

Love Story Study Guide

Love Story by Erich Segal

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Plot Summary

Love Story by Erich Segal is a timeless story of tragic love. Oliver is a child of privilege, the son of a family of importance dating back many generations. Jennifer is the only child of a widowed baker, as opposite from Oliver as one person can be. However, their union is one of strength and volatility that sweeps them both up in an uncontrolled wave, their love surviving every obstacle except one, mortality. *Love Story* is the Romeo and Juliet of the twentieth century.

Oliver meets Jennifer at the library on the Radcliffe campus. Oliver prefers this library to the one at Harvard, because the required reading material is much easier to find. However, Jennifer, the clerk on duty one fateful night, disagrees with Oliver's preferences and feels free to tell him so. This encounter leads to coffee, which in turn leads to a date to one of Oliver's hockey games. Oliver tries to convince himself that he does not like this opinionated girl, who does not even know who he is, let alone how prestigious his family is, while Jennifer attempts to convince Oliver she could not care less about his family or his impressive athletic abilities. However, neither is very good at convincing the other of anything but their joy in spending time together.

It is not long before Oliver and Jennifer are spending every free moment together. Oliver feels different with Jennifer, afraid to use his normal lines on her for fear she will see through him. Jennifer is different. Oliver does not want the same things from her that he has wanted from other girls. It does not take long before Oliver realizes the depth of his feelings for this girl.

Oliver has a strained relationship with his father, due to the fact that Oliver feels he can never compete with his father's accomplishments. Jenny sees this when Oliver takes her to meet his parents. Soon after, Oliver's father informs Oliver that if he marries Jenny, he will be cut off from the family fortune. Oliver takes this declaration as the severing of the relationship he has been waiting for. Oliver marries Jenny and begins his life separate from the Barrett legacy.

Oliver and Jennifer live on Jennifer's income for the three years that Oliver is in law school. During this time, Oliver and Jennifer find new ways to scrounge every day, making every penny stretch. Oliver's father attempts a peace offering by inviting Jennifer and Oliver to his sixtieth birthday party, but Oliver refuses to go. Unhappy with his decision, Jennifer argues with Oliver, until he explodes and throws the phone across the room. Jennifer rushes out of the apartment, and Oliver spends the rest of the night searching for her, finally finding her waiting on the top of the steps to their apartment.

Upon graduating from law school, Oliver receives many job offers. Finally, Oliver accepts a job with a law firm in New York City at a salary that is a record for a Harvard Law School graduate. Jennifer and Oliver enjoy their new wealth by buying every luxury they missed out on while living on Jennifer's teaching salary. Jennifer and Oliver also decide to try to have a baby. When Jennifer does not become pregnant right away, they go to a fertility doctor to rule out any problems. During the course of this investigation,



the doctor discovers that Jennifer has a fatal type of leukemia. Oliver does not tell Jennifer at first, preferring to keep things as normal as possible. Jennifer, on the other hand, knows there is something wrong with her and goes to the doctor, insisting he tell her the truth.

Within weeks, Jennifer becomes so ill that she agrees to be placed in the hospital. Oliver stops going to work, preferring to be at Jennifer's side as often as she will allow. Oliver wants Jennifer to have everything she needs, so he goes to his father and asks for five thousand dollars without telling his father why. Jennifer's health declines quickly. Jennifer makes Oliver promise he will allow her father to have a Catholic funeral for her, just moments before she dies. When Oliver leaves the hospital after his wife's death, he finds his father rushing in. Oliver's father has just learned of Jennifer's illness and has come to support his son. Oliver allows himself to be consoled in his father's arms for the first time since he was a small child.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Love Story by Erich Segal is a timeless story of tragic love. Oliver is a child of privilege, the son of a family of importance dating back many generations. Jennifer is the only child of a widowed baker, as opposite from Oliver as one person can be. However, their union is one of strength and volatility that sweeps them both up in an uncontrolled wave, their love surviving every obstacle except one, mortality. *Love Story* is the Romeo and Juliet of the twentieth century.

Oliver begins his story by describing a girl who died at twenty-five, before he takes the reader to the first place he met this girl. Oliver goes to the Radcliffe library, because it is often easier to get required materials there than at the Harvard library. Less than a day before a history exam, Oliver is at Radcliffe to read the first book on the required reading list. When Oliver asks one of the two girls at the main desk, she wants to know why he does not use his own library. Oliver defends himself by saying Harvard students can use the Radcliffe library. The girl says she knows this, but there is a moral problem with the Harvard students, who have access to millions of books, using the smaller library with barely thousands of books. Oliver again becomes annoyed, especially when the girl accuses him of being rich and dumb, and stating that she would never have coffee with him. Oliver proves her wrong by taking her to coffee later that night.

Over coffee Oliver and this girl exchange names, and Oliver discovers the girl, Jennifer, is a music major and that she has no idea who he is. Oliver has been sure up to this point that everyone knew who he was, since there was a hall on the Harvard campus named after his family. Later, however, Jenny makes a sly comment that allows him to know she knew who he was all along. When Oliver drops Jenny off at her dorm, he asks her to go to a hockey game the following weekend.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter introduces the two main characters, Oliver and Jennifer. Oliver is a rich boy, whose family is very prestigious, as suggested by the fact that there is a hall named after his family on the Harvard campus. Jennifer is the opposite, a poor girl who got into Radcliffe on her intelligence alone. These two people are like oil and vinegar in their first meeting together. However, Oliver asks her out, and she goes. Then, he asks her out again. Clearly, there is an attraction here.

There is foreshadowing in the opening lines of this chapter when Oliver asks the reader what one should say about a girl who died at twenty-five. This clearly warns the reader that this girl is going to die. The foreshadowing is when and where and what is going to happen in the pages in between. More immediate foreshadowing is also offered in the final sentences of the chapter, when Oliver asks Jennifer to go to the hockey game.

Jennifer never answers and this leaves the reader wondering if she will attend the game with him or not.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

At the hockey game Oliver made sure that the team manager gave Jenny a copy of the program so she could see his bio and realize what a great student and athlete he is. Oliver then ignores Jenny while he warms up for the game, afraid of appearing uncool in front of his friends. Oliver plays the game with the same energy and violence he normally plays with, although he is distracted by Jenny's presence. When Oliver is forced into the penalty box for his aggressive playing style, Jenny comes down to tease him. Jenny wants to know what Oliver did wrong and, when he tells her to be quiet so he can pay attention, Jenny says she is leaving. When Oliver goes back onto the ice, he cannot keep himself from searching for Jenny in the crowd.

While searching for Jenny in the stands during game play, Oliver finds her. However, his distraction allows a player from the other team to knock him down, something that has rarely ever happened to Oliver. His embarrassment is soothed by Jenny's sudden excitement regarding the game. Oliver and his team won the game.

After the game, Oliver goes into the locker rooms and takes a shower. After his shower, due to a bad knee, Oliver takes a soak in the whirlpool where the team trainer comes over and insists that he add more salt to his diet. After the trainer leaves, Oliver quickly finishes his soak and dresses, hoping Jenny will be outside waiting for him. At first, however, Oliver does not see her. Oliver talks with a few of the hard-core fans, searching for Jenny. Finally she steps out from behind a bush. Oliver is so happy to see her that he kisses her on the forehead. Jenny tells him she did not give him permission to do that. In response, Oliver kisses her on the lips. Oliver walks Jenny back to her dorm at Radcliffe and tells her he might not call her for a few months. When Jenny gets upset, Oliver points out that she can dish the pain, but she cannot take it.

Back in his own dorm room, Oliver finds his roommate entertaining a few of his football buddies. Oliver's roommate, Ray Stratton, and his friends tease Oliver about Jenny. Oliver slips away and calls Jenny. Oliver tells her he is in love with her. Jenny hangs up on him.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Oliver attempts to be cool about his feelings toward Jenny, but from the beginning of the chapter the reader can see that Oliver's feelings go much deeper than he would like to admit. This touches on Oliver's character elements, showing that underneath his strong exterior, Oliver is a sensitive person, who worries about his own inadequacies. This character element foreshadows events later in the story that include a volatile relationship with his father.



