

# **The Longest Ride Study Guide**

## **The Longest Ride by Nicholas Sparks**

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## Plot Summary

The Longest Ride was written by Nicholas Sparks. In this novel, Ira Levinson is in his early nineties when he sets out to fulfill a long standing commitment. It is snowing outside and Ira, who has had problems with his vision, misses a curve and wrecks his car. Ira is stuck in the car for several days before he is found by a young couple returning home from a brief weekend retreat. This couple, Luke and Sophia, have only been seeing one another for four months. However, in those four months they have forged a bond that is like no other. Their chance meeting with Ira will change all their lives in new and unexpected ways. The Longest Ride is a novel of life and love. Chance meetings that have such a huge impact on the direction that life takes are part of the story.

Ira Levinson was married to the love of his life for more than fifty years. Although they were never able to have children, Ira and Ruth lived a fulfilling life together. Now, more than nine years since Ruth's death, Ira has accepted that lung cancer will soon take his life as well. Before he goes, Ira wants to fulfill a longstanding tradition for Ruth, but the trip ends in a car accident that leaves Ira stranded alone in his wrecked car.

Four months before Ira's accident, Sophia, a college student at Wake Forest, is dragged out to the rodeo with her roommate in an attempt to help her get over a recent break up. At the rodeo, Sophia is confronted by her ex-boyfriend who becomes unexpectedly violent. A cowboy comes to Sophia's rescue, and she finds herself having a long, pleasant conversation with him.

Sophia invites herself to see Luke's ranch. The first visit turns into a second date, then a third. Before they know it, Sophia and Luke settle into a warm, committed relationship despite the basic differences in their lives. Sophia even supports Luke's return to the rodeo circuit despite the inherent dangers of bull riding. When Sophia learns that a past accident with a bull has left Luke with a life threatening condition, she refuses to stay with him if he chooses to continue bull riding. Faced with losing his family's ranch or his own life, Luke chooses the ranch despite the ultimatum Sophia has presented to him.

Sophia returns to college, anxious to find a job in her chosen field of art history before she graduates in the fall. Luke returns to bull riding. However, when Luke is faced with riding the bull that caused his life threatening injuries, he begins to think twice about his choices. Luke rides the bull, but he walks away from his career. Luke and Sophia reunite to face the uncertain future together.

Luke and Sophia are on their way home from a weekend retreat when Luke spots tire tracks on the edge of the highway. Luke gets out to inspect them and discovers a car crashed over the side of the road. Luke and Sophia try to comfort Ira as they wait for the ambulance. Ira asks them to take a letter he has written to Ruth and keep it safe. At the hospital, Sophia reads the letter of undying love from Ira to Ruth.



Months after Ira's death, Sophia is planning on going to an art auction when she realizes the art collection belonged to Ira. At the auction, the first painting put up for bid is a child's portrait of Ruth. Aware that the painting must have been deeply important to Ira, Luke buys the painting for four hundred dollars. Moments later, Luke learns that because he bought the painting, Ira has left his entire art collection to him. With an act of kindness, Luke has not only gotten the money to save his mother's ranch, but enough to help him live comfortably for the rest of his life. Soon after, Luke and Sophia become engaged.



# Chapters 1-5

## Summary

### Chapter 1

Ira Levinson is ninety-one years old and dying of lung cancer. Ira was traveling alone in the dark during a snow storm and missed a curve in the unfamiliar highway. Now Ira is sitting alone in his wrecked car, unable to get out, because he has a broken arm and a concussion. Despite his age and his impending death, Ira wants to survive. Ira also thinks of his dignity, wanting to move into the backseat should he feel death coming so that the paramedics will not have to drag his dead, frozen body out of the front seat. Ira thinks of a story he saw on the Weather Channel in which a man survived more than sixty days after a similar crash. Ira wonders how long he will survive.

Ira is joined by his wife Ruth. Ira knows that Ruth is only a fragment of his imagination since she died more than nine years ago, but he is happy for the company. Ruth expresses concern for Ira and asks why he was driving out in such weather. Ira tells her that it is their anniversary, not their wedding anniversary but the anniversary of the first time he saw her. This is a reason for him to fulfill a tradition they began many years before. They talk about that day, the first day they saw one another. Ruth and her parents had just moved to the United States from Vienna ahead of the coming war. Ruth did not speak English and was pleased to find that Ira's mother did. Ruth and her mother had gone to Ira's family's haberdashery to buy her father a hat. Ruth teases Ira about the fact that he remained too shy to ask her out for a long time. Ruth even dated another boy during that time. However, she always knew Ira was the one.

### Chapter 2

Four months earlier. Sophia is studying in her room at her sorority at Wake Forest when her roommate Marcia insists on her going to the rodeo with her and a bunch of other girls. Sophia is reluctant, but her roommate refuses to allow Sophia to hide out in the aftermath of her break up with Brian, a boy Sophia dated for two years. Sophia reluctantly agrees, but is ready to go home when the rodeo is over. However, there is an after party and Sophia's friends insist on staying. When Sophia spots Brian in the crowd, she decides to go outside, hoping he did not see her. Unfortunately, Brian follows her and they get into an argument over their relationship. Brian wants to get back together, but Sophia is tired of his infidelity. As they argue, Brian grabs her and appears to be ready to hit her.

Sophia tries to break contact with Brian, but he only gets angrier. As things begin to spiral out of control, a cowboy comes over and demands Brian let Sophia go. Brian refuses. When the cowboy does not walk away, Brian turns to attack him. The cowboy manages to dodge Brian and knock him to the ground where he steps on his neck to



keep him flat. The cowboy, who by that point has been joined by others, keeps Brian flat until he promises to leave Sophia alone.

### Chapter 3

Usually, Luke would not have gotten involved in the violent situation he saw between Sophia and Brian because he has been burned by those situations in the past. However, there was something about Sophia that drew him to her. After Brian leaves, Luke and Sophia begin to talk.

### Chapter 4

Sophia surprises herself with her forwardness toward Luke and her attraction to him. Eventually, Luke invites Sophia out to his truck where they sit in lawn chairs in the bed to watch the bulls. They talk about their childhoods and Luke's career as a bull rider. They also discuss college life and Sophia's relationship with Brian. When Sophia finally decides it is time to go, she exchanges numbers with Luke.

### Chapter 5

Ruth and Ira reminisce about their first dates. Ruth teases Ira for being so shy, while Ira accuses her of using another boy to push him into action. Ruth also admits to having been jealous of a girl Ira went to college with and who was clearly interested in him. Ira assures her that the girl had never been a threat. Ira thinks back on the time, of the pending war in Europe and the changes it would bring to the world and his family. After graduating college, Ira enlisted in the Navy Air Corps because he wanted to fly and was sure he would be drafted elsewhere. His parents took it hard, but Ruth promised to wait for him. They even became engaged before he left for training, dreaming of what the future would mean for them. Ira recalls that night with mixed feelings and Ruth begs him not to think of it.

