

The Best of Me Study Guide

The Best of Me by Nicholas Sparks (author)

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Best of Me Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapters 3-6.....	7
Chapters 7-9.....	10
Chapters 10-15.....	12
Chapters 16-20.....	15
Chapters 21-23 and Epilogue.....	18
Characters.....	20
Objects/Places.....	24
Themes.....	26
Style.....	28
Quotes.....	30
Topics for Discussion.....	31



Plot Summary

"The Best of Me" is a novel by author Nicholas Sparks. In this novel, Dawson Cole returns to his hometown for the first time after twenty years to fulfill the last wishes of his dear friend and surrogate father, Tuck Hostetler. When he arrives, Dawson is surprised to find that Tuck arranged for Dawson's high school girlfriend, Amanda, to join him in fulfilling these last wishes. In fact, it soon becomes apparent that Dawson and Amanda seeing one another again and perhaps rekindling their old romance is the main goal of Tuck's final wish. However, Amanda is married and Dawson's family, a group of notorious criminals, pose a danger that could alter not only Tuck's plans but Dawson's future irrevocably. "The Best of Me" is an emotion packed romance novel that fulfills the expectations readers have come to expect from Nicholas Sparks.

Dawson Cole works on an oil rig off the coast of Louisiana. One day an explosion on the rig nearly took Dawson's life, but a stranger in the water showed Dawson where to go, saving his life. Months later, Dawson learns of the death of his good friend, Tuck Hostetler. Dawson rushes home to see to Tuck's final wishes even though he has not been home in twenty years.

Dawson was born into a notorious criminal family, allowed to get away with many petty crimes out of the fear the town feels toward this family. Dawson is not like his family, but no one really believes that a Cole could be honest or law abiding. For this reason, Dawson lived an isolated life in his hometown. In fact, as a teen Dawson left his father's home and began living in the garage of local mechanic, Tuck Hostetler. Tuck, who had recently lost his wife, allowed Dawson to stay, forging a relationship that would last the rest of Tuck's life.

Late in his teens, Dawson became lab partners with Amanda Collier, the daughter of a prominent family. They soon fell in love and began dating despite the tension this caused Amanda with her parents. When high school graduation came and Amanda had to make a choice between college and Dawson, Dawson forced her to choose school. Shortly thereafter, Dawson was involved in an accident in which the truck he was driving struck and killed a local doctor. Dawson plead guilty to the charges even though it was simply an accident. Dawson served four years in prison and his parole living with Tuck. When he was free, Dawson left town and never looked back.

When Dawson arrives at Tuck's, he is surprised to find Amanda there. Amanda had struck up a friendship with Tuck in the last few years of his life and for this reason was called by Tuck's lawyer upon his death. Amanda and Dawson talk for a while, even having dinner together in Tuck's house, before parting. When Amanda goes home to her mother's, her mother lectures her about her relationship with Tuck and how it looks, especially since Amanda is a married woman. Amanda's mother, however, is unaware that Amanda has become disillusioned in her marriage because of her husband's alcoholism in the wake of the death of their daughter, Bea.



The following day, Amanda and Dawson visit Tuck's lawyer and learn that they are to scatter his ashes at a cabin he owned with his wife. This means another full day together. Amanda and Dawson have lunch together and discuss their plans. When Amanda goes home, Dawson remains at Tuck's to repair a car Tuck was working on when he died. As Dawson works, he is unaware that his cousin, Crazy Ted, is stalking him with plans to kill him for a feud that began years ago. As Crazy Ted sneaks up to Tuck's, Dawson sees the same man he saw the day of the oil rig explosion and chases him through the woods. This causes Dawson to find Crazy Ted's truck and learn of his danger. Dawson confronts Crazy Ted, beating him and returning him to the family compound.

The following day, Dawson and Amanda go to Tuck's cabin and learn from a letter written by Tuck about his love story with his wife. This inspires Dawson and Amanda, as Tuck clearly hoped, and they spend the night alone together. The following day, Amanda makes the agonizing decision to return to her family. Dawson prepares to leave town, but returns to Tuck's when he recalls that he left a letter Tuck had written to him there. As Dawson enters town, he again sees the strange man who saved him after the oil rig explosion. Dawson follows this man to a bar where he discovers the young doctor he killed has led him to save his son, now grown, from a beating Dawson's cousins are giving him. Dawson saves the young man, but is killed when Crazy Ted shoots him in the head. At the same time, Amanda's son has been in an accident and needs a heart transplant. Amanda will later learn it is Dawson's heart her son received.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Chapter 1. Dawson Cole is a forty-two year old man. Dawson works on oil rigs off the coast of Louisiana. He has survived many accidents on the oil rigs. However, none were as bad as an explosion that threw him across the deck and into the water. Dawson should have died from the fall alone, but was lucky to survive. In the water he became disoriented and might have drowned if a strange man he had never seen before did not lead him to a piece of debris to hold on to and into an area where he would be seen by the rescue ship. Dawson saw the man again on the rescue ship, but he was never able to speak to him. Months later, Dawson received a large settlement for the accident, but as a man who lives frugally in a small trailer, he has little need of the money. Instead, he had the money deposited into a special account overseas for a specific purpose.

Dawson grew up in a small town in North Carolina called Oriental. Dawson's family, the Coles, are notorious criminals who have been arrested for everything from assault to murder. Dawson's father abused Dawson mercilessly in the wake of his mother's abandonment of the family. Dawson put up with it for years, but when he became a teenager, he began fighting back. Finally he moved out, taking refuge in the garage of mechanic Tuck Hostetler, even though he did not know Tuck or anything about him. Tuck, something of a drinker at the time, allowed Dawson to remain in the garage and soon gave him a job working on the cars. Dawson's father wasn't ready to let him go, however, and began showing up once a month to take most of Dawson's paychecks.

Dawson's junior year of high school, he was partnered with Amanda Collier, the daughter of an affluent family in Oriental, in chemistry class. Their partnership soon blossomed into romance. At first they kept their relationship quiet because of their families, but soon it became hard to hide. Amanda's parents were deeply upset by the relationship. At first they tried to ignore it, but soon it led to arguments and unfair punishments. In the end, Amanda's parents threatened to cut her off, refuse to pay for college, if she did not give up Dawson. Amanda wanted to run away with Dawson, but he knew how important college was to her. Dawson lied to Amanda, forcing her to leave him.

Chapter 2. Amanda arrives at Tuck's after the three hour drive from her home in Durham. Amanda is married now, for nearly twenty years, and has four children. Two of Amanda's children are nearly grown, seventeen and nineteen, while her youngest is only twelve. Another of their children, one who should be fifteen now, died as a toddler. This tragedy caused Amanda's husband to begin drinking, a habit that has developed into alcoholism. As a result, Amanda has been unhappy in her marriage for many years. This is one of the things that caused Amanda to begin visiting Oriental more and more often as good memories of the past begin to occupy her thoughts. It is this, too, that brought her to Tuck's on many occasions, striking up a friendship that lasted till his death.



