

Two by Two Study Guide

Two by Two by Nicholas Sparks

(c)2017 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Two by Two Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 – 6.....	5
Chapters 7 – 11.....	9
Chapters 12 – 16.....	13
Chapters 17 – 22.....	18
Chapters 23 – Epilogue.....	23
Characters.....	27
Symbols and Symbolism.....	30
Settings.....	33
Themes and Motifs.....	35
Styles.....	39
Quotes.....	41



Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Sparks, Nicholas. *Two by Two*. Grand Central Publishing, October 2016 First Edition.

Two by Two is a romance novel by Nicholas Sparks in which thirty-something Russell Green does his best to be a single parent to his six-year old daughter, London. He does this amid the backdrop of his divorce from London's mother (Vivian) and his new relationship with a former girlfriend (Emily). When the novel begins, Russell is married to stay-at-home mom, Vivian. Russell, Vivian, and London live close to Russell's family in Charlotte. Russell is generous and romantic, Vivian is demanding and condescending. Despite this, Vivian seems committed to her marriage and her daughter. Things change quickly when Russell quits his marketing firm to begin his own marketing company. This enrages Vivian, and things begin to worsen between the two as Vivian's shopping habits and condescending ways continue.

Vivian decides she will go back to work. She joins the real estate development firm of billionaire Walter Spannerman. Spannerman is a known womanizer who is branching out into politics. This worries Russell, who now has the primary responsibility of raising London while trying to grow his startup business. Russell has some difficulty getting a handle on the role reversals. However, soon both he and London take to it happily. Russell, despite the difficulties of balancing primary parenting responsibilities and work, is thrilled to have more time with London. His family, including sister Marge, are lovingly supportive of Russell. However, things continue to worsen between Russell and Vivian, as Vivian begins spending nights away from home. Eventually, Russell's worst fears are confirmed she will be moving to Atlanta with Spannerman's company when it relocates. She and Walter are in love. Vivian then leaves Russell and files for divorce.

Russell, meanwhile, hires his first client, Joey Taglieri, a lawyer, to represent him. Russell does not care about any monetary demands Vivian makes, but he wants joint custody of London. At the same time, Russell must now struggle with being a single dad. Step by step, he makes progress, and he and London grow closer. Russell begins speaking with Emily, an old girlfriend from many years ago. She is a single mom with a son named Bodhi. Bodhi is London's age. Emily recognizes that Russell is a good father and he is clearly London's favorite parent. This, in turn, enrages Vivian, who pushes for full custody of London. Russell fights back, refusing to give ground. He is becoming stronger man. He and Emily also realize they have fallen in love with each other. Then, tragedy strikes when Marge, Russell's sister is diagnosed with advanced, incurable cancer.

Despite the bad blood between Vivian and Russell, Vivian is sad to hear of Marge's condition. For the sake of London and Marge at Christmas, Vivian travels up to spend the holiday with them. During this time, Marge has a long talk with Vivian, telling her that London needs both her parents. This convinces Vivian to settle things with Russell out of court. She agrees to shared custody should Russell move to Atlanta. Russell agrees to do move. He is pleasantly surprised when Emily and Bodhi also move to Atlanta.



Emily and her son live less than a mile away from Russell and London. Marge passes away, and Russell's parents plan on moving to Atlanta to be close to Russell and London. Russell realizes that the relationships he has had with the women in his life, two by two –London, Marge, Emily, and others –have made him a better man.



Chapters 1 – 6

Summary

Chapter 1: And Baby Makes Three – Russell Green is surprised when, a year into his marriage to Vivian, she announces she is pregnant. He worries financially because she will stay at home the first few years to raise the baby, but he looks forward to life as a family. The day of the big IT, October 16, 2009, Vivian awakens Russell to explain her contractions are five minutes apart, and it is time to go to the hospital. There, Vivian and Russell are delighted when their baby girl London comes into the world. Russell's parents and Vivian's parents come in to see London. Russell feels uneasy around Vivian's parents because he believes they feel their daughter settled for him instead of marrying somebody better. Russell's sister, Marge, and her girlfriend, Liz, come by to visit as well. Both Russell and Vivian are happy for the visits, and amazed to have a daughter. That night, Russell tells London he will always be there for her, but when she uses her diaper, Russell hands London to Vivian.

Chapter 2: In the Beginning – Vivian tells Russell she is not going to go back to work. Russell says this is perfectly okay, but he worries since Vivian always spends so much money. After making love the next morning, Russell goes in to check on London. London smiles at him, which delights Russell. As Russell, a native of Charlotte, North Carolina, ages into his thirties, he feels the pressure on him increasing to provide for his family. Russell works for a Charlotte midtown branch of a Manhattan advertising agency. Russell, a romantic who loves marriage, reflects unhappily on the past, when most girls would tell him how nice he was, but would not actually want to date him. He reflects on how he himself was not perfect, such as how he planned to marry a girl named Emily after college, only to get drunk out at the bar with guys and go home with a girl named Carly. He reflects on meeting Vivian at a cocktail party for the ad agency in Manhattan not long after. Russell believes marriage is a good thing, but in practice, can be complicated with curveballs along the way.

Chapter 3: And Then What? – Russell does not find it easy to be the sole provider for his family, but he commits to it out of love. Russell works even harder to attain bonuses, which help the family. Vivian's expensive tastes continue, as she wants to remodel the kitchen to add value to the house with the thought that the family will not live there forever. Despite financial concerns, Russell can clearly see Vivian is naturally suited to being a mother: she excels at it. Deeply in love with such a loving woman, Russell does all he can to please her, working extra hard to afford the kitchen remodel. Vivian is aggressive when there are disagreements, and plays on Russell's dislike of confrontation to get him to back down. Through 2014, Russell is advancing through the ranks at work and London is five years old. Getting ready for the office Christmas party, Russell expresses his concerns about his boss, Jesse Peters, a rich womanizer who is clearly attracted to Vivian. Vivian tells Russell to get over it. This stings Russell, but Vivian remains by his side through most of the party.



Peters is not thrilled about Vivian avoiding him at the party. As such, he gives a cold shoulder and dismissive remarks to Russell at work. When he has Russell begin partnering with a lower-ranked member of the agency in early 2015, Russell can see the writing on the wall. Russell begins searching for a new job, but decides to begin his own agency, the Phoenix Agency. Vivian is angry about this, accusing Russell of not caring for the family, and accusing Russell of jeopardizing their future. She tells him Peters will try to run him out of business. She barely speaks to him for three days. Russell begins laying the groundwork for his new business, but ironically does not advertise his advertising agency well.

Chapter 4 – Russell thinks about how many firsts he has missed with London because of work –such as her beginning to walk. It makes him feel as if his love for London is not enough. Despite the initial interest of some clients, Russell signs none of them because they back off, thanks to Peters’s influence. Vivian remains distant, and Russell needs someone in his corner. Meanwhile, Russell’s mom confides in him that she believes his dad has cancer because he has been out of breath. She insists he needs to go to a doctor, so Russell agrees to talk to him. Russell’s dad is in his mid-sixties. He recommends seeing a doctor, but his dad brushes off the suggestion. His dad suggests, not unkindly, that maybe Russell shouldn’t have quit his job.

Russell thinks about how his dad is a traditional, old-fashioned guy who lives by absolute rules: love a wife and treat her with respect, have children, do a job and don’t complain, etc. Russell has done his best to follow these rules. Marge questions Russell’s decision to quit and begin a new company, but also questions why he does not limit Vivian’s spending as the family has no income. At home, Russell and Vivian disagree about Vivian’s shopping once more, even though Vivian has decided to return to work and already has an interview. It will be in PR for Walter Spannerman, CEO of a super PAC, someone with whom Russell has unhappily dealt before. When Vivian announces it would be full-time and involve overnight travel, Russell has a bad feeling. He knows that Spannerman is a womanizer.

Chapter 5: Changes – Initially, Russell believes quitting his job and beginning his own company will be the biggest event of 2015, but this does not turn out to be the case. Vivian takes a call from Rachel Johnson at Spannerman, who offers her the job to begin the following Monday. Russell and London decide to visit Russell’s parents while Vivian is out for the day yet again. Everything leaves Russell feeling unsettled. When Vivian returns home that night, she has gone shopping yet again. When Russell questions why Vivian has not been in touch with him, and when he is stunned by the bill for what she has purchased, Vivian becomes angry. She tells him she is shopping for work, and must go to work because Russell quit his work. She refuses to speak to him until bed, then accuses him of trying to pick a fight when Russell tries to talk about everything again. In the morning, they both apologize. With both of their weeks now to be occupied by work –Vivian by orientation and Russell meeting with potential clients –it is agreed on by Russell’s mom that she can help babysit London when needed. Vivian goes out with London for the day, and comes home with two pet hamsters – Mr. and Mrs. Sprinkles. When Vivian begins work, Russell realizes the roles in their marriage have reversed.



Chapter 6: Mr. Mom – Vivian's new work schedule means Russell having to adjust his own daily schedule, no longer showering first and now having to put on the coffee while tending to London after waking up. Russell will now have to do the things Vivian used to, such as signing London up for tennis camp, taking her to art class, and then dropping London off at his mom's before his client meeting for the day in addition to picking up wood shavings for the hamsters. Vivian writes down London's weekly schedule for Russell, which is made up of things like dance class piano lessons. Russell manages to handle the schedule, but he runs a little late to dance lessons and can't begin dinner because of work. Vivian reprimands Russell about being on time, saying he is not doing anything she has not been doing for years.

