

EVENTS

‘Me Before You’ quickly winds up out of its depth

REUTERS

Imagine “The Intouchables” with more romance and less chemistry cross-bred with a far tamer version of “Pretty Woman” so lacking in eroticism that its PG-13 rating seems unduly harsh, and you’re halfway toward picturing Thea Sharrock’s “Me Before You.”

Pairing a working-class British lass with an icy, quadriplegic aristocrat whose heart she’s been hired to melt, “Me Before You” would seem to boast a can’t-miss premise — class divides and medical misfortune being the peanut butter and jelly of tear-jerking romance. But Sharrock’s technically sound yet workman-like direction never sells the emotional peaks and troughs, the characters are alternately too exaggerated and too buttoned-down to come to life, and the final resolution pushes the film into morally provocative territory that it has neither the inclination nor the courage to confront.

That said, considering the popularity of Jojo Moyes’ best-selling source novel — she adapts her own work here — and Hollywood’s bizarre reluctance to make the sort of big-hearted romantic dramas that would seem to be its most reliable date-night draws, the film ought to do solid business, bur-nishing the rising careers of its stars, Emilia Clarke (“Game of Thrones”) and Sam Claflin (“The Hunger Games” movies).

Though Clarke is the clear protagonist, Claflin is

the star of the film’s first reel. Here he’s cast as Will Traynor, a debonair London financier from a family rich enough to own its own castle, who spends his spare time skiing, windsurfing, cliff-diving and bedding flashy women. In spite of these high-risks, he’s horribly injured the one time he tries to play it safe: Opting against taking his motorcycle to work on a rainy morning, he’s hit by a bike while crossing the street and left paralyzed.

Two years later, we find ourselves in an unnamed English country town, back-grounded at all times by the looming Traynor castle in the distance. Twenty-six-year-old Louisa “Lou” Clark (Clarke) has lived here all her life, helping support her large extended family as a waitress. She’s burdened with a limp noodle of a boyfriend (Matthew Lewis), who ignores her to pursue his twin passions of running and entrepreneurship; to wit, he’s introduced running laps in his “Young Entrepreneur of the Year” shirt.

Guileless, naive and accident-prone, Lou is such a ray of sunshine that her offer to wrap up a customer’s leftover sandwich elicits the sort of reaction you’d usually see from recent lottery winners, but she’s thrown for a loop when her quaint tea shop closes down.

Heading to the unemployment office, she’s assigned a lucrative temp position at

the Traynor mansion. The job, essentially, is to be a paid companion for Will, who now sports scraggly hair, a beard and an arsenal of withering quips. As the script is a bit too quick to note, her position doesn’t require her to do any of the real heavy lifting that caring for a quadriplegic demands, with bathroom and bathing duties handled by a hunky nurse (Stephen Peacocke). No, as Will’s imperious mother (Janet McTeer) and kindly father (Charles Dance) explain, she’s there to cheer him up.

Like too many filmic depictions of good-hearted lower-class people, Lou is clearly meant to be relatively ordinary but instead comes across as frustratingly dim, if not emotionally stunted: She is equally aghast by the notion that her caregiver job requires her to occasionally dispense medication as she is by the revelation that Will watches films that require subtitles. Yet in spite of her continually insane wardrobe and borderline ineptitude, Will eventually warms up to Lou, hoping to expand her provincial horizons, and she starts to bring a bit of genuine cheer into his sterile abode.

However, Lou soon learns the real implications of her job. Distraught by the loss of his old life-style and beset by chronic pain — in keeping with the film’s misguided gentility, we’re often told of his suffering, yet scarcely allowed to really feel it — Will plans to end his life at a dying-



ALEX BAILEY | WARNER BROS.

Sam Claflin as Will Traynor and Emilia Clarke as Louisa “Lou” Clark in “Me Before You.”

with-dignity facility in Switzerland. He’s promised his mother to spend six months weighing the decision, and she hired Lou as part of a last-ditch campaign to help change his mind. Horrified, Lou starts plotting a series of outings and luxury vacations to brighten Will’s life.

