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A Walk to Remember

by

Nicholas Sparks

1999



MonkeyNotes by Diane Clapsaddle

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The story takes place in the real-life city of Beaufort, North Carolina (pronounced..... "

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Landon Carter - The 57 year old man who through flashback narrates the story of his

Jamie Sullivan - The seventeen year old girl daughter of a Baptist minister who is dying.....

Hegbert Sullivan - The Baptist minister, the writer of *The Christmas Angel*, and Jamie's

Minor Characters

Worth Carter - Landon's father and the local congressman, he is seldom home and so, he

Landon's mother - Although she is nameless, she has a great deal of influence on her son and.....

Eric Hunter - Landon's best friend and the star of the football team, he is a natural joker and.....

Miss Garber - The teacher who teaches the Drama Class and helps them stage *The Christmas Angel*.

Carey and Eddie - The two boys whom Landon often mocks as being somehow less than he is.

Jamie's mother - Although she has died at Jamie's birth, it is her Bible that has a.....

Landon's grandfather - A kind of robber baron who made the family fortune by stealing from

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. He or she must usually overcome some opposing force. In this novel, the protagonist is Landon Carter who tells his story in the same manner as one might hear a bildungsroman, or the story of a young man's

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the force that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. The antagonist does not always have to be a single character or even a character at all. The antagonist is really Landon, also, because he is at war with himself and wants to find who he is and who he wants to be. It is Jamie who....

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. The climax of the story occurs when Jamie finally reveals her secret: she is dying of leukemia.

Outcome - The outcome, resolution, or denouement of this plot is somewhat vague. We know that Landon finds the answer he has been seeking and proposes to Jamie. She makes her walk to remember down the aisle and they marry exactly in the way she had always dreamed. However, the final sentence when

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Landon Carter, a 57 year old man from Beaufort, North Carolina, narrates the story of his seventeenth year, the year that changed his life. He tells the reader how he takes part in the Christmas play at the urging of a strange girl he had known and teased for being different all his life. Her name is Jamie Sullivan and she is the deeply

religious daughter of the local Baptist minister, who has himself been the object of ridicule over the years. Through his experiences with her during the play and other times that Jamie impacts on his life, Landon.....

THEMES

Love conquers all - The theme of love conquers all is one of the most prevalent themes in that we are shown throughout the story, without love, life is meaningless.

God's Plan - The theme of God's Plan is also an important idea. The answer to the question, "What is....."

Additional themes are identified in the complete study guide.

MOOD

At times, the mood is tragic, filled with despair, and very sad; at other times, it is uplifting and

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Nicholas Charles Sparks was born the second son of Patrick and Jill Sparks on December 31, 1965 in Omaha, Nebraska. As a child he lived in Minnesota, Los Angeles, and Grand Island, Nebraska. The family finally settled in Fair Oaks, California. He graduated as the valedictorian of his high school class in 1984 and attended the University of Notre Dame on a track scholarship. He graduated from Notre Dame with a degree in Finance with high honors in 1988.

He worked numerous jobs since college, including: waiter, phone salesman, and real estate appraiser. His first published work was a book with the Olympic athlete Billy Mills that published in 1990.

He moved from California to North Carolina as a pharmaceutical salesman in 1992 and wrote *The Notebook*, which was later published in 1996. That really sparked his writing career and since *The Notebook* (1996), he has been the best selling author of several books, including: *Message in a Bottle*(1998), *The Rescue* (2000), A.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

PROLOGUE

Summary

The narrator of the story, Landon Carter, who is a 17 year-old senior in Beaufort, North Carolina, in 1958, begins his story with the line, "When I was seventeen, my life changed forever." He asserts that no one in his hometown would question that a 17 year old could know that, at such a young age, his life was irrevocably different. They know, because they have lived it with him.

As he tells his story, he is 57 years old, but he says he can remember every detail like it was yesterday. He relives it often in his mind as he has over the forty years since it happened and he feels both sadness and joy in the re-living. He'd like to take all the sadness away, but he knows that he would also lose the joy, so it takes it all in every time he reminisces.