The next day, Russell hits a snag as his mom's schedule does not match up to his. On the phone with Marge, Marge reveals her dad has been to the doctor and seems good though they are still waiting on lab results. Russell asks Vivian to watch London, but Marge refuses because she does not have the ability. She is also sick. When Vivian gets home, she reveals she has been working to see what an environmentalist "nut job" journalist is up to trying to come after Spannerman for erosion caused by an oceanfront condo development. Vivian announces she will have to go to Atlanta that weekend for a fundraiser for Walter Spannerman's super PAC.

Analysis

In addition to the gentle romance that always populates Nicholas Sparks' writing, the author writes *Two by Two* as a defense of fatherhood. Apart from Russell's relationships with his wife (Vivian) and, later, with his girlfriend (Emily), the story primarily focuses on Russell's efforts to be a good father to London. Russell is aware that he needs to be a strong, reliable, and caring father for his daughter. His example will help determine London's choice for a husband when she is older.

Fathers are just as important in the lives of their children as mothers. The author reinforces this point throughout the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Russell does not realize how important he is in London's life. Though he and London love one another, it is clear that she is closer to her mother than she is to Russell. This is not unusual given that Russell works and Vivian remains at home.

Russell is a romantic who wants to please Vivian, his wife. It is in his nature to be accommodating. He does not like confrontation, and he would rather go along to get along, especially where Vivian is concerned. It is why he endures her coldness and her condescension. Yet, it also demonstrates a certain weakness in Russell's character. He cannot stand up for himself, even when Vivian is clearly in the wrong. However, Russell believes his role as a man –as a husband and a father –is to make the women in his life happy. In so doing, he bends to Vivian's force. Rather than being supportive of Russell or changing her life given his unfailing support of her and London, Vivian continues on life as normal. Although the family is in no real financial danger, Vivian decides she will go back to work. She obviously considers Russell her inferior, and sees him as



something of a child, which is why she decides she wants to be an “adult” by returning to the workforce.

Initially, readers see that Russell is taken off-guard by this change. He has difficulty accepting the role reversal in the marriage not because of chauvinism or sexism against women working, but because of the fact that the one place where he was able to clearly demonstrate his masculinity –in the traditional role of sole income earner in the family, supporting everyone else –has been usurped unnecessarily by Vivian. Vivian’s job thus becomes symbolic not only of change and reordering, but of the undermining of Russell’s masculinity. Often, dramatic changes in marriages are portrayed as the fault of the husband or the father, but Sparks takes that stereotype to task. It is abundantly clear that Russell is not the problem in his marriage or in the household -it is Vivian. Vivian does not do well when challenged. She reacts by projecting blame onto others, specifically Russell.

Discussion Question 1

Does Russell consider his marriage to Vivian to be healthy and happy? Why or why not? How would you characterize his marriage? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Russell considered a romantic who wants to please? How does this trait affect his marriage? Is this for the better, as he believes, or for the worse? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Vivian decide she will return to work? What does this mean for Russell, in terms of manhood and fatherhood? Why?

Vocabulary

deficient, anemic, swaddled, nostalgia, Bohemian, megalomaniacal, gruff, profane, mischievousness, agape, conscientious



Chapters 7 – 11

Summary

Chapter 7: Two by Two – The rest of the week gets better in terms of adjusting and timing for Russell, but still Russell cannot land any contracts. Things take a gloomy turn when Vivian must leave for Atlanta. Marge does her best to be encouraging later with Russell, but reminds him not to complain about things because they always work out. With Vivian gone, London begins acting up, blaming Russell for making Vivian get a job. London cries, but Russell comforts her. He reads to her about Noah and the ark at bedtime, including how all the animals went onto the boat two-by-two. It makes Russell consider he and London are now two by two, both doing the best they can. Russell, however, feels as if he is failing.

Chapter 8: New Experiences – In the morning, London seems happy again. Vivian calls to say she should be home at one, but might be home at three depending on whether or not they decide to have lunch with a developer from Mississippi. This may mean missing out on a blueberry farm visit with London and Russell. Afterward, Russell brings London outside to begin riding a bike without training wheels. London is thrilled. Vivian gets home as planned at one (the business lunch did not happen) where Russell meets her with a lunch of salad and grilled salmon. Vivian then goes out with London, skipping the blueberry farm to go shopping for school clothes. When Vivian gets home, she is annoyed with Russell for taking the training wheels off London's bike because she did not get to see London actually ride for the first time. She accuses Russell of always thinking about himself, and doing only what he wants. Vivian later apologizes, saying she did not want to miss a first, and saying firsts are different for mothers. She reveals she will have another overnight on Wednesday in Washington, D.C.

Chapter 9: The Past is Never Quiet Past – At the tennis court that morning for London's lessons, Russell meets a New Jersey-accented man named Joey the Bulldog Taglieri, who is there for his daughter on behalf of his ex-wife, Adrian. They trade background information. Joey is a personal injury lawyer. Joey says he dislikes the advertising firm he is with now. As the lesson ends, Joey says he'll see Russell the next morning. After dropping London off at art class, Russell goes to get coffee, and runs into Emily. Emily explains her son is also in the art class. Emily reveals she is divorced, and that it occurred because she and her ex, David, just drifted apart. Emily now works at a gallery in addition to making her own paintings. When she leaves, Russell looks up Joey online to discover his advertising needs help. When Vivian gets home, she and Russell talk about their days. Russell reveals he met Joey. Vivian considers a potential job with Joey might be lowbrow, and she still does not want to put London in daycare. Russell is at least comforted by the fact that the dinner he prepares, London really enjoys.

Chapter 10: Moving Forward – Russell remembers being a kid with little structure, free to run around, adventure, and play. He wonders how London, as a kid, has had such an opposite kind of childhood –one with a strict, morning-to-night schedule. At tennis on



Tuesday morning, Russell and Joey talk about Joey's advertising. Both agree it could use some improvement. At home that evening, London asks to go bike riding again. Russell agrees. After dinner and a bath, Russell reads *Two by Two*, about Noah and the ark, to London once more. She asks him what daycare is, having overheard him and Vivian talking about it. She also asks about why Vivian is working. Russell does his best to explain what daycare is, and why Vivian must also work. London does not like the situation, but is happy to have Russell with her and tucking her in. Before sleep that night, Russell gives Joey's law profession a thought, imagining what he could do with a marketing campaign.

The next day, Joey agrees to meet with Russell to hear what Russell has to say. The following day, Russell learns that Emily's son, Bodhi, is London's best friend in the class. Russell and Emily are both pleasantly surprised by this. A playdate is arranged for London at Emily's, which will give Russell the chance to do his work. Russell, London, Emily, and Bodhi then decide to go to Chick-fil-A. Emily explains Bodhi likes to run around in the play area, as Bodhi can be a handful since his dad is away so much. Russell apologizes for what happened between him and Emily all those years ago, but Emily is no longer bothered by it at all. She tells him he no longer needs to apologize anymore. She says guilt is a wasted emotion. As Russell later leaves, he has a twinge of guilt about having lunch with Emily, which is something he has not done with Vivian in a while.

Chapter 11: And Then There Was One – Russell uses his afternoon to get to work, reaching out to contacts and getting a feel for the marketing package Joey currently had –and how it could be improved upon. Russell works through the weekend, wondering if Vivian still loves, or even likes him. She is unimpressed by his practice presentation, and is angry with him for working all weekend. She tells Russell not to make her out to be the bad guy, and that it is not her fault that Russell cannot even support his family anymore. It makes Russell feel sick to his stomach. Emily recognizes Russell has had a bad morning, and goes with him to the coffee shop while their kids are in class. He goes over his presentation with her. Emily is impressed, as is Joey later at the meeting. Joey has done some background checking on Russell, finding out that Russell has just started out, and has no clients. Joey is not totally comfortable with this, but willing to give it a shot. Russell is thrilled and heads to Emily's to pick up London. There, she shows him her artwork and her studio. Emily asks how the pitch went, at which time Russell happily reports he has gotten the job.

That night at home, Vivian reveals that Walter Spannerman will be relocating most of his office to Atlanta. What will become of her job is not yet known, but she may be able to continue to work out of Charlotte. Until then, Vivian believes she and Walter will have to be in Atlanta two or three days a week. Vivian also brings up the subject of Emily, having already heard from London about the playdate and lunch. Vivian tells Russell that this is how rumors get started, and that he probably should not see Emily again. Russell later speaks about all of this with Marge, reminding Marge not to say anything about the business relocation because he was not supposed to tell anyone. Marge explains she and Liz are interested in one of them getting pregnant. The next day,



London spots a giant bird in the tree in the backyard. Looking outside, Russell sees that it is a bald eagle.

Analysis

Among the common stereotypes that are to be found in contemporary culture is the idea that fathers cannot have the same touch as mothers when it comes to parenting. Tradition and sociology hold, however, that a child needs both parents from whom the child gains essential knowledge, experience, and love that are unique to each gender. Sparks once again takes modern stereotypes to task, upholding the traditional view that not only are fathers just as important in the lives of their children as their mothers, but sometimes can be even more important. This is the case for Russell and London. Russell is clearly a warmer, more loving, and more accepting parent –not because of a lack of discipline, standards, or expectations toward London –but because by nature, he is this way. London is at first upset that her mother is not around more often, but quickly warms to her father, whom she has not had the ability to spend time with in the same way as her mother. She quickly recognizes a stark difference between her mother and her father, and so begins to cling to Russell.