These are deep, complicated issues the film wades into, and it quickly winds up out of its depth. Aside from its inelegant way of addressing the politics of euthanasia — with the con side represented by a character, never previously identified as religious, now prominently wearing a crucifix — “Me Before You’s” admirable presentation of a disabled person as a swoon-worthy romantic lead collides awkwardly with its implicit suggestion that perhaps such a life isn’t even worth living, and the under-

currents of wish-fulfillment leave a sour taste. The skit-ish delicacy with which it tiptoes around the realities of quadriplegia doesn’t help; 2014’s similarly themed romance “The Fault in Our Stars” was far bolder and more honest about the painful details of living with serious medical difficulties, and that was a film aimed at teenagers.

Claflin and Clarke are effortlessly appealing actors, yet neither of their performances really click. Clarke has a hugely expressive face, but too often here she simply cycles back and forth between aggressively adorable cutesiness and dew-eyed pathos, as if she’s continually modeling for either a Kewpie doll or a marble statue of the Pieta. The range of Claflin’s character is likewise limited, with his attitude toward Lou shifting on a time from condescend-

ing distaste to condescending affection.

Sharrock, a veteran theater director making her filmmaking debut, certainly maintains an air of sweetness throughout, and several scenes throb with unexpected resonance. The dignified mortification on Will’s face when Lou recruits a gang of blokes to lift his wheelchair out of the mud is affectingly underplayed, and a late wedding scene hums with the sort of real romantic charge that goes missing elsewhere. But too many of the bigger moments play out with curious airlessness, as on-the-nose music cues from Ed Sheeran and Imagine Dragons give heavy scenes a saggy atmosphere.

But that’s “Me Before You” in a nutshell: A melodrama with soft-rock ballads where its beating heart should be.

Things to Do

BANGOR — Bangor Area Children’s Choir auditions for new members for Youth Chorale for ages 12-18 and Treble Choir for ages 9-plus for the 2016-17 school year. Open auditions, 4 p.m. Wednesday, June 1, St. John’s Episcopal Church, 225 French St., or contact artistic director Robert Ludwig to arrange individual audition. Information, bangorareachildrenschoir.com, RobertLudwig@bangorareachildrenschoir.com or 974-7715.

BANGOR — Bangor Historical Society Brown Bag Lunch Series, noon Tuesdays, Isaac Farrar Mansion, Union Street: June 7, “200 Years of the Bangor Fire Department,” Bangor Fire Department; July 12, “Understanding the Declaration of Independence,” Liam Riordan; Aug. 2, “Maine at Gettysburg,” Brian Swartz; Sept. 13, “Then and Now with the Bangor Police Department,” Bangor Police Department; Oct. 4, “Hail to the Chiefs: Presidents in Bangor,” Dick Shaw. 942-1900.

BANGOR — Leathers for Literacy, 80-mile motorcycle ride to benefit Literacy Volunteers of Bangor, Saturday, May 28, Bangor Waterfront. Registration, 9 a.m.; kick-stands up, 10:30 a.m. Ride through Milo, Dover-Foxcroft and end in Hermon at Central Maine Harley-Davidson for dealer open house with lunch, entertainment by Bee Bop Bob DJ Service, and ice cream with Darling’s Ice Cream Truck for a Cause. Raf-fle. Advance registration, lvbangor.org/ride for \$15 and collect sponsors.

BANGOR — “Haroutunian: Riffs of Maine,” paintings by Joseph Haroutunian, through May 31, Boyd Place, 21 Boyd St. Open daily 9 a.m.-7 p.m. through May 31. 963-6005, 941-2837 or info@littlefieldgallery.com.

BAR HARBOR — “The Penobscot: Ancestral River, Contested Territory” 2-3 p.m. Sunday, May 29, Reel Pizza Cinerama. Free. reelpizza.net.

BELFAST — Conservation biologist, artist and fiction writer Alison Dibble pre-

sentation, “Road Trip to Eastern Cuba,” 6:30-8 p.m. Tuesday, May 31, Belfast Free Library. Free. 338-3884, ext. 10.

BLUE HILL — Flash in the Pans street dance, 7:30-9 p.m. Monday, May 30, Blue Hill Town Park. flashinthepans.org.

BREWER — Next Generation Dance Studio Circus and Carousel 2016 dance recital, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturday, May 28, Next Generation Theatre, 39 Center St. 989-7100.

DOVER-FOXCROFT — The Center Theatre and Slightly Off-Center Players auditions for 10th Anniversary Encore, 9 a.m.-noon Saturday, May 28; 6-8 p.m. Tuesday, May 31. Singing and nonsinging roles for adults and children available. No experience necessary. SOCP@center-theatre.org, 564-8943, or at the theater 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday through Friday, 20 East Main St.