Jenny is quiet and abrasive toward Oliver, implying to him that she is going to leave the game due to his refusal to explain it to her, and then remaining. Oliver gets her back for this by telling her he would not call for a month or two. This sets the parameters of the relationship that is building between these two characters. Jenny is abrasive and yet sensitive, the same as Oliver. These two play off each other's emotions, saying mean things that are actually meant as endearments in their unique way of dealing with each other. This too foreshadows future events in the story, mainly events that relate to the relationship building between these two characters. The end of the chapter also foreshadows the next chapter as the reader wonders if Oliver is really in love with Jenny.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Oliver gets hurt in a hockey game between Harvard and Cornell. Oliver made a comment about Canadians, forgetting that several members of the team are Canadian. These Canadians attacked Oliver on the ice, and Oliver got a five-minute penalty for fighting. The team trainer put tape on the wound Oliver received on the side of his face until the game ended. Harvard lost. After the game, a doctor stitched Oliver's wound while the trainer complained to the doctor about Oliver's lack of salt in his diet. After a shower, Oliver went out to the parking lot and found his father waiting for him.

Oliver and his father go to dinner and have the same conversation they have had many times in the past. Oliver's father wants to take Oliver to a doctor, which leads to a conversation about how animalistic Oliver's choice of sports is. Then Oliver's father wants to know if Oliver has gotten his law school admission letter yet. When Oliver says no and his father suggests he make a phone call to the dean of the school, Oliver becomes irritated. Next Oliver's father wants to know if Oliver or any of his friends ever thought of going into the Peace Corp. The meal finally ends with a strained peace between the two men. Oliver III, Oliver's father, drives home. Oliver III is an avid driver, who enjoys timing himself to see how fast he can get from one place to another, another habit that greatly annoys Oliver, especially when he cannot beat his father's personal records. Oliver joins his team at the hotel there in Ithaca, New York and calls Jenny.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter introduces a new character and the beginning of a smaller plot line within the main plot. Oliver III is Oliver's father. Clearly, from the way this chapter reads, Oliver and his father have a strained relationship. Oliver is not happy having dinner with his father, not impressed with his father's appearance at the game, and not pleased with the conversation they have, a conversation that Oliver tells the reader he has had with his father many times in the past. The foreshadowing this dinner opens for the reader is questions into the affect of Oliver's relationship with his father on his relationship with Jenny, as well as on his future. Not only this, but also this dinner also touches on one of the themes of the novel, relationships between parents and children. Parents and children have unique relationships and this one is no different.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

When Oliver goes to Briggs Hall to pick up Jenny for a date the girl on bells recognizes him right away and knows he is there for Jenny. Jenny is on the phone. After waiting for a few minutes, Oliver goes toward the phones to rush her a little. When he approaches, Oliver hears Jenny tell a man named Phil that she loves him. Oliver is jealous and demands to know who this Phil is after Jenny hangs up. Jenny says it is her father, a fact Oliver does not believe at first.

Jenny tells Oliver how her father raised her alone after her mother died. Jenny then asks about Oliver's father. Oliver tells her how difficult it is to live up to his father, how he was on the Olympic team for rowing one year, making it impossible for Oliver to compete with him. Jenny questions everything Oliver says about his father since the parent child relationship is a sacred one to her, and she wants Oliver to feel that way too. However, Jenny admits that this proves Oliver is not perfect, a fact she takes relief from.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Again the theme of parental-child relationships is touched on in this chapter, as Oliver learns about Jenny's father and tells her about his own father. Jenny's relationship with her father is clearly much closer than Oliver's with his father, and she clearly values her father more than Oliver. This foreshadows tension between the two, as Oliver grows more distant from his father. This chapter also foreshadows the depth of caring that is quickly developing between these two people, preparing for events to follow in the next few chapters.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Oliver admits that he has not slept with or attempted to sleep with Jenny in the three weeks since they began dating. Oliver does not know how to approach this part of their relationship, because he feels differently about Jenny and does not want to scare her off with his usual lines. Then one day they are studying together, and it just happens. Oliver is surprised by how soft and gentle the whole thing is, surprised by his own reaction as much as anything else. Jenny has a gold cross on the first time and this also surprises Oliver since he did not think she was religious. It turns out she is not religious. The cross had belonged to her mother. Jenny also admits that she is in love with Oliver.

Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter marks a transition in Oliver and Jenny's relationship. Oliver has admitted to feeling differently about Jenny here. More important than the physical part of their relationship, this chapter shows the depth of emotion on Oliver's part by admitting he feels differently about Jenny than he did for any other girl, and Jenny's admission that she is in love with Oliver. This touches on the theme of relationships between lovers, as it is the first time the reader has found that what lies between Jenny and Oliver is really love and not infatuation, though the two characters may not be confident in that idea just yet. It also foreshadows the next few chapters as this relationship deepens.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Ray, Oliver's roommate, has been forced to study and sleep in other parts of the university now that Oliver and Jenny have begun the sexual part of their relationship. Oliver refuses to tell Ray that there is a sexual aspect to his relationship with Jenny and continues to deny that he is in love with Jenny, promising Ray that they will get the apartment in New York they had always planned on. However, after watching Jenny perform in a concert, Oliver learns that she has been accepted as a student to a well-respected music teacher in Paris. Rather than allow Jenny to leave him behind, Oliver asks her to marry him.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Here the main characters have reached a minor climax in their relationship, the decision to get married. This again touches on the theme of relationships between lovers. These two have been enjoying what up to this point appeared to be a casual love affair. With the revelation that Jenny is planning to move to Paris for a time, Oliver takes the relationship to the next level, revealing to the reader his true emotions toward this woman, who just a few passages before Oliver was claiming was just a pastime, a college fling.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Oliver drives too fast on the road to his parents' house, intent on proving to himself that he can drive just as fast and reckless as his father. Jenny is with Oliver, preparing to meet his parents for the first time. Jenny is nervous, and her apprehension increases the more expensive the homes around them become. When Oliver pulls into his parents' driveway, Jenny nearly panics, when she sees the size of the house. Once the door is opened by the butler, and Jenny makes her way down a long hall where there hang many portraits of past Barretts, Jenny's fear reaches a fever pitch. Oliver downplays the roles his ancestors have played in history, almost embarrassed by the prestige of his family.

In the library, Oliver introduces Jenny to his parents, Oliver Barrett III and Alison Barrett. Oliver watches Jenny closely, curious if she is sizing him up against his father. Oliver is very uncomfortable with the entire situation and would like to leave, but his every attempt to slip out is foiled by Jenny, who is anxious to get to know Oliver's parents. Dinner is an awkward affair during which Oliver is constantly mortified by his parents' behavior and making comments that do nothing but make everyone else uncomfortable. After dinner, Oliver's mother tells everyone that Oliver III has been appointed the head of the Peace Corps.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In meeting his parents, Oliver allows not only Jenny but also the reader as well to see how he feels about his father, his mother, and his entire family background. Oliver is not comfortable with his life, but his deepest anxiety appears to come from his father. Oliver does not feel good enough to be Oliver III's son. This touches on the theme of relationships between parents and children. Oliver feels inadequate, as though he does not measure up to his father. The reader watches the two Olivers interact and has to wonder if this sense of competition is mostly a product of Oliver's imagination rather than a true competition that his father has initiated. Jenny seems quite content with Oliver's parents, embarrassed at times at Oliver's behavior. Jenny does not seem to see the same things that Oliver sees. This foreshadows the next chapter as well as Jenny voices her opinion regarding Oliver's behavior at dinner, and her impressions of Oliver's parents.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Jenny is impressed with Oliver III's new appointment and is surprised that Oliver is not. Jenny lectures Oliver on his behavior toward his father, trying to impress on him how important a father-son relationship is and how Oliver's prestigious family is part of who he is. Oliver sees that Jenny can see inside of him and accept his faults and this makes him love her all the more.