As things begin to disintegrate with Vivian, Sparks introduces –or rather, reintroduces – Emily to Russell's life. Emily provides a stark contrast for readers when compared with Vivian. Emily is much more like Russell: she is warm, accepting, and comforting. Readers should note that Emily, and not Vivian –with Vivian being the one who should celebrate Russell's successes like no other –is the one to be congratulatory toward Russell for landing his first client. Vivian is dismissive, and even insulting, saying taking on a personal injury lawyer is “low-brow”. This reveals that Vivian even has impossible expectations toward her husband, castigating him for failing to live up to what she wants, while Emily applauds Russell for taking a step forward.

Russell takes great steps forward as a father as well. As Vivian's work keeps her away more and more, Russell and London grow closer and closer. The bald eagle that London and Russell see symbolizes hope for a better future, already exemplified by their growing relationship. Readers need to understand as well that, not only is it important for children to have fathers in their lives, and not only do fathers matter just as much as mothers, but that the parent-child relationship is just as important for the father himself. Indeed, readers can already sense a growing confidence in Russell as he manages not only to handle work and essentially being a single father (he might as well be at this point, which in turn is symbolically prophetic of things to come), but he is becoming a stronger man in general. He is growing stronger on behalf of London, and because of London's growing influence on his life. Note the novel drawing its name from a storybook version of the Biblical account of Noah's ark – Two by Two, just as London and Russell are now a two.



Discussion Question 1

How does London react to Russell being around more often than Vivian? Why?

Discussion Question 2

How do Vivian and Emily react toward Russell taking on his first client? How does Russell feel about each reaction? Why?

Discussion Question 3

As Russell becomes a single parent, how does his relationship with London change his own composition as both man and father? Why is this important for London's sake?

Vocabulary

rampaging, mimicking, resilient, reverential, hucksterism, rambunctious, surreal, exasperation, noncommittal



Chapters 12 – 16

Summary

Chapter 12: Bad Weather on the Horizon – Despite the increased amount of work Russell must now do because he actually has a client, he feels less stressed. Russell grows closer with London, while Vivian is away two or three days each week. When she is home, she is either warm or cool, snapping on and off. Russell begins running to get back in shape. Russell learns that Vivian has opened her own bank account for her paychecks to keep Russell's business and her pay clear of each other for the sake of simplicity. Vivian says this is not a big deal, but Russell feels like it is. When Russell speaks to Marge about this, Marge says it is because Vivian obviously did not want Russell to know. Russell's mom later reveals to Russell she has had a dream about Russell's dad being in the hospital with cancer, Judge Judy on TV, and a giant stuffed purple pig on the hospital bed. She has no idea what any of it means. She also reveals how much London has been talking about Russell lately, and that she never used to do it. Russell's parents, sister, and Liz are all interested to know London will be starting school in a few days. London is looking forward to kindergarten with Mrs. Brinson. Vivian also comes over to spend time with everyone, and talks about how Walter is contemplating a run for governor. She will be needing to spend up to four nights a week in Atlanta in a corporate apartment.

In conversation with everyone, Vivian talks down about Russell, saying their living situation has been a good experience for him so he could understand what her life has been like for the past five years, and saying that Russell has been moody at home, believing she can do nothing right. Russell is stunned by everything he has learned, and knows she has brought these things up around other people, knowing he would not question or argue with her about them. Russell can only wonder how things will work out in the coming weeks, knowing he might have to leave Charlotte for the sake of his marriage. When Vivian lectures Russell about eating too much pudding, Liz asks Vivian if she is still hitting the gym. Vivian explains she uses the gym at work two or three times a week, which allows her to do extra work. In the garden, London is stung by a bee. She screams for Russell, but it is Vivian who grabs London to look at her hand. Vivian pulls the stinger out, but London runs into Russell's arms, saying she wants Daddy. Vivian looks at Russell as if he has betrayed her.

Chapter 13: Crime and Punishment – Russell remembers convincing his sister not to commit suicide by jumping off a water tower during college over a failed relationship with a girl named Tracey, something he never told his parents about at Marge's request. The day after the sting, Vivian announces she and London will have a girls' day since she has not seen London much lately. When they leave, Russell realizes just how empty the house seems especially without London. The day out with London puts Vivian in a good mood, however. On London's first day of school, Russell, Vivian, and Russell's parents all bring her in. London is excited. Russell works the next eight hours, and is happy to pick London up at school at the end of the day. London explains she



had a good day. She is also happy to have Bodhi at the same table in her class. While London is at her piano lesson that afternoon, Russell and Marge talk by phone as Marge wants to check in on Russell after Vivian's coldness over the weekend.

When Vivian gets home from work, she is not happy because Walter was not happy at work because the CFO, who had agreed to move to Atlanta, backed out of the deal and resigned. Vivian reveals the CFO is also attempting to get other CEOs to go with her to a new company. Vivian explains this means she will probably have to spend more time in Atlanta, which disturbs Russell. That night, Vivian explodes at London for putting wet towels in the hamper in the bathroom, which have probably ruined London's new dress. Russell tells Vivian it is his fault, that he told London she could put anything in the hamper. Vivian shoots back that London knows better, and turns on Russell, telling him he has been undermining her ever since she has begun working again. Vivian storms out while Russell soothes London. London feels as if Vivian no longer loves her. Russell realizes London is just as confused by what is going on to the family as he is. Russell later hears Vivian on the phone with Walter, laughing as if she is in love. When Vivian asks Russell if he is coming to bed later on, Russell refuses, saying he has work to do. Over the next two weeks, Vivian packs nearly everything she owns for the corporate apartment in Atlanta. It is then that Vivian tells Russell she is leaving him for Walter.

Chapter 14: Shock – Russell is stunned by what has happened. Marge comes to see him at once, stays with him all day, and helps care for London. Marge comes back the next day to do the same. Marge tells Russell he has done nothing wrong. Russell only blames himself, however, wondering if quitting his job months before was to blame. When Vivian calls, Russell tries to get her to work things out with him, but she refuses, wanting only to speak to London. London is not thrilled when talking to her mother on the phone. That night, Vivian leaves voicemail for Russell, saying that London should stay with him for about a month until she can set up a room for London to come and live with her in Atlanta. Russell is angered now. He does his best to focus on work.

Marge and Liz come over that evening, aware of everything going on. Marge encourages to fight Viviane if she tries to get London to go to Atlanta with her. While Liz goes on a walk with London that weekend, Russell breaks the news about Vivian to his parents with Marge by his side for support. Russell and his dad have a heart-to-heart talk in the garage a little while later. Russell's dad is a man of few words, but his ability to be there for Russell is important. Russell confesses he does not know if he can be a single dad. Russell's father tells Russell that Russell is a good father, and better than he ever was. Russell's dad believes London needs Russell. He tells Russell he has done what has needed to be done taking care of London and handling work and he is proud of him. It brings a tear to Russell's eye as Russell thanks him for the encouragement.

Chapter 15: One Day at a Time – Russell reflects on how his mother struggled with the deaths of her parents and her siblings, and how she knew Russell worried about her. He remembers her telling him not to worry, that she would make it through, and that Marge had told her about his talking her down from suicide. In the present, Russell does his best to struggle through the days. He decides to pay a surprise visit to Vivian in Atlanta, a four-hour drive. He ultimately decides not to try to see Vivian, then returns home.



There, he and London are thrilled to see one another. He lands a second client (a plastic surgeon) for Phoenix. Vivian later calls, saying she will be coming to Charlotte to visit London, but wants Russell out of the house for the weekend so she does not have to stay in a hotel, and so London does not think anything is wrong. This angers Russell, but he agrees. Vivian also asks to meet for lunch, to which Russell agrees. Marge agrees to let Russell stay with her and Liz for the weekend. At lunch, Vivian explains she will need Russell to keep London longer, but that London will eventually be able to come to Atlanta because daughters need their mothers. Russell argues that they need their fathers, too. Vivian is set on divorce. When Russell tries to talk about seeing a therapist or working things out, Vivian leaves.

Chapter 16: The Sun Also Rises – After lunch with Vivian, Russell wishes that he was a stronger person. Even though he sees a movie with Marge and Liz, Russell can only think about what Vivian and London are doing. When Vivian calls the next morning to ask Russell to bring a vase to London’s art class, Russell agrees. Marge compares him to a trained seal. When Russell drops off the vase, Vivian does not even want talk about her evening with London. She goes back inside with the vase, making Russell realize he did behave like a seal. At the coffee shop, Russell is delighted to run into Emily. Emily reveals she has been working like crazy, as a number of her paintings have sold; and she also explains that Bodhi has been having a hard time with his father in town, because his father will leave again soon. It is then that Russell speaks of what has happened with him and Vivian. Emily asks Russell to go for a walk with her at the golf course, which he agrees to. Emily explains that it took four or five months for her to begin to feel like her old self again following the divorce. She explains her ex, David, is not a bad father, but was a horrible husband because of all his affairs. Russell and Emily then get lunch together.

Emily explains her real reason for not falling apart was Bodhi, just as it will be the same for Russell because of London. Emily reassures Russell he is a good guy, but Russell brings up the past. Emily says she has forgiven Russell for what happened with them, and that what happened with Russell and the girl from the bar was a mistake, not maliciousness. Later, Marge and Liz are excited to hear Russell had lunch with Emily. Marge believes Russell is already beginning to heal. That night, Russell FaceTimes London, but Vivian ends the call because they are watching a movie. The next morning, Vivian texts Russell to come back at six-thirty. This annoys Russell because it is so late. Back at his house, Russell learns from Vivian that she has no interest in saving the marriage, that a settlement will be arriving with in the week, and that they are to tell London what was going on. Russell is surprised at how well London handles things, though Vivian does not tell the whole story and though London does end up crying. Russell knows, from the messy condition of the house thanks to Vivian, that Vivian has no care for Russell whatsoever. Russell asks London later on if she would like to have a date night with him after her next dance class on Friday. He explains they could have dinner, then color or watch a movie or do whatever London would like. London readily agrees, and is utterly excited about it. Russell’s heart melts when London dresses up for the date, and does her best to act like an adult.