FRANKFORT — All-you-can-eat family-style turkey supper, 4:30-6:30 p.m. Saturday, May 28, Frankfort Congregational Church, UCC, Route 1 A. 323-8666.

MONSON — Traditional Finn dance, 7:30-10 p.m. Saturday, May 28, Finn Hall on Route 15. Schottisches, polkas, waltzes and foxtrots. Music led by Alexandra Conover Bennett on accordion. \$8, free to children under 12. 997-3639.

ORONO — University of Maine Intermedia MFA program exhibit “Without Borders XIII: Play on Worlds” Lord Hall Gallery, University of Maine. Free. Gallery hours, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Friday until through July 1. Wheelchair accessible. inter-mediamfa.org.

PORTLAND — “Commissioned by God” (the Bible collaged and deconstructed) by artist G. Bud Swenson, through May 26, Union of Maine Visual Artists Gallery, 516 Congress St.

PORTLAND — Free reading and discussion group led by Dr. Jeannine Uzzi, University of Southern Maine; and Kyle Elsea, U.S. Army, 6:30-8 p.m. Wednesday, May 25, Woodfords Church, 202

Woodford St. Combat veterans of all eras invited. Space limited and registration required. Rita Siavelis, 780-3584. Offered in partnership with Portland Vet Center.

PORTLAND — Journalist and sports historian Rob Sneddon discussing his book, “The Phantom Punch,” noon-1 p.m. Wednesday, May 25, Maine Historical Society, 489 Congress St. \$5, free to historical society members. 774-1822 or ddippolito@mainehistory.org.

ROCKPORT — Down East Singers rehearsals, 7-9:15 p.m. Tuesdays, from the midcoast area, from Newcastle to Belfast. Car-pooling available. Memorial Day concert, 5 p.m. Monday, May 30, Camden Opera House. Membership fee, \$60; free to high school students. downeastsing-ers.org or 619-0413.

SEARSMONT — Presentation on Cuba by Jim Robbins of Searsmont, 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 25, Searsmont United Methodist Church. Illustrated with slides and video. Reservations not required. Free. Light refreshments served. 763-2778.

ST. GEORGE — Death Cafe, 5-7 p.m. Thursday, May 26, Soulmilk Healing Arts Studio, 1012 River Road. Free and open to all. RSVP to Sylvia Si-enikeha Pearlman at sienikeha@gmail.com. deathcafe.com/deathcafes/3345 or soulmilkhealing-arts.com/death-cafe.

STONINGTON — Flash in the Pans street dance, 7:30-9 p.m. Monday, June 20, Stonington Fish Pier. Benefits Island Community Center. Flashinthepans.org.

UNION — Vose Library annual plant and bake sale, 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, June 4, Common. Rain or shine. Benefits the library. Information or to donate plants for the sale, Zoe FitzGerald-Beckett, 785-4740.

UNITY — Micromass, 7 p.m. Friday, June 3, Unity College Center for the Performing Arts, 42 Depot St. Jazz. \$15, online or at the door. 509-7132 or wrichards@unity.edu.

VEAZIE — Rhubarb Festi-

val, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, June 4, at Veazie Congregational Church, 1404 State St. Strawberry-rhubarb pie, rhubarb cookies, breads, bars, crisp and most anything rhubarb will be on sale. Free samples of rhubarb coffee cake and cook-ies.

WESTBROOK — West-brook Police Department Coffee with a Cop, 8:30-

10 a.m. Friday, June 10, Starlight Cafe, West-brook Community Center, 426 Bridge St. Community members invited to meet with Westbrook police officers, discuss community issues and drink coffee. Officer Joel Loranger, jloranger@westbrook.me.us.

WINTERPORT — Open house to view Winterport Union Meeting House’s

newly completed lighting project, refreshments and silent auction, 6-9 p.m. Friday, June 10, at the meeting house. 223-4091, Fitz1357@roadrunner.com or winterport-maine.gov/winterport-meetinghouse.

For a complete listing of calendar items or to submit your event, visit www.bangordailynews.com.