Amanda explores the house and garage, remembering her many visits with Tuck. Tuck began telling her about his marriage, his beloved Clara, and how he believed he could see her from time to time. This visits also brought Dawson to mind. Perhaps that was the reason why she chose Tuck, over all her friends from the past, to talk to about her child's death and her slowly dying marriage. Even now, as she explores Tuck's garage, she finds herself thinking about Dawson. Those were the happiest times of her life and Amanda truly believes that Dawson was the love of her life. Tuck never talked about Dawson. For this reason, Amanda finds herself often thinking of him.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The first two chapters introduce the main characters of the novel. Dawson is a forty-two year old man who works hard and lives frugally. As Dawson ruminates on the past during his journey back to Oriental for the first time in twenty years, the reader learns that he is a member of a family of criminals, but he chose the path of morality instead. This caused a great deal of friction between Dawson and his family members, especially a father who mercilessly abused him as a child. Dawson moves out, but finds himself still obligated to his family, forced to fork over most of his paycheck each month or face probably death.

Dawson is a complicated man who has a dark past that has overshadowed his present. Dawson has never married, never even dated, because he is still in love with the one person who saw through his family's reputation and misdeeds to see the person he really is. Amanda was everything to Dawson when they were kids and he has remained devoted to her even though he broke up with her more than twenty-four years ago. This shows the reader how passionate Dawson is. It also suggests a passion that is about to be brought to the front and confronted.

Amanda, on the other hand, has lived a full life. Amanda is married and has four children. Unfortunately, one of Amanda's children died while a toddler, changing Amanda's outlook on life. It has also caused Amanda's husband to become an alcoholic, something that has put a great strain on Amanda's marriage. Amanda is deeply unhappy and feels she cannot speak to anyone about it because her husband refuses to listen and her mother has never dealt with the messy aspects of life. For this reason, Amanda sought out Tuck, the surrogate father of the only man Amanda has ever truly loved. This brings Amanda to a place in which she has fantasized the past, leaving her vulnerable to making mistakes should she ever come face to face with Dawson again.

The author has set up an interesting situation in which former lovers have so fantasized the past that they have forgotten some of the darker aspects of their relationship. This could lead to possible disaster, especially since Amanda is a married woman.



Chapters 3-6

Chapters 3-6 Summary

Chapter 3. As Dawson drives from New Bern to Oriental, he recalls how shortly after Amanda left for college, he was driving home after picking up some tires for Tuck on wet roads and a car that drifted into his lane caused Dawson to swerve, hitting the town doctor, who was jogging in the gloom of dusk, in a fatal accident. Arrested due to political pressure from local politicians, Dawson decided to plead guilty out of a sense of responsibility for the young widow and her children. Dawson served four years and returned to Oriental to serve out his parole. During this time, Dawson's father resumed his demands on Dawson's paycheck. However, having had enough of this treatment, Dawson fought back, injuring his cousin, Crazy Ted, and scaring his father off.

Dawson arrives in Oriental and drives to the beach where he thinks he sees the man who rescued him after the rig explosion. This has happened quite frequently since the accident even though the doctors tell Dawson he is perfectly healthy. Dawson then drives to Tuck's and is surprised to find a BMW in the driveway. In the garage, Dawson finds himself face to face with Amanda Collier for the first time in twenty-four years.

Chapter 4. Dawson and Amanda are both shocked to see the other. They exchange pleasantries before exploring the house and property. In the house, Amanda tells Dawson about her visits to Tuck and some of the things they talked about. Dawson asks about Amanda's life and she tells him about her marriage and her living children, but she does not mention her deceased child. They talk about Amanda's life now, and Tuck. Dawson tells Amanda about his life, about the oil rigs.

Chapter 5. Amanda and Dawson decide to have dinner together, since both believe this is what Tuck had in mind for them. Over dinner, Amanda continues to ask Dawson about his life, forcing him to reveal that he lives almost like a monk when not on the oil rigs. Dawson also admits that he has not dated since his break with Amanda. Amanda then asks Dawson about the accident that killed Dr. Bonner and left Dawson in jail. As Dawson describes that night, Amanda realizes that it was an accident, something she suspected all along. However, it is clear to her that Dawson still feels a great deal of guilt. They talk about Dr. Bonner's wife and Dawson seems to know a great deal about her.

Amanda and Dawson talk for hours. Finally they go down to the creek where they once spent a great deal of time and talk about the past. Amanda apologizes for not going to see Dawson in prison, but he tells her he would not have wanted that. They walk back to the house and say their goodbyes. Amanda leaves and Dawson spends some time alone in the garage.

Chapter 6. Dawson wakes early the next morning and goes for a run around Oriental. As he runs, Dawson thinks of Marilyn Bonner, the doctor's wife. Dawson went to her



after his release from jail, but she blamed him for the abject poverty she has found herself in and asks him to leave. After leaving town and gaining work, Dawson began sending Marilyn checks every week to help her out. Once established on the oil rigs, Dawson hired a private detective to give him reports on Marilyn and her two children from time to time. Dawson also continues to send her money.

Abee Cole, Dawson's cousin, has an infection from a cut on his stomach that makes him feel sick despite some antibiotics he is taking that Crazy Ted stole from a vet. Abee is standing on the street and he sees Dawson run by, but hope that Crazy Ted does not see him. This is because Crazy Ted is still angry with Dawson over the beating he gave him twenty years ago which led to Crazy Ted assaulting a guy in a bar and being arrested.

Abee is in love with a girl named Candy who works in a local bar. Candy is a drifter who knows how to use men. Abee, however, scares her and she is trying to decide what to do about him.

Alan Bonner, Marilyn Bonner's son, drives a delivery truck, delivering snacks to local businesses. Alan does not like work, does not like much of anything except video games and a beautiful bartender called Candy. Alan thinks about the weekend and is working up the courage to ask Candy out.

Marilyn Bonner worries about her son. Marilyn was left desperate after her husband's death, having to take on her father's debt on the family orchard and care for her elderly parents as well as her two children. However, Marilyn made a success of her life, beginning a business selling jams. However, Alan does not seem to have learned anything from his mother's struggles, living his life passively in a trailer she bought for him. This worries her.

Amanda argues with her mother over breakfast. Amanda's mother disapproves of Amanda's relationship with Tuck Hostetler and her habit of coming to Oriental when she knows her mother is out of town.

Evelyn Collier, Amanda's mother, knows that it is important to keep up public appearances and bury the emotional baggage of a difficult life.

Crazy Ted Cole knows Dawson is back in town and he plans to kill him.

Chapters 3-6 Analysis

Amanda and Dawson find themselves face to face for the first time in twenty years. It should be awkward, but somehow they fall right in to their old patterns. The reader can see there is a great deal of affection between them. In fact, it is clear that Dawson is still in love with Amanda, but Amanda is struggling with the realities of her life with her husband and children as opposed to a possible life with Dawson. The reader can see that Amanda is aware of her responsibilities and that she is keeping Dawson at arm's length. It is also clear that Dawson respects this despite his clear emotional attachment



to the Amanda he once knew and is getting to know again. The reader also suspects, as does Amanda, that their friend, Tuck, was hoping to get them back together and allow time and their past to bring them back together.

