

A Bend in the Road Study Guide

A Bend in the Road by Nicholas Sparks (author)

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Plot Summary

A Bend in the Road is a novel by bestselling author Nicholas Sparks. Two years ago, Miles Ryan lost his wife when she was killed in a hit and run accident. For the first time, Miles begins to date again when he meets his son's second grade teacher, Sarah Andrews. The relationship begins strong, but when Miles learns of new evidence in his wife's death he pushes everyone away. To save him, Sarah must sacrifice someone close to her and risk losing everything. A Bend in the Road is a romantic novel that questions what it means to be a husband, lover, and father.

Miles Ryan's wife died two years ago while jogging. Someone ran her over, killing her instantly. Miles was obsessed for a time with trying to find who killed her, feeling that as both her husband and a sheriff's deputy it is his responsibility. Recently, however, Miles has begun to move beyond his past and look to the future.

When Miles meets Sarah Andrews, his son's second grade teacher and he is immediately interested. However, Miles has never had to date as an adult and finds it difficult to find the words to ask Sarah out. Sarah has recently gone through a complicated divorce and is equally unsure when it comes to dating again. However, Sarah is not willing to allow this chance to pass her by. Sarah ends up asking Miles out.

Miles and Sarah find instant chemistry and date for more than a month before sliding into intimacy. Just when it seems that everything will work out for them, the past comes back to haunt Miles. After arresting a local drunk, Miles is told that a long time enemy of his, Otis Timson, confessed to the murder of his wife. Miles goes crazy, arresting Otis on his own and going back over the investigation to the exclusion of everyone, including Sarah and his son, Jonah. When Miles is suspended from his job for his actions, he refuses to back off of the investigation.

When Sarah tells her brother, Brian, about Miles' obsession and violent threats against Otis Timson, Brian confesses to Sarah that he was the one who hit Missy on that fateful day. Sarah forces Brian to tell Miles the truth. At first Miles becomes enraged, making accusations and attempting to arrest Brian. However, as time passes, Miles comes to realize that it was simply an accident. Miles makes the agonizing decision to let Brian go.



Prologue and Chapters 1-2

Prologue and Chapters 1-2 Summary

In Prologue, an unknown narrator begins the story of Miles Ryan and Sarah Andrews. The narrator begins his story by telling how Miles' wife of seven years, his high school sweetheart, lived a typical small town life until her death in 1986 in a hit and run accident.

In Chapter 1, Miles stands alone on the back deck of his house in the moments before dawn two years after his wife's death. Miles thinks about his wife, his deep grief over her passing, and their now seven year old son. Miles has been grieving a long time and has recently realized that he is beginning to look toward the future. Miles has been lonely and is finally ready to do something about it. After dressing, Miles rouses his son from bed. Over breakfast, Miles asks his son about a note Miles found in his backpack asking for a parent-teacher conference. Jonah admits to having some trouble at school, but seems unsure of what the teacher wants from Miles.

In Chapter 2, the night before meeting Miles Ryan for a parent-teacher conference, Sarah Andrews is walking through downtown New Bern. Sarah has recently moved to New Bern after a difficult divorce because her parents and younger brother have lived there for several years. Sarah's divorce has left her shaken. Sarah's husband, a rich and successful man, divorced her shortly after learning that Sarah would never be able to give him children. Now, Sarah finds herself thinking about Jonah Ryan. Jonah's mother was killed two years ago and as a result Sarah has discovered that his previous two teachers have let him slide on classwork. Due to this, Jonah is severely behind the other kids in her second grade class, causing her great concern.

After getting Jonah on the bus for school, Miles drives to work. Driving the twisting road on which his wife died, Miles recalls the argument they had that night that caused Missy to go for a long jog as the sun was setting. Miles will always regret the last words he ever spoke to his wife. Later, Miles meets his boss, Charlie, for lunch. They talk some about Sarah Andrews. Charlie's wife, Brenda, works at the school and has informed Charlie that Sarah is a very attractive woman, perfect for Miles. They also discuss Otis Timson, a member of a criminal family on the outskirts of town whom Miles recently arrested again. Otis has been a thorn in Miles' side for years, harassing Miles for his frequent arrests of family members. Once Otis even threw a brick through Miles' living room window, injuring then four-month-old Jonah. Now Miles learns that Otis is claiming police brutality against Miles, claiming Miles beat him up during his last arrest. However, charges will not be filed. Charlie advises Miles to be more careful in the future.



Prologue and Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The prologue of this novel introduces an unknown narrator who feels a certain obligation to tell Miles and Sarah's story. The narrator does not reveal his relationship to either Miles or Sarah, nor does he tell the reader how he knows about them. However, when the narrator goes on to describe Missy Ryan, the reader begins to suspect that this mysterious narrator must have had something to do with Missy's death. This suggests to the reader that this mysterious narrator will eventually reveal himself at some point in the plot.