## Analysis

The early chapters of this novel introduce Ira and Ruth, as well as Sophia and Luke. Ira is ninety-one. He is dying of cancer. Ruth, Ira's wife, has been gone for more than nine years, and he is ready for his life to be over. However, a car accident that has left him injured and stranded leaves Ira struggling to survive just a little longer so that he can finish one last task that he feels he must complete. For this reason, Ira finds himself reminiscing with his dead wife on the long life they spent together as he waits for someone to come rescue him.

It is important at this point for the reader to note Ira's predicament, but more important for the reader to remember the urgent mission Ira feels he must complete before he dies. It must be an incredibly important thing to Ira to have taken him out into a dark, stormy night at his age. The reader will be left wondering what that mission is for the majority of the book. The simple story of a long life filled with love might seem like filler as Ira waits; but, in truth, the most important thing about Ira's mission is his story.



Four months before Ira's accident, Sophia was dragged to a rodeo with her sorority friends. It was there that she met Luke. The meeting might seem completely random at this point in the novel, but it is clear that a love story is about to blossom between these two young, modern people. If the reader pays close attention, the reader might notice similarities in the two parallel stories and begin to see where the separate stories might one day come together.

Sophia is a kind, gentle young lady who grew up in a hardworking, foreign born family with a sense of morality that other modern youths may not have. Luke, too, has grown up working hard on his family's ranch while also becoming a leading champion on the bull riding circuit. Both seem very different on the surface, but underneath it is clear they were both raised with the same morals and the same sense of family and work ethic. Luke and Sophia are instantly attracted to one another, suggesting a blooming love story that will take them far into the future. The reader cannot help but root for this young couple even as trouble seems to brew in the form of Sophia's violent ex-boyfriend.

## Discussion Question 1

Who is Ira? How did he come to be stranded on the side of the road? Why does he not expect anyone to come rescue him?

## Discussion Question 2

Who comes to speak with Ira? Why is this unusual? How does this help keep Ira focused and alert? Is this important?

## Discussion Question 3

Why did Sophia not want to go to the rodeo? Why did she go? Whom does she meet there? Why is this an important meeting?

## Vocabulary

painfully, rodeo, bull riding, cowboy, romance, violence, cousins, sorrow, insists, forgotten, dreams, distract, admits, jealousy, engagement, arguments, fidelity, infidelity, objection, hesitate, together, longest, unlike, reminded, shame, memory, proposed, mistaking, warning, impossible, translucent, ghostlike



# Chapters 6-11

## Summary

### Chapter 6

Luke does his morning chores before going to the main house to have breakfast with his mother. Luke is surprised when his mother eats with him because she has been angry with him since he began riding the rodeo circuit again. However, he quickly discovers that his mother is there because she wants him to skip the rodeo that weekend to help with pumpkin sales at the ranch. Luke refuses. Later, Luke finishes the rest of his chores before showering and waiting for Sophia to arrive. Luke and Sophia go horseback riding on the ranch.

### Chapter 7

Sophia is surprised by her own forwardness with Luke and blames it on Marcia, who is obsessed with Luke's looks. Luke does not seem to mind, though. After horseback riding, they sit on Luke's porch and drink beer while they talk about the ranch. Toward the end of the evening they share their first kiss.

### Chapter 8

Ira is confused when he wakes from a brief nap. Eventually, his thoughts return to the past. He recalls his time in training before going to Europe as a navigator. Ira made a good friend, Joe Torrey. However, Joe was killed, along with most of Ira's crew, when their plane was hit by enemy fire. Miraculously, it landed safely at an ally base. Ira was badly injured. The doctors did not think at first that he would survive. However, not only did he survive his injuries, he also survived a particularly bad case of the mumps.

Ruth returns, and they argue quietly about Ira's decision to stop writing to Ruth while he recovered from his injuries. Ruth wrote often, but Ira never did. When he returned home after his discharge, Ira avoided Ruth. Eventually, Ruth sought him out; but, Ira insisted that he did not want to see her again. Ruth was relentless, however, and forced him to have a chocolate soda with her once a week. Later, Ira told Ruth the truth about the attack, the injuries, and his time in the hospital. He told her that he could not give her children, something he knew she desperately wanted.

### Chapter 9

Marcia questions Sophia on details of her relationship with Luke as she prepares for a date. When Luke arrives, Marcia insists on going down to let Luke in. When Sophia joins them, she notices how all the girls in the parlor are watching Luke. Sophia suddenly realizes that someone is going to tell Brian and that could cause trouble. For this reason, Sophia rushes Luke out the door, lying about having restaurant reservations.





## Chapter 10

Luke and Sophia go to a sushi restaurant where Luke has sushi for the first time. They discuss their childhoods and the things they like and dislike the most. Luke talks about his father's support of his rodeo career and mentions the rodeo he will be going to the following day. Luke and Sophia then go back to the ranch where they spend the evening by the lake. Luke feels that he is falling in love, which scares him a little.

## Chapter 11

Nearly a full day has passed since Ira's crash. He is becoming very thirsty and it seems to be all he can think about.

Ira remembers that after he told Ruth he could not have children their relationship cooled for a time. Then, Ruth and her family went to the beach for a few weeks. They invited Ira to go along, but he could only spare a few days from his family's business. When he arrived, something had changed because Ruth was genuinely glad to see him. They had dinner with her parents and later walked together for a time. That night, Ruth had sneaked into Ira's bedroom. They made love for the first time.

## Analysis

As Ira continues to be stuck in his car, his health begins to decline. He has moments of confusion. He is beginning to feel the effects of severe thirst. The thirst is remedied for a time, but his age and his injuries suggest to the reader that his time is short if he is not found soon. At the same time, Ira continues to think back on his life, on the romance he shared with Ruth despite the rough patch they hit after the war. The war had a profound impact on their relationship, romantically and emotionally, as they struggled with Ira's injuries and the reality of the Holocaust.

As Ira remembers the early years of his romance, Sophia and Luke are living the early moments of their own romance. Sophia is young and has never had a serious relationship outside of her failed romance with Brian. Luke, too, has never really had a real love affair. Clearly, these two find one another irresistible. Something strong is building between them. The reader is left to wonder if Sophia and Luke are on the road to a long romance like Ira must have had with Ruth, or if they are destined for something different.

From everything he has told Sophia, Luke and his mother are very close. Yet, these chapters make it apparent that Luke's mother is angry with him for riding the rodeo circuit. At this point, the reader has two questions to ponder. Why is Luke's mother so angry with him about riding the rodeo circuit? What does his mother's anger foreshadow about Luke's future with Sophia?



## Discussion Question 1

Why did Ira enlist in the Navy Air Corps? What did he do there? What happened to him during the war?

## Discussion Question 2

Why did Ira try to end his relationship with Ruth? Was he successful? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Sophia afraid of Brian learning of her relationship with Luke? What does she think he might do?