As Dawson and Amanda reunite, the reader learns more about their pasts. It turns out that Dawson was arrested for a car accident that left a jogging doctor dead. The accident was just that, an accident, but because Dawson plead guilty he served four years in prison. Dawson is clearly consumed with guilt over this accident, evidenced by the fact that he has become somewhat obsessive about the welfare of the doctor's widow and children. Dawson has been sending money to them for years and has hired someone to keep him informed of their circumstances. This is surprising and somewhat invasive, but it is clear evidence of the depth of his emotions. Dawson is a man who feels things very deeply.

In chapter 6, the reader is introduced to other important characters in the novel. Abee and Crazy Ted are cousins of Dawson's who embraced the criminal aspects of the Cole legacy. Crazy Ted continues to blame Dawson for an arrest that took place a week after Dawson beat him up. For this reason, Crazy Ted wants to kill Dawson, setting up a situation that will present danger to Dawson. At the same time, the reader learns of Abee's obsession over a bartender named Candy and the young man, Alan Bonner, who also has interest in her, a situation that could lead to a dangerous conflict. At the same time, the reader learns that Amanda's mother is still as controlling of Amanda as she was in the past, condemning Amanda for her friendship with Tuck and the animosity in her marriage. This conflict, too, could lead to trouble later in the novel.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

Chapter 7. Dawson returns to his bed and breakfast for breakfast. Dawson saw Abee on the street and wonders if he should worry about his family. Later, Dawson goes to the cemetery and places flowers on Dr. David Bonner's grave. At the same time, Amanda is at a local coffee shop. Amanda's cellphone rings. Amanda speaks to her daughter, Lynn, then calls her son, Jared. Finally Amanda calls her husband and learns that he plans to golf that weekend, a situation that always leads to drinking. Dawson joins Amanda and they walk together to the lawyer's office.

The lawyer tells Amanda and Dawson that Tuck carefully instructed him on everything he should do upon Tuck's death. This turns out to include cremating Tuck's body. Dawson and Amanda are instructed to take Tuck's ashes to a cabin he owned in Vandemere. Tuck gave specific instructions that Amanda and Dawson do it together the following day. Tuck also left a letter to be read before his ashes are spread and a letter each for Amanda and Dawson to be read when they felt it was right. Finally, the lawyer tells them that they are to take one item from Tuck's home and that the rest of his estate would be liquidated and given to Duke University's Pediatric Cancer Center.

Amanda and Dawson return to Tuck's and have a picnic lunch. As they eat, Amanda tells Dawson about Bea's death from cancer at the age of two. It becomes clear that this is the reason why Tuck chose Duke's Pediatric Cancer Center to give his money to. Then they talk about Tuck's insistence that he could see Clara. Dawson wonders why Tuck never told him much about Clara. Then Dawson tells Amanda, under her interrogation, how he has had Marilyn and her family watched over the years. Amanda feels it is an invasion of privacy and asks him to stop.

Dawson and Amanda walk through the house, trying to choose the one thing they will take. Amanda chooses a wedding picture of Tuck and Clara. Dawson takes a handkerchief that Tuck always had with him while working in the garage. Dawson then takes a look at the car Tuck was working on when he died, a classic Stingray, and decides to finish it to remove the hassle from the lawyer. Amanda watches him work as she did as a teenager and they talk some more. Finally, Amanda has to leave to meet her mother for dinner.

Chapter 8. Crazy Ted hides his truck on the road near Tuck's and watches Amanda leave. Ted then creeps through the woods so that he will have the element of surprise when he confronts Dawson. At the same time, Dawson becomes overwhelmed with feeling that someone is watching him. As Ted approaches through the woods, Dawson spots the strange man who saved him after the rig explosion. Dawson follows the man through another portion of the woods until he comes upon Ted's truck. Dawson turns to return to Tuck's and sees evidence of someone walking recently in this area and realizes the truck must belong to someone trying to sneak onto the property. Dawson is



careful upon his return even as Ted begins throwing stones at the windows of Tuck's house, trying to draw Dawson outside. When Dawson does not appear, Ted goes into the house. Dawson, who has arrived back at the house and spotted Ted, follows him and hits him in the face with a tire iron. Dawson then hits Ted on the arm. When Ted falls unconscious, Dawson loads him up in his own truck and drives him to the outer fence of the family compound. Dawson calls Abee to let him know where to find Ted.

Chapter 9. Abee sits at the hospital with Ted, who has suffered a broken arm and concussion. When Ted wakes in the night, he tells Abee that Dawson threatened both their lives.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Amanda and Dawson spend more time together as they make their best effort to fulfill Tuck's last wishes. Tuck was very precise and mysterious about his wishes, causing Dawson and Amanda to feel some confusion about what Tuck wanted from them. To the reader, however, it becomes clear that Tuck made his wishes in such a way that it would bring Amanda and Dawson back together. Clearly Tuck was of the opinion that Dawson and Amanda need one another, either as friends or as lovers. This seems like a man who cared deeply for these two people and wants his death to bring them happiness in the form of the solace they might take in one another.

As par with Tuck's wishes, Amanda and Dawson spend the day together reliving some of their happier moments in adolescents. It is clear that Amanda is losing herself in Dawson, allowing herself to let go of some of the darker responsibilities adulthood has brought her. It is also clear that Dawson is still deeply in love with Amanda and will take anything she is willing to give her. This builds some tension for the reader as the reader wonders what Amanda will choose, responsibility or love.

Dawson's family begins to cause trouble when Crazy Ted, who has blamed Dawson for more than twenty years for a beating Dawson gave him and a subsequent arrest Crazy Ted blames on his anger toward Dawson for that beating. For this reason, Crazy Ted wants to kill Dawson and believes him to be an easy mark because of the number of years he has been away from the family and their criminal habits. However, Dawson proves to be more than capable of taking care of himself when he catches Ted at Tuck's house and gets the better of him. It is clear, unfortunately, that Ted will continue to hunt Dawson when he tells his cousin that Dawson threatened both their lives.



Chapters 10-15

Chapters 10-15 Summary

Chapter 10. Dawson has moved to a hotel in New Bern to avoid trouble with his family. As he runs on the beach, he tries to figure out who the man is that he keeps seeing in times of trouble. At the same time, Amanda and her mother have an argument over Amanda's behavior over the past few weeks, as well as her behavior in her relationship with Tuck. Amanda suggests to her mother that she feels she is living a life that was not meant to be hers.

Chapter 11. Amanda and Dawson meet at Tuck's and decide to take the Stingray to Vandemere. The drive is pleasant and Amanda finds herself thinking about Dawson and his deep sense of love for her.