Analysis

Fathers are just as important in the lives of their children as mothers. Vivian represents a mother who works more hours outside the home than the father. Vivian chooses not to be around much for her daughter, London. Vivian does not make the choice to work outside the home out of necessity. Therefore, it is only natural that London will look for safety and comfort from the parent who is always there for her. London gravitates toward Russell because she discovers in him the warmth, acceptance, and encouragement that she does not receive from Vivian. This, in turn, enrages Vivian because she has looked down for so long on Russell. To see their daughter reach out for him rather than her in times of need is unacceptable to her. An example of London looking for comfort from her father occurs when she is stung by a bee.

Russell's relationship with his father is critically important: Russell draws strength and example from his father, who in turn through encouragement, bolsters Russell's confidence. There is a masculinity handed down from father to son that is directly inherited by sons from their fathers, but which also serves to be a model for daughters to understand not only that they too can be strong, but that this is what they should seek in a man. The relationship between a father and a daughter is just as important to the father as it is to the daughter, Sparks continues to argue. He demonstrates this through the continued growth of Russell's confidence and self-recognition that he, at some point, transcended from someone who wanted to please to, as Marge describes, a trained seal. Because London will inevitably take after Russell, Russell knows he needs to project a gentle kind of strength –being warm but unafraid to stand up for what is right. He recognizes just how important the time he and London have together is, and so he begins to have date nights with London –which utterly thrills London. As Sparks argues, despite prevailing stereotypes, divorces are not always the fault of fathers. This is key to understanding why Sparks allows Russell to narrate the novel himself. Sparks is giving all good fathers everywhere a strong voice through Russell, which challenges conventional pop stereotypes of fathers as always being at fault and being poor parents.

At the same time, with Vivian now having left Russell for Spannerman, and with Russell growing closer to Emily, the novel enters a kind of transformational period. There are a number of changes that are manifested here –but the one constant thing that remains in Russell's life is London. Family members and wives may come and go, love may begin and end, marriages may crumble –but London remains with Russell unfailingly, helping him move through life as a two-by-two kind of arrangement. No person is meant to be alone. Life is meant to be shared. At the moment, that life Russell leads is shared by London, and vice versa. This is utterly important for readers to understand, Sparks seems to say: love is crucial to human life. Love in the novel here comes about by second chances. Second chances, Sparks definitely argues through both Russell's reconnecting with Emily and his renewed relationship with London, are never impossible. Russell has a second chance at life between London and Emily, essentially, and Russell –growing stronger each day because of London and his work –is going to take that second chance.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Russell decide to institute date nights with London? Why is London so thrilled about this? What does London's excitement mean to Russell? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Sparks argues through the dissolution of the marriage between Russell and Vivian that divorce is not always the fault of the husband. Based on the novel and real life, do you agree or disagree with Sparks's assertion? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What second chances does Russell have through this section of the novel? Why do these second chances matter so much to him?

Vocabulary

blithely, frankness, subtext, interjected, levity, therapeutic, coy, profound, reticent, mercilessly, omitted



Chapters 17 – 22

Summary

Chapter 17: Moving Forward and Backward – Although London seems sick on Monday, she insists on going to school because it is coloring day, and because the teacher is bringing in her goldfish. On Tuesday afternoon, Russell receives the settlement agreement. Russell asks Joey to look it over. Joey agrees, and listens to Russell explain the situation. Joey, who also has a license to practice law in Georgia, is happy to take on the case. He does some research and learns that Vivian's attorney is a high-priced bully, meaning Spannerman must have been involved somehow. The settlement calls for Vivian to receive half of everything, including what Russell has invested into his business, and half of his retirement. Despite dating a billionaire and having a higher salary, Vivian's agreement also calls for her to receive alimony. Russell is not happy about this, but his primary concern is London. Russell later meets with Emily, to whom he reveals the settlement situation. Emily suggests Russell needs a break, and suggests she, Bodhi, Russell, and London go to the zoo in Ashboro on Saturday. Russell agrees. At home, London explains she is unhappy about dance class, so Russell tells her she does not have to go. She does look forward to the idea of the zoo, however. Vivian FaceTimes later in the evening, arguing with Russell about leaving the house so she can visit again and host London's birthday party. She accuses Russell of being a bad father not only for preventing her from seeing London, but for letting London miss dance class.

Chapter 18: It's Not a Date – On Saturday morning, Russell and London arrive at Emily and Bodhi's to head to the Ashboro zoo. Russell drives while Emily handles snacks and movies. Emily is playful, which reminds Russell of what she was like when they dated. He wonders how he could have been so stupid to cheat on Emily. At the zoo, Russell buys London a pair of wearable butterfly wings while Emily buys Bodhi a pair of dragonfly wings. Russell and Emily follow their kids around as they explore the zoo. Emily explains that her first meeting with Russell at the coffee shop was planned: she says she saw how gentle and good Russell was with London at the class, and how close they seemed, so she had to find Russell to say hello. Russell is intrigued by this. He says he cannot ever remember Emily being angry, or having a fight with her. Emily says she can get angry. She explains that one does not have to be a really good parent, just good enough.

Chapter 19: Finding My Own Way – Russell recalls how, after meeting Emily at a wedding for the mutual friend, Liam, he decided he had to see her again because she was so beautiful, kind, intelligent, and poetic. On Monday morning, Russell meets with Joey Taglieri. Joey explains the situation: Russell cannot feasibly have joint custody of London unless he moves to Atlanta or somewhere nearby, as Vivian was sole custody of London with visitation rights afforded to Russell. Joey explains that in such situations, fathers are always at disadvantages. He explains he is willing to fight, but that it could get very ugly. He explains that Russell should not be surprised by anything Vivian might



do to get custody. Russell talks the situation over with Marge on the phone, and then Emily in person. At home, Russell removes all photos he can find of Vivian, packing them into a box while saving a few for London. He then rearranges the furniture and décor of the house, except in London's room. When London gets home, she is thrilled at the changes.

She asks to go bike riding, and Russell agrees, and puts sunscreen on her. Seeking to avoid a car backing out of a driveway, and seeking to slap a mosquito from her arm, London crashes into a mailbox. She gashes her forehead, and Russell rushes her to the hospital. Russell calls Marge and his parents, who all come to the hospital right away. It turns out the gash is clean but will need stitches, and London has injured her left wrist, which may be broken but which is difficult to determine due to swelling. Russell sees London, who shaken and in pain, but otherwise alright. She thinks too much sunscreen led to her handlebars being slippery, causing the crash. Russell then realizes he must call Vivian. Vivian flies in on Spannerman's private jet, then rushes to see London at the hospital. Vivian sticks around overnight and through the next day when London is discharged. Vivian is surprised by the changes in the house, but glad Russell has not actually thrown away the photos he has taken down. When Vivian leaves, Russell calls Emily, who makes him feel better about the whole situation.

Chapter 20: Autumn – Marge is happy to hear that Russell has been talking to Emily, but Russell is worried about Marge, who is still sick. Marge says her doctor thinks it is viral, but should be gone by the time she and Liz go on their trip to Costa Rica. London, meanwhile, despite a little pain in her wrist sometimes, is recovering well and returns to school. To engage London's mind while she recovers, Russell buys a game called Hoot Owl Hoot! which London comes to enjoy. Russell goes to speak with the dance teacher, Ms. Hamshaw, who says London cannot participate in the coming recital if she misses any more dance classes. London tells Russell she no longer wants to go to dance, but worries what Vivian will have to say. Russell tells London she no longer has to go.

Russell begins to find other ways of entertaining London, all involving spending time with her –such as letting her help him prepare dinner. Meanwhile, he continues to speak with, and see Emily. Immediately after school on Friday, London gets dressed up for date night. When Vivian comes to spend the weekend, she takes the guest room and does not ask Russell to leave. When Russell goes to sleep, his mind drifts to thoughts of Emily. The next morning, he tells Vivian about London quitting dance. Rather than being angry, Vivian seems not to care about it anymore. This causes Russell to wonder why. While Vivian is out with London, Russell calls Emily to let her know how the weekend is going. He decides to visit Emily after tucking London in for the night to see her latest painting, letting Vivian know he will be back before leaving. When Russell returns home, he knows Vivian wants to know what he has been up to, but he says nothing.

Chapter 21: Clicking on All Cylinders – As soon as Joey's new marketing campaign goes live, his business booms. He calls Russell to thank him and to hire him for more commercials. Two more lawyers –one in Hickory, another in South Carolina –call Russell to ask about his services. Russell is thrilled. He tells Emily and Marge about



how things are going. Marge explains she is still sick, but not as bad as before. Marge also explains that it has been decided she will be the one to get pregnant. She cannot wait. On Friday, with Vivian not in town, London asks for another date night with Russell. Russell immediately agrees. London asks to include Bodhi and Emily on their date. Russell is quite alright with this, so calls Emily, who agrees. They decide to go to the Aquarium. Emily insists she and Bodhi both wear their wings. While at the Aquarium, Russell hears a song by J.D. Eicher called "Two by Two" playing on the radio. He points it out to her, saying it is just like her favorite book. Because it is date night, Russell asks to dance with London. London happily says yes. It melts Russell's heart. Emily is beyond touched, and takes pictures with her phone that she says she will send to Russell later. They get Chick-fil-A on the way home. The next day, Russell and Emily get coffee while their kids are in art class. Russell later visits with his mom, who insists his father has cancer because she has had a second dream about it. Russell is later put off by a phone call with Vivian regarding London's upcoming birthday party. She has made all the plans, and speaks in very cold, clipped tones.