Oliver has lunch with his father at the Harvard Club in Boston. Oliver III begins the meal by complaining about Oliver eating too fast and continues this theme, as he discusses Oliver's relationship with Jenny. Oliver III thinks that Oliver is rebelling with this relationship and that to marry Jenny now would be a mistake. Oliver III says it has nothing to do with Jenny and everything to do with Oliver. Oliver becomes enraged and tells his father to mind his own business. Oliver III tells his son that if he marries Jenny, he will cut him out of his life. Oliver walks out of the club with every intention to marry Jenny and live his own life, free of his father.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This is another climactic moment within the plot development of the novel. First Oliver sees how well Jenny knows him and falls even deeper in love with her. Second, Oliver III becomes the clear protagonist in this story, when he forbids Oliver to marry Jenny. Of course Oliver chooses to defy his father and marry Jenny anyway, almost relieved to be free of his father's oppressive achievements and prestigious family history. However, this event creates tension within the plot that will come back to create more tension later in the novel. This is foreshadowing into future events that include moments of high tension between Oliver and his father.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Oliver and Jenny travel to Cranston, Rhode Island to meet Phil, Jenny's father. Now, Oliver is the one who is nervous, most especially because not only does he not have the means to support his soon-to-be wife, but also Jenny and Oliver have made the decision that Jenny will support them while Oliver attends law school. Oliver is afraid Phil will not like this choice.

When they arrive on the street where Jenny lives, Jenny steps out of the car and is greeted by many of her neighbors. These neighbors seem to know Jenny well and know who Oliver is, as well. This makes Oliver even more nervous. However, when he meets Phil at the door, Oliver finds the man to be kind and polite, if boisterous. There is clearly a lot of love between father and daughter, a fact Oliver watches with some awkwardness. Before dinner, Phil loads Oliver up with pastries he made fresh in his own bakery. Phil pronounces Oliver okay, sending Oliver once more in a spiral of confusion.

Before dinner, Phil tries to heal Oliver's rift with his father by suggesting he call him and talk to him, father-to-father. Oliver refuses. During dinner, Oliver and Jenny tell Phil that they do not intend to have a traditional church wedding. Oliver explains that neither of them believes in organized religion and feels it would be hypocritical to have a church wedding. Phil agrees with some reservation and confusion on how the ceremony will be performed. On the drive back to Cambridge, Oliver asks how Jenny thinks it went, and she says an ambiguous okay.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Oliver is in the hot seat now, going to meet Jenny's parents. Oliver is very nervous, but this visit goes much better than the one between them and Oliver's parents. Oliver is quickly put at ease by Phil's boisterous behavior, feeling a part of the family much quicker than he ever did with his own family. When Phil offers to help mend fences between Oliver and his father, Oliver quickly shuts him down, foreshadowing later attempts to fix things between Oliver and his father. It is clear Oliver is not interested in making amends. Again, this foreshadows later events in the novel in which Oliver's strained relationship with his father moves once more to the forefront of the plot development.

Also important in this chapter is the parallel, if somewhat opposite, relationship between Jenny and her father. This touches on the theme of relationships between parents and children, showing the kinder side of this relationship. Where Oliver feels he has to compete with his father, Jenny feels loved and accepted in hers with Phil. The introduction of Phil also brings into the plot not only a new character, but foreshadowing

of Phil's part in later events throughout the rest of the novel. This chapter also adds foreshadowing in regards to the wedding Oliver and Jenny are planning.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Oliver goes to the Associate Dean of Harvard Law School to discuss financial aid for his tuition. The dean does not think that Oliver needs the aid and suggests that Oliver should not drag the school in on a family feud.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Oliver's need for financial aid is a new event in his life and is not received well by the dean of the school, who is aware of Oliver's family background. This chapter foreshadows the fact that Oliver must now find his own way to pay for things now that he and his father are no longer speaking.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Jenny graduates from Radcliffe on Wednesday, an event many members of her family attend, although she and Oliver make the choice not to tell any of her relatives about their impending wedding, since they do not intend to invite many of them and do not want to offend anyone. Oliver graduates on Thursday, the ceremony attended by only Jenny and Phil. Jenny and Oliver get married the following Sunday in a small ceremony attended by only a few close friends and Phil. The wedding consists of Jenny and Oliver saying a short poem to each other, hers a poem by Elizabeth Barrett and his, a more difficult choice, one by Walt Whitman. The reception takes place at a local bar where Oliver allows Phil to pick up the tab, a fact that wins Oliver Jenny's appreciation. Later, when Phil boards a bus for home there are many tears, but also it leads to the beginning of a new life for Oliver and Jenny, a fact they are quite excited about.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Oliver and Jenny graduate from college and a few days later they get married in a small, simple ceremony. This marks another climactic point in the plot development, the culmination of many chapters of planning and preparing for this moment. Oliver seems to have grown some by this point as marked by his intuitive awareness that Phil would have been hurt if Oliver did not allow him to pay for the reception after their wedding. Oliver is maturing. This growth also foreshadows future events in the novel as the reader becomes more aware of the changes in Oliver. This chapter also foreshadows the next few chapters, as Oliver and Jenny begin their new life together.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Oliver and Jenny begin their married life working at a boat club in Dennis Port. When they return to Cambridge with their combined salaries, Jenny and Oliver move into a tiny apartment they had found before leaving for the summer. The place is small and in poor shape, but it is the best they can afford. Oliver carries Jenny over the threshold their first night in the new apartment. Jenny takes a job as a teacher at a private school, disappointed that she does not get the salary she had planned on, causing them to tighten their belts more than expected. Jenny and Oliver no longer have the social life they had before because of the tightness of their budget, Jenny's job, and Oliver's school schedule. Jenny insists that Oliver take the time to attend Harvard sporting events, but he refuses, afraid he will run into his father at one of the games.

Chapter 12 Analysis

A new tangent in the plot development as began in this chapter with the beginning of Oliver and Jenny's life together as a married couple. Life without Oliver's family money is beginning to make it felt in this chapter, foreshadowing the struggle Oliver and Jenny will face over the next three years while Oliver attends law school. Also touched on in this chapter for the first time is the theme of money. In this chapter the reader is allowed to see how important money is to this couple, a fact that has been glossed over up to this point. Also foreshadowed in this chapter is Oliver's bad feeling toward his father and a meeting that is sure to happen very soon between the two men, as well as more tension that will be result of this contact.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Oliver and Jenny receive an invitation to Oliver Barrett III's sixtieth birthday party. Jenny tries to goad Oliver into agreeing to attend the party, saying that the invitation is his father's way of reaching out to him. Oliver refuses, stating that his mother sent the invitation, not his father. Jenny continues to push, bringing up the possibility that Oliver himself will someday have a child who will feel the same way about him, as he feels about his own father. Jenny throws out the possible name for this child as Bozo the Clown. Jenny finally agrees to call Oliver's parents to let them know they will not attend. Oliver III answers the phone. Jenny tries to get Oliver to talk to his father, finally telling Oliver III herself that Oliver loves him. Oliver becomes enraged. Oliver tears the phone out of Jenny's hand and throws it across the room, causing Jenny to run from the apartment.

Oliver goes searching for Jenny in every place he can think of she might go, including many buildings on the campuses of both Harvard and Radcliffe. When Oliver cannot find Jenny, he calls Phil hoping Jenny went to him. Phil has no idea where Jenny is and requests that Oliver and Jenny come see him more often. Finally Oliver goes home and finds Jenny sitting on the top step in front of their apartment. Oliver attempts to apologize, but Jenny tells him he does not have to.

Chapter 13 Analysis

This chapter is important for two reasons. First, this chapter further establishes Oliver's feelings toward his father. This touches on the theme of relationships between parents and children as well as foreshadowing future developments of this strained relationship. Oliver clearly wants nothing to do with his father, but both Jenny and his father believe they should try to work things out. Jenny has always thought Oliver should forgive his father and continues to work to convince Oliver of the same thing. Oliver's father clearly feels bad about how he has treated his son, but has never been able to express his feelings to his son, a fact that is clear in the way Oliver III has always talked to Oliver throughout the course of the novel.