Chapter 12. Amanda and Dawson arrive at the cabin and are shocked by the riot of color that greets them in the form of thousands of wildflowers blooming in the yard. They walk hand in hand through the garden and discuss how Tuck must have come each year and planted these wonderful plants. Amanda goes inside while Dawson gathers their things from the car. When Dawson joins her, he and Amanda tour the house, deciding that the house must have been decorated by Clara and Tuck left it as she wanted it. They share a glass of wine and then read the letter Tuck had wanted read at the scattering of his ashes. The letter tells a story of Tuck and Clara's relationship and the purpose of the wildflowers. It is very romantic and clearly a story of soul mates. Afterward, Amanda and Dawson scatter Tuck's ashes among the wildflowers.

Dawson and Amanda go to dinner. Afterward, they find themselves faced with the decision to go back to Oriental or return to the cabin. After some hesitation, Dawson turns the car toward the cabin. They talk, about her life, her marriage, and his loneliness. Then they dance for a short time and go into the bedroom.

Chapter 13. Ted and Abee, each with their own injuries and pains, wait all day, even in the rain, for Dawson to return to Tuck's. They wait until well after midnight before finally deciding Dawson is not coming and return home.

Chapter 14. Amanda wakes and is sad to find Dawson is not beside her. She dresses and finds Dawson on the porch. Dawson gives Amanda a four leaf clover he found out in the yard. Dawson then tells Amanda about the explosion on the rig and the man he has seen many times since. Dawson also tells Amanda about Ted's visit to Tuck's. A short time later, they pack up and prepare to leave. Amanda is filled with guilt, but she manages to ignore it. When they arrive at Tuck's, prepare for Dawson's cousins to be there, they instead find Amanda's mother waiting.



Chapter 15. While Amanda goes to speak with her mother, Dawson goes into the garage and reads the letter Tuck left for him. The letter tells him that he knows Dawson will only love Amanda for all his life. Tuck tells him that Amanda needs him too, but she is a responsible woman and the decision to leave her family will not be an easy one. Tuck warns Dawson that Amanda might not choose him and if she does not, that Dawson must move on with his life. Dawson appreciates everything Tuck has said in the letter, but is unsure he could go on with his life without Amanda.

Amanda sits on the porch with her mother. Amanda expects her mother to attack her for spending the night with Dawson, but instead her mother tells her that she must make her own choices in these matters. Amanda's mother also assures her that she did not tell Amanda's husband despite several phone calls he made to her the night before. After her mother leaves, Dawson joins Amanda on the porch. Amanda tells Dawson that she loves him and wants to be with him, but she cannot imagine causing the pain leaving her family would cause her husband and children. Amanda asks Dawson to let her go.

Amanda returns home and takes a long shower. Afterward, she begins focusing on the responsibilities awaiting her at home.

Chapters 10-15 Analysis

Dawson and Amanda make the trip to Vandemere to spread Tuck's ashes. When they arrive, they find themselves in a very romantic place that clearly meant a great deal to Tuck. The letter Tuck has left for them to read together makes this even more clear, defining the place as something that was very important to Tuck's memories of his beloved wife, Clara. As Amanda and Dawson become closer and follow Tuck's last wishes, it becomes very clear that Tuck wanted them to find together what he had with Clara because they are two people he loved very much and they are clearly miserable without one another.

As time passes, it becomes clear that Tuck's plan is working. Amanda and Dawson draw pleasure from one another as they become closer and closer, reliving some of the happier times of their past. They even spend the night together. However, Amanda is immediately overwhelmed with guilt. No matter how hard she tries to pretend it is not true, Amanda is married and she has responsibilities to her husband and children. This places her in a difficult position, especially as her mother continuously attempts to play the voice of her conscious. However, when Amanda needs her mother to tell her what she has done is wrong and she should go back to her husband, her mother refuses. Instead, she encourages Amanda to make her own choices, to decide what will make her happiest. Unfortunately, Amanda decides that happiness must take a back seat to responsibility and she decides to return to her family, a decision that is clearly a difficult one for her that leaves Dawson understanding, but devastated as well.

At the same time, Dawson's cousins continue to stalk him and attempt to find a way to kill him. This foreshadows a moment when Dawson's life will be placed in jeopardy. The

reader can only hope that the mysterious man he has been seeing might save him once again.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary

Chapter 16. Marilyn Bonner is bothered because she went to visit her husband's grave, she saw flowers on it. At the same time, Candy is packing her car with all her belongings, planning to leave town after work that night. Alan Bonner is planning on visiting the bar where Candy works and working up the courage to ask her out. Frank, Amanda's husband, is playing a bad round of golf and drinking too much. Ted wakes at home, feeling worse than before, and angry. He makes his way out to his truck to go hunt down Dawson. Abee wakes, feeling better for the first time in days, and watches his brother make a fool of himself as he stumbles to his truck.

Chapter 17. Dawson cleans up the Stingray, wishing he had never come back and seen Amanda again. Amanda packs her things. Amanda finds Tuck's letter to her and reads it. The letter advises Amanda to find happiness in her life, even if it means leaving her family and being with Dawson. The letter spurs Amanda to seek out Dawson one last time.

Dawson is at the cemetery, paying his respects one last time at Dr. Bonner's grave when Marilyn Bonner arrives. Marilyn tells Dawson that she knows he has been sending her money and that it helped, but she no longer needs it. Marilyn then tells Dawson that she knows her husband's death was an accident and that Dawson should stop punishing himself for it. At the same time, Amanda drives toward the cemetery, but at the last minute she changes her mind about seeing Dawson again.

Chapter 18. Amanda drives home, regretting her choices but knowing it is too late to change her life. Amanda chose to marry and have children, she can't take that back now. Back home, Amanda's husband, Frank, continues to drink at the country club even though he is already very drunk. In Oriental, Abee watches over Ted after he passed out trying to get into his truck. Ted agrees to rest for a while, but is still determined to kill Dawson. Candy speaks to Abee, lying to him about her car so he will not wonder why it is not in the bar parking lot. Later, Abee and Ted go to Tuck's to look for Dawson. When they cannot find him, they destroy the Stingray. Dawson is in New Bern, reluctantly deciding to go home quietly and hope that Amanda will come seek him out. In Durham, Jared has gone to pick his father up from the country club. On the way home, a car runs a red light and slams into Jared's car, crushing his chest between the side door and the steering wheel. Jared calls his mother and tells her about the accident, especially his fear that his father is badly injured because of the amount of blood on him. Amanda rushes home as quickly as she can.

Chapter 19. Dawson wakes from a short nap and remembers that he left the letter Tuck wrote him in the garage. He decides to return to Oriental for it. Alan Bonner goes to the bar where Candy works in hopes of getting a date with her. Amanda arrives at the hospital only to discover that Frank is relatively uninjured, but Jared is having some kind



of cardiac issues. In Oriental, Abee goes to Candy's house and discovers that she has packed up all her belongings. Convinced she plans to leave town with one of her customers, he goes to the bar. In Durham, Amanda is informed that the accident causes a problem with one of Jared's heart valves and he needs surgery.

