, the real catalyst for change in Louisa's life arrives in Chapter 5 in the figure of Lily Houghton-Miller. Lily behaves in ways that make her appear unsympathetic and untrustworthy to begin with, but her actions are explained in a chapter told from Lily's perspective later in the novel.

Louisa's two main concerns in the novel are Lily's welfare and her burgeoning romantic relationship with Sam. Chapter 6 marks two major turning points in both of these storylines, when Louisa spends time alone with Sam for the first time and allows Lily to spend the night in her apartment, beginning the two relationships that will have the most impact on her growth as a character during the course of the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Louisa working in an airport?



## Discussion Question 2

How has Louisa coped with Will's death during the time between the first and the second novel?

## Discussion Question 3

What role does the Moving On Circle play in the novel?

## Vocabulary

perspiration, intense, brace, convey, inclined, nonsensical, abruptly, detached, specimen, awning, giddy, aghast, reconcile, exuded, melancholy, hoarding, grubby, refuseniks, lieu, tautened





# Chapters 7 – 12

## Summary

In Chapter 7, Louisa insists that Lily must introduce her to her parents so that she can understand what is going on. Louisa meets Lily's mother Tanya, who is extremely angry with Lily for running away from boarding school. Tanya tells Louisa that Will Traynor was a bad person and that he did not deserve to know that he had a daughter. Lily asks Louisa if she can stay with her for a while and Louisa agrees. Back at the flat, Lily tells Louisa that she was there the night that Louisa fell off the roof.

In Chapter 8, Louisa takes Lily to Stortfold to meet the Clark family. Lily tells them Louisa did not jump off the roof. Back at the flat, Lily climbs up to the roof and criticizes Louisa for letting all her plants die. Lily says that she wants to meet Will's parents.

In Chapter 9, Louisa takes Lily to meet Mr. Traynor, Will's father. He had remarried and is expecting a baby with his second wife. Initially he is very warm and welcoming towards Lily but when she asks if she can come to stay with them he says it is a bad time because his wife is pregnant, and Lily is very angry and upset.

In Chapter 10, Lily behaves erratically, sometimes arriving at the flat drunk in the middle of the night and sometimes lying on the sofa all day. Louisa agrees to give her a key so that she does not wake her up when she wants to come in.

Sam comes to the flat and asks Louisa on a date. He takes her to the site where he is building his own house in the countryside. Louisa worries that he is just trying to sleep with her, because of what Jake has said in the grief counseling sessions.

In Chapter 11, Louisa attends another grief counseling session and is disappointed that Jake is not there because it means she will not bump into Sam afterwards. Louisa asks Lily to help her paint the flat in more cheerful colors and they agree to contact Will's mother, Mrs. Traynor. Lily takes Louisa out dancing in a nightclub and they get a ride home in Sam's ambulance after bumping into him on a shift.

In Chapter 12, Louisa takes Lily around all of the places she used to go with Will during the first novel. On the way back to London Louisa's car breaks down and the two of them sit on the embankment waiting for a mechanic. Lily tells her that when her mum married her stepfather and had two sons they sent her away to boarding school and she felt like they did not want her to be part of their family.

## Analysis

It appears throughout the first novel, and to a lesser extent in the second novel, that Louisa's dependence on her family is holding her back from living her life to its fullest



potential. In Chapter 7, the contrast between Louisa's family background and Lily's family background gives a different perspective on the nature of family.

On the surface, the most obvious difference between the Clark family and the Houghton-Miller family is wealth. The sleek, expensive interior of the Houghton-Miller household, as described in Chapter 7, is contrasted with the cramped living conditions of the Clark household in Chapter 8, where the space around the dining table is so cramped that everyone would have to stand up and move if one person wanted to go to the bathroom. However, the Houghton-Miller's advantages in terms of their financial situation do not lead to them being a happier family. Throughout the novel, wealth is associated with selfishness and narcissism, most clearly through the character of Tanya Houghton-Miller who is critical and unloving towards her daughter Lily and shows no remorse over never telling Will that he had a daughter. This is contrasted with the automatic warmth and generosity extended to Lily when she meets the working class Clark family, who immediately extend all the hospitality they have available to them when she comes to visit (although this only amounts to a share of their roast chicken).

This contrast between the behavior of the rich and the behavior of the working class is continued in Chapter 9 when Louisa takes Lily to visit Will's father, Mr. Traynor. Although he clearly feels warmth and an emotional bond towards Lily, he does not extend to her the same kind of hospitality and generosity that is extended to Lily at the Clark household, even though he has so many more resources available to him to do so.

The Moving On Circle serves as a story device to let the reader know where Louisa is on her journey to recovering from her grief. In Chapter 11, Louisa is more focused on Jake's whereabouts and whether she might bump into Sam than she is on her bereavement over Will, showing that she is beginning to move on from his death.

When Lily takes Louisa out dancing, she reverses the roles played by Louisa and Will in the first novel. It was Louisa's job in the first novel to get Will out into the wider world again after his accident and try to get him to take joy in being alive. In *After You*, it is Lily who gradually helps Louisa start enjoying her life again by taking her out to have more fun and be more lighthearted.

Lily's revelations about feeling unwanted in Chapter 12 sets up Louisa's decision to turn down opportunities later in the novel in order to be present for Lily.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Lily want to get to know Louisa?

## Discussion Question 2

What is Lily's relationship with her family like? How does Lily's relationship with her family impact the way Louisa feels about her?



## Discussion Question 3

In what ways are Lily and Louisa's families different?

## Vocabulary

hauling, gurning, expat, weary, squawked, concourse, prematurely, bonhomie, equanimity, interlude, inclined, hindsight, enigmatic, contemplate, snorted, endowed, dingy, anticipated, concoction, exasperated

# Chapters 13 – 18

## Summary

In Chapter 13, Sam visits Louisa in the airport bar and asks her to come to dinner at his place later that night. After dinner, they have sex. Louisa worries that she is becoming one of the many obsessive and crazy women that Sam has casual sex with, whom Jake speaks about in the counseling sessions. Louisa asks him to take her home. When they get back to the flat they discover Lily playing loud music and trying on lots of Louisa's clothes. Louisa becomes very angry and upset when she sees Lily wearing a pair of black and yellow striped tights which had been a gift from Will.

In Chapter 14, Louisa attends another session of the Moving On Circle and Jake says that he thinks his dad is finally thinking seriously about a relationship with one of the women he's sleeping with. Louisa realizes that Jake is talking about another woman, not her. When she sees Sam outside she yells at him and storms off. Lily and Louisa go to visit Mrs. Traynor. Mrs. Traynor is very distracted and confused by their visit and Lily angrily storms off, assuming that she does not want to get to know her.

In Chapter 15, Louisa goes to Stortfold and discovers that her mother has been taking classes in feminism and has stopped cooking Sunday lunch for the family and no longer shaves her legs. Louisa's Dad is really annoyed about it. Louisa's sister Treena complains that she needs to move to London for her career but she cannot because the childcare costs for her son Thom would be too high.