The second important part of this chapter is the fight between Oliver and Jenny. This is the first and only fight between the two in the course of their marriage. Oliver's clear regret is present both in his behavior after Jenny leaves the apartment and his attempts to apologize. Jenny's entire personality is clear in her answer to this apology. Jenny is not the type to have regrets about anything, and she simply does not want Oliver to have regrets either. This attitude foreshadows Jenny's reaction to later, trying times in which she is faced with her own impending mortality.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

In July Oliver and Jenny are back in Dennis Port when Oliver receives the letter that will tell him where he has placed in his law school class. Oliver searches out Jenny before he opens the letter. It is good news. Oliver has placed third in his class, which places him as a staff member of the *Law Review*. Jenny is not impressed, however, curious who the two people were who did better than him. Oliver finds out, when he returns to Cambridge, relieved to find that one is a man who is not Jenny's type, and the other is a woman. Oliver works hard that year, editing several articles for the *Law Review* and writing one himself that no one but his wife seems very impressed with.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Oliver places top in his class at law school, which is important foreshadowing because the top three members of his class will receive the best job offers after graduation. Another year passes in this chapter in which Jenny continues to tease her husband and keep him off balance, deepening the relationship between the two for the reader to see how deeply in love they continue to be. This too sets foreshadowing for the future of the novel as the reader begins to remember the opening lines of the novel in which Jenny's death was predicted.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

After graduation Oliver is still third in his class and is offered many good jobs. After Jenny and Oliver decide they want to stay on the east coast, they entertain offers from many firms that include trips and dinners out. Finally Oliver picks a firm in New York that is both prestigious and civil liberties oriented. Oliver also receives a salary that is a record high for the members of his graduating class.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Oliver's graduation marks another climactic change in the lives of these two people. Oliver receives a good job in New York that pays him a record salary, officially ending the money drought they have suffered for the last three years. Now things will be different for them do to this extra money, affecting their lives drastically and touching on the theme of money once more.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Oliver and Jenny rent a very expensive apartment in New York and begin to fill it with every material thing they felt they went without before. Their social life began to change again, with invitations coming in daily, and Oliver joining the Harvard Club of New York. Shortly after the move, Oliver decides he wants to have a baby, and he has taken a shine to the name Bozo. Jenny is skeptical at first but slowly comes around.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Another climactic event has happened here. Jenny and Oliver suddenly have lots of money and have decided to move on to the next level in their relationship, having a baby. This offers foreshadowing into the next few chapters, as Jenny and Oliver begin to try to fulfill this next wish and discover it is not as easy as they first thought it would be.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Jenny and Oliver's attempts to get pregnant do not come to fruition right away so they decide to visit a fertility doctor just to make sure everything is alright with both of them on a physical level. The doctor performs complete exams on both of them after first explaining that they should not rush and that fertility problems can be easily repaired. Jenny is called in for a second time when the nurse supposedly lost some of her blood samples. The doctor calls Oliver a few days later and asks him to come in for the results. Oliver is excited so he goes in earlier than planned. The doctor tells Oliver that their infertility problem rests with Jenny, something Oliver had suspected. However, the doctor tells him that Jenny's problem is not related to her fertility but the fact that she has an incurable type of leukemia. The doctor tells Oliver to go home and pretend everything is normal for as long as possible.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The final climactic moment of the plot comes in this chapter when Oliver learns that Jenny is dying. This moment is very surprising despite the fact that the reader is warned in the first paragraph of the novel that Jenny dies. Now all the foreshadowing in the previous chapters regarding Jenny's character, and Oliver and Jenny's relationship has come together in this climactic development that foreshadows an obvious conclusion that will slowly unveil itself in the next few chapters. This chapter touches on the theme of relationships between lovers where Oliver not only has to deal with the idea that he will not have a child with his wife, but that his wife will soon die. This is a heartrending moment that changes the tone of the novel from one of naive frivolity to the truth of reality.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Oliver has trouble dealing with this situation, turning to God for the first time in his adulthood. Keeping things normal for Jenny proves to be difficult, especially when Oliver's boss offers him a case of his own that requires him to leave town. Oliver refuses the job, not telling his boss why. On his way home one night, Oliver stops to buy tickets to Paris for him and Jenny, hoping to give her a little of what he took away, when he married her instead of allowing her to study abroad in Paris. At home Jenny tells Oliver that she knows about her illness, because she went to the doctor to demand the truth. Jenny does not want to go to Paris. She simply wants to live life as normally as possible.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Oliver's character peeks through in this chapter. Oliver wants to protect his wife from the truth of her illness, but the burden of hiding it begins to wear him down. Oliver also wants to give his wife everything she has missed out on and decides to buy her tickets to Paris. This move is touching, but it is not what Jenny wants, contrasting her personality with Oliver's. Foreshadowing here is set by Jenny's announcement that she felt ill and went to the doctor, learning the truth. Jenny is beginning to grow sicker, foreshadowing the eventual end.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Jenny continues to insist on doing the housework and cooking for Oliver every night, although she has relented and allowed him to do the clean up after dinner. One night while Oliver is doing the dishes, Jenny plays the piano. When Oliver goes to check on her, Jenny tells him she needs to go to the hospital. In the cab on the way to the hospital, the cab driver thinks Jenny is pregnant and wishes them luck with their baby. At the hospital, Oliver authorizes the doctor to do whatever needs to be done to make Jenny comfortable.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Jenny's illness has grown worse, resulting in her going to the hospital. In the cab, the driver thinks they are having a baby, a mistake Jenny insists Oliver allow the man to continue to believe. This marks a loss, something Oliver and Jenny will never experience, but something Jenny allows to happen in order to protect the cabby's feelings. This is a clear example of the depth of Jenny's character, foreshadowing her reaction when death becomes eminent. The chapter ends with Oliver insisting the doctor do anything necessary to help Jenny. This foreshadows Oliver's need for money to pay for this medical care and a possible meeting between him and his father.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Oliver drives quickly to Boston in order to see his father. Oliver is ushered into his father's office by Oliver III himself even though there are many people waiting in the waiting area. Oliver does not beat around the bush and simply asks for what he has come for, five thousand dollars. Oliver III gives it to him while asking why he needs it. Oliver does not feel that his father really wants to know why, he simply wants to speak to his son and prolong the visit. Oliver refuses to tell his father the truth and allows him to believe he got some girl in trouble. Oliver thanks his father before he leaves.

Chapter 20 Analysis

The theme of relationships between parents and children is clear in this chapter. Oliver wants money and goes to his father, because he knows no one else who can loan him such a large sum. Oliver III gives his son the money, because he loves him. Oliver III also delays the meeting with prying questions although Oliver knows he does this not, because he wants to know the answers, but because he wants to talk to his son. Oliver III cannot express his true emotions and that is no clearer than in this chapter.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Oliver tells Phil about Jenny's illness. Phil moves into the apartment and spends every moment he is not with Jenny cleaning the place. Oliver finally tells his boss what is happening and stops going to work. Oliver spends as much time with Jenny that he can and prays to God that she will continue to live for months or years to come. One night at the hospital, Jenny kicks Oliver out of the room so she can speak to her father alone. When Oliver is allowed back in, Jenny tells him that she has promised Phil he can have a Catholic funeral. Then Jenny tells Oliver to stop blaming himself and to not regret the things he may think he kept her from doing. Finally Jenny asks Oliver to hold her. Jenny dies soon after.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Oliver spends his time with Jenny, forgetting everything else. Money is no longer important except in how it can prolong Jenny's life, therefore Oliver stops going to work. This touches on the theme of money. Jenny shows personal growth in this chapter not only by allowing her father to have a Catholic funeral, but also by facing her own death much calmer than the men in her life. Finally, Jenny's insistence that Oliver stop regretting all he took from her touches on the theme of relationships between lovers, as Jenny shows her concern is deeper for Oliver at that moment, as it should be.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Oliver leaves the room and tells Phil that Jenny is dead. Then Oliver goes out to the lobby, needing to get some fresh air. Oliver III rushes into the lobby, as Oliver reaches it, announcing that he has just learned of Jenny's illness and wants to help. Oliver says she is dead, and Oliver III says he is sorry. Oliver says he should not be sorry and then cries in his father's arms for the first time.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Jenny's death has been the climactic ending to the main plot of the novel and this chapter, with Oliver reaching out to his father, is the climactic end to the subplot. Oliver accepts his father's love for the first time, seeing it for what it is in his father's awkward way of showing love. This touches on the relationship between parent and child theme again, showing that no matter what might have happened between the two men, in the end there is nothing but love between them. It is a happy ending despite the devastation that marks Jenny's death.