Chapter 20. As Dawson approaches Oriental, he spots the strange man who saved him from the oil rig on the road. Abee and Ted arrive at the bar, causing most of the customers to flee and Candy to take refuge in the office. When Alan tries to leave the bar, Ted grabs him and Abee turns his anger on him. Alan is the man Abee thinks Candy is having an affair with. At the same time, Dawson pulls his car to the side of the road and tries to approach the strange man. Suddenly Dawson can see the man's face and recognizes him as Dr. David Bonner. Dr. Bonner leads Dawson to the bar where Alan is being beaten by Abee and Ted. Dawson now knows that Dr. Bonner saved him so that Dawson can save Dr. Bonner's son, Alan. Dawson stumbles into the bar and pulls Abee and Ted off of Alan. Dawson successfully beats the two men off of Alan and begins to guide Alan out of the bar. Ted, however, finds his gun and manages to get off a single shot.

Chapters 16-20 Analysis

For twenty-four years, Dawson has carried around the guilt of Dr. Bonner's death. Dawson has given financial support to Dr. Bonner's widow and children as well as getting reports on them from a private detective. Dawson has also brought flowers to Dr. Bonner's grave often while he was in town. Marilyn Bonner is aware of all of this and has allowed it to continue all these years. However, when she realizes that Dawson is in town once more and is again visiting her husband's grave, she decides it is time to put an end to it. Marilyn confronts Dawson and tells him that she knows it was an accident and that he should stop punishing himself. It is a wonderful thing Marilyn has done, giving Dawson permission to move on with his life. However, in an odd way, it leaves Dawson without purpose.

Amanda has struggled with her feelings for Dawson and her responsibilities to her family. Amanda wants to be with Dawson because she knows she loves him more than she will ever love her husband, Frank. However, Amanda also knows that although Dawson ended their relationship, that there were times when she could have reached out to him, when she could have rekindled their romance before she was married, but she chose not to. Amanda knows that she has made choices in her life of her own free will that she cannot now change. For this reason, Amanda knows that she cannot run away with Dawson no matter how much she may want to.

Amanda's husband is an alcoholic and she has begged him many times to stop drinking. However, he has refused. Now Frank's drinking has placed their eldest son, Jared, in peril when he is in a car accident after picking his father up from the country club where he was drinking. Now Jared faces life threatening surgery as the doctor's attempt to repair damage to his heart. This puts an understandable strain on Amanda



and Frank's marriage, leaving the reader wondering if maybe Amanda might not change her mind as Tuck foresaw.

Abee and Ted have been a danger for Dawson since he was a teen. They have been stalking him since his return to Oriental, but Dawson has managed to avoid them. Unfortunately, Dr. Bonner had other plans. Dr. Bonner's ghost appears and Dawson finally makes the connection between his past and the ghost that has been leading him to safety over and over since he nearly died on an oil rig. Now it seems that Dr. Bonner has been saving Dawson so that he might save Alan, Dr. Bonner's adult son. Dawson jumps to the opportunity, more than willing to place himself in danger in order to save Dr. Bonner's son. A life for a life. However, the reader must wonder if Dr. Bonner will protect Dawson once again from his vengeful cousin.



Chapters 21-23 and Epilogue

Chapters 21-23 and Epilogue Summary

Chapter 21. Amanda, Frank, and Lynn wait most of the night for Jared to come out of surgery. When he does, they are told that all went well and Jared is expected to survive. Amanda sends Frank and Lynn home and she goes to sit with Jared, who remains unconscious. The next morning, Amanda is kicked out of ICU while the nurses change Jared's catheter. When Amanda returns, she is barred from reentering. When the doctor finally comes out, he tells Amanda that Jared had a massive heart attack and will die unless they can get him on the heart transplant list and a heart is found quickly. The doctor manages to get Jared on the list, but now they must wait. Amanda calls her mother and arranges for her youngest daughter, Annette, to come home. When Amanda's mother takes the kids to the cafeteria for lunch, Frank and Amanda are alone. Frank tries to talk to Amanda, but she blames him for what has happened and makes that clear to him. That night, Amanda remains alone with Jared. It is then that she learns that a heart has been found.

Chapter 22. Amanda goes home to rest for a short time while Jared is in surgery. When she wakes, she panics, but her mother assures her that she has been in contact with the hospital and the surgery is still progressing. Amanda returns to the hospital and some time later learns that Jared has survived the surgery. Amanda goes to see him only to find a young man who is confused and angry and frightened. Amanda does all she can to calm him.

Several days later, Tuck's lawyer calls Amanda to tell her he found Tuck's letter for Dawson in the garage. As they talk, the lawyer realizes that Amanda is unaware of what happened to Dawson Sunday night. Amanda learns that Dawson was shot in the head by Ted and died immediately.

Epilogue. Two years later, Jared is adjusting well to his new way of life. He has returned to school after a brief hiatus and dating a new girl. Amanda and Frank are still together, though they went through a rough patch immediately after Jared's surgery. With the help of counselors, they seem to be back on track and Frank has stopped drinking. The family is happy and whole once more. Jared, however, is curious about his heart donor. Amanda tells him that he should not know about the donor, that there are reasons why the donor's identity is kept secret. However, Amanda knows who the donor is. It is Dawson, who with his own death, saved Amanda's child.

Chapters 21-23 and Epilogue Analysis

Amanda's son has been in a car accident and suffered injuries that were initially undiscovered. However, the injuries quickly prove to be life threatening and Amanda soon learns that not only must her son have lifesaving surgery, but later that the stress



to his body has caused a devastating heart attack. Jared needs a new heart. The situation is so time sensitive and so dangerous that it seems there is no chance Jared will survive. However, fate intervenes and Jared is given a new heart from a healthy forty-two year old man that saves his life. Although Jared's life will be forever altered, he will have a life.

Amanda is so overwhelmed with the tension of her son's situation that she has little time to think about anything else. Dawson does not cross Amanda's mind for days, while anger for her husband overwhelms her because of his role in her son's injuries. This leaves the reader with the impression that although Amanda loves Dawson with a passion she has not known since adolescence and will never know again, it seems that her family matters much more to her than him. It makes it clear Amanda has made the right decision. This does not stop Amanda from becoming overwhelmed with grief at the announcement of Dawson's death, it does not take away from the love she feels for him. This also does not take away the sense of gratefulness she feels when she realizes that it is Dawson's heart beating inside her son's chest. He promised to give her the best of him and this is what he has done, allowing her son to live and allowing her to remain with her family.



Characters

Dawson Cole

Dawson Cole is a forty-two year old man. He has been working on oil rigs most of his adult life. Recently Dawson nearly died when a fire on an oil rig caused an explosion that caused him to fall into the water. Dawson was saved when he saw a man who led him to safety. Later, Dawson sees this man again when his life is once more in danger. A short time after the oil rig explosion, Dawson receives word that his good friend and surrogate father has died. Dawson decides to return home for the first time in twenty years in order to see to the man's final wishes.