Louisa returns to London and discovers Lily and a group of stoned teenagers in her flat. Louisa kicks out the others and realizes that her grandmother's jewelry is missing. She tells Lily that her friends stole her jewelry and asks Lily to get out of the flat, giving her the money to take a taxi back to her mother's. Louisa tells Lily to give back the key to the flat.

In Chapter 16, Nathan calls and asks Louisa to apply for a job working with the family he is employed by in New York. At the Moving On Circle, Louisa finally admits that she has been lying about the details of her bereavement and tells the group Will's real name. At the airport, Louisa conducts a job interview via Skype with Leonard Gopnik, her potential employer in New York. Back in the flat, Louisa discovers that Lily has secretly planted a beautiful garden for her on the roof.

In Chapter 17, Louisa tries to get in touch with Lily, but Lily will not reply. Sam tries to find out why Louisa is angry with him and she discovers that Sam is Jake's uncle, not his father. All of the stories she has heard from Jake were about another man, not Sam. Sam comes inside the flat and spends the night. They spend the next few days together when they are not at work. Louisa tells Sam that she is worried that Lily is angry with her and he suggests they go to Tanya Houghton-Miller's house and ask to speak to Lily.



When they arrive, Tanya tells them that Lily isn't there and that she assumed she was with Louisa.

In Chapter 18, Tanya refuses to call the police because Lily goes missing all the time. Sam and Louisa drive around London looking for Lily but they do not find any sign of her. Louisa gets an email from Nathan telling her that she got the job in New York.

## Analysis

When Sam and Louisa first have sex in Chapter 13, unbeknownst to Louisa, the opposite of what she thinks is happening is what is really happening. At this stage, Louisa is still under the mistaken impression that Sam is Jake's father. As a result of this, she views his behavior in the light of what Jake says about his dad during the counselling sessions at the Moving On Circle.

Louisa believes that as a result of Sam's bereavement over the death of the woman he loved, he has been sleeping around with a lot of people despite it making him feel terrible about himself. She also believes that after sleeping with these women, Sam breaks up with them or refuses to communicate with them, leaving the women hurt and confused. Ironically, in reality, it is Louisa who is really engaging in this destructive behavior. In Chapter 1, she receives a message from a man named Jared who she hooked up with prior to the beginning of the novel, but she ignores the message and does not contact him again. Later, she reflects on a series of hookups she engaged in after Will's death which "had been fueled by alcohol and ended with a taxi and tears of self-loathing in the shower" (136). Despite Louisa's fear in Chapter 13 that Sam has not recovered from his grief and will close down emotionally now that they have had sex, it is actually Louisa who behaves in this way towards Sam, immediately deciding to go home after they have slept together and becoming distant with him, telling him their time together had been "nice" (179).

Louisa's reaction to seeing Lily wearing the tights Will had given her in the first novel shows that she still has a long way to go before she has truly recovered from her grief over his death.

Although the reader is not yet aware that Louisa is incorrect in her assumption that Sam is Jake's father, the comparison between Louisa's behavior and Jake's real father's behavior continues during the Moving On Circle session in Chapter 14. Jake announces that, after a series of regrettable and upsetting one-night-stands, his father seems to be considering a serious relationship with one of the women he has slept with, just as Louisa is beginning to consider starting a serious relationship with Sam after her string of drunken hookups. However, because she is still under the misapprehension that Jake is talking about Sam, this session causes the first serious hurdle in the progression of the novel's central romantic relationship. At this stage, the reader is as disappointed in Sam's behavior as Louisa is, as the fact that he is Jake's uncle has not yet been revealed.



Throughout the novel Louisa is held back from fulfilling her potential because of her grief. Chapter 15 hints at some of the ways other characters are being held back in their own lives, including the difficulties of being a housewife (Louisa's mum Josie) and a single mother (her sister Treena).

Chapter 16, introduces the possibility that Louisa could go to live and work in New York, establishing the central conflict for the rest of the novel. Will Louisa prioritize her career and her ambitions to travel the world, or her burgeoning relationships with Lily and Sam? This conflict is immediately brought to the fore in Chapter 17, when Louisa realizes that Lily is missing and that she is the only one who cares about her welfare. Feeling that there is no one else who will take responsibility for this situation, Louisa prioritizes Lily's safety over her dreams of going to New York.

## Discussion Question 1

What are the biggest complications in Louisa's burgeoning relationship with Sam?

## Discussion Question 2

Is Louisa justified in kicking Lily out of her flat? How does your opinion change about this as the novel progresses?

## Discussion Question 3

What role does Louisa's mother play in the novel?

## Vocabulary

exclamatory, muted, flattered, gulping, subsequently, spluttered, sheepishly, seeping, gracious, umbilical, indignation, legacy, reflexive, ceasing, terracotta, lurched, fumbling, immaculate, truanting, manipulator



# Chapters 19 – 24

## Summary

Chapter 19 is told from the perspective of Lily and explains her behavior over the course of the novel so far. Earlier that year, a boy at a party had taken a photograph of Lily giving him a blowjob while she was drunk and had been threatening to put the picture on Facebook if she did not give him money. After she ran out of money, Lily started stealing jewelry from her mum and from Louisa to give him instead. One day a colleague of her stepfather, Mr. Garside, saw her with the boy who was blackmailing her. Mr. Garside gave the boy some money for the phone and took Lily to a hotel. He came to see her the next morning and said that she owed him sexual favors in return for his help. Lily ran away.

In Chapter 20, Sam finds Lily taking shelter in a hospital emergency department and calls Louisa who comes to collect her. Louisa and Lily hug.

In Chapter 21, Louisa shares her own experiences with sexual assault when she was a teenager, and Lily confides everything that has happened to her. Louisa and Sam concoct a plan to convince Mr. Garside that Sam is going to kill him and cover up his murder by using drugs he has access to as a paramedic. Terrified, Mr. Garside hands over the phone and Sam destroys it. Later, Sam admits to Louisa that there are no drugs that can be used to cover up murder and he had made the whole thing up.

In Chapter 22, Lily receives a photograph album full of pictures of Will that Mrs. Traynor has made for her. Louisa emails Mr. Gopnik and Nathan to turn down the job offer in New York because she feels she needs to stay in London to take care of Lily.

In Chapter 23, Louisa is fired from her job at the airport bar and she tells her boss Richard that she thinks he is a bad person who treats his staff poorly. Richard admits that she is right and apologizes to her. He says he would offer her the job back, but that she should do something more with her life. Louisa says that she would like to have her job back anyway and Richard agrees to re-hire her. Louisa's mum comes to visit her in London, even though she does not usually go anywhere by herself.

In Chapter 24, Louisa takes Lily to have lunch with Mrs. Traynor who apologizes for the way she behaved at their first meeting, saying she was too bereaved to process what was going on. Mrs. Traynor invites Lily to come to stay with her and Lily agrees. Louisa goes to see Sam at the building site and he tells her that it is time for her to move on after Will's death.

## Analysis

Chapter 19 is a break in the narrative of the novel as the reader is temporarily shown events from Lily's perspective instead of Louisa's perspective. The sense that Lily has



been mistreated by people around her has been evident throughout the novel, but the reader's sympathy for her character has been diluted by some of her behavior towards Louisa, especially: showing up at her flat drunk in the middle of the night, not showing respect for Louisa's property, and allowing strangers into the flat who had apparently stolen jewelry of big sentimental value to Louisa.

