

# The Notebook



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NICHOLAS SPARKS

Born in Omaha, Nebraska, Nicholas Sparks and his family moved around the United States frequently as his father pursued graduate studies in Minnesota and California. After graduating as the valedictorian of Bella Vista High School in Fair Oaks, California, Sparks enrolled at the University of Notre Dame. Sparks graduated early after meeting the woman who would become his wife in 1988. Shortly thereafter, the two of them moved to New Bern, North Carolina—a place neither of them had ever been to. The town of New Bern would become the setting for Sparks's first novel, *The Notebook*, which he wrote in his spare time while working in the pharmaceutical industry. Sparks was an undiscovered writer when he sold *The Notebook* for \$1 million advance in 1996. The book hit *The New York Times* Best Seller list in its first week of publication, and Sparks's career as a lauded writer of romance novels began. The author of over 20 novels (and 11 *New York Times* bestsellers) including *A Walk to Remember*, *Nights in Rodanthe*, and *The Last Song*, Sparks's romantic books have been widely adapted into movies starring Rachel McAdams, Ryan Gosling, Miley Cyrus, Richard Gere, and numerous other lauded actors and actresses. As of 2020, Sparks is rumored to be working on a TV follow-up to the wildly successful film version of *The Notebook*.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The main action of *The Notebook* is set in October of 1946—barely a year after the end of World War II. The lingering emotional effects of the war, and the Great Depression which preceded it, can be felt throughout the novel. Noah fights in Europe during the war (and loses his friend Fin to a torpedo while there) while Allie remains stateside and volunteers at a local hospital in Raleigh. Both Allie and Noah are traumatized by the horrors of war. Allie, who meets Lon while volunteering, retreats into a relationship with him in order to “dr[i]ve all her fears away” and numb herself to the pain she witnesses. Noah, meanwhile, throws himself into fixing up an old house as soon as he returns home from Europe, working day and night to distract himself from the old pain of missing Allie as well as the new traumas of witnessing so much loss and violence. When Noah and Allie reconnect in New Bern, Allie marvels at how strong Noah seems compared to the men “destroyed by war” she’s seen over the last several years—yet in spite of her observation that the world is “rushing forward [and] leaving behind the horrors of war,” Allie senses that forgetting the past too quickly, in spite of the sadness or

“horrors” it might hold, is a dual-edged sword. Allie’s conflicting thoughts about leaving the past behind reflect accurately the sentiments with which many Americans struggled in the wake of World War II. The desire to move on, reinvigorate the economy, and get back to life as usual conflicted with people’s lingering traumas in the wake of the massive human rights violations and unprecedented losses of the Holocaust and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*The Notebook* is part of a long tradition of novels centered around an unlikely romance between two individuals from very different backgrounds. Drawing inspiration from romance novels about wealth, status, and class such as Jane Austen’s classics *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, *The Notebook* offers a contemporary twist on a tale as old as time. Some other contemporary romance novels which engage similar issues of love, destiny, wealth, and class include Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You* and even E.L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *The Notebook* is also a unique romance novel because it focuses on two characters who are near the ends of their lives. Other romance novels which feature the tragic death of one (or both) of its central lovers, either due to illness or an accident, include John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*, Nicola Yoon’s *Everything, Everything*, and even two of Nicholas Sparks’s other novels, *Nights in Rodanthe* and *Message in a Bottle*. Throughout the novel, Noah makes repeated references to his favorite book, Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, as well as poems by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Sir Charles Sedley.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Notebook
- **When Written:** 1990s
- **Where Written:** New Bern, NC
- **When Published:** 1996
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Romance
- **Setting:** New Bern, North Carolina
- **Climax:** After reuniting with Noah and having sex with him, Allie learns that her fiancé, Lon, has come to New Bern to demand that Allie make a decision between him and Noah once and for all.
- **Antagonist:** Anne Nelson; Lon Hammond, Jr.
- **Point of View:** *The Notebook* alternates between Noah’s first-person account of his and Allie’s present-day lives in a North Carolina nursing home and limited third-person retrospectives from both his and Allie’s points of view.