## Vocabulary

arena, spectacular, witnessed, electricity, against, tenderly, monotony, finally, streamed, preoccupied, gratitude, opted, fortunate, tempted, apparent, disguise, directly, wandered, wonder, spread, perfect, marriage, civilized, unlike, controlled, puzzlement, urges, kindnesses, appreciated, reminisces, natural, nervous



# Chapters 12-17

## Summary

### Chapter 12

Luke finishes ninth in Saturday's rodeo. His mother does not respond to the text that he sends her. The following day, Luke has breakfast with his mother and tries to hide his injured knee. His mother notices anyway. They discuss the pumpkin sales the previous day before beginning the day's work. Luke works helping his mother sell pumpkins and helping young kids through the hay bale maze.

### Chapter 13

As Sophia gets ready for her dinner with Luke and his mother, Marcia warns her that she is on the rebound and that she or Luke will eventually get hurt. This leaves Sophia in a dark mood as she drives to Luke's, something he notices immediately. Sophia brushes it off and Luke lets her. They walk to his mother's where Sophia hits it off with Linda immediately. After dinner, Luke and Sophia return to his house where they carve a pumpkin in his kitchen. When Luke kisses Sophia goodbye, she realizes that Marcia was wrong, that this is more than a rebound relationship.

### Chapter 14

As Ira's condition declines, he continues to remember the past. Ira insists that he and Ruth get married after their weekend together at the beach. They are married in August and spend their honeymoon in Asheville. While there, they visit Black Mountain College which hosts a large number of art students. At the time of their visit, an art show is being held. Ira and Ruth get to know several artists that weekend. As a surprise, Ira buys six paintings for Ruth. He gives them to her on their last day there. Ira bought the art because of the way Ruth looked when she found a piece she really liked. Many years later, Ira tried to explain this to a reporter; but, she never understood.

### Chapter 15

Sophia and Luke spend the next few weeks constantly together or speaking on the phone. One weekend Luke invites Sophia to go away with him to a remote resort he once visited often as a child. They both find the view amazing after their arrival.

### Chapter 16

After quickly unpacking, Sophia and Luke saddle the horses and go for a long ride. Once back at the cabin, Luke takes a quick shower before handing the bathroom over to Sophia while he makes dinner. Sophia lies in the bathtub thinking about Luke. As they wait for dinner, Luke tells Sophia how he was badly injured when he was knocked out while riding a violent bull called Big Ugly Critter. Luke's medical bills afterward forced his



mother to take out a large mortgage on the ranch. The payments are about to increase to a point where they are sure to lose the ranch. For this reason, Luke has begun riding again in hopes of making enough money to save the ranch. The opportunity to injure himself again seems to explain the anger Luke's mother has toward him. However, Luke leaves something out of his story. After talking, they decide to skip dinner and make love for the first time.

## Chapter 17

After their honeymoon, Ruth goes to work as a teacher in a small, rural school where most of the kids are too poor to have basic essentials such as shoes and their parents rarely care if they get an education or not. Ruth struggles her first year, but when the children go out on their own to make her Hanukkah gifts, she feels accepted. At the same time, Ira works in his family's haberdashery and takes on more responsibilities as his father and mother struggle with the realities of the war's aftermath.

Ira and Ruth buy a house that they renovate over the next few years. This is the same house Ira continues to live in with nothing but his memories and the massive art collection he and Ruth developed over their years together. Each summer they returned to Black Mountain College until it closed. Then, they began traveling to New York where they continued to meet new and up-and-coming artists.

Ira eats some snow to help with his thirst. Then he remembers the reporter who showed up at his door six years ago and turned his life upside down with an article about his and Ruth's art collection in the New Yorker. Ira had to install a security system in the aftermath as his world was turned upside down. However, he has never and will never think of the collection in terms of money or its impact on the art world. To him, it is still all about Ruth.

## Analysis

Ira's condition continues to deteriorate, leaving the reader rooting for someone to come and rescue him. In the meantime, he continues to think about his romance with Ruth. They were happy for many, many years. In those years, they amassed an amazing art collection because of Ruth's eye for art, her relationships with many up-and-coming artists, and Ira's love of the way Ruth looked when she saw art she admired. The collection is all about Ruth to Ira, something he has tried to explain to others, but failed. The reader, however, can see how this art reminds Ira of his wife and their life together, almost like the art is a product of their love like a child might be in another relationship. To Ira, this art is everything now that he has lost Ruth, the only thing that ever mattered to him.

Sophia and Luke continue to grow close. After several weeks of dating, they go away for a weekend and make a physical commitment to one another. Sophia is concerned for a time that she might be with Luke on a rebound after her relationship with Brian. However, it soon becomes clear that there is something different and bigger between



her and Luke. There is something that was missing in her relationship with Brian. Brian was a childish mistake, a first love that was not what it seemed. It appears that Sophia has found something real with Luke and that he feels the same way. However, relationships are complicated. Therefore, the reader must wonder what might be in store for Luke and Sophia as their relationship continues to develop.

Luke tells Sophia how he was knocked unconscious while riding a bull named Big Ugly Critter, the same bull he showed to Sophia the first night they met. The bull trampled him, and it took a long time for Luke to recover. This has caused his family to be in deep debt, a debt that threatens their ranch. It is for this reason that Luke has returned to bull riding even though the reader senses that he would rather not ride again. This story explains Linda's anger with Luke. Yet, it leaves the reader feeling as though there is something more to the story.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Ira buy art for Ruth on their honeymoon? What is significant about these six pieces of art?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Sophia worry that her relationship with Luke will end in one of them getting hurt? Who put this idea in her head? For what reason?

## Discussion Question 3

What has Ira done with the art collection he and Ruth have amassed? For what reason? What does this suggest about his emotional connection to the collection?

## Vocabulary

interludes, wanderings, nonetheless, happiness, marriage, surrounded, distance, outdoor, drenched, intact, remain, installed, security, cousins, memories, collection, answered, unannounced, frequently, journalist, reminded, intelligent, article, unleashed, described, invisible, elderly, becoming, comprising, comprising, moments



# Chapters 18-27

## Summary

### Chapter 18

For the next few weeks, Sophia and Luke settle into a happy routine together. Luke begins practicing for the upcoming rodeo season that is set to begin at the end of January. Marcia again tries to convince Sophia that she is making a mistake with Luke, but Sophia refuses to listen this time. When Sophia discusses it later with Luke, he tells her that he loves her and that they will face their uncertain future together when the time comes.

### Chapter 19

Sophia is in New Jersey for the holidays, leaving Luke feeling lost and lonely. He puts in extra workouts to prepare for the rodeo season, something that upsets his mother. For New Year's Eve, Luke drives to New Jersey to be with Sophia and to meet her family. Back in North Carolina, Luke's mother confronts him over a secret she knows he is keeping from Sophia. Luke was told by a doctor that if he goes back to bull riding, he will die.