The first chapter introduces Miles Ryan. Miles is a grieving widower who feels double guilt for his wife's death, not only because he is her husband and should have protected her from her sad fate, but also because he is a sheriff's deputy and has so far been unable to find her killer. Miles needs someone to blame for his wife's death, a drunk who was driving erratically or a criminal who targeted Missy on purpose. To this end, Miles has spent two years creating a case file on his wife's death that is thick but has shed no light on the truth.

Sarah Andrews is introduced in the second chapter. Sarah is younger than Miles, but has lived a different life. Where Miles married his high school sweetheart, Sarah was single through high school and college, only to marry a rich, successful man in the city. Sarah's future looked bright with Michael as he prepared to run for political office, but the revelation that Sarah could not have children changed Michael's plans. Sarah learned just how badly her husband wanted children when he divorced her for her failure to provide him with a namesake. Now Sarah, wounded and angry, has moved to New Bern to be close to her family. The reader can see where this will go, that Sarah and Miles will seek one another out. The only question at this point in the novel is whether their differences will make a relationship difficult. The reader must also wonder how Sarah's inability to have children might affect a relationship with Miles.



Chapters 3-9

Chapters 3-9 Summary

In Chapter 3, Sarah tells Miles at their meeting that Jonah is desperately behind the other students in class, but she thinks he can catch up with some extra work at home. Miles explains that he is not home in the evenings three days a week, so Sarah volunteers to keep Jonah after school those days and work with him if Miles will work with him the other days. Miles agrees.

In Chapter 4, the unnamed narrator tells the reader how Miles began to worry about Missy that night when she did not come home immediately. Miles called Charlie and asked him to look for her since Miles had to stay with Jonah. A short time later, Charlie and his wife came to tell Miles the awful news.

In Chapter 5, Miles takes Jonah to ice cream and talks to him about what Sarah said. Jonah is unhappy with the prospect of staying after school, but agrees to work hard to catch up. That night, while consoling Jonah during a nightmare, Miles thinks about Sarah, shocked to realize he was attracted to her.

In Chapter 6, Sarah sits at home alone, drinking, after having a bad day. Sarah has just learned that Michael is getting married again. Later, while shopping with her mother, Sarah breaks down.

In Chapter 7, while Sarah and Jonah begin their after school sessions, Miles faces a couple of country kids who were shooting owls in an abandoned house. Later, Miles picks up Jonah and finds him happier about the situation. Over the next few weeks, Miles finds himself drawn more and more to Sarah. One Saturday, Sarah shows up at one of Jonah's soccer games. Miles tries to ask her out afterward, but finds himself mumbling about other things. Miles is mortified by his failed attempt.

In Chapter 8, Sarah talks to Brenda about Miles and learns more about Missy's death. When Miles comes to pick up Jonah later in the day, Sarah asks Miles out.

In Chapter 9, the night before Miles' first date with Sarah, he talks to Jonah about what it means to date when you are an adult. Later, Miles watches video tapes of home movies with Missy. At the same time, Sarah fields phone calls from her mother who is overly excited that Sarah is dating again.

Chapters 3-9 Analysis

Miles meets Sarah and is instantly attracted to her despite the guilt this causes. Miles has loved Missy all his adult life and would still be contentedly married to her if she had not died. For this reason, the idea of dating someone new is foreign and frightening. However, Miles is strong enough to recognize that he is lonely and he is the kind of guy



who needs a woman in his life. For this reason, Miles allows his attraction to Sarah to grow, but cannot quite figure out how to ask her out.

On Sarah's part, she is still grieving the death of her marriage. When Sarah learns that her ex-husband is about to remarry, she is devastated. However, in a strange way this information helps Sarah move on. Sarah is attracted to Miles and recognizes his interest in her. For this reason, Sarah makes it easier on Miles by asking him out. The reader can see this couple is on the cusp of a new relationship and is rooting for them. Unfortunately, there are obstacles in the way and the reader cannot help but wonder how these will impact this new couple.



Chapters 10-15

Chapters 10-15 Summary

In Chapter 10, the unnamed narrator describes Missy's funeral and how he stood in the back, needing to see Jonah and Miles during their time of grief.

In Chapter 11, Miles picks up Sarah and takes her to a local restaurant where they begin to get to know one another. Afterward, they go to a local bar where they play pool. Sarah hustles Miles, but he takes it with good humor. Their good time ends, however, when Otis Timson comes over and starts hassling them. Sarah gets Miles out of the bar before a fight can start. As they walk toward the river, Miles tells Sarah about Missy.

In Chapter 12, Sarah attends Jonah's soccer game the next day. When Jonah makes plans to spend the night at a friend's house, Miles accepts an invitation to have dinner with Sarah. Miles and Sarah continue to see each other over the next few weeks.

In Chapter 13, Miles takes Sarah on a tour of houses that includes ghost stories a few days before Halloween. Miles makes a special point of taking Sarah to the home of Miss Harkins. Miss Harkins tells the tragic love story of Harris and Kathryn Presser. After a secret romance that ended in a secret wedding, Harris was arrested for treason and hung from a tree outside of Kathryn's bedroom window. A few days later, after placing two candles in her window, Kathryn hung herself from the same tree. Miss Harkins says to this day lovers who are truly in love can still see the candles. As Miles walks Sarah home later, he kisses her.