## EXTRA CREDIT

**In-Laws in Love.** Nicholas Sparks has stated that he was inspired to write *The Notebook* after finding himself feeling touched and moved by the love story of his wife's grandparents. When Sparks first met them, they had been married for 60 years—and yet the depths of their enduring love for each other were, according to Sparks, awe-inspiring. Though Sparks took liberties with their story and invented the narrative of Noah and Allie on his own, meeting them is what motivated him to write a tale of a love that endured through the years as theirs had.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Eighty-year-old Noah Calhoun, who lives in a nursing home in North Carolina, describes the lonely and sometimes painful nature of his final days. Noah knows that he has lived an ordinary life by most people's standards, but he insists that having known "perfect love" has been enough for him. Noah wanders down the cold halls of the nursing home to visit the room of another patient—a woman—who barely acknowledges him as he sits down beside her, opens up a small **notebook**, and begins to read to her. Noah is hopeful that today will be the day a miracle happens.

The story flashes back to October of 1946. As dusk falls, Noah sits on the porch of his sprawling **home** in New Bern, North Carolina. Noah is proud of the work he's done on the old plantation house—a few weeks ago, a reporter even came to interview him about it and take pictures. Noah is a simple man who spends his days kayaking, reading poetry, and playing guitar with his neighbor Gus. But all the while, Noah pines for a lost love: in 1932, he shared an intense, romantic summer with a young woman named Allie Nelson whose family came to visit New Bern for several months. At the end of the summer, after losing their virginities to each other, Noah and Allie parted ways. Though Noah wrote Allie many letters, she never answered them, and he has not heard from her or seen her since.

The following morning, Allie arrives in New Bern from Raleigh to visit Noah—and to tell him about her engagement to the wealthy lawyer Lon Hammond, Jr. Allie has recently read a newspaper article about Noah's renovated house and, in the weeks since, has been unable to think of anything else—even though her wedding to Lon is just weeks away. Allie has come to New Bern under the guise of going antiquing. As Allie bathes, dresses, and gathers her courage to head out to visit Noah, the narrative switches back to Noah's point of view as he reflects on the years since Allie's departure from New Bern. After heading up north in search of work at the height of the Great Depression, Noah found a job at a scrap yard owned by the kindly Morris Goldman, a man who took a shine to Noah. When

Noah returned from fighting in World War II, he found that Morris had left him a significant portion of the company. Noah bought the plantation house and the surrounding land with the funds, and in the 11 months since, he's dedicated himself day and night to fixing up the property. Lost in thought, Noah finishes his daily tasks, showers, and sits out on the porch. He is surprised when he spots a car coming down the drive—and he is even more shocked when Allie steps out of it.

After standing and staring at each other, Allie and Noah embrace excitedly. Allie tells Noah about having found the article and compliments him on his beautiful handiwork. She apologizes for showing up out of the blue, but Noah assures her that he's excited to see her. Allie tells Noah about her engagement, and the two of them take a walk down to the river. As Allie tells Noah about Lon, he senses hesitation in her voice. Noah invites Allie to stay for dinner, and she accepts. Allie and Noah continue reminiscing about their summer together as they prepare dinner and tour the house. When Noah asks Allie why she never answered his letters, she becomes confused—she says she never got any letters. Soon, Allie realizes that her mother, Anne, who disapproved of Noah for being of a lower social class, must have confiscated the letters. Noah asks Allie if she thinks they'd still be together if she had gotten the letters, and she admits that she thinks they would be.