### Chapter 20

Ira recalls the time when Daniel McCallum came into Ruth's life. Daniel is a troubled young man who is disruptive in the classroom. Ruth spends extra time with the boy, even bringing him home to tutor him. Over time, Ruth and Daniel develop a close relationship. When Ruth learns of the boy's difficult home life with his stepbrother and sister-in-law, she dreams of having him live with her and Ira. However, while Ruth and Ira are in New York for the summer, Daniel McCallum disappears and Ruth never hears from him again. This sets off a dark time in Ira and Ruth's marriage. Ira blames himself, believing that it is his fault that Ruth is so hurt and angry. In the end, however, they find their way back to one another.

Time passes. Ira and Ruth continue to build their art collection. In time they both retire and stop traveling as much. In the nineties, as Ruth reaches her eighties, she begins to have a series of strokes. One day, while Ira is sleeping in the living room, Ruth has a fatal stroke alone in the bedroom. Ira finds her and calls for help, but she cannot be revived.

### Chapter 21

Luke recalls the injuries he had after riding Big Ugly Critter. Luke's head was so damaged that the doctors had to place a metal plate at the back of his head near the brain stem. This plate is the only thing protecting his brain stem. One bad blow to the back of Luke's head could result in death. For this reason, Luke gave up bull riding, but



now feels that it is the only thing he can do to save his family ranch. Luke knows he must tell Sophia, but he cannot. A few days later, Luke falls off the mechanical bull and hits his forehead on the floor, leaving him with a mild concussion. A short time later, Luke and Sophia have a fight that is caused in part by Luke's fear of bull riding and his need to tell Sophia the truth.

#### Chapter 22

Sophia misses Luke and is upset when he does not call to apologize. As she is about to call Luke and apologize herself, she sees Marcia and Brian kissing. Sophia confronts Marcia and warns her that Brian will cheat on her. Sophia then goes to Luke, who is very sympathetic to her plight.

#### Chapter 23

When rodeo season begins, Luke is unhappy to begin riding again since he feels he has not practiced enough. However, he goes ahead with the ride and places well.

#### Chapter 24

Luke finally tells Sophia about the danger of his riding after she confronts him about his obvious pain after his ride. When she learns the truth, Sophia accuses Luke of being selfish. Back at her sorority house, Sophia watches the video of the ride that left Luke injured. She is frightened by it.

#### Chapter 25

Luke struggles with his decision to keep riding in the aftermath of his fight with Sophia. Luke goes to see Sophia before he leaves for his next ride. Sophia tells him that it's over between them if he rides. Luke struggles with the decision, but he rides anyway.

#### Chapter 26

Sophia spends Saturday night with Linda while they wait for news on Luke. When Luke texts that he is fine, both Linda and Sophia are visibly relieved.

#### Chapter 27

The following week, Luke goes to another competition. When he arrives, he is shocked to learn that Big Ugly Critter is there. Luke does fair in the first two rides. On the third, he is surprised to find that he is to ride Big Ugly Critter. Luke seriously considers just driving away.

## Analysis

Ira reflects on a time in his marriage when the inability to have children became an issue between him and Ruth. During middle age and after losing one final opportunity to



become a mother, Ruth fell into a deep depression that threatened their marriage. Ira has always blamed himself, even though he knows that Ruth never regretted their marriage or her choice to be with him. It is clear this is something that Ira has struggled with for many years, simply because he was unable to give to Ruth one thing that she desperately wanted. This is a difficult thing for a man like Ira who would give his life for the woman he loves. This shows the reader the man Ira is, but it also shows the depth of his devotion to his wife just as much as his reaction to her illness and death shows.

Luke and Sophia have settled into a happy relationship. However, this relationship blows up when Sophia learns that Luke is in danger of dying if he continues riding bulls. Sophia loves Luke so much that she cannot imagine her life without him. The idea that he could die devastates her and leaves her questioning his motives. Sophia understands that Luke feels guilty for the mortgage on the ranch and he wants to save it; but, she sees his actions as selfish. Sophia feels that Luke's life is more important than the ranch. Luke's mother clearly feels the same way as Sophia. None of this has an impact on Luke. Luke believes that he is the only one who can save the ranch. He continues to put himself at risk, even if it means that he will lose Sophia. This leaves the reader wondering if, perhaps, it is all over between Luke and Sophia.

## Discussion Question 1

Why was Luke told he cannot ride bulls any longer? Why does he not tell Sophia right away?

## Discussion Question 2

Why did Ira and Ruth hit a rough spot in their marriage? Why does Ira feel guilty for it? Is it his fault?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Sophia end her relationship with Luke? Is she being hasty in her decision?

## Vocabulary

considering, withdraw, decision, announcer, mention, convince, challenge, depending, rankings, successful, dissipated, remained, darkened, wintry, promoters, arena, remained, snorted, attempt, scramble, stretched, competitors, circuit, participate, conjunction, generally, challenge, straightforward, accomplishment





# Chapters 28-33 and Epilogue

## Summary

### Chapter 28

As Ira's health continues to decline, he thinks of what life was like after Ruth's death. Ira falls into such a depression that he refuses to eat, hoping to die so that he can be reunited with his wife. However, one night Ira is looking at the letters he has written to Ruth each year on their anniversary since the year of the dark time and finds a letter Ruth wrote to him in anticipation of her death. This letter pulls Ira out of his depression and he begins to live again. It is about this time that Ira brings the paintings to the house.

A short time after Ruth's death, a woman came to Ira's home and gave him a painting. This woman had been married to Daniel McCallum. She found the painting among his things when he died. The woman felt Ira should have the painting as it is a portrait of Ruth Daniel made shortly after leaving the area. This painting, out of all the paintings he and Ruth bought together, is Ira's favorite because he knows what it would have meant to Ruth.

Ira's lawyer has badgered him and Ruth for years to appoint an heir for the art collection. This pressure has increased since the article was published. Ira puts it off, but he finally comes up with a solution. Neither Ruth nor Ira have any surviving family. Ira was an only child and Ruth's extended family all died in Vienna. Ira decides to have the art collection auctioned off, but he wants it done in Greensboro, North Carolina. It is a complicated process to prepare the auction, but Ira is satisfied with the results.

### Chapter 29

Sophia is studying at the library when she gets an urgent text from Marcia. Sophia reluctantly calls Marcia and learns that Luke is on campus and Brian is planning to beat him up. Sophia rushes to her sorority house, but she arrives after Brian and his friends. Brian pulls Luke out of the truck and punches him. Marcia tries to break it up, but Brian pushes her out of the way. Sophia pulls out her phone and begins videotaping it, promising Brian he will be kicked off the lacrosse team. Brian breaks Sophia's phone, but then Marcia pulls out hers. Afterward, Marcia apologizes to Sophia and promises her relationship with Brian is over.