Dawson was born to Tommy Cole, a man who is a member of a notorious criminal family in the small town of Oriental, North Carolina. Dawson's mother left when he was a small child, leaving Dawson at the mercy of his violent alcoholic father. Dawson suffered many beatings as a child. When Dawson became old enough to fight back, he did. Shortly afterward Dawson moved out of his father's home and found refuge in a garage owned by mechanic Tuck Hostetler. Although they never really talked about anything more than cars and mechanical issues, Dawson has always seen Tuck as the father he never had.

In his late teens, Dawson went to prison for the death of Dr. David Bonner. Dr. Bonner was jogging along the side of the road after a rainstorm and Dawson was driving a truck filled with tires for Tuck's business. A car swerved into Dawson's lane, forcing him onto the shoulder. The rain left the ground slick and Dawson was unable to avoid hitting Dr. Bonner. Due to political pressure and his family name, Dawson was arrested and he pled guilty before a trial might have found him innocent. After spending his time in jail and his parole at Tuck's, Dawson left North Carolina for good.

While a teen, Dawson had a romantic relationship with Amanda Collier, the daughter of a well-to-do family in Oriental. Dawson was not the kind of person the Collier saw their daughter marrying and this relationship caused so much tension in Amanda's relationship with her parents that Dawson finally ended the relationship. However, he never got over Amanda and has never had a relationship with another woman. When Dawson sees Amanda again, he hopes that they will be able to rekindle their relationship, but Amanda is married and she chooses to return to her family.

Amanda Collier

Amanda Collier is the daughter of well-to-do people in Oriental. Amanda is raised to be a proper society woman. However, her relationship with Dawson Cole left her parents fuming and it caused a great deal of friction in her youth. When her parents threatened to refuse to pay for her to go to college, Dawson ends the relationship so that Amanda might have the life she always wanted. Amanda embraces her life after this despite her



continuing feelings for Dawson, even refusing to see him in prison after his arrest. After four years, Amanda marries Frank, a dentist. They begin a good life in Durham.

Amanda quits working after the birth of her first child, a son named Jared. Amanda goes on to have two daughters, Lynn and Bea. As a toddler, Bea is diagnosed with a brain tumor and soon dies. The death of their child has a profound effect on Amanda and Frank's marriage. Frank begins to drink and quickly becomes an alcoholic. Amanda remains with Frank, even has another child, Annette, but their relationship continues to degrade as Frank continues to drink.

Unhappy in her life and unable to find a confidant in her mother or friends, Amanda reignites her friendship with Tuck Hostetler. They become confidantes to one another and Amanda begins making visits to Oriental when she knows her mother will not be around. Therefore, when Tuck dies, he has his lawyer contact Amanda to help fulfill his final wishes. This brings Amanda and Dawson back together in order to explore their relationship and see if they might have a future together. Instead, Amanda chooses to return to her family.

Amanda's son is in a car accident while bringing her drunk husband home. The accident proves to be more serious than previously thought when it is discovered that Jared has injured his heart in the accident. Very quickly Jared's situation becomes urgent and he is placed on a list for a heart transplant. When Jared receives the heart, Amanda is happy. However, news of Dawson's death takes some of the joy from Amanda. Later, Amanda comes to the conclusion that Dawson is her son's heart donor.

Evelyn Collier

Evelyn is Amanda's mother. Evelyn is of a different generation, a generation of people who did not air their dirty laundry or show emotion. Evelyn also seems to have been raised by a man who might have been somewhat abusive when his daughter showed emotion. For this reason, Evelyn is very critical of her daughter and impatient with Amanda's shows of emotion. This causes a create deal of tension in their relationship.

Tuck Hostetler

Tuck is a mechanic in Oriental. When Dawson is a teenager, he runs away and finds himself taking refuge in Tuck's garage. Tuck had recently lost his wife and has been drinking heavily. Dawson's arrival brings out something in Tuck that helps him stop drinking and focus on living his life. Dawson and Tuck remain close through the years. However, they rarely talk about anything more than mechanics and the basics of everyday living simply because that is the type of man each of them is. In the years before Tuck's death, Amanda seeks him out and they become friends. Tuck tells Amanda he has never told Dawson because they have a different kind of relationship and Tuck is older. Therefore, when Tuck dies, it is his dying wish that Amanda and Dawson, two people Tuck has come to think of as his children, find happiness in their



lives. For this reason, he brings them together in hopes they will find this happiness in one another.

Clara Hostetler

Clara is Tuck's wife. Clara is long dead before the novel begins. However, Tuck's relationship with Clara is something that was strongly on his mind toward the end of his life and he often speaks of her to Amanda. When he dies, Tuck asks to have his ashes scattered at a cabin he shared with Clara and where he grew a wildflower garden for her each year for her. Clara is a strong motivating presence in Tuck's life and perhaps his motivation for using his final wishes to bring Dawson and Amanda back together.

Abee Cole

Abee Cole is Dawson's cousin. Abee is a criminal who uses his brother, Crazy Ted, as his muscle. Abee is aware of his brother, Ted's, obsession with revenge against Dawson, but he does not feel a need to punish Dawson for something that happened twenty years ago. Abee's obsession is with his girl, Candy. Abee is convinced that Candy is dating Alan Bonner, a customer at the bar where she works. For this reason, Abee goes to the bar seeking revenge and to control his girl.

Crazy Ted Cole

Crazy Ted Cole is Abee's brother. Ted was once a friend of Dawson's father and they worked together to steal money from Dawson. One day Dawson got the better of Ted and his father, beating them both up. A week later, Ted was arrested for assault when his anger at Dawson caused him to pull a knife in a bar fight. Ted has blamed Dawson for that arrest for twenty years. When Ted learns that Dawson is back in Oriental for Tuck's final wishes, he goes after Dawson for revenge. Ted misses out on getting his revenge several times, but finally is able to kill Dawson when Dawson comes to a bar to save Alan Bonner from being beaten to death by Abee and Ted.

Marilyn Bonner

Marilyn Bonner is the wife of Dr. David Bonner. After her husband was killed in a car accident, Marilyn finds herself destitute with two children and her elderly parents to care for. Marilyn's family nearly loses their orchard due to financial trouble, but with the help of anonymous checks from Dawson and her own persistence, Marilyn is able to turn things around. Marilyn begins her own business and settles into a happy life. When she learns that Dawson is back in town, twenty-four years after the accident, she tells him to forgive himself for his role in the accident.



Alan Bonner

Alan Bonner is Marilyn and David Bonner's son. Alan is something of a slacker who does little more with his life than work an hourly job and play video games. However, Alan is much loved by his mother. When Alan finds himself in danger when he crosses Abee and Ted Cole, he is rescued with help from Dawson and his dead father, Dr. David Bonner.