When they arrive at her apartment, Sarah realizes she must tell Miles that she cannot have children because she does not want to go through the same thing she did with Michael. Miles is kind when Sarah tells him, assuring her that it does not change the way he feels for her. Afterward, they make love for the first time.

In Chapter 14, as Miles and Sarah continue with their relationship, Miles worries how Jonah will adjust to the situation. Miles is happy to see that Jonah seems to be accepting Sarah into their lives.

In Chapter 15, on Thanksgiving, Miles and Jonah are invited to dinner at the house of Sarah's parents. This is the first time Miles will meet Sarah's family. Everyone seems to like Miles and Jonah, except Brian who is reserved with everyone. After dinner, Miles, Jonah, and Sarah go for a walk. Miles finds himself thinking that he might want to ask Sarah to marry him someday.

Chapters 10-15 Analysis

Miles and Sarah begin to date. Miles worries about how Jonah will accept the situation and is happy to see that Jonah seems to like having Sarah in their lives. Miles and



Sarah are brutally honest with each other, talking about their previous spouses and the secrets that had the potential to ruin things for them. Miles even finds himself welcoming Sarah into the bed he once shared with Missy and removing photos of Missy from the room. It seems that Miles is ready to move on, especially when he begins thinking about marriage.

The unnamed narrator tells the reader about the night Miles learned of Missy's death and the funeral. The narrator admits to being the one who hit Missy with his car, but as of yet has not told the reader how that happened. There are few clues to the identity of the unnamed narrator, but with each chapter in his point of view the reader learns a little more about him. The identity of this man, the reader suspects, will have a huge impact on Miles. However, the reader has no idea who this person might be except for the tension between Miles and Otis Timson. Otis has done things to Miles before, like throwing a brick through his living room window and cutting four-month-old Jonah's cheek. However, is Otis angry enough with Miles to have killed Missy? This is something the reader must ponder as the plot continues to develop.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary

In Chapter 16, the narrator describes the night of Missy's death. He has worked long hours that day and wanted to have barbecue before going home to sleep, but a slow moving car caused him to have to change the direction in which he had planned to drive. The man saw Missy on the road and slowed down. However, as he was about to pass her, a large dog jumped out and frightened her. Missy stepped in front of the car seconds before he hit her.

In Chapter 17, Sims Addison is an alcoholic who has been to prison in the past. Sims had terrible withdrawn and was beaten severely in prison. For this reason, Sims was released early, but any trouble with the law will get him back in jail for the remainder of his sentence. For this reason, Sims is not happy when Miles Ryan pulls him over for drunk driving. Sims, who has given information to the police in the past for a reward, knows he must come up with good information this time. The following afternoon, Charlie calls Miles into work and tells him that Sims wants to talk to him. Sims tells Miles that he overheard Otis Timson threatening to run over a local man, Earl Getlin, the same way he did Missy.

In Chapter 18, the unnamed narrator remembers getting out of the car and how he finally realized that Missy was dead. The narrator placed a blanket over her because he did not want anyone to see her the way he had. The narrator then left and went home. The next morning, the narrator read in the paper that the police thought it was a hit and run. Fear caused him not to call the police and confess.

In Chapter 19, Miles releases Sims and rushes out to the Timson compound, refusing to tell Charlie what is going on. When Miles arrives at the Timson place, he tells Clyde, Otis' father, to send his son out. When Otis finally comes out, Miles presses his gun to the back of Otis' head. Miles wants to kill Otis, but thoughts of Jonah keep him from doing it. As Miles drives Otis to the sheriff's office, he tries to ignore Otis. However, when Otis tries to goad him, Miles slams on the breaks, forcing Otis to hit the safety cage.

In Chapter 20, Charlie demands to know what is going on when Miles arrives at the station. Miles tells Charlie everything. Charlie is angry that Miles did all this on his own and broke many rules. Charlie sends Miles home and promises to check things out himself. Charlie thinks it all through and decides to first go speak to Earl Getlin to see if he will back up Sims' story. At the same time, Miles drives around town and finds himself at Missy's grave where someone has placed flowers.



Chapters 16-20 Analysis

Just as things are looking good in Miles' life and he is able to put the past behind him, something happens to bring it all back. A local drunk confesses that he overheard Otis Timson confess in part to Missy's death. Miles has hunted for a long time for a clue to the identity of his wife's killer and this information is a catalyst that sends Miles spiraling back into the obsession that nearly consumed his life in the months after Missy's death. Not only this, but a suspect Miles has always thought was responsible for his wife's death is the man being accused now. It seems not only to be the answer Miles has been long looking for, but also a way to rid himself of a menace.

The unnamed narrator tells the reader about the accident that took Missy's life. The narrator was tired and hungry, but he was not drunk as Miles once suspected. In fact, the narrator was careful when he saw Missy jogging along the side of the road and Missy herself had taken certain precautions as well. However, an unexpected appearance by a large dog caused Missy to jump into the road. It was an accident, a horrible accident. The accident was made worse, however, when the narrator chose to run rather than seek help.