Chapter 19 gives the explanation for all of Lily's behavior and makes her isolation from the adults in her life and everyone who might be able to help her even more heartbreaking. Although the reader initially sympathizes with Louisa's decision to kick Lily out of the flat, this chapter shows how what an unfair and distressing thing that was to happen to Lily on top of everything else that she has been going through.

In Chapter 21, Louisa and Lily grow closer by discussing the details of both of their experiences with sexual assault. This echoes a moment in the earlier novel, where Louisa's growing closeness with Will Traynor is symbolized by her willingness to discuss what had happened in her past which made her doubt her own potential and try to limit her life in order to feel safe.

Chapter 21 also features a break in the narrative style of the novel, when three of the main characters hatch a plot to convince Mr. Garside that they are going to murder him and cover up the crime. In what is otherwise a very realistic and relationship-driven story, this sudden tangent into events more suited to a crime, thriller, or conspiracy novel is an unexpected twist in the tone of the narrative which is somewhat implausible and hard to take seriously.

Louisa has been so focused on Lily and her obligation to help her because of her connection to Will that she has become blinded to other possibilities. Throughout the novel, Louisa turns down opportunities to move on from Will's death in favor of staying in a world that is permanently defined by her relationship with him. In Chapter 22, she turns down the job offer in New York without investigating any other possibilities for how Lily could be taken care of. Then, when she is fired from her miserable job in the airport bar, and rather than take it as a sign that it is time to move on, Louisa convinces Richard to hire her again. The switch in the relationship between Richard and Louisa is darkly comic: just as he admits what a talented and valuable employee she is and tells her that she should be doing more with her life, Louisa has reached a point where she wishes to stay stuck in the crummy job at the airport rather than face the risks of moving on to a new and scary phase.

## Discussion Question 1

What effect does the chapter told from Lily's perspective have on your understanding of her character?

## Discussion Question 2

What role does Tanya Houghton-Miller play in the novel?





## Discussion Question 3

How does Louisa's life experience help her to help Lily?

## Vocabulary

glances, exeat, nonchalantly, squealed, fleetingly, ominous, metropolis, concurrent, invalid, triumphantly, requisite, empathetic, irrational, ensconced, undertow, briskly, furrowed, dismissive, neglectful, elaborate



# Chapters 25 – 30

## Summary

In Chapter 25, Louisa reflects that her reluctance to move ahead with her relationship with Sam is based on her fear that love inevitably leads to loss, as it did with Will. Lily gets a job at the grocery store across from the flat. Louisa's parents have an argument because her mum did not have time to make a homemade cake for her grandad's birthday.

Lily announces that Mrs. Traynor is paying for her to go back to boarding school and that Lily will be living with her at weekends, only visiting Louisa during the school vacation. Louisa emails Mr. Gopnik to explain why she had to turn down the job and asks him to keep her in mind if any other vacancies arise.

Louisa's mum, dad, sister, and nephew all arrive at her flat. Her parents have had a big fight about her mum's burgeoning feminism. Louisa leaves them to argue amongst themselves and goes to find Sam at work. She gets into his ambulance along with his colleague Donna in order to apologize for being so distant with him.

In Chapter 26, Sam and Donna are called to attend to a victim of a gang shooting while Louisa is still in the ambulance. While trying to find the injured boy, Sam is shot. Donna and Louisa haul Sam into the back of the ambulance and Louisa tries to stem the blood loss while Donna drives them back to the hospital. Faced with the possibility of his death, Louisa realizes how much Sam means to her.

In Chapter 27, Louisa's family arrives at the hospital to be with her while she waits for news about Sam. Donna comes to tell her that he is going to survive. Louisa visits Sam in the hospital. He is pleased to see her and tells her that he heard everything she said to him in the ambulance. Louisa realizes that her help and support helped to bring him back from the brink of death.

In Chapter 28, Louisa tells the Moving On Circle that she does not think she needs anymore counseling, but that she will keep attending until the end of the course. She visits Sam in hospital and gets a call from Mr. Gopnik who offers her another job in New York. She tells Sam she is going to turn it down, but Sam insists that she should take the job and that he would be willing to try a long-distance relationship with her. Louisa can not decide whether Sam or the job in New York is more important to her.

In Chapter 29, the author leads the reader to believe that Sam and Louisa are getting married, but they are actually at a ceremony for the end of the Moving On Circle being held on Louisa's rooftop. Louisa's dad reveals he has had his legs waxed as an apology to her mum and her parents reconcile. All of the characters from the circle are there, as well as all of Louisa and Will Traynor's families. Lily speaks about her dad, and all of the



bereaved characters release white balloons into the air. Louisa's sister Treena and her son move into Louisa's flat.

In Chapter 30, Louisa says goodbye to her parents and to Richard at the airport bar. Sam comes to say goodbye. Louisa tells him she loves him and leaves to catch her flight to New York.

## Analysis

Louisa's reflection, in Chapter 25, that love is not worth the risk of loss sets up Sam's near-death experience in the following chapters. Louisa fears that the potential for loss means that love is not worthwhile, but later discovers that facing losing someone having turned down the chance to love them is just as scary and heartbreaking. Continuing with the novel's suggestions that working class people are morally superior and more emotionally balanced than wealthy people, Lily's recovery from her traumatic experiences is symbolized by her getting an extremely low-paid job at the grocery store across the street from Louisa's flat in Chapter 25.

Having given up her dream of moving to New York in order to care for Lily, Louisa's duty of care for the teenager is immediately removed by Mrs. Traynor who pays for a new boarding school for Lily and offers to let her live with her at weekends in Chapter 25. Having turned down the job and grown distant from Sam for the sake of taking care of Lily, Louisa now has nothing left in her life to devote herself to.

The subplot of the novel involving Louisa's mother Josie and her growing interest in feminism reflects the limitations that Louisa is placing on her own life. In her older years, Josie is starting to reflect on the kind of life she has led and the opportunities for independence and intellectual growth that she has missed out on by dedicating all of her time and energy to caring for her family, and taking no time for her own development. This issue has been growing throughout the novel, but comes to a head in the final chapters when Josie uncharacteristically visits Louisa in London on her own, when she would previously never have gone anywhere without Louisa's father. Josie's fate shows Louisa what could happen to Louisa if she continues to prioritize caring for other people (such as Lily and Sam) over her own growth, goals, and ambitions.

Chapter 26 is another break in the style of the novel when Sam, Louisa, and Donna become caught up in a gang shooting in London. The impropriety of allowing Louisa to ride in the ambulance when the paramedics are on duty is briefly referred to throughout the novel, but not to the extent that it ever really makes Sam and Donna's behavior in these situations seem realistic or believable. The real purpose of this chapter is to allow Louisa to have a hand in saving Sam's life, which helps to finally heal the wounds of being unable to prevent Will's suicide at the end of the first novel.