Each time the events of that year come back to him, it's almost as if he can see himself grow younger, losing the wrinkles around his eyes and feeling his legs and arms become more muscled. He watches in his reminiscence the landscape of the town as he knows it now return to its narrow roads and acres of farmland. He suddenly imagines himself actually there – Landon Carter in front of the Baptist Church at the age of 17.

And he tells us that he promises to tell us the story without leaving anything out. He warns us that first we will "smile, and then we will cry – don't say you haven't been warned."

Notes

The prologue gives the author the opportunity to introduce his narrator, Landon Carter, and lay out the premise of his story – the memory of a 57 year old man about his senior year in high school. However, the Prologue has an even greater purpose and that is to prepare the reader, through foreshadowing, for a sad, yet joyful, experience.

To clarify the narrator's feelings as he reminisces, the author uses creative license to describe the wandering of his mind to the past as a kind of anthropomorphic change of both the character's body and the landscape of the town. In this way, he draws the reader into the poignant aspects of this story and makes us want to find out how such a memory could have such a long lasting effect for both Landon Carter and his town.

CHAPTER ONE

Summary

This chapter begins with Landon giving us a description of Beaufort, his hometown. He says it was like many other Southern small towns with its everpresent humidity, people who speak to you even when they don't know you, crabbing in the sound or the river and where there are only three channels on TV. What's most important to the residents is their church and Beaufort, in spite of being small, has eighteen of them in the town limits alone.

The Southern Baptist Church, of which Landon is a member, is known every year for its Christmas Pageant, which is actually a play written by Hegbert Sullivan, who had been with the church as its minister for many years. The play, called *The Christmas Angel*, had been written by Hegbert, because he thought the traditional staging of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens was for heathens. He believed that Ebenezer Scrooge should have been saved by angels instead of ghosts, since there was no way to know if God had actually sent them. He had tried changing the end of the play to suit his beliefs, but that did not go over well with the community, so he just wrote another.

Landon describes Hegbert as somewhat of a joke among the children of the town, because he preaches "fire and brimstone" every Sunday and he emphasizes the sin of fornication. This, of course, leads to teasing and the playing of pranks on the minister. His situation is not helped either by his old man appearance with his pale, translucent skin and his inability to smile at anyone. He didn't understand the behavior of the young people in his congregation even though he had a 17 year-old daughter named Jamie.

Landon also tells us that *The Christmas Angel* became an overnight hit with the town and every Christmas, it sold out and ran twice to packed houses. Landon speculates that people love it so much and cry buckets every time they see it, because it is basically a true story, figuring in Hegbert, his wife who had died giving birth to Jamie, and Jamie as a baby. Because it has such a serious message, Hegbert also wants the young people of the high school to perform it. He wants them to learn that if you "put your trust in God, you'll be alright in the end." Landon says it was a lesson he would eventually learn in time, even though it wouldn't be Hegbert who taught it to him.

Landon then tells the reader all about his own family and his own life in Beaufort. His father is Worth Carter and he is a congressman for "everything east of Raleigh and north of Wilmington, all the way to the Virginia border." He has held this position for almost thirty years and, obviously, wields tremendous power in his district and in his state. Landon tells us, without using it as an excuse for his own behavior, that his father was never there for him growing up, because he was always in Washington, D.C. "He was a stranger, someone I barely knew at all." As a result, he grew up under the care of his mother, whom he describes as "a nice lady, sweet and gentle, the kind of mother most people dream about. However, he recognizes that she cannot substitute the male influence he needs and combined with his growing disillusionment with his father, he turns into a bit of a rebel.

He never actually does anything really bad, but he does break enough rules that parents in the community whisper to their children not to be like that “Carter boy. He’s on a fast track to prison.”

Landon goes on to relate that Hegbert Sullivan and his father dislike each other because of Landon’s grandfather. Hegbert had worked for the man at one time and saw up close what a “bastard” he really was. The old man amassed a fortune on the backs of the townspeople, charging them exorbitant interest on loans from his bank, making promises he never kept, and foreclosing on their property in order to take it for himself. Landon observes that if anyone deserved to die an early, horrible death, it was his grandfather. Instead, the old man died at a ripe-old age while sleeping with his mistress on his yacht off the Cayman Islands. Landon thinks the fact that life isn’t fair should be the number one lesson taught in school.