Noah then asks Allie about Lon and about her passion for **painting**. Allie admits that she gave art up despite going to college for it. Noah takes Allie to the living room and shows her that he has hung a painting she gave him long ago over the fireplace—he assures her that she is a true artist and should give painting another shot. Over dinner, Allie realizes that she and Lon never talk as freely as she's conversing with Noah. After dinner, as Noah reads Allie poetry on the porch, Allie feels a sensual stirring inside of her and thinks that she doesn't feel this kind of passion for Lon. Overwhelmed, Allie leaves in a hurry. As Noah walks her to her car, he invites her back the following day. Allie accepts his invitation and returns to the inn, unaware that Lon has been trying to call her room all night long.

The next day, as Allie and Noah enjoy their separate mornings, they find themselves lost in thoughts of each other. Noah kayaks as he does every morning, while Allie heads to a department store to purchase some art supplies and make a couple of quick sketches. At noon, Allie drives out to Noah's, where Noah tells her he is taking her for a surprise. Allie follows Noah down to the river and hops into his canoe. The two set off down the river, again reminiscing about their summer of love as they paddle downstream. When Noah turns off into a small lake, he tells Allie to close her eyes. When she opens them again, she finds that Noah has led them to a secluded cove—they are surrounded by hundreds of swans. After feeding the birds, Allie and Noah notice thunder and lightning approaching. They begin rowing home, but they get trapped in

the storm anyway. Allie laughs rapturously as she and Noah are soaked to the bone. Back at the house, Allie and Noah sit in front of the fireplace and sip bourbon as they continue reminiscing about the summer of 1932. When Allie asks Noah if he recalls having sex at the end of the summer, neither of them can resist their feelings any longer. Overcome by passion, the two have sex by the fire. Meanwhile, back in Raleigh, Lon asks for an adjournment in the case he's working on. He tells the judge he has urgent business to attend to over the weekend, and the judge urges him to be back by Monday at nine. Lon accepts the judge's mandate and hurries to his car to begin the drive to New Bern.

The next morning, Allie and Noah are in the kitchen when there is a knock at the door. Noah goes to answer it—and he's shocked to find himself face to face with Allie's mother, Anne Nelson. Noah welcomes Anne in, and he and Allie sit with her in the living room. Anne tells Allie that she's noticed her behavior was strange for weeks—and she knew it had to be due to the article about Noah. Anne warns Allie that Lon is on the way—he called the house last night deeply upset, having figured out what Allie was doing in New Bern. Before leaving, Anne gives Allie the letters from Noah and urges her to “follow [her] heart” as she chooses what path her life will take. After Anne leaves, Noah asks Allie what she wants to do. She tells him she is afraid of hurting or upsetting anyone. Noah, however, insists that Allie must do what she wants to do—she must live a life which doesn't constantly force her to keep looking back and wondering what could have been. Allie begins crying, and Noah tells Allie he already knows she won't stay. He walks her to her car and helps her inside. He tells her he loves her before she starts the engine, but Allie stoically begins driving away without looking back. Allie continues crying all the way to the inn. When she arrives, she spots Lon's car in the parking lot. She turns off the engine and reads Noah's final letter to her, from March of 1935, as she puzzles over what to say to Lon. By the time Allie is finished reading Noah's last note, she knows exactly what to say, and she heads into the inn with purpose.

The narrative returns to the frame story in the future. Noah finishes reading the notebook and closes it. His female companion—whom readers can now infer is Allie—is comforted by the story and asks if Noah wrote it himself. Noah says that while he didn't write it, it is a true story. Allie tells Noah that she has a question for him but doesn't want to hurt his feelings—she asks him, confusedly, who he is. Noah becomes lost in thought as he reflects on the full, beautiful life he and Allie made together. They have four children and many grandchildren, and Allie is a world-famous painter—yet most days, her Alzheimer's disease prevents her from remembering any of this. Nevertheless, Noah reads to Allie each day in hopes of jogging her memory and enjoying just a few lucid moments with her. Noah spends much of his free time reading old letters and looking at old photographs, reminiscing about the past.

