

Book Review: The Midnight Library

Between life and death there is a library. When Nora Seed finds herself in the Midnight Library, she has a chance to make things right.

“Some big, some small. But every time one decision is taken over another, the outcomes differ.”

– MRS. ELM, THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY

Do you believe in the afterlife? Do you think there is a place you go to when you cease to live? Is it death or something in between life and death? Why is there an afterlife and what is it supposed to mean for humans? All these questions have been addressed and redressed at various levels, but who knows what exists and what does not. The book ‘The Midnight Library by Matt Haig’ is an attempt to give afterlife or more precisely the moment between life and death a shape and meaning. It is astonishing that in such an attempt the book has beautifully given meaning to life and the continuous endeavours we make through it. It’s about the various possibilities our simple decisions hold and how those decisions can shape our achievements, our regrets and more importantly us. It is a book about infinite lives a person holds within a single lifetime, and how they live it and un-live it. A thought-provoking novel like this is not something we come across daily. The ability to teach life lessons and entice deep thoughts through simple stories is the quality of Matt Haig’s

writings.

So, the story is about a simple woman who has taken almost all the wrong decisions in her life and has lost everything from her friends to her job. As the book starts off, within the first few pages we find ourselves in the setting where this woman, the protagonist of the book, whose name is Nora is ready to end it and she commits suicide. Although the end of the protagonist's life is not actually the end of the book, it is a start, an entrance in the world that is unusual but promising. Every reader imagines an afterlife to unfold, a heaven to take the centre stage or a hell to slowly build around but instead Haig opens a different door, a door of in between. Nora enters a library, which is her view of the in between, where she meets her school librarian Mrs. Elms. She enters this different world, unaware of what possibilities it holds for her. Her dear librarian walks her through this world and shows her how the books in this library are not actually stories but her own infinite lives. She also introduces Nora to her book of regrets, a book that is so thick, heavy and repulsive at the same time.

Nora decided to commit suicide with regrets about her decisions, she expected that her life would have been different if she would have chosen differently, she might have been more successful and have not regretted anything. This library gave her the chance to find if she could have done better and how much better. She now had an infinite life to live and choose from but not infinite time, and more importantly she only had one shot at each life. A tragic story unfolds with simplicity. She used to enter a life and return as soon as she felt dissatisfied, it can be months or the first moment she entered. The library is a part of herself, it is disrupted when she is hopeless and it gets stable when she is hopeful and excited. The best part of the narrative is that Haig does not let all this seem unrealistic. He adds scientific explanations of quantum physics that give scope for

the existence of this world, this library where Nora is seated.

It is a plain book without thrill or suspense, it's very simple but yet it holds the reader till the end. Everyone is hooked on what Nora will choose now, life or death or if its life then will it be the same life or something which is a result of other different decisions. The irony is that the book has held the readers to know Nora's final decision but that decision does not mean anything for the readers or Nora, instead it's the process of finding how to decide. The story is tragic but mixed with the cleverness of the multiverse. It is not purely philosophy or science fiction, it is a mixture of both, because that is what life is, a mixture of deep thoughts and scientific facts.

Finally, I recommend this book because it holds a power that we miss in our fast-moving life, the power to evoke thoughts, the power to push us to find meaning and the power to show how our life has been shaped. I consider that if anything can make you introspect then that thing has achieved its purpose and surprisingly, you will find that while reading this book you are introspecting not at one point but at many moments, needless to say that it has amazingly achieved its purpose. It is a must read for teenagers and young adults as it might not solve your problems by giving a solution but it would definitely comfort you. Matt Haig has beautifully written the characters and the plot; Nora might not seem to be you but she would for sure feel like a hidden part of you. The plot is also not yours but it would remind you of the infinite possibilities your life had or can have.

Concluding, the book is not about travel but still it unravels a journey of acceptance and self. It is not attractive but indeed binding. This book is nothing more than a variation of an old fable that your grandmother might read to you and still you need to be grown up enough to enjoy the real meaning of it. And lastly a bit of spoiler, the book starts with the end

of life but ends with the start of life.

Do give it a read.