Chapter 22: The Eye of the Storm – London is thrilled when Russell buys her a fish tank aquarium for her bedroom. She is also happy with the birthday party her mom organizes. Before Vivian leaves on Sunday evening, she has it out with Russell, demanding to know why he is dragging London around on his dates with Emily. Russell says this is not the case. Vivian says Russell is only thinking about himself, is not thinking about London, and has not changed. She then leaves. Russell wonders if Vivian is right, but realizes she is not. A few days later, Joey explains that Vivian has escalated her settlement demands, will only be speaking to Russell through the attorneys, wants Russell out of the house during her next visit, and that she wants to bring London to Atlanta on the weekend of November 13. Russell is prepared to fight, but Joey reveals it will get expensive to the point that Russell will probably have to sell his house. When Vivian shows up for Halloween weekend, she is strangely friendly, and expects Russell to be around to see London's Halloween costume, and to hand out candy on Halloween.

With Marge and Liz back from Costa Rica, Russell explains the recent developments. Marge encourages Russell to go out with Emily on a date without the kids. As November comes on, work continues to go well for Russell, and he puts the house up for sale. When London goes with Vivian for the weekend, Russell is lonely. He does his best to keep his head up by attending Emily's gallery opening. Emily is thrilled to have Russell be her date, and Russell is in turned happy to be out with her. He is very impressed by her paintings at the gallery. Russell is so happy with one that he decides he will buy it. After the show, Russell and Emily go to Fahrenheit, a rooftop bonfire bar. They both confess to being in love with each other, but both agreed they cannot yet move forward romantically, but will instead take things one day at a time. Russell is thrilled. As November continues, his work continues to go well, he continues to see Emily, and London gets along well. But on the last Sunday in November, Russell receives a call from his mother. Marge is in the hospital because she has been coughing up blood.



Analysis

Fathers are not always to blame for problems in marriages or for divorces. Sparks continues to argue this point through Russell's character. It is clear through this section of the novel when Vivian uses her connection to Spannerman to hire a lawyer who is a bully to represent her in the divorce. Although the law favors mothers, Vivian knows that she is in the wrong. As such, she will need all the help she can get. Sparks here unveils a controversial, but utterly truthful assertion: good fathers are unjustly treated by the law. Custody is all but guaranteed to mothers no matter the circumstances. From the start, even good fathers must make their case against bad mothers, whom the law automatically backs. Joey says such a battle –for joint custody –will be long, arduous, and even ugly. This is what a good father must deal with thanks to the law. But Russell – who has become a stronger, better man, especially because this has occurred due to London –is ready to fight Vivian every step of the way no matter the cost.

Russell has come to believe, just as Sparks has argued all along, that fathers are just as important in the lives of their children as mothers. Russell, in particular, knows how important he and London are to one another. This is beautifully and touchingly illustrated by the scene in which Russell and London dance to the J.D. Eicher song, Two by Two, while at the Aquarium. Emily recognizes that London idolizes her father, and with good reason. He is the warm but strong and attentive parental figure she has so desperately needed in her life. While Vivian has run off on the family, Russell has been London's rock. He is the steady, influential father figure who has made it possible for her to handle the divorce and to get through trials, such as when she runs into the mailbox on her bike. Russell is her two-by-two. Nowhere is this more clear than in Vivian's disgusting insinuations about Russell's date nights with London –a sharp distinction between the moral natures of both Russell and Vivian. Here, the father dwarfs the mother in importance by simple, common human decency and honesty.

Discussion Question 1

Why does London's bike accident prove to be more traumatic for Russell than for London? How does Vivian react to the situation? Why do you believe she responds in the way that she does?

Discussion Question 2

How is Russell immediately disadvantaged by divorce law? Why is this so? What recourse does Russell have to succeed? Why does Joey think this is a long shot? Why is Russell unafraid to try?



Discussion Question 3

Why does the dance Russell and London share at the Aquarium prove to be so immensely important to both father and daughter? Does this confirm or deny Sparks's arguments about fathers and children? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

adversely, enunciated, scampered, vitality, engrossed, exorbitant, nocturnal, forlorn, gallivanting



Chapters 23 – Epilogue

Summary

Chapter 23: No – The doctors and nurses run a series of tests on Marge, who is optimistic and in a good mood. Everyone else, however, is worried. Liz is concerned, but not panicked. Russell calls Vivian to explain the situation, but asks her not to tell London. Vivian, for once, is understanding. While alone with Marge, Russell learns from Marge that their parents already know about Emily. The day wears on. Russell is stunned when he sees a girl in a wheelchair with a stuffed purple pig, just like in his mother's dreams. The family's worst fears are confirmed when the doctors reveal Marge has Stage IV cancer, incurable. She will only have a few months, but treatments, the doctors say, can help prolong her life indefinitely. Liz asks to be alone with Marge, so everyone leaves. At home, Emily comes to visit Russell to comfort him. Marge is released from the hospital on Sunday, having already begun chemotherapy. Russell picks her up. Marge is, for the first time in a long time, sad. She says it is not fair what has happened, because she has never smoked, has always exercised, and never done anything wrong. Marge encourages Russell to keep moving forward in his life, because he is the strength and the rock that everyone is going to need in the coming months.

Chapter 24: December – Vivian gives Russell a hug when she drops London off Sunday evening. London senses her father is sad, so Russell explains it is only because he missed her. Russell goes to see Marge Monday morning. Marge has quit her job and has decided to enjoy what time she has left. She is upbeat and happy, and wants to take London roller skating. While Marge naps, Russell talks with Liz, who is worried that Marge wants to go to New York for the weekend. Liz also has no idea what she will do without Marge when she dies. The next day, Marge texts Russell and invites him and London over for dinner. Emily remains warm and supportive, being there for Russell however she can be. Russell realizes why Marge is ensuring she has time to spend with each member of her family here and there: she wants alone time with each of them before she dies. The family does its best to be around for Marge as much as humanly possible. Russell happily watches as Marge teaches London how to roller skate. Russell realizes that Marge's activities are not just about enjoying things with people, but saying goodbye to those things she loves.

Meanwhile, Russell's business continues to expand. Marge and Liz have a wonderful time in New York. Marge continues to encourage Russell to pursue a love life with Emily. Marge also says she wants to take a trip somewhere with Russell, but will not yet say where. Meanwhile, Vivian asks to spend Christmas at the house with London and Russell, because it will be their last one at the house. Russell agrees. When Marge goes out with Russell, she brings him to the water tower. Russell is in disbelief, but Marge insists. Marge and Russell talk about life. Marge explains she wants Liz to find someone and move on, someone she can grow old with. Russell promises to make sure Liz remains a part of the family. Marge also demands that Russell refuse to back down from Vivian, and to fight for London.



A few days later, Russell and London begin decorating for Christmas. Russell later goes to visit with Marge, who is having a good day. He learns that Marge has been calling Emily to check up on Russell. Marge insists that, aside from whatever Russell gets Emily for Christmas, he should write Emily a letter expressing how much his time with her has meant, how much she means to him, and that she should take a second chance on him. Russell agrees to do so. Vivian later arrives, and the family gets together. At one point, Russell notes that Marge and Vivian slip off by themselves to talk. Russell later visits with Emily, who is beyond thrilled with the letter. She then gives Russell what she has made for him: a painting of him and London dancing at the zoo. Russell knows now that Marge had been looking out for him, making sure he would give Emily a gift from the heart, just as she had done for him. New Year's comes on, and 2016 begins.

Chapter 25 – For Auld Lang Syne – Tests done on Marge in early January reveal that the cancer has not slowed, but continued to spread. Marge resolves to stop doing chemo, because it is taking up too much time. Russell does not know what he will do about London, and does not know what he will do without Marge. When London visits Atlanta for the weekend, Marge and Liz come over to help Russell and the realtor talk his house up during an open-house. At the end of the weekend, Russell and Vivian finally reveal their divorce to London. London is horrified and cries. Vivian tells Russell that London will be alright provided he does not make the divorce more ugly than it has to be by signing the agreement and being done with it. Russell is enraged by this. When Russell overhears London playing with her Barbies, expressing her desire to be with him rather than Vivian, he calls Joey, saying he is ready to do whatever is needed to make sure London remains with him.

Joey learns that Vivian is ready to do whatever she can to prove Russell is an unfit father, from bringing in a psychologist to talking about the unhealthy foods London eats to talking about Emily to the bike injury, all of which Vivian blames on him. The most disgusting thing, Joey reveals, is that Vivian and her lawyer are suggesting the date nights Russell has with London are unhealthy and inappropriate. Russell is stunned, but wants to fight on. He goes to visit Marge, who is now very weak and essentially bedridden. Marge continues to encourage Russell along with Emily, and asks to see London because her time is running out fast. She also encourages Russell to keep fighting for London. Russell later brings by London to visit with Marge. The visit is needed, but upsetting to London. She is even more upset to have to go to Atlanta for the weekend, but Russell promises her he will look after Marge. Russell upholds the promise, spending nearly the entire weekend with Marge.

