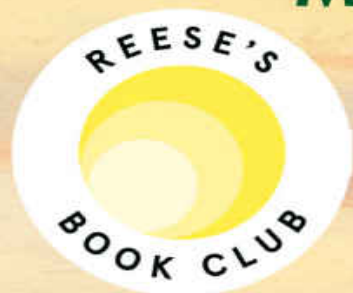


#1 Bestselling Author of
ME BEFORE YOU



Jojo Moyes

The Giver *of* Stars

a novel



#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER



Additional Praise for *The Giver of Stars*

“*The Giver of Stars* is a richly rewarding exploration of the depths of friendship, good men willing to stand up to bad, and adult love. Moyes celebrates the power of reading in a terrific book that only reinforces that message.”

—*USA Today*

“Timeless, Jojo Moyes’s greatest work yet, and one of the most exquisitely written—and absolutely compulsory—novels about women ever told.”

—Lisa Taddeo, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Three Women*

“Bestselling author Jojo Moyes has a unique way of using her prose to make her readers feel great emotions—love, passion, sadness, and grief—and her latest novel, *The Giver of Stars*, does not disappoint.”

—Parade.com

“Inspired by the history of the actual Packhorse Librarians, Moyes depicts the courage and resourcefulness of these women in loving detail. *The Giver of Stars* is a tribute not just to the brave women who brought the light of knowledge in dark times, but also to the rejuvenating bond of women’s friendship.”

—Associated Press

“Riveting. A stirring novel sure to please Moyes’s many fans.”

—*Star Tribune*

“Moyes brings an often forgotten slice of history to life. . . . The true power of the story is in the bonds between the women of the library. . . . A love letter

to the power of books and friendship.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“[An] homage to the power of reading and the strength of community . . . A must read for women’s fiction fans.”

—*Booklist* (starred review)

“Rich in history, with well-developed characters and a strong sense of place.”

—*Library Journal* (starred review)

Praise for *Still Me*

“Delightful.”

—*People*

“*Still Me* offers a worthy, warm conclusion to the *Me Before You* trilogy . . . resulting in the best entry in the trilogy yet. . . . Moyes has crafted a clear-eyed tale of self-discovery and the sacrifice required to live a life honestly in pursuit of the things you love. [It will] keep you sighing with delight to the very last page.”

—*Entertainment Weekly*

“Jojo’s work never fails to bring a smile to my face with her honesty, humor, and empathy about what it is to be human—[*Still Me* is] a must read!”

—Emilia Clarke

“While the series may have started off as a romance, Jojo Moyes has turned Louisa Clark’s story into one about learning to be, and to love, yourself.”

—*Bustle*

Praise for *After You*

“Jojo Moyes has a hit with *After You*.”

—*USA Today*

“The genius of Moyes . . . [is that she] peers deftly into class issues, social mores, and complicated relationships that raise as many questions as they answer. And yet there is always resolution. It’s not always easy, it’s not always perfect, it’s sometimes messy and not completely satisfying. But sometimes it is.”

—Bobbi Dumas, NPR.org

“Expect tears and belly laughs from *Me Before You*’s much-anticipated sequel.”

—*Cosmopolitan*

Praise for *Me Before You*

“A hilarious, heartbreaking, riveting novel . . . I will stake my reputation on this book.”

—Anne Lamott, *People*

“When I finished this novel, I didn’t want to review it: I wanted to reread it. . . . An affair to remember.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“An unlikely love story . . . To be devoured like candy, between tears.”

—*O, The Oprah Magazine*

“Funny and moving but never predictable.”

—*USA Today* (four stars)

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THE GIVER OF STARS

Jojo Moyes is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Giver of Stars*, *Still Me*, *After You*, *Me Before You*, *The Peacock Emporium*, *The Horse Dancer*, *Paris for One and Other Stories*, *One Plus One*, *The Girl You Left Behind*, *The Last Letter from Your Lover*, *Silver Bay*, and *The Ship of Brides*. She lives with her husband and three children in Essex, England.

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ALSO BY JOJO MOYES



The Giver of Stars

Still Me

Paris for One and Other Stories

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The Girl You Left Behind

Me Before You

The Last Letter from Your Lover

The Horse Dancer

Silver Bay

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The Peacock Emporium

The
GIVER
of
STARS



JOJO MOYES



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To Barbara Napier, who gave me stars when I needed them.