Wednesday prime time

MOVIES

	7 PM	7:30	8 PM	8:30	9 PM	9:30	10 PM	10:30	11 PM
BROADCAST	2 NBC 207 Inside Ed.	Heartbeat (N) (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Chicago P.D. (N) (HD)	News				
	4 CBC Dragons' Den	Winnipeg Comedy	NHL Hockey St. Louis Blues at San Jose Sharks. (N)						
	5 CBS Big Bang	Broke Girl	The Price Is Right	Criminal Minds	Criminal Minds	News			
	6 CW Family Guy	Family Guy	Arrow (N) (HD)	Supernatural (N) (HD)	News	Seinfeld	Cougar		
	6 NBC 207 Inside Ed.	Heartbeat (N) (HD)	Law & Order: SVU	Chicago P.D. (N) (HD)	News				
	7 ABC Wheel	Jeopardy!	*** Finding Nemo (2003)	Voices of Albert Brooks.	Nashville (N) (HD)	News			
	WAGIM FOX The Insider	Ent. Tonight	Rosewood (N) (HD)	Wayward Pines (N)	News	Big Bang	Big Bang		
	8 ABC Wheel	Jeopardy!	*** Finding Nemo (2003)	Voices of Albert Brooks.	Nashville (N) (HD)	News			
	MPBN PBS PBS NewsHour (N) (HD)	Nature (HD)	Genius by Hawking	Genius by Hawking	C. Rose				
	9 IND Criminal Minds	Arrow (N) (HD)	Criminal Minds	Criminal Minds	News-Lisa	CTV News	Daily Show		
KIDS	13 CBS Ent. Tonight	The Insider	The Price Is Right	Criminal Minds	Criminal Minds	News			
	22 FOX Mod Fam	Mod Fam	Rosewood (N) (HD)	Wayward Pines (N)	FOX 22 News at 10 (N)	The Closer			
	11 IND M*A*S*H	M*A*S*H	Andy Griffith	Andy Griffith	Happy Days	Laverne	Hogan Hero	C. Burnett	
	38 IND Big Bang	Big Bang	The Closer (HD)	The Closer (HD)	WBZ News (N) (HD)	Seinfeld			
LEARN	HIST American Pickers	American Pickers	American Pickers (N)	Pawn Stars	Pawn Stars	Pawn Stars			
	DISC Bering Sea Gold	Bering Sea Gold	Bering Sea Gold (N)	Alaskan Bush People	Bering Gold				
	TLC My 600-Lb. Life	My 600-Lb. Life: Where Are They Now? A medical emergency; bonus scenes.	600-Lb. Life						
SPORTS	A&E The First 48	*** Gladiator (2000, Historical Drama)	Russell Crowe, Joaquin Phoenix. (R)	The First 48					
	ANPL Scariest Animal Attacks	Most Monsterific	How to Catch	How to Catch	Monster				
	CSNE SportsNet	Early	Golf/World	141st Preakness Stakes	Sports	SportsNet	Sports		
NEWS	ESPN SportCtr	NBA Countdown (N)	NBA Basketball Toronto Raptors at Cleveland Cavaliers. (N)	Sports	Sports	Sports			
	ESPN2 NFL Live (N)	Soccer Friendly -- United States vs Ecuador. (N)	Baseball Tonight (N)	NFL Live					
	NBCSP To Be Announced	NHL Live (N)	NHL Hockey St. Louis Blues at San Jose Sharks. (L)	Extra	Red Sox	Sports			
VARIETY	NESN MLB Baseball Colorado Rockies at Boston Red Sox. (N)								
	CNBC Undercover Boss	Shark Tank	Shark Tank	Secret Lives	Secret Lives	Shark Tank			
	CNN Erin Burnett OutFront (N)	Anderson Cooper 360	Anderson Cooper 360	CNN Tonight	Tonight				
PREMIUM	FNC Greta Van Susteren	The O'Reilly Factor (N)	The Kelly File (N)	Hannity (N)	O'Reilly				
	MSNBC Hardball Chris Matthews	All In With Chris Hayes	Rachel Maddow Show	The Last Word	All In With				
	AMC *** The Rock (1996, Action)	(ESP) Sean Connery, Nicolas Cage, Ed Harris. (R)	*** Die Hard (1988) Bruce Willis. (R)						
SHOW	BRV Housewives/NYC	Housewives/NYC	Housewives/NYC	Motherhood	Happens				
	CMT Last Man	Last Man	Last Man	** Legally Blonde (2001, Comedy)	Reese Witherspoon. (PG-13)				
	COM Futurama	Futurama	South Park	South Park	South Park	South Park	Daily Show		