Sophia and Luke drive up to the mountain resort and spend the weekend together. On the way home, Luke spots some tire tracks that run toward a broken guardrail. Luke goes to investigate and yells for Sophia to call 911.

### Chapter 30



Sophia and Luke go down the embankment to the wrecked car. Inside is Ira who is moments from death. The man manages to tell them of a letter he wants them to find. Sophia finds the letter and keeps it as the paramedics pull the man from the car and take him to the hospital. Sophia insists on going to the hospital and waiting to find out if the man makes it. When the doctor comes and tells them they can visit the man, Sophia explains to the man she has his letter. Ira asks her to read it. Sophia feels it is the most romantic thing she has ever heard.

### Chapter 31

Sophia is close to graduation and worried about finding a job in her chosen field. Luke and Linda are consumed with finding a way to save the ranch, but every option seems out of reach. Sophia talks Luke into going to an art auction with her in Greensboro in May. Luke reluctantly agrees. The day before the auction, an article in the paper reveals that the art collection to be auctioned off belonged to Ira Levinson, the man Luke and Sophia rescued from the side of the road. This upsets them both.

### Chapter 32

Sophia and Luke go to the auction. The other people in attendance seem consumed with their own agendas for the auction. Sophia and Luke are simply overwhelmed with all the amazing art Ira and Ruth collected throughout their marriage. Ira's lawyer makes a speech about Ira before the auction begins. The first piece placed up for auction is a portrait of a woman clearly done by a child. No one in the room seems interested. Luke, however, bids on the piece because he and Sophia both guess that the portrait is of Ruth and it must have meant a lot to Ira for it to be part of the auction. The lawyer returns to make another speech. As he speaks, Luke and Sophia are shocked to learn that Ira has left his entire collection of art to the person who bought the portrait of Ruth, namely Luke.

### Chapter 33

Luke and Sophia are escorted to a private room where Ira's lawyer comes and explains the legal aspects of what has just happened. Luke is now the sole owner of the huge collection, but because he has inherited it he must pay a large tax on it. The lawyer, however, assures Luke that if he sells the collection, he will not only have enough money to pay off the taxes, but also enough to save his ranch and live comfortably for the rest of his life.

### Epilogue

Luke hires Ira's lawyer to help him deal with his new inheritance. The lawyer arranges an extension on the loan against the ranch. Luke then begins making plans for the future. Part of these plans include repairing and renovating the ranch house for his mother.

Sophia asks Luke about the day he drew Big Ugly Critter at his final bull ride. Luke admits that not only did he ride Big Ugly Critter, but he stayed on and won a new truck.



Luke took the money rather than the truck and used it to buy Sophia an engagement ring.

## Analysis

Luke makes the decision to walk away from bull riding because his love for Sophia is stronger than his need to save his mother's ranch. Luke has finally realized that placing himself in such danger is as selfish as Sophia has told him. If he dies, his mother will have to face foreclosure and a new life without him, as will Sophia. Instead, the reader later learns that Luke won a large sum of money by riding his nemesis, Big Ugly Critter. He used the money to buy an engagement ring for Sophia. In an odd way, this proves that Luke's love for Sophia is stronger than anything else in his life.

Luke and Sophia save Ira Levinson from his car crash several days after the wreck. Their rescue of Ira occurs at a point when Ira thinks that he will die alone in his freezing car. He survives long enough to deliver his message that he has been trying to share all along. To Ira it was never about money, art, or anything else. It was about his love for Ruth. Sophia and Luke get it. When Ira dies, it is a difficult point for the reader who has harbored hope throughout the novel that Ira will survive.

Luke inherits all of Ira's art works when he buys the painting of Ruth painted by the student she once thought of as a son. This painting, while the crudest and least valuable of Ira's collection, was the one painting that meant the most to him. It not only represented Ruth and a child's love for her, but it represented all Ruth gave up to be with him. This painting also came to Ira at a time when he needed it the most. It saved his life in the months after Ruth's death. When Luke bought this painting, he showed Ira that he got it. Luke understood why it was so important, why the rest of the collection was not about the money or the impact it would have on the art community, but about love.

Luke is given what he needs to help his mother and to provide a future for himself and Sophia. In the end, Ira and Ruth's love left a legacy that would allow their love to flourish in another young couple. It is a beautiful ending to two love stories that, in some ways, were very much alike.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Brian try to beat up Luke? What might have happened had there been a more physical altercation between the two men? Who stops this from happening?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Luke find Ira's car? What do Luke and Sophia do to help Ira?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Luke buy the portrait of Ruth at Ira's art auction? How does this simple act of kindness lead to a solution to all of Luke and Sophia's troubles?

## Vocabulary

southerner, ordained, haberdashery, imagine, outlawed, appropriate, disappoint, despite, random, decency, assumed, aspects, integrity, honesty, teachings, synagogue, regularly, unfortunately, accommodating, recovered, weakened, numerous, founding, triumphed



# Characters

## Ira Levinson

Ira Levinson is a ninety-one year old man as the novel begins. Ira is dying of lung cancer and has been told he will only live a few more weeks. Ira decides to move up the schedule of a long held tradition he has shared with his wife, Ruth. For this reason, Ira is driving after dark in a snow storm when he misses a curve and ends up trapped in his car with a broken arm, broken collar bone, and concussion.

As Ira sits in the car and waits for someone to come rescue him, he remembers his long romance with the love of his life, his wife Ruth. Ira remembers the first time he saw Ruth, the moment they began to date, and the dreams they shared the night they became engaged. Ira also remembers the dark moments after he was injured in the war and contracted the mumps, leaving him unable to ever have a child. Ira tried to end his relationship with Ruth at this point because he knew she wanted children more than anything else, but Ruth would not allow him to go.

Over the years, Ira and Ruth lived a happy, fulfilling life together. Instead of having children, they filled their time with travel and collecting the art that Ruth loved so much. For more than sixty years they were together. When Ruth died, Ira fell into a dark depression and tried to starve himself to death. One night, Ira was reading the letters he had given to Ruth every year on their anniversary for more than thirty years when he found a letter she wrote to him asking him to remember the good things about their relationship and to keep living for her. This letter saved Ira's life, as did a visit from the widow of a child Ruth once hoped to adopt.

Ira was given a portrait of Ruth painted by David McCallum, a child Ruth once took under her tutelage and wanted to bring into their home. This child thought highly of Ruth and kept this painting with him everywhere he went until the months before his sudden death. This painting is the most important one in Ira's collection not only because it is of Ruth, but because it brought her back to him after her death and made his life tolerable again. When Ira has to make a decision as to what to do with his collection after his death, he ties it all to this one painting, hoping that someone someday will be able to understand what it all meant to him.

Almost three days after the accident, Ira is found in his car by Luke and Sophia. Ira tells them of the letter he wrote to Ruth and later Sophia reads it. With this mission completed, Ira dies. Soon after, his art collection is set to be auctioned. When Luke buys the painting of Ruth, he learns that Ira has left the rest of the collection to him. Ira has finally found the one man who gets it.