The reader has some sympathy for the unnamed narrator. However, his story makes several things clear to the reader. The man who killed Missy was more than likely not Otis Timson because he does not seem like the kind of a guy who works a full time job or the type who would feel such remorse for his actions. Also the man who killed Missy reacted to shock and fear in a way that a more mature person accustomed to run-ins with the police would not have. This suggests to the reader the man might be younger or at least a law-abiding citizen. Therefore, the reader is concerned that Miles might be focusing on the wrong person in his need for justice.



Chapters 21-28

Chapters 21-28 Summary

In Chapter 21, the unnamed narrator describes nightmares he had after the funeral.

In Chapter 22, Charlie visits Earl Getlin at the state prison and hears his story about the night Otis Timson threatened him. However, Charlie recognizes several problems with Earl's story even though it corroborates Sims' story. Charlie is troubled, afraid that Otis' statement was a lie.

In Chapter 23, the unnamed narrator describes how he began to sneak up to the Ryan house and spy on Jonah and Miles.

In Chapter 24, Miles begins studying his file on Missy's death, ignoring everything around him, including Jonah. When Sarah comes by later for a prearranged date, Miles tells her everything that has happened. Later, Miles returns to the file and Sarah leaves. At the same time, Charlie tries to soothe the district attorney and the Timson family lawyer who want to press charges against Miles for police brutality. Later, Charlie works late into the night trying to decide what to do about Miles.

In Chapter 25, the unnamed narrator describes how watching Miles and Jonah became a compulsion he could not control.

In Chapter 26, Jonah has his first nightmare in weeks. Later, Miles goes into the sheriff's department only to be told that the Timsons want to press charges against him. Charlie tells Miles that he cannot work on Missy's case and that he is on suspension until things settle down with the Timsons. Angry, Miles goes looking for Sarah.

In Chapter 27, Miles tells Sarah all that has happened that morning. Sarah tries to speak to Miles, but everything she says comes out wrong. Miles thinks that Sarah is not on his side and he leaves. Later, Sarah tells Brian that she is afraid that Miles might hurt Otis Timson when he is released later that day. Brian advises Sarah to call Charlie and warn him about Miles' state of mind. Later, after receiving two troubling phone calls, one from Sarah and one from Sims' mother, Charlie decides to have a deputy watch the Timson compound.

In Chapter 28, a year after Missy's death, the unnamed narrator was watching Miles when he saw him smile at Missy's image on a home video. After that, the narrator no longer felt compelled to watch Miles and Jonah.

Chapters 21-28 Analysis

Charlie begins an investigation into Sims' story and finds someone to back him up, but Charlie does not like it. The man was not frightened enough by the threat to leave the



bar and he continued to associate with the Timsons until he was arrested six months later. Charlie begins to think the statement might have been made in jest or was simply a lie. At the same time, Charlie finds himself defending Miles' actions to the DA and the lawyer for the Timson family. Miles has acted inappropriately on evidence that is not strong enough to justify Otis' arrest. Not only does Charlie have to defend Miles, but he has to let Otis go, too.

Miles becomes obsessed with the investigation into Missy's death again. Miles was obsessed in the year after her death, but now he is so intent on proving Otis' guilt that he pushes everything aside, even Jonah and Sarah. At the same time, Miles is frustrated with Sarah for not outright supporting him and he pushes her even further away. Sarah begins to worry about Miles, afraid he might do something he should not do to Otis.

The unnamed narrator describes how his guilt made him become obsessed not only with Missy, but with Miles and Jonah as well. The narrator visits Missy's grave regularly, the spot where she was hit, and he watches Miles and Jonah through their windows until he sees that Miles is beginning to recover from his grief. This shows clear guilt on the part of the narrator, suggesting that he is not Otis because a career criminal would not likely experience that degree of guilt even in an accident.



Chapters 29-37 and Epilogue

Chapters 29-37 and Epilogue Summary

In Chapter 29, on Sunday, Brian goes to Sarah's apartment and begs her to stop Miles from doing anything stupid to Otis and to stop pushing the case. Then Brian admits to the reader that he is the one who hit Missy.

In Chapter 30, Sarah questions Brian over and over about Missy's death.

In Chapter 31, Charlie goes to Miles and asks for his case file on Missy's death and his guns. Charlie admits he is afraid Miles might do something stupid to Otis and he is doing this for his own protection. Later, while Sarah is struggling with Brian's confession, Miles comes to see her. When Sarah pushes Miles to let up on Otis, he becomes angry and leaves.

In Chapter 32, the next morning, Sarah convinces Brian he must tell Miles the truth. Together they go to Miles' house and explain everything. Miles becomes angry, especially when he begins to think that Sarah knew all along and that is why she has been dating him. Miles puts cuffs on Brian and drags him to his car to turn him in.