When Sam tells Louisa that he could hear her speaking to him when he was bleeding out, in Chapter 27, it allows Louisa to believe that Sam felt that their relationship was something worth holding onto life for. This is the opposite of the conclusion of the



relationship between Louisa and Will in the first novel, and helps Louisa to let go of her feelings of rejection and instead embrace her newfound love with Sam.

In Chapter 30, the novel ends where it began, back in the airport bar. The author avoids the need to have Louisa choose between her career or love by having Sam suggest a long distance relationship. Like the novel, Louisa as a character has also come full circle. From being on the brink of taking an adventure but unable to move past the symbolic cusp of the airport, Louisa is now ready to embrace her new dreams and her new career in New York: a city that, not coincidentally, has “new” in its name, symbolizing all of the new adventures that Louisa will pursue in the future.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Louisa turn down the job in New York?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What role does Donna play in the novel?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What effect does Sam's injury have on Louisa's attitude to life?

## **Vocabulary**

brutal, imprint, gazebo, succession, loomed, eerily, catcalling, flickered, intermittently, concourse, moulded, linoleum, abruptly, unleashing, strained, mouldering, microclimate, periodically, sluicing, objectification



# Characters

## Louisa Clark

Louisa Clark is the central character/protagonist. In the first novel, *Me Before You*, Louisa met and fell in love with a paralyzed man named Will Traynor. Although Louisa's job in the first novel was to care for Will and help to get him out and about in the world again after his accident, their relationship ended up being more mutual than this, and Will widened Louisa's horizons which had been limited in the past by her family's working class background. At the end of the first novel, Will committed suicide, leaving Louisa feeling that their relationship had not provided enough meaning in his life to convince him to carry on living. Will also left Louisa a large inheritance which freed her from the financial restrictions of her background.

Louisa's growth in *After You* is brought about by her romantic relationship with Sam the paramedic and her surrogate parental relationship with Lily Houghton-Miller, Will Traynor's long lost daughter. With Sam, Louisa must allow herself to begin a new romantic relationship without feeling guilt over whether this means that she is betraying Will. Louisa's relationship with Lily is a mirror of her relationship with Will in the first novel. Although, on the surface, Louisa's role is to take care of both Will and Lily in each novel, in reality it is these characters who help Louisa to grow and take new risks in her life. Lily encourages Louisa to decorate her flat so that it is a more cheerful place to live, plants a roof garden for her, takes her out dancing, and encourages her relationship with Sam. When Louisa helps Sam recover from a life-threatening incident, it heals the wounds left by Will's suicide, by convincing her that Sam feels their relationship is something worth living for.

In *After You*, Louisa has made progress in some areas of her life that were problems in the first novel, but not in others. She has finally moved out of her family's home in Stortford, but she remains stuck in a dead-end job working in an Irish-themed bar in an airport. The airport symbolizes where Louisa is in her life: on the cusp of going somewhere new, but not quite there yet. At the end of the novel, Louisa passes through the literal and symbolic gateway of the airport in order to begin her new life in New York. At the start of the novel, Louisa falls two stories from the roof of her apartment building, leading to multiple serious injuries. These injuries are an external symbol of the internal injuries caused by Will's suicide. As Louisa's body slowly heals from the injuries sustained during her fall, she also recovers from the psychological injuries caused by her grief over Will's death.

## Lily Houghton-Miller

Lily Houghton-Miller is Will Traynor's daughter. Lily's mother, Tanya Houghton-Miller, never told Will that he had a daughter and he committed suicide without ever having known about Lily. Lily tracks down Louisa after discovering her father's identity while



watching a TV documentary about assisted suicide with her mother. Lily has a highly unstable family background which leads her to act-out and misbehave. Her mother is selfish and uncaring, which leads to Lily requesting to move in with Louisa. Lily fills a hole in Louisa's life which was left when Will died.

Initially, Lily is painted as an unsympathetic character: she is frequently drunk, rude, and unresponsive to Louisa's attempts to get to know her. Later, through a chapter told from Lily's perspective, the reader gets a deeper understanding of her character and behavior through the discovery that she is being blackmailed over a sexually explicit photograph. Once Louisa and Sam help to solve the situation with the photograph, Lily is able to move on from these upsetting events and get her life back on track.

## Sam

Sam is a paramedic who takes Louisa to hospital after she falls off the roof. He is also the love interest in the novel. Sam and Louisa reconnect when Sam comes to pick up his nephew Jake from the Moving On Circle grief counseling sessions, which Louisa also attends. A central misunderstanding occurs early on in their relationship when Louisa (and the reader) mistakenly assumes that Sam is Jake's father, when he is in fact his uncle. This leads Louisa to believe that Jake's description of his dad as a womanizer applies to Sam, making her unjustifiably suspicious of him.

After this initial misunderstanding, the other problem in their relationship is Louisa's struggle to move on from her grief over Will's death. It takes the possibility of Sam dying as well – after being shot in a gang incident while he is at work – to make Louisa realize how much he means to her. Although Louisa chooses to move to New York at the end of the novel rather than stay in London with Sam, the couple agrees to try a long distance relationship.

## Jake

Jake is a teenage member of the Moving On Circle and Sam's nephew. Jake unwittingly causes problems in the burgeoning relationship between Louisa and Sam through the details he shares about his dad's sex life. After the death of Jake's mum, Jake's dad has a series of casual affairs which Jake discusses in the counseling sessions. Believing that Sam is Jake's dad, Louisa suspects that she is just another one in a series of meaningless sexual encounters for Sam, rather than someone who he truly cares about.

## Josie Clark

Josie Clark is Louisa's mother. Josie undergoes a significant change of character during the course of the novel after her discovery of feminism. She stops removing her body hair and starts to question why she has devoted all of her life to caring for others instead of pursuing her own interests and passions. Josie gains a lot of confidence after her



discovery of feminism and begins to behave in a more independent way, doing things like traveling to London alone which she would never have done in the past. Josie's old life as someone who sacrificed everything for the sake of caring for others, serves as a warning to Louisa not to abandon her own dreams for the sake of Lily and Sam.

## **Bernard Clark**

Bernard Clark is Louisa's father. He becomes angry and frustrated by his wife, Josie Clark's, growing interest in feminism. Initially, it appears as if he is just angry because he is used to Josie taking care of all the cooking and housework, but he later confesses to Louisa that he fears her growth will mean that she leaves him behind. This reflects the novel's theme of pushing out of the comfort zone. Bernard signals his acceptance of his wife's new lifestyle by getting his legs waxed and telling Josie she need not do it anymore because he now understands how painful it is.

## **Treena Clark**

Treena Clark is a single mother, trainee accountant, and Louisa's sister. Through observing her sister's life circumstances, Louisa comes to understand how many options are open to her in her own life and that she is the one getting in her own way. Treena cannot afford to move to London to further her career because the childcare costs would be too high. When Louisa moves to New York at the end of the novel, she gives her flat in London to Treena, allowing both sisters to pursue their dreams.

## **Tanya Houghton-Miller**

Tanya Houghton-Miller is Lily's mother. She refused to tell Will Traynor that he had a daughter because she felt his treatment of her had been so poor that he did not deserve to know about her. Tanya is depicted as self-absorbed, selfish, and unkind. Her lack of interest in Lily's welfare is Louisa's primary motivation for becoming so involved in Lily's life, alongside the sense of obligation that she feels towards Will.