## Ruth Levinson

Ruth Levinson was born and raised in Vienna. Shortly before World War II, she and her parents immigrated to the United States. Ruth's father, an art history professor, could only find work as a furniture maker. Ruth, who only spoke German, would often visit the local haberdashery where the owner's wife spoke German. It is also here that Ruth met Ira Levinson, her future husband.

Ruth and Ira became engaged shortly before he left for training camp at the beginning of World War II. Ruth waited eagerly for Ira to come home, dreaming of their future together and the children they would have. When Ira returned and tried to end the relationship, Ruth pursued him patiently. In the end, Ruth learned that Ira had contracted the mumps while in the hospital recovering from an injury and could no longer have children. This hit Ruth hard; and, it took her a while to reconcile herself to the idea of a childless marriage.

Ruth and Ira married and began collecting art work. Ira began this collection on the honeymoon because he liked the way in which Ruth reacted to good art. This became a tradition, something Ruth and Ira routinely did during the long summers when Ruth, a teacher, had vacation time. In her middle age, Ruth met a child through her teaching she hoped to adopt, but the child disappeared before she could begin the process. This left Ruth in a dark place as she came to grips with the loss of the little hope she once had of being a mother.

Ruth died of a stroke in her eighties, leaving her husband of more than sixty years alone. Ruth knew her husband, however, and left him a letter that he found in a time of need and brought him out of the depression that would surely have killed him. Later, Ruth appears in the car after Ira's accident to keep him focused and alive until he can do what he set out to do. It is Ira's love of Ruth that keeps him alive and gives him motive.

## Sophia Danko

Sophia Danko is a senior at Wake Forest College in North Carolina. Sophia, the daughter of immigrants, grew up in New Jersey where she spent all her spare time working in her family's deli. At college, Sophia studies art history, but she worries about finding a job in her chosen field. Sophia also discovers the ups and downs of a social life while at college, enjoying the first years of being a part of a sorority, but later finding it tedious. Sophia also has her first love affair, but her first boyfriend proves to be a selfish, violent boy who leaves her frightened and heartbroken.

When Sophia meets Luke, she has just come out of a long relationship. Sophia worries about getting hurt, but she and Luke connect so completely that she finds it hard to imagine life without him in a very short time. When Sophia learns of the seriousness of Luke's injuries from his bull ride accident, and sees a video of it, she breaks up with him. Sophia cannot imagine watching Luke kill himself. In the end, however, Luke



chooses Sophia over everything else in his life, giving her hope of a good future with him.

## Luke Collins

Luke Collins is a young bull rider from North Carolina. Luke grew up on his mother's family ranch. Luke's father, who was a bronco rider, got Luke into riding bulls. Luke was so good at riding bulls that he was once a top ranked rider and world champion. However, Luke was badly injured when he made a mistake while riding a notoriously violent bull, Big Ugly Critter, and was knocked out during the ride. The bull trampled Luke, leaving him with a plate over his brain stem that could lead to death should he ever hit his head in that area again.

Luke's mother mortgaged the family ranch to pay for his medical bills and the payments are about to triple. To help save the ranch, Luke goes back to bull riding. It is at the first of these bull rides that he meets Sophia. Luke and Sophia fall quickly in love and begin planning a future, but Luke fails to tell Sophia of the danger of his rides. When Sophia learns the truth, she breaks up with him. Luke continues to ride, but when he successfully rides Big Ugly Critter, he quits bull riding and chooses to make a life with Sophia.

Luke is the one who finally finds Ira's car on the side of the road several days after his accident. Afterward, Luke goes to the art auction of Ira's collection and buys the portrait of Ruth that was so important to Ira. By doing this, Luke inherits Ira's complete collection, allowing him to not only save his mother's ranch, but to have enough money to make a new life with Sophia.

## Linda Collins

Linda Collins is Luke's mother. Luke is Linda's only child. When Luke was injured the first time he rode Big Ugly Critter, Linda mortgaged the family ranch, a ranch she inherited from her own father, to pay his medical bills. Unfortunately, the terms of the mortgage are not good and the payments are about to triple. Linda is faced with the reality that she will lose the ranch if she cannot increase her income. For this reason, Luke goes back to bull riding even though he knows it could kill him. Linda is very angry with Luke for this choice, feeling she would rather be homeless and have her son alive than to lose both her son and her ranch. In the end, Luke manages to save the ranch and give it a makeover for Linda out of gratitude for all she has done for him.

## Brian

Brian is Sophia's ex-boyfriend. In high school, Sophia worked in her family's deli, so she never had time for dating. For this reason, Brian was her first serious boyfriend. Sophia learned that Brian was cheating on her and was devastated, but when he promised to never do it again, Sophia took him back. However, Brian cheated again and Sophia



ended the relationship after two years. Brian begins stalking Sophia, texting her constantly and showing up where she is. On the night Sophia goes to the rodeo, Brian finds her. They argue and Brian appears to be on the edge of becoming violent when Luke intervenes. It is this moment that brings Sophia and Luke together, but it also sets up a later moment of violence when Brian tries to get revenge on Luke for his actions.

## **Marcia**

Marcia is Sophia's roommate in her sorority house. Marcia is the reason Sophia goes to the rodeo where she meets Luke because Marcia makes Sophia go that night. Marcia is also the source of many of Sophia's doubts regarding Luke as well because Marcia is the one who suggests that Sophia might be with Luke as a rebound relationship and Marcia who points out that after graduation Sophia will be leaving North Carolina, the state where Luke makes his home. Later, Sophia discovers that Marcia is dating Brian, Sophia's ex-boyfriend. Sophia is deeply troubled by this fact because she knows Brian will not treat Marcia kindly, a fact that seems to prove itself when Brian pushes Marcia out of the way while trying to beat up Luke in revenge for the beating Luke gave Brian the first time they met. Marcia breaks up with Brian. She and Sophia make amends.

## **David Epstein**

David Epstein is a young man who lived in the same town as Ira and Ruth when they were young. Ruth would have chocolate sodas with David Epstein before Ira became brave enough to ask her out. Ruth often teases Ira that she could have married David Epstein, who was a wealthy young man, rather than him.

## **Daniel McCallum**

Daniel McCallum is a young boy who was once in Ruth's third grade class. Daniel was a difficult child, always causing trouble in class. For this reason, Ruth took special interest in him, inviting him into her home and tutoring him on his own. When Ruth makes a visit to Daniel's home and discovers that his home life with his stepbrother and sister-in-law is not a good one, she entertains the idea of taking Daniel into her own home. Unfortunately, Daniel suddenly disappears over the summer and Ruth never hears from him again.