In Chapter 33, Miles drives too fast and erratically toward the sheriff station. Sarah follows a few minutes later. Brian begins to talk to Miles, trying to convince him that Sarah knew nothing until the day before and that the hit and run was an accident. Miles turns in his seat to see Brian when Brian mentions the blanket he placed on Missy. The car wanders into the wrong lane and nearly runs into a church van.

In Chapter 34, Miles takes Brian from the car and assesses his injuries before releasing him from the handcuffs. The other driver comes over and yells at Miles for reckless driving. Sarah arrives and insists on taking Brian to the hospital. Miles allows them to leave. Later Charlie arrives to ask Miles what is going on. Miles refuses to tell Charlie about Brian's role in Missy's death. Instead, Miles later goes to the sight of the accident and looks for evidence of the dog Brian mentioned. Brian and Sarah wait the whole day for Miles to arrest Brian, but he never does. Instead, Miles visits Sarah and asks when she knew about Brian.

In Chapter 35, Miles picks up Jonah and goes home. Alone in the living room, Miles watches home videos of Missy. Jonah comes into the room and asks a few hard questions about his mother. After Jonah goes back to bed, Miles retrieves a handgun from the shed in the backyard.

In Chapter 36, Brian takes flowers to Missy's grave a few days later. Miles arrives behind him and asks him not to do that anymore. Miles then tells Brian that he needs to do something productive with his life. Miles also tells Brian he cannot tell anyone about his role in Missy's death or the fact that Miles has decided to let him go free. Later Sarah comes to thank Miles for letting Brian go. Miles tells Sarah that he cannot



continue his relationship with her because being with her would mean being near his wife's killer. Sarah agrees.

In Chapter 37, Charlie arrives as Miles is packing for a trip to Nags Head. Charlie tells Miles that the trouble with the Timsons is over and he is welcome to come back to work after his vacation. Charlie then asks about Miles' arrest of Brian, but Miles assures him it is over.

In the Epilogue, Brian tells the reader that he has gone to medical school and is now a trauma doctor who has saved several lives. Brian is also married and living in California. Brian then tells the reader that Miles came back to Sarah on Christmas Eve and they are still happily together.

Chapters 29-37 and Epilogue Analysis

The unnamed narrator turns out to be Sarah's brother, Brian. This makes sense to the reader. Brian is young, explaining his irrational actions after the accident by running away. It also makes the tension between Brian and Miles at Thanksgiving make more sense. It also makes things between Sarah and Miles difficult.

Miles goes crazy when he learns the truth about Missy's death, especially when Brian tells him that she stepped in front of the car. Miles is so determined to think that Missy's death was the fault of a drunk or someone with a grudge that he has never considered the idea that Missy might have been responsible for her own death or that it might have been a simple accident.

Miles arrests Brian, but on the way to the station they are in an accident. Miles has now heard everything Brian has to say and realized that accidents do happen, such as his accident with Brian in the car. However, Miles still craves justice for his wife's death. Miles has suffered and he wants the person who caused that to suffer as well. However, Miles is a good man and he recognizes that the only thing Brian did wrong was to run. Finally Miles decides that revenge against Brian or even the dog would not be a good idea and he lets it go.

Miles and Sarah have obstacles between them before either learns of Brian's role in Missy's death, but have managed to avoid them with honesty. However, the honesty of Brian's role in the accident might be a little too much honesty. Miles wants to break up with Sarah, but soon realizes that his love for her goes much deeper than his anger with Brian.



Characters

Miles Ryan

Miles Ryan is a sheriff's deputy. Miles has lived in New Bern all his life and married his high school sweetheart. Two years ago, Miles' wife, Missy, was killed when she was hit by a car while jogging. Miles has struggled with his grief, which has been compounded by the fact that they never found out who did it.

Miles has recently come to the realization that he is lonely and he is not the kind of guy who can be content without a partner in life. For these reasons, Miles is open to a new relationship when he meets Sarah Andrews, his son's second grade teacher. Miles and Sarah begin dating and everything appears to be going well until Miles is pulled back into his grief and his obsession over his wife's killer when a snitch tells him that Otis Timson bragged about killing Missy.

Miles struggles to make Sarah understand how important it is for him to learn the truth about what happened to his wife. When Sarah finally brings Miles the answers, he feels betrayed. In the end, however, Miles comes to recognize that it was all a tragic accident and that enough people have been hurt.

Missy Ryan

Missy Ryan is Miles' wife. Missy is a gentle, kind woman who is well liked by everyone in New Bern. Missy and Miles have been together since high school and have settled into a contented marriage. One evening, angry with Miles for going fishing instead of doing the yard work, Missy storms out of the house to go for a jog. When Missy does not return, Miles asks Charlie to find her. It turns out that Missy was hit by a car while jogging and the driver left her on the side of the road.

Jonah Ryan

Jonah is Miles' son. Due to the death of his mother a few weeks before he began kindergarten, Jonah's teachers allowed his schoolwork to slide. For this reason, Jonah begins second grade far behind the other students. His teacher, Sarah Andrews, arranges with Miles to teach Jonah after school in order to help him catch up. This is how Jonah's father, Miles, and Sarah Andrews meet.