Chapter 26: Saying Goodbye – February comes on, and Marge continues to worsen. Despite her pain and agony, she does not complain, and focuses on doing what she can to help others and to focus on them. Russell sells his house, and Emily decides she will sell hers too in order to get a fresh start. Russell's father is hard at work on Marge and Liz's house, remodeling their bathroom. He even has Russell help him buy and learn how to use a cell phone. He uses the phone to take pictures of everything from tile to faucets to get Marge's opinion on what he should use. Marge has everyone come over for Valentine's Day, including Emily and Bodhi.



A few days later, Marge asks to see London again. London gives Marge the gift of her first ever Barbie, while Marge gives London a DVD of *Pretty Woman*—a movie she and Russell used to watch all the time, so that London and Russell can watch it when London is older. Liz later speaks with Russell to tell him that Marge still wants her to have a baby, and that Marge has made sure she and Marge's parents will all be taken care of by the life insurance policies Marge has quietly been keeping. As Marge moves into her final hours, she spends a little time with Russell, encouraging him to remain with Emily, and not mess it up this time. She and Russell share their love. It is the last time Russell ever speaks to her. He and his parents leave that evening so that Liz may have alone time with Marge. Marge days a day later. After the funeral, when everyone else has gone, London dances for Marge one last time.

Epilogue – It is now the summer. Business is booming for Russell so that he has had to hire two people to help him. Russell reflects on meeting with Vivian the day after the funeral to reach a fair settlement between them. He reflects on how Vivian's conversation with Marge helped her understand that London needed both her parents, and how his agreement to move to Atlanta resulted in shared custody of London. He remembers Vivian apologizing for the lawyer's letter, saying she was only venting in the lawyer's office at the time—anger which found its way into the letter. He reflects on how Emily, upon learning of his moving, was not concerned because she and Bodhi were relocating to Atlanta as well, to be with him and London. They now live less than a mile from each other, are prepared to get married. Russell visits his parents and Liz each weekend. They are planning to move to Atlanta as well, thanks to the money Marge left for them. Liz herself is preparing for pregnancy. Russell knows the past year has been filled with challenges, but that he is a better man, now. London is very happy, and Russell knows he has been able to get through his life, two by two, thanks to the women in it.

Analysis

Fathers are just as important in the lives of their children as mothers. Russell has now fully come to believe that this argument is true. He recognizes that, despite the fact that his life has been influenced just as much by London as London's life has been influenced by him, the law still works against him in divorce. Nevertheless, Russell continues to refuse to back down. He knows how important he has become to London, and will do whatever he must to be in her life. Here, he demonstrates his true moral goodness, and his character as a man. Readers should note, however, that it is the intervention of Marge that ultimately prompts Vivian to settle out of court. Marge reminds Vivian that fathers are just as important as mothers in the lives of children, and so Vivian must realize anything she does against Russell will only hurt London. Marge's symbolic acts of intervention demonstrate not only the quality of her character as a woman, but as someone with an immensely beautiful heart. Readers will also see the symbolism of love—both between father and daughter, and love for Russell and London by Emily—in her painting of the dance they share at the Aquarium.



Marge's death, not the divorce, proves to be the tragic twist at the end of the novel. Russell, London, and the rest of the family are deeply saddened by Marge's unexpected cancer and death. This continues to put things into perspective for Russell. He must value the life he has as it is, and what it can be. Marge's death gives her a second life in Heaven, true enough, while Russell now has a second chance in life with Emily. Emily also provides Russell with a second chance at marriage and at a complete family. In reflecting on the events of the previous year, Russell realizes that the Biblical account of Noah's ark is more prescient than ever: not only were the animals taken aboard the ark two by two, but Russell's own life has been a tale of two-by-two: he has always been the complement to, and complemented by, another woman in his life, from his mother and sister to London, and now to Emily. Men –especially fathers –are critical in life.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Marge's death prove to be the shocking and tragic twist in the novel? What amazing things does Marge manage to do before dying? Why does this make her death all the more tragic, especially for Russell?

Discussion Question 2

How has Russell always moved through his life two by two? Why does this matter to him so much, especially as a man and a father?

Discussion Question 3

How has Russell grown, both as a man and as a father, since the beginning of the novel? To what can this growth be attributed? Explain your reasoning.

Vocabulary

malignant, aficionado, quantifiable, sardonic, emaciated, sequestering, cordiality, maelstrom, acrimonious, innuendo, tremulous, abbreviated



Characters

Russell

Russell, a thirty-something marketing firm agent, is the father of London. He is also the brother of Marge, the husband of Vivian, and the former boyfriend of Emily.

Russell, who tries to please the domineering Vivian, often lets himself be bullied by her for the sake of harmony and peace. His decision to go into business for himself causes stress. When Vivian leaves him for another man and Russell becomes the primary parental caregiver for London, he becomes stronger and more manly. He knows that he must protect and provide for his daughter, as well as set a good example for her. After Russell and Vivian divorce, Russell grows even closer to London. The two share a strong father-daughter familial bond. There is nothing Russell would not do for London. By the end of the novel, he is prepared to move to Atlanta to ensure joint custody.

Russell had dated Emily when they were younger. Though he cheated on her back then, he now shares a romantic relationship with Emily.

London

London is the daughter of Russell and Vivian. Gentle, kind, and full of life, London loves both her parents, but she comes to be especially enamored with her father. She sees in him as a strong, stable man. Though London has difficulties with the divorce, she survives by clinging to Russell.

Vivian

Vivian is the wife of Russell and the mother of London. Vivian is a controlling and domineering woman in a condescending, quietly manipulative way. It is clear she wants to be in charge. She is not afraid to step over Russell to make it happen.

While Vivian loves London, she does not have the warmth or caring touch that Russell has with London. London's favoring of Russell enrages her. This becomes all the more potent when Vivian leaves Russell for her boss, Walter Spannerman. Vivian is prepared to get ugly to gain sole custody of London, but a discussion with Marge prompts Vivian to settle fairly with Russell outside of court.

Emily

Emily is the divorced single mother of Bodhi and the former girlfriend of Russell. Emily is creative, warm, encouraging, and compassionate. She meets up again with Russell when both of their children attend the same summer art class. As Vivian exits Russell's



marriage, Emily draws close to Russell. The two fall deeply in love. She even moves to Atlanta to be with him. By the end of the novel, Emily is preparing to marry Russell.

Russell's Mom

Russell's mom is a sweet, gentle, and fiercely loyal woman who is married to Russell's dad. She loves Russell and her daughter Marge with all her heart. Additionally, she deeply loves and is grateful for London. Russell's mom is overjoyed at being a grandmother. Russell's mom helps encourage and support Russell and London through their divorce. She is later heartbroken when Marge dies. Russell's mom and dad decide to move to Atlanta by the end of the novel.

Russell's Dad

Russell's dad is a traditional, conservative husband and father. He is the husband of Russell's mother and the father of Russell and Marge. Russell's dad is a man of few words, but his words are direct and powerful. In accord with his very traditional and very conservative nature, Russell's dad has a heart of gold that shines through his words and his very masculine example. It is Russell's dad who especially encourages Russell in being a father. It is from his dad's example as a father that Russell draws his own lessons.

Marge

Marge is the sister of Russell, aunt of London, and partner of Liz. Marge works in tax accounting. As such, she is never thrilled about dealing with the IRS. Nevertheless, she loves her family and loves her life. She is incredibly wise and utterly compassionate. She is very close to Russell, whom she gives much-appreciated advice to constantly.

Marge lays the groundwork that ensures Russell joint-custody of London and ensures Russell and Emily will end up married. Eventually, Marge succumbs to cancer.

Liz

Liz is the partner of Marge. Professionally, she is a therapist. Liz is a gentle and supportive partner, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law, and aunt. She helps to give Russell advice through his divorce, and she is devastated when Marge is diagnosed with cancer. She is grateful for Russell's decision to actively keep her a part of things alongside his parents and London. She will always be part of Marge's family.

Joey

Joey Taglieri is a personal injury lawyer who relocates to North Carolina from New Jersey. Divorced three times, Joey is a stellar father and an excellent lawyer. He becomes Russell's first client for Phoenix, and he later becomes Russell's lawyer through the early days with Vivian. He also ends up as Russell's good friend.

Walter Spannerman

Walter Spannerman is a billionaire real estate developer, super PAC founder, and later potential political candidate for governor of Georgia. Based on Russell's work experience with him in the past, Spannerman is difficult to please. Thus, Russell has no particular liking for him. Vivian ends up leaving Russell and London for Walter Spannerman.



Symbols and Symbolism

Pregnancy test

A pregnancy test symbolizes the fulfillment of promise. Russell and Vivian married out of love and a desire for children. The promise of marriage is fulfilled when Vivian becomes pregnant within a year of marrying Russell.

Vivian's new job

Vivian's new job symbolizes reordering and change, as well as a challenge to Russell's masculinity. When Vivian decides to return to work because of Russell's struggling business venture, Russell realizes everything has changed. The gender roles have been reversed. He finds himself the primary caregiver to London. He runs errands, deals with household chores, and does his own work. Vivian becomes the working parent and the primary breadwinner for the family. Though Russell struggles with his new role, he does his best to accept it.