And to librarians everywhere.

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PROLOGUE



December 20, 1937

L*isten.* Three miles deep in the forest just below Arnott's Ridge, and you're in silence so dense it's like you're wading through it. There's no birdsong past dawn, not even in high summer, and especially not now, with the chill air so thick with moisture that it stills those few leaves clinging gamely to the branches. Among the oak and hickory nothing stirs: wild animals are deep underground, soft pelts intertwined in narrow caves or hollowed-out trunks. The snow is so deep the mule's legs disappear up to his hocks, and every few strides he staggers and snorts suspiciously, checking for loose flints and holes under the endless white. Only the narrow creek below moves confidently, its clear water murmuring and bubbling over the stony bed, headed down toward an endpoint nobody around here has ever seen.

Margery O'Hare tests her toes inside her boots, but feeling went a long time back and she winces at the thought of how they're going to hurt when they warm up again. Three pairs of wool stockings, and in this weather you might as well go bare-legged. She strokes the big mule's neck, brushing off the crystals forming on his dense coat with her heavy men's gloves.

"Extra food for you tonight, Charley boy," she says, and watches as his huge ears flick back. She shifts, adjusting the saddlebags, making sure the

mule is balanced as they pick their way down toward the creek. “Hot molasses in your supper. Might even have some myself.”

Four more miles, she thinks, wishing she had eaten more breakfast. Past the Indian escarpment, up the yellow pine track, two more hollers, and old Nancy will appear, singing hymns as she always does, her clear, strong voice echoing through the forest as she walks, arms swinging like a child’s, to meet her.

“You don’t have to walk five miles to meet me,” she tells the woman, every fortnight. “That’s our job. That’s why we’re on horseback.”

“Oh, you girls do enough.”

She knows the real reason. Nancy, like her bedbound sister, Jean, back in the tiny log cabin at Red Lick, cannot countenance even a chance that she will miss the next tranche of stories. She’s sixty-four years old with three good teeth and a sucker for a handsome cowboy: “That Mack McGuire, he makes my heart flutter like a clean sheet on a long line.” She clasps her hands and lifts her eyes to Heaven. “The way Archer writes him, well, it’s like he steps right out of the pages in that book and swings me onto his horse with him.” She leans forward conspiratorially. “Ain’t just that horse I’d be happy riding. My husband said I had quite the seat when I was a girl!”

“I don’t doubt it, Nancy,” she responds, every time, and the woman bursts out laughing, slapping her thighs like this is the first time she’s said it.

A twig cracks and Charley’s ears flick. Ears that size, he can probably hear halfway to Louisville. “This way, boy,” she says, guiding him away from a rocky outcrop. “You’ll hear her in a minute.”

“Goin’ somewhere?”

Margery’s head snaps around.

He is staggering slightly, but his gaze is level and direct. His rifle, she sees, is cocked, and he carries it, like a fool, with his finger on the trigger. “So you’ll look at me now, will ya, Margery?”

She keeps her voice steady, her mind racing. “I see you, Clem McCullough.”

"I see you, Clem McCullough." He spits as he repeats it, like a nasty child in a schoolyard. His hair stands up on one side, like he's slept on it. "You see me while you're lookin' down that nose of yours. You see me like you see dirt on your shoe. Like you're somethin' special."

She has never been afraid of much, but she's familiar enough with these mountain men to know not to pick a fight with a drunk. Especially one bearing a loaded gun.

She conducts a swift mental list of people she may have offended—Lord knows there seem to be a few—but McCullough? Aside from the obvious, she can find nothing.

"Any beef your family had with my daddy, that's buried with him. It's only me left, and I ain't interested in blood feuds."

McCullough is directly in her path now, his legs braced in the snow, his finger still on the trigger. His skin has the purple-blue mottle of someone too drunk to realize how cold he is. Probably too drunk to hit straight, but it's not a chance she wants to take.

She adjusts her weight, slowing the mule; her gaze slides sideways. The banks of the creek are too steep, too dense with trees for her to get past. She would have to persuade him to move or ride right over him, and the temptation to do the latter is strong.