Sarah Andrews

Sarah Andrews is a second grade teacher. Sarah has lived in Baltimore most of her life and enjoys the big city life. However, after her husband divorced her because of her



inability to have children, Sarah moved to New Bern to be closer to her parents and brother who had moved there several years earlier.

Sarah was deeply injured by her divorce, therefore she is a little weary when it comes to dating again. However, Sarah is strongly attracted to Miles Ryan and quickly agrees to date him. Sarah is brutally honest with Miles about her past and it seems their relationship is going strong until Sarah learns that it was her brother who ran over Missy Ryan with his car. Sarah is heartbroken to realize that Miles cannot get past their past in order to have a future together.

Brian Andrews

Brian Andrews is nineteen when the novel begins. When he was seventeen, Brian was driving home from a double shift at work when Missy Ryan stepped in front of his car. Brian ran from the scene and did not turn himself in afterward, but has spent the last two years filled with guilt that has caused him to become a voyeur in Miles and Jonah's lives. When Brian admits the truth to Miles, Miles becomes enraged and attempts to arrest Brian, but later decides that enough people have been hurt by what happened to Missy.

Maureen Andrews

Maureen Andrews is Sarah and Brian's mother. Maureen is an obsessive mother who finds it difficult to keep out of her children's lives. Maureen drives Sarah crazy with questions when she learns that Sarah is dating Miles. However, Maureen is well meaning and loves her children deeply.

Charlie Curtis

Charlie Curtis is the sheriff for whom Miles works and also a good friend of Miles. Charlie finds himself in the uncomfortable position of having to defend Miles' actions after Miles learns that Otis Timson confessed in public to running Missy down with a car. Charlie does all he can to make a case against Otis, but realizes it is weak at best and will not hold up in court. Charlie suspends Miles and lets Otis go, something that deeply upsets Miles until he learns the truth about Missy's death.

Otis Timson

Otis Timson is a member of a local New Bern family who are habitual criminals. Although Otis has never been convicted of a serious crime, Miles suspects that Otis is responsible for much of the drug trafficking done in the area. Miles has arrested Otis multiple times, causing Otis to have a grudge against Miles. When Jonah was four months old, Otis threw a brick through Miles' living room window, causing Jonah to receive a cut on his cheek. For this reason, Miles quickly assumes Otis had something



to with Missy's death, an assumption that appears to be confirmed when Miles receives information that Otis confessed to the murder in public not long after Missy's death.

Harvey Wellman

Harvey Wellman is the district attorney in New Bern. Miles comes into conflict with Harvey multiple times because the Timson family, Otis in particular, makes many complaints about Miles' treatment of them in custody. When Miles arrests Otis for Missy's death, Miles presses his gun against Otis' head, causing the family to once again attempt to press charges. However, Harvey refuses once again to be pressured by the Timsons and the whole thing eventually blows over.

Sims Addison

Sims Addison is a local alcoholic in New Bern. Sims makes a living by playing snitch for the police and sheriff's department. Sims has been to jail and had a difficult time of it, therefore he does not want to return. When Miles arrests Sims for drunk driving, Sims tells Miles that he heard Otis Timson confess to Missy's murder months after her death. Sims then disappears as holes appear in the case.



Objects/Places

Green Jacket

Sarah's mother advises her not to wear a green jacket that she would normally wear in cold weather on her date with Miles. However, Miles encourages her to wear it because of the cold.

Matchbox Cars

Sarah gives Jonah a box of Matchbox cars when he comes to her mother's house for Thanksgiving because there are no other children for him to play with.

Pictures

After Missy's death, Miles had many of her pictures framed and placed in his bedroom. When Sarah spends the night with Miles at his home, he removes the pictures.

Home Videos

Miles has a box full of home videos that he sometimes watches alone. These tapes feature both Missy and Jonah.

Case File

Miles has a case file on Missy's death that he compiled himself in the weeks and months after her death. Miles uses this file to try and figure out who killed Missy, but it never offers any clues.

Extra Schoolwork

Sarah gives Jonah extra schoolwork to do with Miles so that he might catch up on his studies.

Gun

Miles takes a gun out of a lockbox his father gave him years before after learning that Brian is responsible for Missy's death. Miles' other guns were confiscated by Charlie Curtis. The reader assumes Miles will use the gun on Brian, however he intended to use the gun to kill the dog that caused Missy to step in front of Brian's car. Miles does not kill the dog.



Pontiac Bonneville

Brian drove a Pontiac Bonneville when he was seventeen. It is this car with which Brian hit Missy Ryan, leaving no damage to the car but killing Missy.

Rhett's Barbecue

Rhett's Barbecue is a restaurant in New Bern. Rhett's was Brian's destination on the night he hit Missy with his car.

Madame Moore's Lane

Madame Moore's Lane is the road on which Missy was killed. The road is filled with surprising curves and Miles has often lobbied for the speed limit to be lowered there.