Biblical account of Noah's ark

The Biblical account of Noah's ark is symbolic of togetherness and new life. Russell reads about Noah and the ark to London while putting her to bed after Vivian leaves for work in Atlanta for the weekend. The account describes how animals were boarded onto the ark two by two. This ensures new life after the flood. This makes Russell think about how he and London are now two, settling into a new life with Vivian working. It is from this Biblical story that the novel takes its title.

Bald eagle

A bald eagle symbolizes hope and love. London spots a bald eagle in the tree in the backyard and alerts Russell. Russell thinks about how hopeful he feels at the moment, having just landed the job with Joey. He also thinks about how close he and London are becoming. It is a wonderful moment shared between Russell and London as they watch the eagle until it flies away.

Bee sting

A bee sting symbolizes London's shifted preference for Russell. When London is stung by a bee, Russell and Vivian both go to her. While it is Vivian who pulls out the stinger, it is Russell to whom London runs for comfort. Vivian is enraged by this.

Wet towels

Wet towels in the hamper symbolize a change in the family relationship between Vivian, London, and Russell. When London puts wet towels in the hamper –against Vivian’s “rules” –Vivian explodes and screams at her. Russell must intervene. This turns Vivian’s anger on him. He realizes the family’s closeness is shattered, and he wonders what will come next.

Settlement agreement

A settlement agreement symbolizes both Vivian’s sense of entitlement and cruelty. The settlement agreement Vivian has her lawyers draft determine that she gets half of everything Russell owns and full custody of London. Russell rejects the agreement. He wants joint custody of London. Joey explains to Russell that contesting the settlement could become very ugly thanks to Vivian.

Stuffed purple pig

Russell’s mom dreams of a stuffed, purple pig. Supposedly, the dream is a symbol of bad tidings. Russell’s mom believes this dream means her husband has cancer. When Marge must go to the hospital, Russell sees a little girl with a stuffed, purple pig. He realizes something bad is coming. His fears are confirmed when Marge is diagnosed with Stage IV cancer.

A letterf from Russell to Emily

A letter from Russell to Emily symbolizes love and the future. At Marge’s insistence, Russell writes a letter from the heart to Emily, expressing just how much he loves her and how grateful he is for her. Emily is delighted by the letter, and this continues to bring her and Russell closer together.

Emily's painting of Russell and London

Emily’s painting of Russell and London symbolizes the love of father and daughter and Emily’s love for them both. The painting is made from a photograph taken by Emily of Russell and London dancing while at the Aquarium. It demonstrates just how much Russell means to London and how much London means to Russell. It also demonstrates to Emily how much she loves them both and that Russell is marriage material.



Marge's acts of intervention

Marge's acts of intervention symbolize her character and good heart, as well as the promise the future holds. Marge's acts ensure that Russell will have joint custody of London and that he and Emily will end up married. Marge knows her time on Earth is short. Therefore, she is laying groundwork as quickly as she can so that Russell and London will be happy when she is gone. At Christmas, Marge speaks to Vivian about London and Russell. Also, Marge ensures that Russell writes a heartfelt letter to Emily. These acts by Marge are as touching as they are beautiful.



Settings

Russell's house

Russell's house is located in Charlotte, North Carolina. It is a spacious house made possible by the hard work Russell puts in to provide for his family. Russell's house proves to be the setting for most of the novel, as his life is centered around his family and the home where they dwell. When Vivian leaves him, Russell and London continue living in the home by themselves. Russell rearranges the furniture and removes some pictures of Vivian in order to make it feel more like his and London's home. Eventually, Russell sells the house and moves to Atlanta to ensure that he is given joint custody of London.

Coffee shop

The coffee shop is where Russell spends time while London is in summer art class. It is there that Russell first encounters Emily again for the first time in years. When Vivian leaves, the coffee shop becomes a regular thing for Russell and Emily. It is where they fall in love.

The Aquarium

The Aquarium is visited by Russell, London, Emily, and Bodhi. It is where one of the most poignant scenes of the novel occurs wherein Russell and London decide to dance to the song Two by Two by J.D. Eicher when it comes on the radio. Emily photographs the dance. Later, she uses the pictures to create a painting for Russell and London. The experience helps Emily to fall in love with Russell. She realizes that Russell is a good man and father.

Atlanta

Atlanta is where Walter Spannerman decides to relocate much of his business. Vivian begins spending much of her time in Atlanta, where she later moves after leaving Russell for Walter. Later, Russell moves to Atlanta so that he can have joint custody of London. Eventually, Emily, Bodhi, and Russell's parents move to Atlanta to be near Russell and London.

Marge's house

After Marge's cancer takes its toll on her, much of the latter part of the novel is set in Marge's house. Despite her illness, Marge's house becomes a place of life and light, as the family gathers there for holidays. They spend most of their free time there with

Marge before her final hours. It is at Marge's house that Marge convinces Vivian to be easy with Russell regarding the divorce settlement. It is also at Marge's house that Marge helps lay the groundwork for Russell and Emily to begin a real romance.



Themes and Motifs

Fathers are just as important in the lives of their children as mothers.

Fathers are just as important in the lives of their children as mothers. The novel *Two by Two* addresses the traditional, time-tested rule that a child needs both a mother and a father in life. Each parent provides different qualities necessary for the child to thrive. All too often, fathers are ignored or deemed unimportant.

When the novel begins, Russell lives a traditional American life. He is the sole breadwinner for the family, while Vivian stays home to raise London. London is always happy to see Russell when he returns home, but both wish they were spending more time with each other. It is clear that London naturally tends toward her mother early on, as it is her mother with whom she spends the most time. Nevertheless, this does not stop London from spending as much time as possible with her father. From her father, London learns what it means to be a hard worker. She also learns from him that one can be strong and loving. These are qualities which she will incorporate in her own life and qualities that she will look for in the future man in her life.

When Vivian returns to work. Then, she leaves Russell for Walter. In effect, when she leaves Russell, she is also leaving London. Russell quickly becomes London's rock, always being there as he becomes her primary caregiver. London quickly grows closer to her father. She recognizes his warm and loving nature. She had never experienced the same closeness with her mother. London continues to learn much from her father, such as how men should treat women with respect and tenderness. She learns how important it is to have quiet strength.

Russell comes to realize how much his relationship with London has changed when London seeks comfort from him, rather than her mother, after a bee sting. Russell recognizes how important his role as a father is in London's life. He is ready to fight and fight hard to keep joint custody of London when Vivian decides to serve him with settlement papers. Russell has become the rock in London's life. He is her only constant, unyielding source of love and support. He will not let London down.

The relationship between a father and a daughter is just as important to the father as it is to the daughter.

The relationship between a father and a daughter is just as important to the father as it is to the daughter. By example, a father teaches his daughter how she should be respected and cared for by men in her future. In turn, the father grows as a person from parenting his daughter. Being a father encourages men to become better individuals as fatherhood requires a man to live beyond himself.



When Russell gets married and settles down, Vivian is his world. When Russell becomes a father, he begins to look at the world in a way he previously did not. He is there to protect London from the worst of the world and to help her to find the best of the world. He relishes his hard work as a provider in ways he never did before becoming a father. In the past, income was about giving Vivian a remodeled kitchen. Now, it is about nurturing, growing, providing, and protecting London.

When the novel begins, Russell is not a strong man. He is a romantic who wants to please Vivian. He prefers to buckle under Vivian's domineering ways rather than cause conflict by confronting her. He wants a peaceful life and a happy wife. Marge, his sister, calls him a trained seal. But, as divorce looms and happens, Russell begins to grow stronger, coming into his own. He reclaims his masculinity by handling his work and fatherhood. He takes on the full mantle of responsibility in order to protect and provide for London.

By the end of the novel, Russell no longer bows down under pressure from Vivian. He is willing to fight and stand up for what is right, as he no longer needs to make her happy or keep peace with her. In essence, Vivian brought on a war when she left Russell for Walter. Now, Russell is prepared to fight back and win.

Russell's resolve to always be there for London helps him find new strength. He is the only source of continuity and security for London. Vivian can no longer be trusted because she was unfaithful. She moves frequently because of her work; so, she is not reliable as a consistent nurturer for London. Russell embraces his role as a father. London has made Russell a better man and father.

Good fathers are treated unjustly by the law.

Two by Two addresses the issue that good fathers are treated unjustly by the law. Divorce laws automatically favor mothers, as men have traditionally been seen to be at fault in the marriage. However, the fact that the law is designed to favor mothers undercuts and disadvantages genuinely good fathers like Russell.

When Vivian leaves Russell, she immediately begins calling the shots, knowing the law will be on her side even though she is at fault for the divorce. She determines when she will visit London and when London will visit her. She determines when Russell must leave the house and when she may return home. At first, Russell does his best to accommodate Vivian, because he wants joint custody of London without a fight.

When Vivian serves Russell with settlement papers, the implications of unjust laws are clear. Vivian has a right by law to half of everything Russell has, even though she has not earned it and is at fault in the divorce. Vivian is also almost guaranteed full custody of London by the law. Russell is stunned by the unfairness. He is determined to fight Vivian on the custody issue.

As expected, Vivian gets uglier, demanding even more money from Russell. Joey explains to Russell that things will get even worse if he pushes for joint custody. He



makes it clear that the law does not favor Russell, even if Russell is not at fault. Vivian's attorney is a notorious bully who will bend and stretch things to have her way. Despite everything being unfairly stacked against him, Russell refuses to back down because he knows London's happiness and stability are at stake.

Second chances are possible

Second chances are possible. People make mistakes, and they suffer losses and setbacks. However, situations are not necessarily permanent. There is always a chance to make a comeback or to recover, as well as to begin a new life. As a novel, *Two by Two* is full of second chances.