## **Mr. and Mrs. Traynor**

Mr. and Mrs. Traynor are Will Traynor's parents, who have divorced since their son's suicide. Louisa contacts them both during the novel to arrange for them to meet Lily. Each responds in opposite ways: Mr. Traynor is initially overjoyed to meet Lily, but quickly backs off when Lily suggests practical ways that they might become a part of each other's lives. Mrs. Traynor is initially too overcome with grief and confusion to properly engage with Lily, but later takes an active role in her life, organizing for her to return to boarding school and having Lily live with her at weekends.



## Richard

Richard is Louisa's boss at the airport bar. His treatment of Louisa makes her hate her job but, ironically, this has a positive effect because it helps her realize that she does not want to be stuck working in that kind of job for the rest of her life. After Louisa loudly criticizes him for his behavior, Richard apologizes and admits that Louisa is right about him, eventually improving the way he treats his staff at the bar.

## Donna

Donna is a paramedic who works in the same ambulance as Sam. She is a comic figure, who encourages Louisa to do everything she can to ensure that her relationship with Sam works out well. Donna assists Sam and Louisa in their attempt to solve Lily's blackmailing crisis and helps to save Sam's life after he is shot by a gang member.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Airport

The airport where Louisa works is symbolic of her inability to move on to the next phase of her life, instead being stuck on the cusp of a new adventure. People arrive at the airport in order to travel to a new destination and Louisa is on her way to a new part of her life. However, her grief over Will's death keeps her trapped on the cusp of the next phase of her life, afraid to take the step of actually traveling into her new future. Like the businessman who is afraid of flying, Louisa is afraid of moving on to her new independent life. Louisa must pass through the symbolic and literal gateway of the airport before she begins her new life in New York.

## White Balloons

The white balloons are used as a part of the Moving On Circle's release ceremony which they complete at the end of their grief counselling course. Each member of the circle (as well as Lily, who is releasing her grief over the death of the father she never knew) speaks a few words about their grief before letting go of the balloon and allowing it to fly away into the sky, symbolizing their desire to let go of their bereavement and move on with their futures.

## Falling From the Roof

When Louisa falls from the roof, it is symbolic of the upheaval caused in her life by Will's suicide. Like the physical injuries that she sustains through her fall, Louisa has psychological injuries caused by her grief. Louisa's bruises, her limp, and the pain in her hip are reminders of both the physical and emotional injuries she has yet to fully heal from. Sam is the key to helping Louisa recover from both of her injuries. He literally rescues her after her fall from the roof, through his job as a paramedic, and his love for her and desire to be in a relationship with her helps to heal the emotional wounds caused by Will's suicide.

## Gardening

Gardening is symbolic of Lily's potential to do great things if only she was well taken care of by the adults around her. Although Lily appears to have no interests other than drinking, partying, and taking drugs it is later revealed that she has a passion for gardening when Louisa discovers that Lily has re-planted her roof garden for her. Lily is being held back in life by her neglectful family and the men who blackmail her. The positive and beautiful things Lily creates when she gardens hint at a better future for her. Gardening also ties Lily to Mrs. Traynor as they bond over planting a new garden for one of Mrs. Traynor's neighbors.



## Lily's Mobile Phone

Lily's mobile phone is symbolic of all that is hidden in Lily's life, and Louisa's inability to help Lily until she understands the teenager's life in greater detail. Through her phone, Lily is sent constant reminders of the sexually explicit photograph that Peter uses to blackmail her. For Lily, her phone comes to symbolize a traumatic incident from her past from that she cannot escape. When Sam destroys the phone after recovering it from Mr. Garside, this is a symbolic destruction of Lily's past, allowing her to begin again and construct a new life with happier prospects for the future.

## Sunday Lunch

Sunday Lunch is symbolic of the traditional gender relations in the Clark family. Each Sunday, they come together to have lunch, but it is always Josie who is expected to make the meal. When Josie starts participating in a class on Sunday afternoon instead of cooking lunch for the family, Bernard experiences it as a betrayal. He feels that the years he has spent working to provide money for the family should be repaid by Josie continuing to do things like cook the Sunday lunch. However both Louisa and Treena feel that Bernard could just as easily cook the lunch himself and that it is unreasonable of him to expect Josie to do everything.

## Leg Waxing

When Josie stops removing her body hair it is symbolic of her growing interest in feminism and her lessening desire to conform to gender expectations for women, wives, and mothers. Bernard is initially affronted by Josie's refusal to carry on shaving her legs but, as he comes to better understand her reasons for embracing feminism later in life, he seeks way to let her know that he supports her. He does this by having his own legs waxed, telling Josie that if he'd known how painful it was he would never have complained about her not wanting to do it anymore.

## Building Site

The site where Sam is building his own house is symbolic of the new beginnings that all of the characters in the novel are searching for. Lily is searching for a new family, Louisa is searching for a new phase in life, and the members of the Moving On Circle are searching for a future without their lost loved ones. Sam is building a physical new beginning through the form of his house, which does not yet exist when Louisa first visits the site. They bond over imagining what the house will look like in the future, which is symbolic of the relationship they are beginning, and the future that they may end up building together.



## **New York**

New York is symbolic of adventure and a new start for Louisa. Like Paris and London, New York has a reputation as an exciting city where young people flock in order to come of age and really begin their lives. Why exactly Louisa feels that New York will be any more enjoyable or inspiring than the time she spent in Paris and London is never made clear in the novel. Nevertheless, the job in New York remains the novel's symbol of Louisa's future, and when she turns it down in order to care for Lily it represents her reluctance to move on from her past.

## **Bumble Bee Tights**

Louisa's bumble bee tights are symbolic of her relationship with Will Traynor, as he gave her them as a gift in the first novel. In the first novel, the tights symbolized the fact that Louisa had become a new person since meeting Will. In the second novel, the tights are a symbol of Louisa's unwillingness to move on after Will's death. Louisa is so upset when she sees Lily wearing the tights that she pushes Lily and Sam away, backing off from the relationships in the novel that are helping her grow into a new person. Louisa's reconciliation with Lily begins when Lily apologizes for borrowing the tights.



# Settings

## London

London is the main location of the novel. It is the second of the large metropolises where Louisa lives after Will's death: the first was Paris and at the end of the novel she moves to New York. These large cities are symbolic of Louisa's desire to have wider experiences and adventures in the world. London, however, is depicted as a dangerous place where people are isolated from each other. Louisa knows few people in the city except Sam and the members of the Moving On Circle and, through Sam's work as a paramedic, the city is depicted as dangerous and full of criminals.

## Louisa's Flat

Louisa bought her flat in London with the money she inherited after Will's death. The state of the flat reflects the state of Louisa's grief. At the start of the novel, the flat is undecorated and Louisa hasn't unpacked her things. After Lily moves in, she starts to add more color to the flat - just as she symbolically adds more color to Louisa's life - by helping Louisa to paint the walls, giving her a painting to hang, and planting a colorful roof garden. Louisa feels guilty about owning the flat because she received it as a result of Will's death. She tries to assuage this guilt by giving the flat to her sister Treena when she leaves for New York.