Characters

Oliver Barrett IV

Oliver Barrett IV is a young Harvard student in his senior year. Oliver is a good student, often at the top of his class, and an exceptional hockey player. Oliver is also the son of a very prestigious family, embarrassed at times by his family's prestige and wealth. Oliver also finds it difficult to deal with his father's personal accomplishments, as though Oliver feels as though he is constantly being measured against his father's accomplishments and falling short.

When Oliver meets Jenny, he falls instantly in love. Jenny is the opposite of everything Oliver is and in this Oliver finds a sort of peace, a world in which he no longer has to compete. Oliver even goes so far as giving up his right to his family's money in order to be with Jenny, a sacrifice that finds them fighting to pay their bills every month during his three years in law school. It all pays off when Oliver graduates third in his class and is given a position with a New York law firm that breaks the top salary record.

In New York, Oliver gives his wife every material thing he can, even planning on having a baby as soon as possible. However, when Jenny does not become pregnant right away, Oliver has them both go to an infertility doctor, sure there is something wrong with Jenny that is preventing them from getting pregnant. Oliver has become arrogant in his new position in life, feeling as though he is on top of the world and nothing can change his luck. However, Oliver soon learns that Jenny is dying and is forced to beg money from his father in order to keep his wife comfortable on her deathbed. It is an experience that causes Oliver to mature faster than he had up to this point.

Jennifer Cavilleri Barrett

Jenny is the brash, honest to a fault daughter of a Rhode Island baker. Jenny was raised as an only child to her widowed father, therefore their relationship is very close. Jenny is a music major not really looking for a relationship. Jenny wants to go to Paris and study under a well-respected music teacher when Oliver changes her mind by proposing. Jenny is happy to give up her music to be with Oliver.

Jenny is so close to her father she cannot imagine having the volatile relationship with him that Oliver has with his father. Jenny does all she can to bring the two Olivers back together, going as far as confessing to the senior Oliver that his son loves him very much. This revelation leads to Jenny and Oliver's first big fight and the famous line, "Love means not ever having to say you're sorry." (pg. 90)

Jenny is an abrasive person on the outset of the book, but as the reader moves deeper into the story and the budding relationship between Oliver and Jenny, the reader begins to see what a sensitive and kind person Jenny is. Jenny's abrasiveness comes from being raised by a boisterous Italian, who is not afraid to say whatever is on his mind.



However, this abrasiveness is coupled with love, taking the sting out of words that might otherwise hurt. To Jenny, life is about living and loving, to not competing with the people you love and to never have regrets. To this point, Jenny lives her life fully and, when her death comes early in life, she is left with few regrets, most of those only due to her short time in life.

Oliver Barrett III

Oliver Barrett III is Oliver's father. Oliver III is a very accomplished person, whose good deeds have placed his son in a position where he feels as though he is constantly competing with his father. Oliver III does not appear to want his son to feel this way, but Oliver III comes from the type of background in which he feels difficulty in expressing his emotions with his son. Oliver III simply has nothing to say to his son outside of the comparison of their common activities, including their driving abilities and their sports accomplishments. It is this comparison that puts the pressure on Oliver IV and makes him feel inadequate.

Oliver III tells Oliver IV not to marry Jenny, because he wants his son to marry someone more in his own class. This is not meant to hurt anyone. This is simply a father looking out for his child. However, it is done with little information and is a mistake that Oliver III tries to make up for later. Oliver IV is too angry to make up, however. Finally, Oliver IV is forced to face his father when Jenny becomes ill, and he needs money to help pay for her medical expenses and his own upkeep while he takes time off work. Oliver III wants to talk to his son so he pressures him into telling him what is wrong. Oliver IV sees what his father is doing and does not become upset although he does resent the questions and does not want to share the truth with his father. Oliver IV did not know what to expect when his father learned the truth. However, Oliver III only wants to help his son. When Oliver III does learn the truth, he goes straight to the hospital and his son's side, proving to the reader the depth of love in this relationship even if Oliver IV was not aware of it.

Phil Cavilleri

Phil is Jenny's dad. Phil is a boisterous baker, who raised Jenny alone after his wife died. Phil is a kind man, who loves his daughter with a passion that all fathers should feel for their children. Phil is demonstrative in his emotions and not afraid to express his opinions. Upon meeting Oliver for the first time, Phil tried to make things better between Oliver and his father by suggesting he give Oliver III a call. To Phil, there is nothing more important than family.

The only time Phil shows disapproval for his daughter and Oliver is when the two of them announce that they do not want to be married in a church. Phil would like his daughter to be married in the Catholic Church since this is the religion she was raised within, but Jenny and Oliver do not believe in religion and do not want it as a part of



their wedding. However, when Jenny is on her deathbed, she agrees to allow Phil to give her a Catholic funeral more for Phil's sake than her own.

Ray Stratton

Ray Stratton is Oliver's roommate at Harvard. Ray is a football player, and he often brings his football buddies to their room. One night, Oliver comes home from a hockey game only to face the good-natured teasing of these football buddies regarding Jenny. When Oliver's relationship with Jenny begins to deepen, Ray finds himself kicked out of the room on many occasions but he does not complain or cause trouble for the two lovers. Finally, when Oliver and Jenny marry, Ray does not complain about the end of his and Oliver's plans to get an apartment together. It is also Ray who stays in touch with Oliver after he and Jenny move to New York.

Alison Forbes 'Topsy' Barrett

Topsy Barrett is Oliver's mother. Topsy seems to have little to do with the relationship between Oliver and his father. Topsy is a typical rich wife. Topsy belongs to many charity groups for which she throws parties in order to raise money. Topsy is polite when Oliver brings Jenny home to meet his parents. Jenny likes Mrs. Barrett, finding her intelligent and interested in many of the same topics that interest Jenny. It is Mrs. Barrett who announces to Oliver and Jenny that Oliver III has been appointed the head of the Peace Corp, explaining to Oliver why his father was so interested to know how many kids Oliver's age have thought about the Peace Corp.

Dr. Sheppard

Dr. Sheppard is the infertility doctor that Oliver and Jenny go to see when Jenny does not become pregnant right, as they begin attempting to make a baby. Dr. Sheppard explains that both partners must be investigated and proceeds to give both Jenny and Oliver examinations. Dr. Sheppard calls Jenny back to his office a few days later, saying the nurse lost her blood samples, and they must take them again. It is not until later that Oliver learns this was just a ruse to retest Jenny's blood in order to make sure their diagnosis of leukemia is correct. Oliver does not tell Jenny right away, and it is not until Jenny begins feeling ill and goes to the doctor herself that she learns the truth about her situation.

Dr. Ackerman

Dr. Ackerman is the blood specialist Dr. Sheppard sends Jenny to when she learns of her diagnosis. Dr. Ackerman is Yale trained, which becomes a joke between Jenny and Oliver, as they attempt to deal with this diagnosis. When Jenny's health worsens, Oliver tells Dr. Ackerman to do anything Jenny wants, that money is no object. Due to this,



Oliver is forced to go to his father and ask for a loan in order to pay the medical costs of Jenny's illness.

Italian Neighbors

When Jenny takes Oliver to meet her father, they also meet lots of her neighbors. When Jenny climbs out of the car, neighbors from all up and down the block come out not only to greet Jenny, but also to check out this boyfriend she has brought home to meet her father. The neighbors are loud and opinionated, preparing Oliver for the man he is about to meet inside the house.



Objects/Places

Harvard

Harvard is a university in Connecticut that is part of the elite Ivy League school system. This is the school where Oliver attends undergraduate and law school classes.

Radcliffe

Radcliffe is the all-girl sister school associated with Harvard. Jenny attends undergraduate classes here.

Ithaca, New York

Ithaca is where Oliver's hockey team played Cornell, and Oliver had dinner with his father.

Cranston, Rhode Island

Jenny's father lives in and owns a bakery in Cranston, Rhode Island.

Ipswich, Massachusetts

Oliver's family has a home in Ipswich, Massachusetts just outside of Boston.

Dennis Port

Dennis Port, not far from Hyannis Port, is where Jenny and Oliver spent their honeymoon, Jenny working as a councilor for vacationing children and Oliver as a yacht captain.

Hockey

Hockey is a game played on ice skates. Oliver is a member of the Harvard hockey team.

Invitation

Oliver and Jenny receive an invitation to Oliver Barrett III's sixtieth birthday. Oliver refuses to attend.