The earliest second chance readers come across is in Marge's life. Russell keeps Marge from committing suicide in college over a broken heart. Marge has the chance to love again, and she finds Liz. Marge's not committing suicide allows her to live a happy life. She is able to move on and make the lives of those she loves, such as Russell, happy.

When Russell discovers that Vivian is going to leave him, he believes that he will end up dying alone. However, a chance reunion with Emily in a coffee shop paves the way for his second turn at love, marriage, and family.

In turn, Emily gets a second chance with Russell. Years before, she and Russell had dated. However, Russell behaved stupidly and cheated on her. Now, after reuniting, Emily has another opportunity with Russell to love and be loved. The rekindling of their past relationship will probably lead to marriage.

Russell's greatest gift of second chances, however, comes inadvertently from Vivian's adultery and separation. Until Vivian returns to work, Russell has never had the chance to spend so much time with London. He gets a second chance at fatherhood, when he becomes London's primary caregiver and when London turns to him for comfort instead of her mother. Russell recognizes that this chance is a gift. He does all he can to make sure London is happy and healthy.

A father is not always to blame for problems in a marriage.

A father is not always to blame for problems in a marriage. It is a common belief that fathers are exclusively to blame for divorces. Many books and movies affirm this belief by portraying men who wreck marriages, homes, and families.

In *Two by Two*, Nicholas Sparks underscores this point through the character of Russell. It is Vivian, not Russell, who causes the disintegration of her marriage first through her domineering selfishness, and later, through outright adultery. Russell is presented at first as an almost emasculated male, subservient to Vivian for the sake of peace. He

tries to make her happy, but their marriage does not improve. Vivian is who she is, and she will not change because of Russell.

At multiple points throughout the novel, Russell attempts to salvage his marriage. He wants to talk things out with Vivian. He is willing to go to therapy. Even after Vivian has been unfaithful, Russell still wants to make their marriage work. His commitment to her and their family stands in stark contrast to Vivian's indifference. She refuses to talk about marital problems with Russell.

Additionally, it is not Russell who chooses to make the divorce difficult. All he wants is joint custody of London. He wants to be actively involved in his daughter's life. This demonstrates his moral character. Vivian tries to make things difficult for Russell by demanding full custody of London. Vivian's divorce lawyer is a bully who insinuates indecent things about Russell. The lawyer hopes that this will give Vivian an advantage in the courtroom, even though it is her unfaithfulness that is responsible for the divorce.



Styles

Point of View

Nicholas Sparks tells his novel *Two By Two* from the first-person, limited-omniscient perspective of Russell, the principal protagonist. Sparks allows Russell to narrate the novel to give good fathers everywhere a strong voice in a genre (romance) and sub-genre (romance, divorce, and single parenting). Since the genre and sub-genre are dominated by stories of women who have been wronged and who struggle being single parents, this novel shatters stereotypes.

The limited-omniscient perspective of Russell adds a sense of foreboding and drama to the novel, as readers only learn about things as Russell learns about them. Russell and readers do suspect things at time or have bad feelings, such as when Vivian begins working for Spannerman.

Language and Meaning

Nicholas Sparks tells his novel *Two by Two* is language that is gentle, casual, and straightforward. This is done for a few different reasons. Russell is characterized as a warm, gentle, and respectful man. As such, he uses no foul language, has a big heart, and is very kind. It is only natural that the language he uses be reflective of his moral character and his emotionally perceptive way of understanding and living his life. As such, he wears his heart on his sleeve, and his simple language is straight to the point. It is also heartrending. For example, consider how Russell determines to approach making his wife happy in Chapter 12 on page 197: “My marriage was important to me – my family was important to me –and I would do whatever it took to keep us together.” The casual, language on Russell’s part allows Sparks to deliver his thematic messages, such as that fathers are just as important as mothers, clearly and succinctly. There is no danger of misinterpretation that a wordy or fancifully-worded narrative might invoke.

Structure

Nicholas Sparks divides his novel *Two by Two* into twenty-six consecutive, linear, and chronological chapters supplemented by an epilogue. The bulk of Sparks’s novel spans the width of more than a year, though the first chapter and the epilogue span time before and after it. The logical progression of chapters walks readers through the time recounted in the novel, specifically the year between Russell’s divorce and his rediscovery of love with Emily.

Thus, the novel reflects a real life being lived step by step, one day at a time –or, in the case of the novel, one chapter at a time. Each chapter is numbered and given a title that reflects the events of the chapter itself. For example, Chapter 1: *And Baby Makes Three* involves Russell’s marriage and the later birth of baby London. Each chapter begins

with a set of memories from Russell's past which also has direct bearing on the events of that chapter. For example, Chapter 13's memory is about Marge nearly committing suicide. Most chapters in the novel are long (30 pages). Sparks breaks up chapters with unnumbered and untitled subsections divided by butterflies. The butterflies reflect the wings London wears at the Aquarium.



Quotes

It was more shock than anything, with a bit of terror mixed in.
-- Russell (Chapter 1)

Importance: Here, Russell explains his surprise regarding Vivian's announcing she is pregnant. He is thrilled that he will be a father, but also worries about the reality of the situation. He worries, like any normal father, about the family's finances and how the household will be made ready for baby London. He also worries how he will be as a father.

Age doesn't guarantee wisdom, any more than age guarantees intelligence.
-- Russell (Chapter 2)

Importance: Here, Russell reflects on his getting older when, at the age of thirty-five and against the advice of his father, Russell begins his own advertising company. The decision to do so creates chaos in Russell's marriage, as Vivian slams him for the decision. It ultimately leads to Vivian deciding to return to work,

Why, then, I sometimes wonder, do I feel as if that's not enough?
-- Russell (Chapter 4)

Importance: Russell reflects on how little time he has spent with London so far in her life because of work. He also reflects on how much he has missed out on with her, such as her first steps. Russell constantly tells London how much he loves her, and how he has always done his best. Still, Russell feels as if this is not enough.

Why, then, did I feel so unsettled?
-- Russell (Chapter 5)

Importance: Here, Russell describes his current situation as being "unsettled." There are several reasons why he makes the statement. He is technically unemployed. His wife has become distant. She is spending money like crazy, She is spending more and more time away from home prior to taking a job from Spannerman.

Two by two, I thought to myself as I made my way down the stairs. London and me, father and daughter, both of us doing the best we could. Even then, I felt like I was failing her, failing at everything.
-- Russell (Chapter 7)

Importance: With Vivian away for work, Russell now has his first real time alone with London. Russell reads to London about Noah and the ark and the animals going on board two by two. This causes Russell to reflect on how he and London are two in a changing world for them both. It is from this that the novel derives its title. Despite his best efforts, Russell feels like a failure.



My marriage was important to me –my family was important to me –and I would do whatever it took to keep us together.

-- Russell (Chapter 12)

Importance: Here, Russell betrays his romantic side and his need to please his wife. Vivian's manipulation is clear to Russell, but he values his marriage and his family over his own heartache. Despite his best efforts, nothing Russell can do will help prevent the divorce that is coming.

Vivian had left me. She was in love with someone else. I was a terrible husband, worthless, and I had failed.

-- Russell (Chapter 14)

Importance: Here, Russell reacts to Vivian leaving him for Walter. He blames himself completely, but also unfairly. Marge must remind Russell it is not his fault, but Russell cannot help but feel that it is. He feels as if he has failed and is worthless. He wonders if he has caused everything to happen by quitting his job.

But the way you've been taking care of her? I know it wasn't easy, but you just got up and did it, and she's a happy little girl. And that's what being a dad is all about. You do what needs to be done and love your kid the best way you can. You've been doing that and I'm real proud of you.

-- Russell's dad (Chapter 14)

Importance: In the first heart-to-heart talk Russell can ever remember having with his father, his father provides a needed boost of confidence. Russell's father is genuinely impressed with how Russell has been taking care of London, and tells Russell just that. This means a lot to Russell, who, with renewed confidence, does his best to handle the situation in which he finds himself.

My little girl was slowly but surely growing up, which for some reason made my heart ache in places I didn't know even existed.

-- Russell (Chapter 17)

Importance: When Russell and London agree to have date nights, London is thrilled. She gets dressed up and does her best to act like an adult, which melts Russell's heart. Though London is still very young, he realizes she is no longer only a baby, but getting older. It is the pull of the heart that comes with parents watching their children grow, and Russell is no exception to these feelings.

You have to fight for her... London should live with you.

-- Marge (Chapter 24)

Importance: After Marge is diagnosed with terminal cancer, she begins to sort out her affairs. Among these is to reinforce, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the fact that London should live with Russell. Marge realizes how important London and Russell are to each



other and how much more London needs Russell in her life than Vivian. It is essentially a dying request from Marge. Russell must fight for London.

Why do you think I put my house up for sale?
-- Emily (Epilogue)

Importance: Russell decides to move to Atlanta so that he can have joint custody of London. He dreads breaking the news to Emily, but he learns Emily will be selling her house to move to Atlanta with Bodhi so that they can both be with Russell and London. As such, marriage between Russell and Emily seems likely.

I'd survived the year because I'd been able to march two by two with those I loved the most...
-- Russell (Epilogue)

Importance: Here, Russell reflects on the challenges, trials, heartbreaks, and successes of the past year. He realizes he is a better, stronger man now than he was a year ago. He also realizes he was able to make it through the year going two by two with those who meant the most to him in his life –London, Marge, Emily, his parents, and Liz. It is a happy ending to an otherwise sad year.