A short time after Ruth's death, Ira is visited by Daniel's widow. Ira learns that Daniel died more than fifteen years ago, but he left behind a portrait of Ruth he painted the year after he met her. This painting, Ira learns, was of great importance to Daniel. Ira hangs this painting in his living room and often stares at it. This painting becomes the most important one in his collection to Ira. It is also this portrait that Luke buys, making him Ira's heir.





## Howie Sanders

Howie Sanders is Ira Levinson's attorney. Howie is the one who pushes Ira to decide on what should happen to his art collection when he dies. Howie gives Ira many choices, such as donating the collection to a museum or selling the collection and giving the proceeds to a charity. Ira decides to have an auction, but he wants the portrait of Ruth done by Daniel McCallum to be the first item sold. When the portrait of Ruth sells, the rest of the collection is to go to the person who bought it because Ira feels that anyone who buys that portrait will be a person who will understand what the collection meant to Ira and Ruth. When Luke buys the collection, he hires Howie to help him liquidate the collection and pay off his creditors.

## Big Ugly Critter

Big Ugly Critter is a notoriously violent bull that often goes after its riders after knocking them off. Big Ugly Critter is the bull that knocks Luke unconscious and tramples him badly while he is on the ground. This causes the condition that will lead to death should Luke continue riding. Luke rides Big Ugly Critter once more and stays on for eight seconds. This feat wins enough money to buy Sophia an engagement ring.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Art Collection

Over the many years of their marriage, Ira and Ruth have amassed an art collection that includes works from such artists as Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso, and Willem de Kooning. This collection is scheduled to be auctioned after Ira's death. When Luke buys Portrait of Ruth by Daniel McCallum, he inherits the entire collection because, in Ira's opinion, he is one of a few who understands the way Ira himself felt about the collection.

## Truck

Upon their first meeting, Sophia and Luke sit in lawn chairs in the bed of Luke's truck. This becomes something they do often as they begin to date.

## Pumpkin

Pumpkins grow on Linda's ranch. Each Halloween, they sell the pumpkins to local visitors.

## Christmas Tree

Christmas trees grow on Linda's ranch. Each year before Christmas they sell these trees to visitors.

## Hay Bale Maze

One Halloween, Luke's father began a hay bale maze on the ranch during pumpkin sales. This has become a tradition. Luke builds it now that his father has died. Luke and Sophia spend one evening going through the maze together.

## Cowboy Hat

Luke always wears a cowboy hat, something Sophia often comments on and even borrows from time to time. For this reason, Luke buys Sophia her own hat for Christmas.

## Cowboy Boots

Luke borrows boots from his mother for Sophia to use the first few times they go horseback riding. Eventually Sophia buys her own boots.



## Cellphones

When Brian tries to beat up Luke in revenge for their first meeting, both Sophia and Marcia threaten to record the beating in order to get Brian arrested and thrown off the lacrosse team.

## Internet Video

Sophia watches a video of Luke's accident on Big Ugly Critter on the Internet. It is the violence of this video that causes Sophia to give Luke an ultimatum. He need to choose between her or bull riding.

## Texts

Brian harasses Sophia after their breakup with frequent texts and by showing up everywhere she goes, something he learns from texts from her sorority sisters.



# Settings

## Levinson Home

Shortly after their marriage, Ira and Ruth buy an old Victorian home that they renovate themselves in the first years of their life together. Ira continues to live in this house until his death. It is also here that Ira brings the art collection after Ruth's death even though there is not enough room in the house to display them all.

## Wake Forest College

Wake Forest College is where Sophia attends college. Sophia lives in a sorority house near the campus and shares a room with her friend, Marcia. This is where Luke often comes to pick Sophia up for their dates. It is also outside of the sorority house where Brian attempts to beat up Luke for Luke's actions the night he and Sophia first met.

## Greensboro, North Carolina

Greensboro is where Ira lived all his life and where Ruth moved after leaving Vienna with her parents. It is also in Greensboro that Ira insists the art auction of his art collection takes place after his death. Luke and Sophia are in attendance at this auction and Luke buys the only painting that goes on the auction block that day, Portrait of Ruth.

## Europe

Ira serves as a navigator in the Navy Air Corps during World War II. While stationed in Europe, Ira is injured when the enemy attacks his plane. While in a hospital in England recovering from his injuries, Ira is exposed to and suffers a bad case of the mumps that leaves him unable to ever have children. This event impacts the rest of Ira's life as he first tries to end his relationship with Ruth and later marries her.

## Collins Ranch

Linda inherited a ranch from her father. Luke grew up on this ranch and it is an important part of both his and Linda's lives. Linda had to mortgage the ranch when Luke was badly injured bull riding in order to pay for the medical bills. The mortgage terms were bad and the payments are about to triple, an amount they cannot afford to pay. For this reason, Luke decides to go back to bull riding in order to help with the payments despite being told he could die if he rides again. In the end, Luke inherits Ira's art collection. This allows him to not only save the ranch, but to renovate it in ways that had been impossible up to that point.



# Themes and Motifs

## Love

This novel is a love story. Not only is it a story about a young couple who find one another in the modern world, it is about a couple who chose one another above all else despite the complications that made their lives different from what they once thought they wanted.

Ruth and Ira found one another when the world was different. Ruth was running from the darkness of the Holocaust, trying to find herself in a world she did not understand. Ira was the shy son of a tailor, lacking confidence in his own worth. Together, however, they found a place where they could be themselves, where they could live a life filled with love and adventure.

Sophia and Luke come together in a world filled with technology and danger. Sophia is stalked by an ex-boyfriend, while Luke faces the loss of the only home he has ever known. The only way out of losing his home could end in his own death. Despite the stress and frustrations of everyday life, they find one another and make a commitment that is as strong as it is complicated.

Ruth and Ira find a way to make love work even when faced with disappointment. Luke finds his way back to love when his choices become muddied by his emotions. Luke and Sophia learn from Ruth and Ira about what love really means and how to make commitment work no matter the complications. It is this that makes love a theme of the novel.

## Understanding

After Ira's death, Howie Sanders makes a speech in which he says the only thing Ira would want from the crowd gathered to buy his art collection is understanding. Ira just wanted someone to get why he collected these pieces and why it had no monetary value to him.

Ira and Ruth spent more than sixty years together. On their honeymoon they spent days in the company of artists at a local college despite the fact that only Ruth got anything from these visits. Ira did not understand art and did not wish to understand it. However, when Ruth stood in front of a piece that she really liked, Ira loved the glow she got, the look in her eye, and the passion that she felt for it. For this reason, he bought six paintings from five unknown artists on their honeymoon and had them displayed by the lake in a spot that would become their spot, the place they would return to each year on their anniversary.

To Ira, art was not about money, culture, or the artist. The artwork that he purchased and shared with his wife was about their love for one another. Ruth chose him despite



the fact he could not give her children. Ruth chose him because she loved him above all else. He alone made her happy. To Ira, everything was about Ruth. When Ruth died, it was the art that gave him comfort, that kept her close to him. To Ira, the art was about love.