Telephone

When Jenny tells Oliver Barrett III that his son loves him, Oliver takes the phone and throws it across the room.

The Letter

Oliver gets a letter in the summer between his first and second year at law school that tells him he is third in his class. This letter is very important in regards to the type of job offers Oliver will receive upon graduation.

The Wedding

Although Jenny is raised a Catholic, Jenny and Oliver elect to have a nondenominational wedding, because neither of them believe in religion.

The Funeral

Jenny allows her father to have a Catholic funeral for her although she no longer believes in religion and asks that Oliver allow her father to do this.



Social Concerns And Themes

One of the crucial social concerns and themes raised by the novel is the question of an ideal marriage. Does such a marriage exist? When a match takes place between a brilliant but poor young woman, with "zero social status" and an equally brilliant, athletic, rich Ivy-leaguer, what are the common denominators to insure an ideal and successful marriage? The parents of the wealthy young man object to the match because the young lady is a commoner; will love alone be strong enough to sustain the marriage, without the parents' blessing? In spite of initial disapproval, Jenny's self-sacrifice and hard work bring about a greatly successful marriage, almost idealistic in nature.

The question of whether to attend the anniversary of Oliver's parents brings a misunderstanding between the couple but reconciliation follows swiftly.

This question of ideal marriage leads Segal to an examination of the important theme of love and of growing up.

In that sense, *Love Story* can be seen as a variation on the bildungsroman with both central characters coming from extremely different backgrounds. These polarities represent wealth and poverty. Even after marriage the process of growing up continues since the couple must support themselves financially.

(Although the Barretts are very wealthy, Oliver's father cuts him off after his marriage.) Oliver, too, has learned the meaning of responsibility, the pains and tribulation of poverty, and the triumphs of success.

Love, in its many variations, is a quintessential theme in the novel. Reciprocal love between father and daughter is clearly outlined in Jenny's entire upbringing and personality.

However, in the case of the Barrett family, the relationship between father and son revolves around hatred and suspicion. Oliver III's assumed hatred of his son stems from the fact that the father tries to push the reluctant Oliver into fulfilling his expected role in the Barrett family tradition. Oliver's mother invariably sides with her husband.

This hatred constantly manifests itself in sarcastic verbal fencing. Oliver holds a very negative image of his father.

The notion of self-sacrificing love, with its now famous dictum "love means not ever having to say you're sorry," has taught Oliver a grand lesson. The overall moral lesson, as far as *Love Story* and even *Oliver's Story* (1977) is concerned, is that Jenny has taught Oliver the true meaning of love, love for a spouse and love for a parent.

Her death acts as the magnet for reconciliation between father and son.

Coping with hospitalization, dying and death in its psychological and financial aspects forms another important theme and social concern in the novel. Oliver is forced to



borrow money from his father to pay for Jenny's hospital expenses. David Hendin in his book, *Death as a Fact of Life* (1973), states that "Death is simply unAmerican. Its inevitability is an affront to our unalienable right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,'" and thus explains readers' reluctance to accept Jenny's death in *Love Story*. In effect, *Love Story* not only deals with the agony of death, but with the psychology of dying and the actuality of the loss. Death as a theme is prevalent in American letters, in Hemingway, in Agee's *A Death in the Family* (1958), and in Plath's enactment of the suicide scene in *The Bell Jar* (1963). The book version of *Love Story* poignantly captures Jenny's passing, as opposed to the motion picture where Ali MacGraw just fades into the hospital to die. In both cases, the emotional impact on the reader or viewer is profound. Oliver's emotional confusion at Jenny's impending death is strongly drawn in the movie version.

Anti-Semitism is a significant social issue present throughout Segal's fiction, although it is handled with subtlety and restraint. In *Love Story*, even though Oliver has graduated third in his class, he lands the most desirable position in the legal firm: The two candidates who finished first and second place are Jewish, and are thus rendered ineligible.



Techniques

One outstanding technical accomplishment of the novel is its simplicity, remarked upon by many critics. In fact, simplicity in terms of plot, construction, and subject is the hallmark of this novel. The denouement is revealed at the start when the author asks the reader, "what can you say about a twenty-five year old girl who died."

This opening sentence sets the tragic tone for the novel. Coupled with the opening scene, the marriage vows and the leukemia all point to a sad end for a brilliant and likable character. The very start of the novel evokes the essence of love, tenderness, family tradition, conflict and brilliance.

As far as style is concerned, the diction is contemporary and collegiate.

Segal has been praised for his sensitive, flashy, endearing ear for dialogue.

Indeed, the entire novel is built upon dialogue. One critic believes that Segal uses dialogue as a device to animate "a spineless, mediocre, spiritless novel."

The writing style is economical, tight and well-constructed, leaving much to the reader's imagination. Segal's originality is superb, with excellent characterization. Almost all protagonists are smart, or rich, or brilliant, or beautiful, or cultured ladies and gentlemen.



Themes

Relationships and Lovers

The main theme of this book as the reader may have guessed from the title is the relationship between lovers. The bulk of the main plot line revolves around Oliver and Jenny. Oliver is a confused young man, who has spent his entire life trying and failing to be better than his father. When Oliver meets Jenny, a girl who does not feel pressured to be better than anyone, Oliver finally finds a place where he can be who he is without feeling as though he is inadequate. Oliver and Jenny quickly fall in love and get married, giving up Oliver's wealth as well as Jenny's anticipated trip to Paris to study under a well-renowned music teacher.

The theme of relationships as it relates to lovers in this novel is an innocent, naive look at romance that is not that different from the famed Shakespeare play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Oliver is willing to give up everything for Jenny, including his father's respect and access to his money. However, this gesture might appear a little half-hearted when the reader realizes how much Oliver has always hated these things. Jenny gives up her one and only chance to take her music career to the next step. These two suffer greatly for their love over the next few years, with Jenny working to support the two of them while Oliver attends school. Jenny does not mind this sacrifice and is well rewarded when Oliver is awarded a high paying job with a law firm in New York City.

Jenny and Oliver are deeply in love. Oliver wants to give Jenny the world and now he can, giving her a nice apartment and all the furnishings she could possibly want. However, none of this is enough to save Jenny, when she contracts a deadly form of leukemia. Here tragedy enters the picture, as Jenny slowly becomes ill and dies. Oliver is left alone once more, his sacrifices no longer a point of contention now that money no longer matters. This theme touches not only on love and sacrifice, it encompasses loss and tragedy as well. The main point of this theme seems to be deeper than the simple idea of love, but the realities of the world, as they greet a young man fresh out of college and just beginning to meet his life head on.

Parents and Children

Like the theme of relationships between lovers, the relationships between parents and children are also an important theme in this novel. There are two such relationships in this novel, that of Oliver and his father and that of Jenny and her father. These two relationships seem to be the same on the surface, but there are basic elements of each that make them radically different.

Oliver has always viewed his father as this highly accomplished man with whom it is impossible for Oliver to measure up. Oliver Barrett III is a highly successful banker, an accomplished athlete, and a successful student. Oliver III is also a fast driver. Oliver



feels he must compete with each of these things, proving himself to be just as good. However, Oliver feels as though he is often coming up short. Whenever Oliver does well in a hockey game, he is reminded that his father was an Olympic rower. When Oliver does well in school, he only needs to look across campus at the building named for his family to be made to feel as though he did not earn the grade he received. Oliver drives faster and more reckless than his father, but is constantly reminded that his father has made each of these drives much faster than Oliver ever could. Finally Oliver can take no more of this competition with his father. When Oliver III tells his son that if he marries Jenny he will be disowned, Oliver jumps at the opportunity. Oliver loves Jenny, but more, he is grateful for the chance to finally sever his ties with a man he can never measure up to. It is not until Jenny's death, and Oliver matures enough to realize not everything is about who the best is and how much money you have that Oliver is able to make amends with his father.

The relationship between Jenny and her father is radically different from that of the two Oliver's. Jenny's mother died, when she was a small child, so it has always been just her and her father. Jenny's father, a boisterous baker, is a kind man who would just as soon lay down and die than allow anything bad to happen to his daughter. Jenny feels her father's love every time they speak, as her father is not afraid to express his emotions. Oliver finds this strange as his father has never been demonstrative, but learns to enjoy it. Jenny's father embraces all her choices in life, not questioning her or forcing her into some sort of competition with himself. In this way, Jenny's relationship with her father is much different than Oliver's with his.