STZENC	E! News (N)	The Kardashians	The Kardashians	The Kardashians	E! News				
	FOOD Diners	Diners, Drive	Diners, Drive	Diners, Drive	Diners	Diners			
	FX (6:57) *** X-Men: First Class (2011, Action)	James McAvoy. (PG-13)	The Americans (N)	Americans					
STARZ	GAC Going RV	Going RV	Going RV	Going RV	Going RV	Going RV	Going RV		
	HALL Last Man	Last Man	Last Man	The Middle	The Middle	The Middle	Golden Girls		
	HGTV Property Brothers: Buying	Property Brothers	Property Brothers (N)	Hunters	H Hunt. Int'l	Listed			
SHOW	LIFE Little Women: NY	Little Women: NY (N)	Little Women: NY (N)	Little Women: NY (N)	Plastic				
	MTV (6:00) Are We Done Yet?	Catfish: The TV Show	Catfish: The TV Show	The Challenge: Rivals III	Chall. Rivals				
	OXY Tia & Tam	** Why Did I Get Married? (2007) Tyler Perry, Jill Scott. (PG-13)	Douglas	Douglas	Married				
SHOW	SPIKE (5:30) The Rundown	*** Rush Hour (1998) Jackie Chan. (PG-13)	*** Bad Boys (1995, Action) (R)						
	SYFY ** A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010, Horror) (R)	*** Fright Night (2011, Horror) Anton Yelchin, Colin Farrell. (R)							
	TBN Receive	Potters	John Gray	Turning	Prince	S. Furtick	Living Proof	Blessed Life	John Gray
SHOW	TBS Seinfeld	Seinfeld	Big Bang	Big Bang	Big Bang	Big Bang	Big Bang	Conan (N)	
	TCM (6:15) I Thank a Fool (NR)	Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter? (1957)	(:45) ** The Girl Can't Help It (1956)	Tom Ewell.					
	TCM *** The Manchurian Candidate (2004) (ESP) (R)	(:10) ** The Giver (2014) Jeff Bridges. (PG-13)	Wamp Ac						
SHOW	TNT Castle	Castle	Castle	Castle	Castle	Castle			
	TRAVEL Expedition Unknown	Expedition Unknown	Expedition Unknown (N)	Expedition Unknown	Expedition				
	TRU Carbonaro	Carbonaro	Carbonaro	Carbonaro	Carbonaro	Carbonaro	Carbonaro		
SHOW	TVL Andy Griffith	Andy Griffith	Raymond	Raymond	Raymond	Raymond	Lopez (N)	Soul Man	King
	USA NCIS	NCIS	NCIS	NCIS	Royal Pains (N)	Law-SVU			
	VAH Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta	** Diary of a Mad Black Woman (2005) Kimberly Elise. (PG-13)	*** 8 Mile (2002) (R)						
SHOW	WGN-A ** National Treasure: Book of Secrets (2007) Nicolas Cage. (PG)	How I Met	How I Met	How I Met	How I Met	How I Met	How I Met		
	HBO (6:15) *** Juno (2007) (ESP) Ellen Page. (PG-13) (ESP)	*** Pitch Perfect 2 (2015) (ESP) Anna Kendrick. The Barden Bellas compete at the world championships. (R)	Last Week To.	The Godfather Epic					
	MAX (:05) *** Kill the Messenger (2014) (ESP) Jeremy Renner. Reporter Gary Webb exposes CIA crimes. (R)	Banshee Lucas resolves to	*** Don't Say a Word (2001, Suspense)	leave Banshee. (ESP)	(ESP) Michael Douglas. (R)				
SHOW	SHOW (:15) ** The Duff (2015) Mae Whitman. A teen tries to overthrow a judgmental classmate. (PG-13)	** The Duff (2015, Comedy-Drama) (ESP) Jack Black. (R)	(:45) *** St. Vincent (2014) (ESP) Bill Murray.						
	STARZ (:10) *** Bull Durham (1988, Romance-Comedy) (ESP) Kevin Costner, Susan Sarandon. (R)	Outlander Claire suffers a medical emergency.	Girlfriend	*** First Sunday (2008) (ESP) Ice Cube. (PG-13)					
	STZENC (6:00) ** When the Game Stands Tall (2014)	*** Terms of Endearment (1983, Comedy-Drama) (ESP) Shirley MacLaine, Debra Winger. (PG)	Kevin Kline. (PG-13)						