## Stortfold

Stortfold is Louisa's home town. Although it was a central location in the first novel, not as much of the narrative occurs there in the sequel. In the first novel, the lack of options for expanding her horizons in Stortfold made the location symbolic of Louisa being held back from her full potential. In contrast, in *After You*, the town has more positive connotations and reminds Louisa of how much she loves her family and has benefited from the strength she has as a result of coming from a stable and loving background.

## Hospitals

Hospitals are locations for reunions and reconciliations in the novel. The first example of this is after Louisa falls from the roof. Although she has been estranged from her family since being involved in Will's assisted suicide, her parents' visits to see her in hospital show her that they are ready to be a part of her life again. Likewise, when Lily and Louisa fall out, they are eventually reunited in a hospital where Lily has been hiding and Louisa takes her back to her flat. Further to this, Louisa finally confesses how much she cares for Sam while visiting him in hospital after she is shot.

## Airport

Louisa works at the airport for most of the novel, symbolizing her inability to take the final leap into her new future. The airport becomes an increasingly unpleasant environment for Louisa after the arrival of her new boss Richard, who makes the job at the Irish-themed bar even worse than it had been beforehand. Once Louisa finally decides to move to New York, she returns to the airport, this time as a passenger and traveler rather than a worker. When she goes through the security gates, she is symbolically beginning her new life having recovered from her grief over Will's death.



# Themes and Motifs

## Grief

Through the device of the Moving On Circle, the author explores different facets of bereavement giving a wider and more in-depth view of the nature of grief than could be communicated from the character of Louisa alone. For example, Daphne struggles with realizations about her husband's homosexuality after his death, which make her question everything she thought she had understood about their relationship when he was alive.

The grief of the other characters at the Moving On Circle is also used as a mirror for what's going on in Louisa's own life. Initially, it appears as if Jake's discussion of his dad's sexual behavior in response to the grief he feels over the death of his mum is included in the novel in order to give further characterization to Sam. However, in retrospect, when it is revealed that Sam is actually Jake's uncle, not his father, it is easier to see that Jake's descriptions of his dad's bereavement echo what is going on in Louisa's life. Like Jake's dad, Louisa pursues one-night-stands and new relationships before she is emotionally ready to do so, hurting herself and the people she gets involved with (especially Sam) in the process.

Through the Moving On Circle, the author demonstrates the progress that Louisa is making in her slow recovery from her grief. When she becomes more focused on Sam's whereabouts and whether she might bump into him after the meetings, it is a sign that she is less preoccupied with her grief over Will's death. Louisa's recovery (and the progress made by the rest of the group) is celebrated in a release ceremony on Louisa's roof where each of the bereaved characters releases a white balloon (symbolizing their grief) into the sky.

## Moving On From the Past

Multiple characters in *After You* struggle with how to move on from the past, but they each come to realize this step forward is worth fighting for.

Louisa's character arc is based around her need to move on from the events of the first novel and build a new life for herself. Throughout the novel, there are two main paths open to Louisa for moving on from the past: her burgeoning relationship with Sam and the job offer from New York.

Her struggle to move past her relationship with Will is shown through her tendency to carry on an inner dialogue with Will in her head, even when she is on a date with her new love interest, Sam. Sam senses Louisa's distance from him and that she is not fully engaged in the present moment, telling her: "I get the feeling, Louisa Clark, that when you're talking to me there's a whole other conversation going on somewhere else" (136). Louisa continues to prioritize her old life and her connection with Will, through her



insistence that only she is willing and capable of taking care of Will's daughter Lily. Eventually, Sam confronts her over her inability to move on from the past, by telling her how hard it is "to be around someone who is still in love with a ghost" (337).

For as long as Louisa remains stuck in the past and focused on her lost relationship with Will, she uses her connection with Lily (symbolic of her old connection with Will) as her excuse for not moving on to the future. Once Lily has returned to school and is safe in the care of Mrs. Traynor, this obstacle to Louisa's future plans is removed and it is entirely within Louisa's own power to embrace her future.

Lily also struggles with incidents from her past that haunt her in the present and make it impossible for her to move onto a brighter future. Lily is blackmailed by a boy who has a sexually explicit picture of her on his phone and she can't find a way to move past this incident and get her life back on track. Things get continually worse for Lily when the phone ends up in the hands of her father's colleague Mr. Garside who also uses the photograph to blackmail her. For Lily, the ability to move on from the past is not within her power until the photograph is no longer in the hands of people who want to harm and exploit her. Lily's past is symbolically destroyed by Sam when he stamps on the phone, thus destroying the photograph, and allowing Lily to move on with her life.

In contrast to Louisa and Lily, who both struggle in life because of their inability or unwillingness to move on from the past, other characters move on so quickly that they do harm to themselves and others. For example, Tanya Houghton-Miller was so keen to move on from her relationship with Will Traynor that she never told him that he had a daughter. Mr. Traynor also moves on from Will's death too quickly, establishes a new family before he has had time to properly grieve the loss of his old family.

## Pushing Out of the Comfort Zone

The author encourages, through the examples of Louisa and her mother Josie, the idea that pushing outside of one's comfort zone can result in life-changing - for the better - outcomes.

Pushing out of the comfort zone is a theme that continues on from the first novel, which explored how Louisa's working class background (and later revelations about her experiences of sexual assault) led her to live a limited and restricted life, which was also echoed in Will Traynor's injuries confining him to a wheelchair. Through their relationship with each other, they both began to push outside of their comfort zones and started to experience new things in life that they had previously deemed impossible.

This theme continues in the sequel, when Louisa has partially re-established many of her old patterns from before she met Will Traynor. Although her inheritance from Will has left her financially independent, Louisa continues in the comfort zone of working in the service industry by taking a job in Paris as a bartender, and then returning to England to work in an airport bar. The location of the airport is symbolic of how far Louisa has travelled in her journey to push outside of her comfort zone. She's come a



long way from where she was before she met Will Traynor, but she is now trapped at a symbolic gateway (symbolized by the airport where she spends her days) on the cusp of moving outside her comfort zone for good, but not quite having the courage to take the final leap. Louisa's predicament is symbolized by the businessman with a fear of flying who she helps in Chapter 1. The businessman's literal fear of flying, like Louisa's symbolic fear of flying, is limiting his options in life. Both of them must overcome their fears and step outside their comfort zones in order to make the most of their potential.

Louisa's gradual steps outside of her comfort zone are shown throughout the novel and include: going out dancing with Lily, finally admitting to the Moving On Circle that her deceased boyfriend's name was Will not Bill, going up on the roof again despite her fear of falling, and telling Sam that she loves him.

The theme of comfort zones is also explored through the character of Josie Clark, Louisa's mum. At the start of the novel, Josie is so insecure and unsure of herself that the mere task of visiting Louisa in a London hospital makes her anxious and uncertain of her surroundings. By the end of the novel, however, Josie is happily making trips to London on her own and no longer feels the need to have her husband do everything with her.