In the end, however, both relationships are basically the same. Both relationships contain a father and a child. In both relationships the fathers want what is the very best for their children. Also in both relationships, the fathers love their children more than life itself. This is the basic necessity in a father-child relationship and the simple elements that gives depth to this theme.

Money

Money is a major theme in this novel as having it or not having it sets the many characters apart from one another. Oliver is the child of a very wealthy family. Oliver has always had money and would more than likely be lost without it. However, Oliver quickly finds out how difficult not having money can be when his father cuts him out of the family wealth, when he decides to marry Jenny against his father's wishes.

Jenny was born in a modest family without much money. This sets Jenny apart from Oliver, as she has never known what it is like to have money. When Oliver is cut off from his family's wealth, Jenny is not bothered because you have to have something before you can miss it. This does not define who Jenny is even though wealth has always defined who Oliver was. Oliver makes the biggest struggle in this situation, but it is Jenny who gets him through.



When Oliver gets a good paying job after law school, the first thing on his mind is to buy Jenny all the things she could possibly want. However, all Jenny wants is to be with him and to have more time. Jenny learns she is ill shortly after this new influx of wealth and no amount of money can save her. Money stops being of major importance upon Jenny's illness, except as a way to pay for the costs of her medical care. Jenny no longer wants a bunch of material belongings. Jenny only wants to be with Oliver and her father.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is the third person point of view through the narration of the main character, Oliver Barrett IV. The narration of this novel, because it never moves into other character's voices, makes the story very tight and keeps the reader's attention on Oliver and his reactions to events that happen around him.

Oliver's voice throughout the novel is the prime source of the emotional impact of the novel. The reader feels the things that Oliver feels, especially at times of high stress or moments of intense emotion. The impact of the story would not be as deep as it is if it were not for the tight narration, as it is focused on Oliver. Toward the end of the novel when Jenny becomes ill, it would be quite easy for the focus of the novel to move to Jenny and her emotional reaction to her illness. However, this does not happen because the writer is very careful to remain in the thoughts and actions of Oliver. Oliver reacts to Jenny's illness in a way that is significantly different from Jenny's reaction, as well as viewing Jenny's emotions. The way that Oliver reacts is different, because it is not his life that has been threatened although the impending death of his wife has the potential of altering his whole life, his whole outlook, in a negative way. The reader is allowed to experience this with Oliver rather than becoming engulfed in the realities of the pain and anger that must be occupying Jenny. There is fear, there is anger, there is pain, but it is a different fear, anger, and pain from that which Jenny is feeling. This is important since this is primarily Oliver's story, not Jenny's.

Setting

At the beginning of the novel the setting is primarily the campuses of Radcliffe and Harvard. This novel is a story about two college seniors, therefore it is appropriate that the two college campuses be the primary setting. When these two get married, the marriage takes place at a chapel on Harvard's campus. Following this, Oliver attends law school on the Harvard campus, so the campus again remains a part of the setting. However, these college campuses do not have a large impact on the overall feel of the novel.

One setting that does affect the emotional impact of the novel is Oliver's family home. This home is a large mansion outside of Boston. This home is important, because it is the first moment in the novel that Jenny becomes aware of just how rich this man she has fallen in love with is. It also allows the reader to see how prestigious Oliver's family really is as the two characters enter the home, and Oliver worries about the portraits hung in the hall that announce to all visitors just how important all the people in this family are. Oliver is embarrassed where Jenny is impressed.



Another important setting is Jenny's home. Jenny lives in a small community in Rhode Island in which everyone knows everyone else. This setting is important, because it once again drives home the opposites between Jenny and Oliver's backgrounds. Where Oliver's family home is large and prosperous, Jenny's is small and modest. This once more underlines the differences between them.

A third important setting in this novel is the apartment in which Oliver and Jenny live while Oliver attends law school. This apartment is small and most resembles Jenny's family home although it is actually smaller. This underscores for the reader how difficult it is for Oliver and Jenny to get by without Oliver's family money.

Finally, the last important setting in this novel is the apartment Oliver and Jenny buy when Oliver takes a job at a New York law firm. This final setting is important for two reasons. First it shows how far Oliver and Jenny have come on their own and how well they can take care of themselves now that Oliver has graduated from law school. This apartment is the first large expense they make after Oliver leaves school, and it is filled with all the luxuries that Oliver can now provide for his wife. The second important element about this setting is the unimportance of it after Jenny becomes ill. Oliver realizes in the throes of Jenny's illness that they should have spent their money on health insurance rather than all the dishes and things they bought for this apartment. This makes this setting a visible symbol of Oliver's inability to help his wife, when she becomes ill and symbolic of Oliver's understanding that money is not the most important thing in life.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is clear, precise English. The novel is simply written and easy to read. The novel consists of a good blend of exposition and dialogue in which at times the writer uses slang that is common for the time in which it was written, all slang that most readers even forty years later will recognize and understand although most of this slang is no longer in common usage.

The setting of the novel in the beginning is the college campuses of Radcliffe and Harvard. Since these settings are important to the background of the main characters, there are many times within the novel that landscape of these campuses are mentioned by name, such as the names of the buildings within these campuses, that adds a certain depth to the novel and gives knowledge to those readers who might not have been very knowledgeable about these two campuses. Within the language of this novel the reader is also introduced to the melody of the speech of several cultures, most notably that of the boisterous Italian family to which Jenny belongs in Rhode Island and the more refined Boston family to which Oliver belongs.

The novel is also written as though it has been written after Jenny's death. Although the plot is linear, there are often times in which Oliver discusses events as though he already knows what is about to happen. This language gives the novel a feel of dread

as well as insight into a tragedy that the first paragraph warned the reader was about to take place.

Structure

This novel is divided into twenty-two chapters, many of which are as short as two or three pages with others that are significantly longer. The plot is linear despite the mention in the first paragraph of the novel of one of the main character's impending death. Time passes in varying degrees within this novel with some of the chapters moving slowly over one evening while other chapters pass over months and at times years within a few short passages.

The plot deals with the development of a relationship between the two main characters, Jenny and Oliver. There is one smaller plot line that enters into the main plot from time to time, that being Oliver's relationship with his father. When Oliver meets Jenny, the writer also takes a small chapter to introduce the reader to Oliver's father. When Oliver decides to marry Jenny, in a parallel plot line Oliver's father forbade him from marrying Jenny. Oliver's father also enters the story at the end during Jenny's illness, first when Oliver asks his father for money and then at the very end when Jenny has died. The two plots intersect at all the important plot lines, with one plot affecting the other, and are both resolved within the same chapter.



Quotes

"What can you say about a twenty-five-year-old girl who died?" Chapter 1, pg. 9

"If I were a sentimentalist, and care enough about Harvard to hang a photograph of it on the wall, it would not be of Winthrop House, or Mem Church, but of Dillon. Dillon Field House."

Chapter 2, pg. 18

"Jen...what would you say if I told you...'

I hesitated. She waited.

'I think...I'm in love with you.'

'I would say...you were full of shit.'"

Chapter 2, pg. 22

"I told her how I loathed being programmed for the Barrett Tradition--which she should have realized, having seen me cringe at having to mention the numeral at the end of my name. And I did not like having to deliver x amount of achievement every single term."
Chapter 4, pg. 35

"Our first physical encounter was the polar opposite of our first verbal one. It was all so unhurried, so soft, so gentle. I had never realized that this was the real Jenny--the soft one, whose touch was so light and so loving. And yet what truly shocked me was my own response. *I was gentle. I was tender. Was this the real Oliver Barrett IV?*"

Chapter 5, pg. 39

"Mother and Jenny shook hands, and after the usual exchange of banalities from which one never progressed in my house, we sat down." Chapter 7, pg. 51

"As if to compensate for my loudness, Oliver III aimed his next words at me in a biting whisper:

'Marry her now, and I will not give you the time of day.'

Who gave a shit if somebody overheard.

'Father, you don't *know* the time of day.'

I walked out of his life and began my own."

Chapter 8, pg. 59



"Jenny, we're legally married!"

'Yeah, now I can be a bitch.'"