When Hegbert quits in disgust, he turns instead to preaching in the Southern Baptist Church. Because of his obsession with preaching, he never married until he was 43 and Jamie wasn’t born until he was 55. His wife died giving birth to Jamie and hence *The Christmas Angel* came to past.

During his senior year, the staging of the play is left up to the Drama Class, taught by Miss Garber. Of course, Jamie Sullivan is given the lead role of the angel and everyone in the community is looking forward to it even more, because of the significance of the play to her own birth. Landon finds himself in the Drama Class also, just because he was looking for a “blow off class” for his senior year. Miss Garber has big plans for the class including leading her students towards “self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-fulfillment.” Of course, Landon finds these goals a little silly and thinks he can just ignore them. The best thing, he thinks, about the class is the fact that he is one of only two boys, which means he can use his “manly approach to women” without any competition.

Miss Garber tells the class that Jamie will be the Christmas angel and begins applauding wildly. The class goes along with the clapping somewhat tentatively, because, even though Jamie is a nice girl, she was unusual to say the least. She deliberately wears her hair in a bun, always has on a brown cardigan and a plaid skirt and is seldom noticed by anyone around her. She also carries her Bible wherever she goes and even reads it a lunch. Furthermore, she is always helping people and animals, going at least once a week to the orphanage, and bringing hurt “critters” to the local vet to be mended. She often voices her opinion that everything is a part of the Lord’s Plan and she even believes she is blessed to be Hegbert’s daughter. All of this is a huge strike against her when it comes to having either girlfriends or boyfriends. So, even though the parents of the town believe the world would be a better place with more Jamies in it, Landon and his friends think one is plenty.

When Jamie turns around to acknowledge the applause of her classmates, Landon is struck by the fact that she has developed breasts and has a nice tan. For the first time, at least to him, she looks almost pretty. She turns again and smiles pointedly at Landon and indicates she’s glad to see him in the class. As the narrator, he observes that “it wasn’t until later that I would learn the reason why.”

Notes

The fact that Landon emphasizes so early in the story the immense popularity of the Christmas play is a clue for the reader that somehow this play will figure strongly in how his senior year in high school is a lasting memory. Also, the fact that he suddenly begins to see Jamie Sullivan in a different light is an important clue to events he has yet to relate.

Landon’s description of Hegbert is also important to note for two reasons: one, he is the author of the play and it is a reflection of his own life; two, he has a bitter past with the Carter family because of Landon’s ruthless grandfather. Therefore, he doesn’t have much good to say about Landon either. This will be important to remember for events to come. Hegbert also has little to admire about Landon, because Landon has always been

behind pranks played on the serious preacher. This then lays the groundwork for a relationship which will spring up between Landon, Jamie, and her father.

There is also significant foreshadowing at the end of the chapter when Landon tells us he didn't know until later why Jamie was glad to see he had taken the class. Could it be that he is part of the Lord's Plan about which she always speaks?.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Landon Carter - He is the narrator of the story who tells us how he grew up in the town of Beaufort, North Carolina, fell in love with Jamie Sullivan, and completely changed in his seventeenth year. He tells his story in flashback, forty years after it happened, as if he lived it only yesterday. As he begins, he.....

Jamie Sullivan - She is the real angel of the story, not just a character in the school play. She is depicted as a rather strange young girl who wears her long hair in a bun and dons the same sweater and plaid skirt almost everyday. Since they have all been children, her classmates have made fun of her for.....

Hegbert Sullivan - The local Baptist minister, Hegbert was once an employee of Landon's grandfather, but he quit his job when he realized how much of a thief the man was and how much he was hurting the town. Hegbert then became a minister and married rather late in his life. Jamie's mother died giving birth

Worth and Mrs. Carter - These are Landon's parents who live rather privileged lives, because of their wealth and his position as a congressman. However, even though he has tremendous power, Worth is not really a bad man, just a frequently absent one. His word is law in his house, but he is, in the end, open to.....