The mule's ears flick back. In the silence she can hear her own heartbeat, an insistent thump in her ears. She thinks absently that she's not sure she's ever heard it this loud before. "Just doing my job, Mr. McCullough. I'd be obliged if you'd let me pass."

He frowns, hears the potential insult in her too-polite use of his name, and as he shifts his gun she realizes her error.

"Your *job* . . . Think you're so high and mighty. You know what you need?"

He spits noisily, waiting for her answer. "I said, do you know what you need, girl?"

"Suspect my version of what that might be is going to differ a mile or two from yours."

“Oh, you got all the answers. You think we don’t know what you all have been doing? You think we don’t know what you’ve been spreading among decent God-fearing women? We know what you’re up to. You got the devil in you, Margery O’Hare, and there’s only one way to get the devil out of a girl like you.”

“Well, I’d sure love to stop and find out, but I’m busy with my rounds, so maybe we can continue this—”

“Shut up!”

McCullough raises his gun. “Shut that damn mouth of yours.”

She clamps it shut.

He takes two steps closer, his legs spread and braced. “Git off the mule.”

Charley shifts uneasily. Her heart is an ice pebble in her mouth. If she turns and flees, he’ll shoot her. The only route here follows the creek; the forest floor is hardscrabble flint, the trees too dense to find a way forward. There’s nobody for miles, she realizes, nobody except old Nancy making her way slowly across the mountaintop.

She’s on her own, and he knows it.

His voice lowers. “I said git down, *now*.” He takes two steps closer, his footsteps crunching in the snow.

And there is the bare truth of it, for her and all the women around here. Doesn’t matter how smart you are, how clever, how self-reliant—you can always be bettered by a stupid man with a gun. The barrel of his rifle is so close now that she finds herself gazing down two infinite black holes. With a grunt he drops it abruptly, letting it swing behind him on its strap and grabs at her reins. The mule wheels, so that she lurches forward clumsily onto his neck. She feels McCullough claw at her thigh as he reaches back for his gun with his other hand. His breath is sour with drink, and his hand is scaled with dirt; every cell of her body recoils at the feel of it.

And then she hears it, Nancy’s voice in the distance.

Oh, what peace we often forfeit!

Oh, what needless pain we bear—

His head lifts. She hears a *No!*, and some distant part of her recognizes with surprise that it has emerged from her own mouth. His fingers grab and pull at her, one arm reaching for her waist, throwing her off-balance; in his determined grip, his rank breath, she feels her future morphing into something black and awful. But the cold has made him clumsy. He fumbles as he reaches for his gun again, his back to her, and at that moment she sees her chance. She reaches behind into her saddlebag with her left hand, and as he turns his head she drops the reins, grabs the other corner with her right fist, and swings the heavy book as hard as she can, *smack*, into his face. His gun goes off, the sound a three-dimensional *crack!* ricocheting off the trees, and she hears the singing briefly silenced, the birds rising into the sky—a shimmering black cloud of flapping wings. As McCullough drops, the mule bucks and lurches forward in fright, stumbling over him, so that she gasps and has to grab the horn of the saddle to stay on.

And then she is off along the creek bed, her breath tight in her throat, her heart pounding, trusting the mule's sure feet to find a hold in the splashing icy water, not daring to look back to see if McCullough has made it to his feet to come after her.

ONE



Three months earlier

It was, everyone agreed, fanning themselves outside the store or passing in the shade of the eucalyptus trees, unseasonably warm for September.

The meeting hall at Baileyville was thick with the smells of lye soap and stale perfume, bodies wedged together in good poplin dresses and summer suits. The heat had permeated even the clapboard walls so that the wood creaked and sighed in protest. Pressed tight behind Bennett as he shuffled his way along the row of packed seats, apologizing as each person rose from their chair with a barely suppressed sigh, Alice swore that she felt the warmth of each body leach into her own as it leaned backward to let them pass.

So sorry. So sorry.

Bennett finally reached two empty seats and Alice, her cheeks glowing with embarrassment, sat down, ignoring the sideways glances of the people around them. Bennett looked down at his lapel, brushing at non-existent lint, then spotted her skirt. “You didn’t change?” he murmured.

“You said we were late.”

“I didn’t mean for you to come out with your house clothes on.”

She had been trying to make cottage pie, to encourage Annie to put something other than Southern food on the table. But the potatoes had gone