Through exposure to feminist literature that Louisa's sister, Treena, introduces to her life after a college class, Josie starts to push outside the comfort zones of her life. She starts questioning elements of her life that she used to take for granted such as the necessity of removing her body hair and cooking and cleaning for her family. Feminist thought opens up Josie's horizons to the wider world and encourages her to think about ways she could pursue her own interests and find time for herself, rather than devoting all of her energies to taking care of others. The changes that Josie makes in her life are threatening to her husband Bernard, who fears that he will be left behind and she will not want to be with him anymore. Louisa encourages her father to treat their differences as a chance for him to grow and push outside of his own comfort zones too.

## Parenting

Finding herself suddenly the parental figure of a teen, Louisa chooses to observe and learn from three mother figures in the novel - Lily's mother, Louisa's own mother, and Louisa's sister - to form a middle ground of stable and loving parenting for Lily.

Clearly, Louisa is not Lily's parent in either a legal or a biological sense, but she feels a duty of care towards the teenager that makes Louisa the strongest parental influence in Lily's life for a large part of the novel. Lily's life up until this point has been defined by turbulent and dysfunctional relationships with various parental figures. This began before Lily had even been born, when her biological father's, Will Traynor, insensitive treatment of her mother Tanya Houghton-Miller led Tanya to decide to raise Lily without ever telling Will that he had a daughter. During Lily's younger years, Tanya was in a relationship with a man named Martin who treated Lily like his own daughter until Tanya broke up with him and abruptly stopped all communication between Lily and Martin.





Although Lily later tries to reestablish contact with Martin once she is older, he has already started a new family of his own by that point, and is unaware of how significant an influence he had been in Lily's life. After breaking up with Martin, Tanya marries Lily's stepfather who she nicknames "Fuckface." When Tanya and her new husband have children of their own it makes Lily feel like an outsider in her own family.

Further to the lack of a stable father figure in her life, Lily's mother is also narcissistic, self-absorbed, and ambivalent about Lily's welfare. Lily's lack of stable parental figures makes Louisa feel responsible for her welfare in a way that threatens to derail Louisa's ability to get her own life back on track. Louisa is able to let go of the burden of sole responsibility for Lily's wellbeing when Lily's biological grandmother Mrs. Traynor makes an effort to become more involved in Lily's life and do what she can to support her welfare. This is contrasted with Mr. Traynor, who is intensely emotional about the discovery of his unknown granddaughter, but less keen to do anything practical to ensure her wellbeing.

On the opposite end of the parenting scale to Tanya Houghton-Miller, is Louisa's mother Josie Clark. Josie has dedicated her entire life to taking care of her husband and children at the expense of her own dreams and development. Through looking at these contrasting examples of parenting, Louisa must find a middle way to behave in her relationship to her surrogate daughter Lily: taking the teenager's welfare seriously and doing what is best for her, while also prioritizing her own needs and not allowing her duty of care towards Lily to derail her own career and love life.

Louisa's sister Treena is a single mother who loves her son but whose life options have been limited by becoming a parent so early in her life. By seeing the advantages of her own life in comparison to Treena's, Louisa is better able to appreciate all of the options that are open to her and selflessly gives her flat in London to Treena and her son so that Treena can expand her career options.

## Class

In *After You*, the theme of class is explored by contrasting the working class Clark family with wealthier upper class and middle class families who they encounter. Throughout the novel, wealth is associated with selfishness and a lack of empathy. This is symbolized most clearly through the character of Tanya Houghton-Miller who is depicted as narcissistic and unconcerned about the welfare of her children, instead only focused on the emotional distress that Lily's problems cause for her. The author juxtaposes depictions of Tanya's selfish behavior with descriptions of her luxurious house and lifestyle, associating the fact of Tanya's wealth with her character flaws: "We stood in Tanya Houghton-Miller's immaculate kitchen and I stared at her shiny coffee machine which had probably cost more than my car" (249); "We were in a spacious, high-ceilinged hallway, with parquet flooring and huge gilt mirror on the wall" (84).



The wealth and luxurious lifestyle of the Houghton-Millers is contrasted with the cramped living conditions of the Clark family residence. When Louisa takes Lily to meet her family, the author focuses on how cramped and confined the space is, in contrast to the “spacious, high-ceilinged” (84) home of the Houghton-Millers: “We had crammed ourselves around the dining-table in the front room, the seven of us knee to knee, and six of us praying that nobody needed the loo, which would necessitate everyone getting up and moving the table six inches towards the sofa” (96). The coldness of Tanya towards Lily is contrasted with the warmth and hospitality shown to her by the Clarks.

The suggestion of that poorer people are morally superior to wealthy people is echoed throughout Lily’s development as a character. Lily’s path to becoming a happier and more responsible person involves her moving away from someone who thoughtlessly enjoys the luxury of her parent’s home by indulging in chunks of fresh pineapple, to someone who takes a job at a grocery store across from Louisa’s flat, at first being unpaid before agreeing to work for the lowest legal wage for a teenager of £2.73 an hour (at time of writing, about \$3.60). Despite being low paid and living without the luxuries of her former life, Louisa describes Lily as “filthy, exhausted, but curiously happy” (313) associating poverty with greater fulfillment.

Furthering the novel’s attachment to the suggestion that independent wealth is undesirable, Louisa’s goals in life continue to involve being limited to paid employment in service of other people. Rather than taking advantage of the financial independence gifted to her by her inheritance from Will, Louisa spends all of the money on a flat and then gets a job in a bar, before later giving the flat to her sister and taking a job as an assistant to a wealthy family in New York.



# Styles

## Point of View

The novel is told in the first person, present tense, from the perspective of the protagonist Louisa Clark, with the exception of one chapter. The use of point of view serves to narrow the perspective of the reader, leading the reader to perceive things the same way that Louisa perceives them, often without questioning what is really going on. The most significant instance of Louisa's flawed point of view having an impact on the reader's understanding of events is in the interpretation of Sam's relationship to Jake. Both Louisa and, as a consequence, the reader assume that Sam is Jake's father when he is, in fact, his uncle. This colors Louisa's attitude towards Sam as she believes that he is a womanizer who will just use her for sex, rather than being interested in pursuing a serious relationship with her. For the reader, the question of whether Sam is Jake's father adds more suspense to the novel because it places doubt in the reader's mind about whether Sam is the right person for Louisa. Were it not for the reader's suspicion that Sam might be dishonest, the outcome of the romantic element of the plot would feel very predictable.

The only break from Louisa's point of view comes in Chapter 19 when the author switches to Lily's perspective instead. This technique adds extra pathos to the discovery of what has been going on in Lily's life by giving context to all of Lily's previous actions in chapters told from Louisa's perspective. The chapter also shows the limits of Louisa's point of view: from Louisa's chapters alone, it seems perfectly reasonable that she kicks Lily out of the flat, but through Lily's point of view the reader comes to see how desperately unfair and undeserved this decision was.

## Language and Meaning

The novel is told in the first person from Louisa's perspective and, as a result of this, the descriptive passages in the narration help to reveal Louisa's mental state, especially in relation to her grief over Will's death. Through observing the author's language choice when Louisa describes the world around her, the reader gains insight into how she feels.