Dr. David Bonner

Dr. David Bonner was Oriental's town doctor twenty-four years before the novel began. Dr. Bonner came to Oriental when they were desperate for a doctor because his wife, Marilyn, grew up in Oriental. Dr. Bonner was an avid athlete who loved to jog. One night, after a brief rain, Dr. Bonner was jogging around a curve on the road to Oriental when he was struck and killed by a truck driven by Dawson Cole.

For twenty-four years, Dawson lived with the guilt of what he had done, sending money to Mrs. Bonner to help her with the expenses of losing her husband. Then, when Dawson was nearly killed on an oil rig, he saw a man who led him to safety. Dawson sees this man again and again in the months after the accident. This man leads Dawson to safety when Crazy Ted comes to kill him. In the end, Dawson realizes this man is the ghost of Dr. Bonner and he has kept Dawson alive long enough for him to save Alan from Abee and Crazy Ted.

Jared

Jared is Amanda's eldest child. Jared is a typical teenager who has just finished his first year of college. One day Jared goes to pick his father up from the country club where his father has drunk too much to drive. On the way home, they are in a car accident and Jared suffers life threatening injuries to his heart. Jared nearly dies when he has a massive heart attack and is placed on a transplant list for a new heart. Jared receives a heart and Amanda later learns it came from Dawson.

Frank

Frank is Amanda's husband. They have been married twenty years. Amanda was happy the first ten years, but in the years since their daughter, Bea, died, Frank has become an alcoholic. This has led to a great deal of tension in their marriage and Amanda is very unhappy. Amanda considers what it would take for her to leave her husband, but in the end chooses to stay because of her children. After Jared's accident, Amanda openly blames Frank. However, they manage to work things out with the help of a counselor.



Objects/Places

Four Leaf Clover

Dawson gives Amanda a four leaf clover he found in the wildflower garden at Tuck's cabin in Vandemere.

Handkerchief

When told he can have anything of Tuck's he wants, Dawson chooses a handkerchief. Tuck always had one of these handkerchiefs with him while working in the garage.

Tuck and Clara's Wedding Picture

When told she can have anything she wants from Tuck's house, Amanda chooses a photograph of Tuck and Clara on their wedding day.

Stingray

Tuck has a classic Stingray in his garage when Dawson and Amanda arrive to arrange for his final wishes. Dawson decides to finish the work on the Stingray to make things less complicated for Tuck's lawyer. Later, Dawson and Amanda take the Stingray to Vandemere when they spread Tuck's ashes. In the end, however, Crazy Ted destroys the Stingray out of anger for not exacting revenge on Dawson.

Vandemere Cabin

Tuck and Clara own a cabin in Vandemere. It is here that Tuck created a wildflower garden for Clara and where he wants his ashes spread after his death.

Tuck's Garage

Dawson took refuge in Tuck's garage as a teen. It is here that Dawson and Amanda spent most of their time as teen lovers and where they reunite as adults.

Cole Family Compound

The Cole family lives together on a large piece of property just outside Oriental. Dawson grew up here, and Abee and Crazy Ted still live here.



Tidewater

Tidewater is the name of the bar where Candy works. This is the location of the final showdown between Dawson and his cousins. This bar was also built on the curve where Dr. David Bonner was killed twenty-four years before.

Pediatric Cancer Center at Duke University

Amanda volunteers at the Pediatric Cancer Center at Duke University because this is where her daughter, Bea, received care when she was dying of a brain tumor.

Duke University Hospital

When Jared is in a car accident, he is taken to Duke University Hospital where he receives a heart transplant.

Oriental

Oriental is the small town in North Carolina where Dawson and Amanda grew up. It is in Oriental where they reunite to satisfy the final wishes of their friend, Tuck.

Durham

Durham is a large city in North Carolina where Amanda lives with her family and husband, Frank.

Themes

Soulmates

The main theme of "The Best of Me" rests on the idea of soulmates. Tuck Hostetler was married for more than three decades to his beloved Clara. They had a wonderful marriage despite the fact that they were never blessed with children. This match survived many things, including Tuck's deployment to Europe during World War II and his near death when his ship was in battle. Tuck would live twenty years without Clara in his life after her death. The loss of Clara was overwhelming for Tuck at first, but Dawson came into his life and gave him a renewed sense of purpose.

Dawson met Amanda as a child but did not become close to her until his junior year of high school when they became lab partners. Amanda and Dawson dated for more than a year. However, the tension caused by the disapproval of Amanda's parents finally led to them ending their relationship. Dawson would never get over Amanda and spend the rest of his life pining for her, remaining celibate in her memory. Amanda, however, would go on to marry and have four children even though she never forgot Dawson.

Tuck brings Dawson and Amanda back together after his death by asking that they come together to spread his ashes. This allows Dawson and Amanda to explore their relationship and to come to the realization that they continue to have strong feelings for one another. However, despite knowing that Dawson is her soulmate and she will never feel the same for another, she decides to remain committed to the life she chose for herself.

Tuck's decision to use his death to bring Amanda and Dawson back together shows how deeply he believes in the idea of soulmates and how he believes that Amanda and Dawson are destined to be together. The fact that Amanda chooses her family over Dawson does not mean that she does not believe in this philosophy. It simply shows that Amanda is a realist who understands that she has made her choices and she must stand by them.

Revenge

Revenge is a theme of the novel because it is what motivates Crazy Ted to seek out Dawson and attempt on many occasions to kill him. Crazy Ted holds Dawson responsible for his own incarceration on something he did twenty years before. This sense of responsibility that he places on Dawson has nothing to do with reality. However, Ted's intensity and his need to get revenge is.

Ted goes after Dawson several times in the course of the novel and fails each time. This gives the reader some hope that Ted will continue to fail in his endeavors. Unfortunately, the reader soon sees that everything in the novel has been driving Dawson toward one moment in time. Dawson is destined to save the life of the son of the man he killed



twenty-four years before. Everything brings Dawson to this one moment in time. By saving Alan Bonner, Dawson places himself in unmistakable danger. However, this moment allows Dawson to save Amanda's son, making the tragedy of Dawson's loss of life almost acceptable.

Grief

Grief is a major theme of "The Best of Me" because it becomes a motivating factor for many of the characters within the novel. Grief over the death of her daughter causes Amanda to become a different woman, a stronger woman. This same grief, however, leads Amanda's husband to become an alcoholic, pushing their marriage toward ruin. In fact, this alcoholism causes Amanda's son, Jared, to be in a place in time that he should not have been in, leading to an accident that nearly takes his life. It seems grief might ruin Amanda's marriage for many reasons, all of them leading back to her husband's alcoholism caused by his grief for their dead toddler.

Grief also brings Dawson back to Oriental after twenty years, a place he has sworn he would never visit again. When Tuck dies, Dawson knows that it is his responsibility to return home and fulfill his surrogate father's final wishes. It is also grief that brings Amanda back to Oriental, bringing she and Dawson back together again.