New Bern, North Carolina

New Bern is one of the oldest towns in North Carolina. In fact, New Bern was once the capital of the state. New Bern is also where the novel is set.

California

Brian moved to California after confessing his part in Missy's death to Miles in order to give Miles and Sarah the space that they needed to regain their relationship.



Themes

Grief

Miles spends two years grieving for his wife after she is killed in a hit and run accident. Missy was Miles' high school sweetheart and the only woman he imagined himself loving. The night Missy was killed, she and Miles had a fight and she left after Miles said some pretty mean things. When Miles learned of Missy's death, he began to imagine a drunk who might not even be aware that he hit her or that she was targeted by some of Miles' enemies through his job as a sheriff's deputy. Miles began an investigation of his own into the death of his wife, following in the footsteps of the highway patrol in an attempt to learn the truth. However, Miles never does.

A year before the novel begins, Sarah Andrews was a happily married woman. However, Sarah learned that she could never have children. Weeks later, Sarah's husband asked for a divorce, cutting her completely out of his life. When the novel begins, Sarah is still reeling from the divorce and the loss of trust. As Sarah grieves her marriage, she also grieves her inability to have children.

Jonah Ryan was only five years old when his mother is killed. Jonah struggled in school and as a result was far behind when he began second grade. It is this that brings Miles and Sarah together, making grief an important theme of the novel.

Guilt

The man who hit Missy Ryan with his car, the first-person narrator of the novel, is wracked with guilt after her death. The man who hit Missy ran from the scene of the accident and did not turn himself in in the following days because he was afraid of going to jail. As a result, Miles would struggle to find who killed his wife and the man who hit Missy would be filled with a compulsion to watch Miles and Jonah for signs that they have been able to get on with their lives.

Miles is a sheriff's deputy, therefore he feels it is his responsibility to solve crimes. When Missy is killed, Miles feels that he has let her down as a husband by not protecting her, and as a sheriff's deputy by not solving the crime. Miles lives with this guilt for two years after Missy's death until the man who hit her finally comes to him and tells him the truth. Hence guilt is a theme of the novel.

Second Chances

Sarah and Miles have both been married before and both have suffered the end of their marriage for one reason or another. For both of them, a new relationship is a second chance to find happiness. They go into their relationship with open eyes and use



honesty to overcome any obstacles to their future relationship. It appears that Sarah and Miles might be able to make it where they might have failed before.

When Miles learns the truth about his wife's death, he is angry at first, especially when it appears that Missy herself might have been partially at fault. However, as Miles struggles with the truth, he realizes that many people have already been hurt by what happened that night and that now he must put his son first. Miles does not want Jonah to learn the truth about his mother's death or learn that his father knew the truth and let the perpetrator go. For this reason, Miles gives Brian a second chance by letting him go but makes him keep the truth secret.

When Miles learns that Brian was the man driving the car that killed his wife, he tells Sarah that he cannot be in a relationship with her. Miles does not think he can be involved with a woman whose brother killed his wife and face this man over the holiday table for the rest of his life. However, Miles soon realizes that he cannot be happy without Sarah and gives her a second chance.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in two points of view. The first point of view is the first person. The narrator is unnamed at the beginning of the novel, but the reader quickly learns that this person is the man responsible for hitting Missy Ryan with his car. Late in the novel, the reader learns that the unnamed narrator is Brian Andrews. The majority of the novel is written in the third person point of view. The narrator shifts from scene to scene, but sticks mainly with Sarah Andrews and Miles Ryan.

The novel is written as though the man who hit Missy Ryan with his car is attempting to write out his story in order to assuage some remaining guilt. The unnamed narrator begins his story with background on Missy Ryan and suggesting that Miles' new relationship with Sarah Andrews has an important impact on Miles' life and the moment in which he finally learns the truth. For this reason, the unnamed narrator tells the story of Miles and Sarah's romance before telling the reader the truth about Missy's death. For this reason, the author chooses to use two different points of view in his novel and these points of view work well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is set in New Bern, North Carolina. New Bern is an old city with a great deal of history in North Carolina. In 1988, when this novel is set, New Bern is a small town, the kind of town where everyone knows everyone else. For this reason, everyone in town knows about the death of Missy Ryan, a fact that causes Miles some difficulty in moving beyond the past and finding a new love. However, when Sarah Andrews makes the choice to move to town to be close to her family, it offers the perfect opportunity for Miles to be with someone new.

The setting of the novel is typical to Nicholas Sparks, who has set most of his novels in North Carolina. This setting creates an intimate setting in which the town is so small that there are few secrets among its citizens. However, there is one huge secret that Miles Ryan is obsessed with discovering. The setting of the small town, and the time period in which the novel is set, allow the reader to feel that sense of intimacy and the intrusion of everyone's curiosity about everyone else. It also allows the reader to understand how a hit and run can go for two years without being solved. For these reasons, the setting of this novel works with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. The author uses a basic language that expresses the intelligence of the characters, but does not leave the reader feeling unintelligent.



The author does not use foreign phrases or slang that might make comprehension of the plot difficult for the reader.