At the start of the novel, when Louisa's grief is still raw and in need of healing, she sees darkness and despair all around her in London from the vantage point on her rooftop: "The plants have long since withered and died... Now I stand on the roof, staring out at London's winking darkness below. Around me a million people are living, breathing, eating, arguing. A million lives completely divorced from mine" (6). Louisa's description of London focusses on the basic essentials of life (eating, breathing etc.) and any mention of emotion focuses on the negative act of arguing. This reflects Louisa's own life at the start of the novel where she is simply surviving and not experiencing any joy or fun in her life.



By the end of the novel, Louisa's descriptions of London in the narration have become lighter and more optimistic, just as she herself has become happier and less restricted by her feelings of grief. Again describing London from the view on the rooftop, Louisa observes uplifting details like "a dawn mist, burning off to a crisp clear light" (386) and things that symbolize her upcoming adventures like an airplane "leaving a vapor trail across the sky" (386).

## Structure

The novel is written in the present tense in a straightforward chronological order, with the exception of Chapter 19 which covers past events from Lily's perspective. The main structural device in the novel is the Moving On Circle which serves as a benchmark for where Louisa has reached in her journey towards recovering from her grief over Will's death.

During the first Moving On Circle meeting, Louisa is so cut off from the world and from her own emotions that she refuses to even tell the other group members Will's real name. The next time Louisa attends the Moving On Circle, she reunites with Sam the paramedic for the first time since her fall: an event which will do more than anything else in the novel to help Louisa move on from the past. Later, signs that she is beginning to ruminate less on her relationship with Will and is becoming more focused on her potential future with Sam emerge at a Moving On Circle meeting where Louisa is too distracted by daydreams about Sam to answer the group leader's questions about her grief over Will. When Louisa finally admits Will's real name to the group, it is a sign that she is willing to allow herself to be emotionally vulnerable again. Finally, the surest sign that Louisa is ready to move on with her life comes in the final release ceremony of the Moving On Circle that occurs on Louisa's rooftop. Each member of the group speaks about their lost loved one, before releasing a white balloon that symbolizes their grief into the air. Through her participation in the group, Louisa has been able to release her grief for Will and embrace a new relationship with Sam who stands by her side after she lets go of her balloon.



## Quotes

You never know what will happen when you fall from a great height.

-- Narration (chapter 1)

**Importance:** A phrase that is repeated throughout the novel: in the first instance at the hospital when Louisa is recovering from falling off the roof. It refers to Louisa's literal fall and the fact that medical outcomes from falls vary a great deal, but also references Louisa's mental state of being. Will's death was a symbolic fall from a great height that Louisa must struggle to recover from as she recovers from her physical fall. The phrase also reflects the fact that Louisa would not have met Sam if she had not fallen.

He charms women into sleeping with him and then he gets off on being sad about it. It's like as long as he feels guilty about it afterwards then it's okay.

-- Jake (chapter 6)

**Importance:** Jake tells the Moving On Circle about the behavior of his father who the reader and Louisa believe to be Sam. Although it is later revealed that Sam has not been behaving in the way described by Jake during the counselling sessions, Jake's words do apply to Louisa's behavior towards Sam and her feelings of guilt about whether their relationship is a betrayal of Will.

What do you think, Will? Is this okay?

-- Narration (chapter 10)

**Importance:** While Louisa begins her new relationship with Sam, she continues an ongoing conversation with Will in her mind, as if she needs to obtain his permission before she will be allowed to move on with her life. As the novel progresses and Louisa slowly recovers from her grief, she engages in fewer of these internal dialogues with Will.

Louisa? The daily things? There must be something.' I kept thinking about that field, the neat confines of the railway carriage, the way Sam had strolled down the field with a hen under one arm, as if he was carrying a precious parcel. The feathers on her chest had been as soft as a whisper.

-- Marc/Narration (chapter 11)

**Importance:** When Marc prompts Louisa to engage in the counseling session at the Moving On Circle, she is too distracted to participate because she is daydreaming about Sam. This symbolizes that her relationship with Sam is starting to heal her grief over Will's death.

What happened to you after Dad died? I mean, you seem to have done a lot more stuff when you were with him – even with him being stuck in a wheelchair – than you do now.

-- Lily (chapter 12)



**Importance:** Lily points out to Louisa that she is allowing her grief to restrict her enjoyment of life, just as Will allowed his paralysis to restrict his enjoyment of life in the first novel. Louisa tried to get Will to participate in the world again during the first novel. In a reversal of status, Lily plays that role for Louisa in the second novel.

Suddenly, looking at her from the outside, I'd felt a sudden sympathy. She was right: I'd been handed, against the odds, all the advantages – a home of my own, a future free of any responsibilities – and the only thing stopping me from embracing them was myself.  
-- Narration (chapter 15)

**Importance:** Louisa has been so wrapped up in grief that it has blinded her to all of the positive things about her life. She sees her own world from a new perspective by thinking about the problems her sister Treena faces as a single mother. This change in perspective prompts Louisa to give her flat to Treena and her son at the end of the novel.

I tried to imagine what he would have said if he could see me then, but I could no longer hear his voice in my head and that small fact made me even sadder.”  
-- Narration (chapter 16)

**Importance:** Although Louisa is initially saddened by the realization that she can no longer hear Will's voice speaking to her in her head, it is actually a sign of her gradual recovery from grief over his death and her ability to approach the world again and begin a new life without him.

It felt odd speaking to him while having concurrent conversations with Will in my head, a strange infidelity. I just wasn't quite sure who I was being unfaithful to.  
-- Narration (chapter 20)

**Importance:** Louisa grapples with her feelings of guilt over her relationship with Sam and whether her attachment to him means that her relationship with Will is less meaningful. Louisa must learn to prioritize her feelings for the living over her feelings for those that have passed away.

You could say that about anyone. So what? So we sit there and do nothing every day in case we have an accident? Is that really how to live?  
-- Sam (chapter 26)

**Importance:** Sam encourages Louisa to overcome her fear of falling in love by acknowledging that there is no proof that she will not get hurt again. Rather than trying to live safely inside a comfort zone, Sam advocates taking risks and experiencing everything that life has to offer, which is the same message that Will wanted to communicate to Louisa when he died.

This is what catastrophe does: it strips away the fluff and the white noise, the should I really and the but what if. I wanted Sam. I knew it with a stinging clarity.  
-- Narration (chapter 27)



**Importance:** It takes the realization that she may be about to lose Sam for Louisa to fully acknowledge and accept how powerful her feelings for him are.

I saw what I had really done. I saw that I could be somebody's centre, their reason for staying. I saw that I could be enough.

-- Narration (chapter 27)

**Importance:** The realization that her actions had helped to save Sam's life heal the old wounds of the first novel, when Louisa felt rejected and not good enough when Will decided that their relationship was not enough to make him change his mind about committing suicide

But what became clear as I sat on my plastic chair and drank my instant coffee was that I had somehow found myself on the other side. I had crossed a bridge. Their struggle was no longer my struggle.

-- Narration (chapter 28)

**Importance:** Returning to the Moving On Circle for the final time in the novel, Louisa realizes that she has finally overcome her grief over Will's death and is ready to move onto the next phase of her life.