Tuck has grieved for his wife for many, many years before his death. This grief has led him to cultivate a wildflower garden for her every year and it has inspired him to bring Amanda and Dawson together again to fulfill his final wishes. Tuck knows what it is to be without someone you love and he does not want this for Dawson and Amanda. However, things do not work out as Tuck has planned, but it has worked out in such a way that Amanda must grieve for a lost love, but is saved from having to grieve another dead child.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person omniscient point of view. The author Nicholas Sparks chooses to write his novel in such a way that multiple characters tell their story, including the two main characters, Amanda and Dawson, as well as multiple minor characters.

The point of view of this novel can often be a challenging one for some readers as many authors fail to alert the reader when a change in narrating character is taking place. However, this author is careful to alert the reader of changes by starting a new chapter or leaving white space between the changes in narrating character. The author tells a very well rounded story in this novel, showing the story from many points of view that allows the reader to understand exactly what is happening and why. For this reason, the point of view of this novel works well with the plot.

Setting

"The Best of Me" is set mainly in the small town of Oriental, North Carolina. The setting is well described, taking the reader all through the town, from the sandy beaches to the cemetery where Dr. David Bonner is buried. Many of the most important scenes of the novel take place at Tuck's garage, but there are many scenes that also take place at the Tidewater bar and in Vandemere.

The setting of this novel is typical of this author's preferred settings. The small town is a perfect, lazy southern town that brings to mind lazy vacations and antebellum mansions. However, there is also a dark side to this particular small town that adds a little danger into the plot. The setting is well described, the people fit well with their surroundings, and the plot flows perfectly through the tension and peace of this location. For this reason, the setting of the novel works well with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. It is intended for adult readers and for this reasons many of the characters are adults with something of an education. This creates a language that is sophisticated, but not overly so. There is little slang and no foreign phrases in the novel, making it easy for readers of all ages and backgrounds to comprehend.

The language of a novel is important in that it represent the characters and setting of that novel. This novel does well in representing its characters, using a language that the reader can imagine people of this place and background would use. However, the language does not exploit the southern location of the setting by adding in any influence



such a setting would have on the characters. The language also fails to take into account the lack of education and criminal background of several of the characters, leaving the reader feeling as though these characters are less than authentic. However, in the overall ability to comprehend the meaning of the language throughout the novel, most readers will have little trouble appreciating the plot and its intentions.

Structure

"The Best of Me" is divided into twenty-three chapters and an epilogue. The novel is told from many points of view, telling the story in a linear format. The novel is told in both dialogue and narration, showing more than telling a story.

The book contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot brings together Dawson and Amanda, teenage lovers who have been separated for twenty-four years. As the lovers rediscover one another, they find themselves forced to make difficult decisions about their future. One subplot follows Crazy Ted Cole as he attempts to exact revenge on Dawson for a past transgression. Another subplot follows Abee Cole as he attempts to keep his girlfriend from cheating on him with an imaginary suitor. Another subplot follows Dawson's relationship with the Bonner family after an accident that ended in Dr. David Bonner's death. All these plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"For Dawson Cole, the hallucinations began after the explosion on the platform, on the day he should have died." Chapter 1, pg. 9

"Maybe it was the intimate nature of his stories, or maybe her growing loneliness, but over time, Tuck became a sort of confidant to her as well, something Amanda could never have predicted." Chapter 2, pg. 33

"It was then, while Amanda was staring back at him from across the years, that he suddenly knew why Tuck Hostetler had insisted he come back home." Chapter 3, pg. 44

"He still loved her, she was certain of that now, and the realization was intoxicating. She knew it was wrong, and she tried to force the feeling away, but Dawson and their past had taken root once more, and she could no longer deny the simple truth that for the first time in years, she'd felt like she'd finally come home." Chapter 7, pg. 103

"After all, he was still a Cole and he had a record." Chapter 8, pg. 111

"Forever. He'd carved the word into Tuck's workbench. A teenage promise, nothing more, yet somehow he'd been able to keep it alive." Chapter 12, pg. 139

"The music seemed to fill the room with longing, and for a moment neither of them knew what to do." Chapter 12, pg. 147

"He took her into his arms and whispered again that he loved her, and for just an instant, as impossible as it seemed, she felt that everything was going to be all right." Chapter 14, pg. 155

"For Alan Bonner, Sundays were always a little depressing, because he knew the weekend was almost at an end. Work, he decided, wasn't all it was cracked up to be." Chapter 16, pg. 170

"All around him, everything was slowly being destroyed." Chapter 19, pg. 192

"And when the tears finally came, she wept for Dawson, and for all of the days they would never know together." Chapter 23, pg. 230

"Dawson, she knew, had saved Alan's life—but in the end, he'd saved Jared's as well. And for her that meant...everything. I gave you the best of me, he'd told her once, and with every beat of her son's heart, she knew he'd done exactly that." Epilogue, pg. 238



Topics for Discussion

Who is Dawson Cole? What is particular about the man who saved Dawson after an explosion on an oil rig? What is strange about the way Dawson lives? Why does he not date? Why does he not have friends or lovers? Who calls Dawson to inform him of Tuck's death? For what reason? Why has Dawson not been to Oriental in more than twenty years?

Who is Amanda? Why is she in Oriental at the beginning of the novel? What has brought her there? Why did she never tell her husband, Frank, about Tuck Hostetler? What does Amanda's other think of Amanda's relationship with Tuck? For what reason? How many children does Amanda have? What happened to Amanda's daughter, Bea? How did this effect Amanda's life? Her relationships?

Who is Tuck Hostetler? Why do Dawson and Amanda go home when Tuck dies? What are they intending to do? Why did Tuck leave wine at his house? Why did he tell Amanda about his steak deliveries? What does the reader soon discover Tuck has in mind for Amanda and Dawson? For what reason?

Who is Abee? Why is he feeling ill at the beginning of the novel? Why do you suppose the author had Abee injured at the beginning of the novel? What is the point of this injury? Why is Abee convinced that Candy is seeing another man? Is she? Why is Abee obsessing over Candy? What is their relationship? How does this relationship cause trouble for Alan Bonner?

Who is Crazy Ted Cole? Why does Ted want revenge on Dawson? Does Dawson deserve such behavior? What does Ted do to try to sneak up on Dawson? How does Dawson end up getting the better of Ted? Why does Dawson's behavior cause Ted to become even more obsessed with revenge? Does Ted ever get his revenge? How?

Who is Dr. David Bonner? How did he die? Was it an accident? Why does Dawson go to jail for Dr. Bonner's death? How does Marilyn Bonner respond when Dawson tries to make amends? What does Dawson do for Marilyn Bonner for the next twenty years? For what reason? What does Marilyn Bonner tell Dawson when she finds him at Dr. Bonner's grave? Why? How does Dawson respond?

Who is Frank? Why does he drink? What caused the accident that injured Jared? Why does Amanda blame Frank? Why did Jared not think he was injured at first? What kind of injury does Jared have? What happens when Jared has a heart attack? Why is Amanda afraid Jared will die? Does he? Explain.