Eric Hunter - He is Landon's best friend and is depicted as the golden boy of Beaufort High School. He's good-looking, athletic, and sometimes very cruel in his teasing of those who aren't part of.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The story is a narrative told in flashback from the viewpoint of Landon Carter who relates his senior year in high school, the year, he says, changed his life. Sparks has stated that he set the novel in the 1950s to make the events more believable in this simpler time. He felt that a more modern setting would not have worked as well. Sparks also notes that he wrote the Prologue of the novel last. He was also unsure as he

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The theme of **love conquers all** is the most prevalent theme. Every time Landon tries to deny the impact Jamie is having on his life, the love that she is slowly building in him and around him refuses to allow him to turn his back on his better nature. She also spreads her love to everyone else in the community and changes everyone for the better.

The theme of **God's Plan** is also an important idea. Throughout the book, Jamie searches for.....

Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide

RISING ACTION

The rising action begins in chapter one when Landon describes the small town he lives in a....

FALLING ACTION

The falling action involves the days following Jamie's revelation of her illness and how Landon comes to....

POINT OF VIEW

It is written in first person point of view and narrated by Landon Carter forty years after the facts had unfolded.

OTHER ELEMENTS

FORESHADOWING

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

1. When Landon opens the story with the words that his life changed when he was seventeen years old, he is preparing us for profound events that he's never forgotten.
2. When Landon warns us that we will laugh and we will cry, he foreshadows the loving relationship that will develop between him and Jamie and the fact that she is dying.....

17 additional examples of foreshadowing are explained in the complete study guide.

IRONY

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

1. Landon promises Jamie that he won't fall in love with her if she'll go to the homecoming dance with him, but that's exactly what happens.....

5 additional examples of irony are explained in the complete study guide.

CREATIVE LICENSE

Another literary device used by the author is **creative license**. This device allows the author to imagine obviously impossible things and make the reader suspend his.....

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS - QUOTES

The following quotations are important at various points in the story:

(Warner Books, Inc., New York, New York, 1999):

- 1.) *"When I was seventeen, my life changed forever."*
(pg. xi; Landon opens the book with this observation and prepares the reader for a story about profound change.)
- 2.) *"First you will smile, and then you will cry – don't say you haven't been warned."*
(pg. xiii; Landon foreshadows the wonderful sadness and joy of his seventeenth year that he's about to relate.).....

29 additional quotations are identified and discussed in the complete study guide

SYMBOLISM/MOTIFS/IMAGERY/SYMBOLS

Other elements that are present in this novel are **symbols and metaphors**. Symbols are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. Metaphors are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas. There are many symbols and metaphors used by the author such as:

- 1.) When Jamie sits on the floor at the orphanage on Christmas Eve with a sleeping child on.....

Additional symbolism is identified and discussed in the complete study guide.

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *A Walk to Remember*

Author: Nicholas Sparks

Date Published: 1999

Meaning of the Title: It refers first to the walk Jamie Sullivan makes down the aisle to marry Landon, in spite of the fact that she is so gravely ill. With her own personal strength and the desire to fulfill her

STUDY QUESTIONS / MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUIZ

- 1.) Landon warns the reader that his story will
 - a.) make us laugh.
 - b.) make us laugh and cry.
 - c.) make us cry.
- 2.) This warning is an example of
 - a.) irony
 - b.) metaphor
 - c.) foreshadowing.....

ANSWER KEY

1.) b 2.) c 3.) c 4.) a 5.) b 6.) c 7.) c 8.) c 9.) b 10.) b 11.) a 12.) b 13.) c 14.) c 15.) c

ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Jamie Sullivan is depicted as a very good young girl who never loses her patience or her temper; who always tries to good and think of others first; and who seeks to change Landon for his own good as well as hers. At first glance, her character seems too good to be true. Explain why you believe this is so or whether you believe there really are people who are just like Jamie and why.....

9 additional Essay Topics / Book Report Ideas are examined in the complete study guide.

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