Chapter 11, pg. 75

"Stop!" She cut off my apology, then said very quietly, 'Love means not ever having to say you're sorry.'" Chapter 13, pg. 90

"I had been more or less prepared for this, but the finality with which the doctor pronounced it still threw me. He wasn't saying anything more, so I assumed he wanted a statement of some sort from me.

'Okay, so we'll adopt kids. I mean, the important thing is that we love each other, right?'

And then he told me.

'Oliver, the problem is more serious than that. Jenny is very sick.'

'Would you define "very sick," please?'

'She's dying.'"

Chapter 17, pg. 104

"And I told this God, whoever and wherever He might be, that I would gladly settle for the status quo. I don't mind the agony, sir, I don't mind knowing as long as Jenny doesn't know. Did you hear me, Lord, sir? You can name the price." Chapter 18, pg. 107

"Not knowing why, I repeated what I had long ago learned from the beautiful girl now dead.

'Love means not ever having to say you're sorry.'

And then I did what I had never done in his presence, must less in his arms. I cried."

Chapter 22, pg. 125

Adaptations

Love Story (Paramount, 1970; nominated for seven Oscars) and Oliver's Story (Cinema International Corporation, 1979) have been adapted for film.

The screenplay of Love Story (with Ali MacGraw and Ryan O'Neal in the title roles) actually prefigured the novel, and although very popular, only readers of the novel and viewers of the movie would have noticed minor variations. The remorse and tenderness stressed in the novel give way in the movie version to a much more aggressive, macho Oliver. Even the concluding reconciliation scene lays the burden of guilt more upon the father than the son.

The movie Oliver's Story is a more faithful reproduction of the novel, again with only minor variations: In terms of the characters, Joanna Stein was a medical intern, but in the movie she is a furniture designer. The movie lays more emphasis on Oliver's psychological problems as well as his philanthropic activities, ending in reconciliation between Oliver and his father, when Oliver decides to return to his hometown to run the family business.

What both versions stress are the basic problems of a seemingly perfect and ideal family couple.

Man, Woman and Child has been adapted for film (Columbia, EMI, Warner Brothers, 1983). In Man, Woman and Child substantial changes are evident in the film version. The novel is set in the Boston area at MIT; the movie is set in California. Again in the novel, Professor Beckwith is a teacher of and authority on statistics and attends a scholarly conference in France where he meets Dr. Nicole Guerin. In the movie, Martin Sheen, who plays Beckwith, is a Professor of Literature, who gives a scholarly talk on Baudelaire, also in France. The accident that led to their opportune meeting also differs in novel and movie. In the book, the police harass Dr. Nicole Guerin and friends; in a rescue attempt, Beckwith is badly beaten up. In the hospital the two meet. However, in the movie, Beckwith is hospitalized from an auto accident and meets Dr. Guerin who is on call that night.

The reconciliation scene at the end of the film version has been given a very pathetic, graphic treatment with genuine love for the boy stressed. An incident that nearly destroyed the family turned out to be their salvation.



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast the relationships of Oliver and his father, and Jenny and her father. What are the differences? What are the similarities? How are these relationships important to the plot?

Compare the parental relationships with that of Oliver and Jenny. How does Oliver's relationship with his father affect Oliver and Jenny's relationship? Would Oliver have married Jenny if not for his feeling of competition with his father? What about Phil? How does Phil affect their marriage? How is it different from Oliver's father's impact on their marriage?

Discuss money. Is money a major theme of this novel? What is the impact of Oliver's wealth on the story? What is the impact of Oliver losing his money? Does Oliver learn anything about the importance of wealth at the end of the story?

Discuss the themes of this novel. Besides the themes already mentioned, how many other themes are there in this story? Does the theme of coming of age enter this novel? Why or why not?

Jenny and Oliver appear to be opposites in the beginning of this novel. List how many ways they are different, and how many ways they are similar. How did each of these items affect their relationship? Were their opposites important in bringing them together?

Discuss the point of view of this novel. How would the novel be different if it had been written from Jenny's point of view? From Oliver III? From Phil's? Why did the writer pick Oliver to be the narrator? How did this decision affect the story line?

Discuss the novel's structure. Do short chapters make a novel easier to read? Do you think the pace of the novel was too fast? How would the novel be different if the writer had not glossed over the law school years? Do you think this speed over Jenny and Oliver's marriage reduced the emotional impact of the final scenes, or do you think it added to it?

Literary Precedents

Love Story's premise harks back to the medieval conception of the connection between love, hatred and death. In the medieval romance tradition, such as the tale of Tristan and Iseult, and in the Shakespearean *Romeo and Juliet* (c.1597), star-crossed lovers abound. In all such cases, the lovers are unable to sustain the relationship on a permanent basis due to death's intervention. The successful utilization of this genre by Segal is evident when *Love Story* is compared with countless other works written in the same tradition.

Related Titles

In a certain sense, *Love Story* would be incomplete without its continuation, *Oliver's Story*, set in New York City, Rhode Island, Boston, and Hong Kong.

The lessons that Oliver Barrett has learned from Jenny and from Jenny's death in *Love Story* have helped him to better cope with life, although he is still very much confused and psychologically off-base. The inability to forget Jenny destroys the possibility for other relationships, especially the potential with Marcie Nash, the modern, dynamic, successful independent tycoon, of the same social class as the Barretts. *Oliver's Story*, therefore, deals with the following themes and social concerns: the fear of commitment and intimacy, vulnerability in personal relationships; the modern idea of seeking psychiatric and therapeutic help; and the Vietnam protests. Other more contemporary issues concern the ideas of open relationships, adultery, cohabitation, and free sex; women's roles, the liberated woman who has her own career and independent life; divorce and alimony; celebrity worship; exploitation of workers, child labor, the plight of the poor with particular reference to "sweat equity"; how the fabulously rich acquired their wealth, and the laundering of dirty money.

One interesting conclusion of the *Love Story/Oliver's Story* connection that began at *Love Story's* ending has been completed at the end of *Oliver's Story*.

Not only has Oliver learned to love his father, but he has come to appreciate his father's hard work, integrity and respect for family tradition. Oliver has agreed to return home to perpetuate the Barrett dynasty. The characters carried over from *Love Story* have fully matured. Oliver Barrett III is no longer the dictatorial father of *Love Story*: Retired now, he is understanding and sympathetic, treating his son as an independent and matured individual.

Oliver's mother is still as steadfastly behind her husband as ever. Phil Cavilleri is fine in Florida, in the pastry business. Although Oliver never remarries, he maintains an amicable relationship with a young Boston woman.

Marcie Nash marries a Washington attorney; Joanna Stein marries a doctor and settles in California. The phase of tragedy has ended.

Man, Woman and Child, Segal's novel following the Barrett family saga, addresses the conception of the so-called perfect family. Again, adultery, free love and its consequences are examined. Emotional turmoil, caused by casual sex, is closely delineated. In the movie version, *Man, Woman and Child* deals with the deemphasizing of the humanities in American education, as opposed to the novel, which glorifies the sciences. Natural childbirth, with both parents participating, is another social concern raised in *Man, Woman and Child*.

In typical Segal fashion, the protagonists are a brilliant, happily married couple. Robert Beckwith, Professor of Statistics at M.I.T., is married to Sheila, a first-rate editor at the



Harvard University Press. As in *Love Story*, their relationship began in college, when both were undergraduates, Sheila at Vassar and Robert at Yale. Later they married, and established the ideal family. Fate intervenes when Robert's brief affair with Dr. Nicole Guerin results in the birth of Jean-Claude Guerin. His son's existence is only disclosed to Robert ten years later, when Nicole is tragically killed. The idyllic family life is shattered when Robert's daughter discovers the truth.

Through much pain, remorse and pity, Sheila and the family come to love Jean-Claude. However, he returns to France after one summer to his guardian, much to the family's sorrow.

Again, Segal is charged with creating a cast of characters too angelic to be real. Even Sheila, who is tempted to engage in an affair with Dr. Garvin Wilson in order to get even with Robert, cannot carry out her plans. The children in general are adoring and adorable, although sibling rivalry is commonplace. The only semblance of a villain in the entire novel is the young son of their family friend and lawyer, who reveals Jean-Claude's true identity.



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