When word spread of Ira's art collection, people could only talk about the monetary and cultural value of it. This never mattered to Ira. All Ira wanted was understanding. Ira found it in Luke and Sophia, a young couple whose story was as different from his and Ruth's as it was fundamentally the same. For this reason, understanding is a theme of this novel.

## **Greed**

In this novel, Ira and Ruth have amassed a large art collection that is filled with art pieces that are extremely valuable because they have never been displayed. They were done by some artists who have become exceedingly famous since their purchase. However, the value of the art collection was never important to Ira and Ruth.

Shortly after Ruth's death, a reporter somehow learns about the art collection Ira keeps in his home. The reporter shows up on Ira's doorstep and asks to do a story about the collection. Ira allows it, but is later upset when he realizes the writer focused on the monetary value of the collection instead of the emotional value it has for Ira. To Ira the collection is about the time he shared with Ruth, about the way the art impacted Ruth, and the love they shared. To the world, the collection is about money.

When Ira dies and the collection is put up for auction, people from all over the world descend on North Carolina to take part. Everyone wants to buy these valuable paintings. To them, it is clearly about the value of the paintings, not what they meant to Ira and Ruth. For this reason, no one is interested in the one painting that was most important to Ira, Portrait of Ruth. It was painted by a child. Had these greedy people taken an interest in what mattered to Ira, as Luke did, they might have gotten more than money.

# Styles

## Point of View

There are two points of view in this novel. The first point of view presented in this novel is the first person point of view. In the chapters in which Ira is the narrator, his story is told from the first person point of view, meaning that Ira tells his story using the pronoun I. As the novel progresses, other chapters are narrated by either Sophia or Luke. These chapters are narrated in the third person point of view, meaning the narrator uses the pronouns he and she to refer to the narrating character.

The differing points of view in this novel give each section of the novel a separate and distinct feel. The chapters that are narrated by Ira draw the reader in quickly to create a close relationship with him. These chapters make the reader fear for Ira. The reader cares deeply about what might happen to him.

In the other chapters, there is a little more distance between the reader and the character. The omniscient point of view allows the reader to see both sides of Sophia's and Luke's story. This gives a modern feel. It presents a richer story that stresses the newness of the relationship as well as the depth of feeling that so parallels Ira's relationship with Ruth. By using two different points of view, the author creates two separate stories which connect to each other in one highly emotional novel.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is simple English. The language in Ira's chapters is a little stiffer than the rest of the novel with dialogue, especially that of Ruth, filled with a sense of difficulty that only comes with English as a second language. This fits both characters, as Ruth is from a foreign country and both Ira and Ruth come from a time period in which language was a little more formal. The language in Sophia and Luke's chapters, however, is more modern, filled with common slang and other mechanisms.

The language of this novel works well with the plot because it is authentic to the characters. The author paid close attention to his use of dialogue and language, filling the novel with a language that not only shows a beautiful story, but remains authentic to his characters, his setting, and his craft.

## Structure

The novel contains thirty-three chapters, slightly less than half narrated by Ira Levinson, while the rest of the chapters are narrated equally between Sophia and Luke. The novel also includes an epilogue that nicely ties up the end of Sophia and Luke's story. The novel is written in both narrative and dialogue. Although all of Ira's chapters deal heavily

with flashbacks, the author handles them in such a way that it is impossible for the reader to lose track of the shifts in time.

There are two main plots in this novel and several subplots. The first main plot is the story of the relationship between Ira and Ruth. The second main plot follows the developing relationship between Sophia and Luke. A subplot of the novel deals with Luke's desire to make money to save his mother's ranch. Another subplot deals with Luke's relationship with his mother. One more subplot follows the building of Ira's art collection and his decisions regarding its placement after his death. All these plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.





## Quotes

I sometimes think to myself that I'm the last of my kind.

-- Ira (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote not only describes Ira as a Southerner and a Jew, but it reflects Ira's deep love for Ruth and his feeling that no one truly understands it.

The world he thought he knew no longer made sense to him, and he began to change.

-- Ira (chapter 1 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This quote describes how Ira's father changed after World War II and information about the Holocaust spread.

Don't let it get to you. It's not like he's psycho or anything. He'll figure it out eventually.

-- Marcia (chapter 2 paragraph 13)

**Importance:** This quote is Marcia trying to reassure Sophia that Brian will not hurt her even though he has been stalking her and will later become somewhat violent toward her. This also shows the reader early how Marcia feels about Brian, foreshadowing a time when she begins to date him.

He was glad no one noticed his hands shaking beforehand.

-- Luke (chapter 3 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This quote shows the nervousness Luke feels each time her rides, foreshadowing a time when the reader will learn that Luke could die each time he rides.

Most of all, she wanted him to feel guilty.

-- Luke (chapter 6 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Luke says this about his mother and the way she has treated him since he began bull riding again. It is somewhat ironic that he mentions his mother wants him to feel guilty, because Sophia accuses him of trying to avoid feeling guilty in his decision to ride again.

I have been here for over twelve hours, and though I am still alive, there is a moment when I feel nothing but terror.

-- Ira (chapter 8 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote illustrates the fear Ira feels each time he comes out of his memories and realizes that his situation after the car accident is very serious.

While in the air, he felt a surge of panic.

-- Luke (chapter 12 paragraph 4)



**Importance:** This quote again shows Luke's awareness of his precarious situation and his fear of dying while bull riding.

Because whatever they had between them was based in the real world, not the fantasy bubble of college life. Luke was as real as anyone she'd ever met.

-- Sophia (chapter 16 paragraph 16)

**Importance:** This quote not only shows how Sophia feels about Luke, but it shows that she has felt as though her life has been less than grown up until she met Luke. Luke is changing things for Sophia, and she is beginning to see just how much change is ahead for her.

Yet experience has taught me that fate is sometimes cruel and that even a boatload of hope is sometimes not enough.

-- Ira (chapter 20 paragraph 73)

**Importance:** This quote expresses how losing hope of having a child nearly destroyed Ira and Ruth's relationship after the loss of Daniel. It is also a reference to Ira's hope that he will survive this car crash.

He wasn't ready for this. And maybe, just maybe, he'd never be ready.

-- Luke (chapter 23 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This quote shows how Luke is beginning to realize just how unreasonable his determination to keep bull riding is and that he might be thinking of quitting.

Because what it sounded like to Luke was that he'd just acquired the entire collection. But that wasn't possible. It couldn't be possible. Could it?

-- Luke (chapter 33 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This is Luke's reaction to learning he just inherited all of Ira's art collection.

Sophia, after all, was the real treasure he'd found this year, worth more to him than all the art in the world.

-- Luke (Epilogue paragraph 56)

**Importance:** This quote shows the reader that Luke truly does get what Ira was trying to make everyone understand. It was never about the art or the money. It was about Ruth.