The language of this novel is appropriate to the plot because it is authentic to the characters and it is suitable for the intended audience. The author does not pepper his novel with words that might cause confusion for the reader, leaving the language as simple as his simple plot. Hence the language works well with the plot and makes the novel a pleasant read for readers of all ages.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty-seven chapters, a prologue, and an epilogue. The chapters are all of fair length. Some of the chapters are written in first person point of view from a time in the present while most of the rest of the novel is written in third person omniscient point of view and takes place in 1988. The novel is told with narration and dialogue, creating complete scenes that show the story rather than tell it.

The novel contains one main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot is about Miles Ryan, a widower who is still struggling with his grief and guilt over his wife's death while he is also attempting to move on with his life. A subplot takes the reader into the history of Sarah Andrews who becomes Miles' love interest in the novel. Another subplot follows the story of Missy Ryan's death and the impact it had on the man who hit her. Yet another subplot follows Miles' difficulties with a local habitual crime family and their accusations against him. All the plots comes to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Where does a story truly begin? In life, there are seldom clear-cut beginnings, those moments when we can, in looking back, say that everything started" (Prologue, p. 1).

"He was tired of being alone, of waking up in an empty bed, though the feeling still surprised him" (Chapter 1, p. 7).

"New Bern, she'd learned almost right away, was not a town for singles" (Chapter 2, p. 17).

"There are some simple truths in life, and this is one of them: Whenever someone dies young and tragically, there's always interest in the story, especially in a small town, where everyone seems to know each other" (Chapter 4, p. 49).

"But real hate, the kind that made the stomach roil, wasn't possible without an emotional bond" (Chapter 6, p. 64).

"Miles hadn't asked her out because he hadn't known how. In his entire adult life, he'd never had to ask a woman out—his wife had been his high school sweetheart" (Chapter 8, p. 95).

"It was then that he first thought of asking Sarah to marry him, and once the idea came to him, he found it nearly impossible to dismiss" (Chapter 15, p. 182).

"I didn't think, however, that I was trying to hide what I had done. Not then, anyway. In looking back and trying to understand it now, I think I started driving home because that was where I needed to be. Like a moth drawn to a porch light, I didn't seem to have a choice" (Chapter 18, p. 206).

"I couldn't escape that image of Missy Ryan, her eyes focused on nothing, and because of that, I became someone I'd never known before" (Chapter 23, p. 243).

"That night, while Miles studied the file in the kitchen, Jonah had his first nightmare in weeks" (Chapter 26, p. 262).

"Nor could he escape the feeling that the whole things was on the verge of spinning out of control" (Chapter 27, pg. 283).

"As he opened the door, Sarah had the sinking realization that this would be her last image of him. She couldn't stay in New Bern the way things were. Seeing Miles around town would be too hard; she'd have to find another job. Somewhere she could start over. Again." (Chapter 36, pg. 359).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Missy Ryan? How was she killed? How has her death impacted the community of New Bern? How has her death impacted her husband? Her son? What kind of life did Missy have before her death? What kind of person was she? How did her death occur? How did her death impact the man who hit her?

Who is Miles Ryan? Why does Miles feel guilty for not finding out who killed his wife? Why does Miles feel guilty about moving on with his life? Why does Miles have difficulty trying to ask a woman out on a date? What kind of life did Miles and Missy have together? What might their life have been like if Missy had not been killed?

Who is Sarah Andrews? Why did her husband divorce her? What does this say about Sarah's husband? What does this say about Sarah? How does Sarah feel about the end of her marriage? Why did Sarah move to New Bern? How long has Sarah's family lived in New Bern? Why did they move there? What kind of relationship does Sarah have with her parents and her brother?

Who is Brian Andrews? How old is he? What does he do for a living? How does Brian react when he meets Miles and Jonah at Thanksgiving? Why does Sarah turn to Brian for advice when Miles goes crazy over the possibility that Otis Timson killed his wife? What advice does Brian give to Sarah? What does Brian later try to convince Sarah of in regards to Miles' state of mind over Otis?

Who killed Missy Ryan? How did the accident happen? Would the driver of the car gone to jail if he had called police to the site of the accident? Why did the driver not turn himself in? Why did the driver run? Who does Miles assume the killer is from the beginning of the investigation? How does Miles come to arrest Otis Timson for Missy's death? How does Miles learn the truth? How does he deal with the truth?

Who is Charlie Curtis? Why does Miles not tell Charlie that he is arresting Otis for the murder of Missy before he does it? Why does Miles argue with Charlie over the case against Otis? Does Charlie believe that Otis is guilty? Is Otis guilty? Why does Charlie suspend Miles? Why does Charlie confiscate Miles' guns and his case file on Missy's death? What does Charlie hope to prove by doing this? Is this in Miles' best interest?

What is point of view? Why does the author of this book use two points of view in his narration? Who is the narrator of the prologue? How does the reader find out the narrator's true identity? Why is this identity hidden for much of the book? What is third person omniscient? What makes third person view point omniscient? Give examples from this book of third-person and omniscient perspective.