One day, Noah invites Allie on a walk, and she accepts. Together, as they walk the grounds of the nursing home, Allie continues asking questions about the story and inquiring about Noah's own life. Allie tells Noah that she believes she has a secret admirer—she tells him she often finds notes and poems tucked into her coat pockets or under her pillow. Noah chuckles and leads Allie back up to her room, where the nurses have set out a candlelight dinner for the two of them. The nurses are charmed by Noah's devotion to Allie and help him woo her every chance they get. As Allie and Noah sit down to dinner and listen to music playing on the stereo, Allie recognizes Noah and tells him she's always loved him. The two of them enjoy a couple of blissful hours together eating and talking—but soon, Allie begins fading away again. She is suddenly unable to recognize Noah and begins screaming for the nurses, who come down the hall to sedate her and remove Noah from her room.

Noah endures several lonely, foggy days without Allie. One morning, while looking through old letters again, he experiences pain, numbness, and loss of vision—he knows he is having a stroke. After two weeks of being intubated and moving in and out of consciousness, Noah is finally cleared to return to the nursing home. On his first night back, he spends hours losing himself in old letters, photos, and memories before shuffling down the hall toward Allie's room, having missed her terribly. Though Noah is not supposed to visit Allie after dark, the night nurse, Janice, lets Noah pass. She tells him how much she admires him and how inspired she is by his and Allie's enduring love. In Allie's room, Noah sits at the edge of the bed and slips a poem beneath her pillow as she sleeps. He cannot stop himself from caressing her face. Allie wakes and turns to face him. Noah is afraid she won't recognize him and will begin screaming—but instead, she smiles and addresses him by name, tells him how deeply she's missed him, and begins undoing the buttons of his shirt.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Noah Calhoun** – Noah Calhoun is a spiritual, hardworking **poet** whose connection to nature, language, and the simpler things in life have carried him through years of loneliness as he pines for his lost love, Allie Nelson. The primary protagonist and narrator of the novel, Noah has lived a hard life. After losing his mother as a baby, Noah struggled with a stutter as a child. To cope with this, Noah's father taught him to memorize poems by Walt Whitman and Alfred Tennyson. As a teenager in 1932, Noah meets Allie, a wealthy socialite, and has a passionate summer of love with her. He writes Allie for years after this, but she never responds. As an adult, Noah is still reeling from the ravages of the Great Depression and the trauma of fighting in World War II, during which he lost his childhood best friend, Fin, and his beloved employer, Morris Goldman. With money given to him

by Goldman, Noah undertakes the renovation of a plantation **house** in his hometown of New Bern—and the article written about it in a local paper draws Allie to New Bern once again. Allie is the “ghost” Noah has been outrunning all his life—considered too poor to be a good match by Allie’s parents, Noah feels he and Allie never got a fair shot at being together. When Allie arrives in New Bern, Noah is shocked yet delighted. As they reconnect and fall in love again over a weekend, Noah shares his simple but passionate way of life with Allie—and he shows her just how deeply he respects her as a woman, an **artist**, and a soul. The older Noah, who narrates the beginning and ending of the novel, is a man in his eighties riddled with rheumatoid arthritis and facing down a battle with prostate cancer—yet his physical woes are dwarfed by the emotionally taxing reality that Allie, now his beloved wife of 49 years, has lost her memories to Alzheimer’s. The determined Noah refuses to lose faith in the power of love: every day he reads to Allie from the notebook containing their love story. Noah is the beating heart of *The Notebook*, and his steadfast belief in his and Allie’s destiny to be together gives Allie the confidence to choose passion over logic, love over resignation, and spiritual fulfillment over material wealth, creating a life and a family with Noah that both of them are proud of.

**Allie Nelson** – Allie Nelson, the secondary protagonist and narrator of the novel, is a sensitive and romantic young woman who finds herself at a crossroads between passion and logic as she questions her choices and revisits her past love with Noah Calhoun in the weeks before her wedding to Lon Hammond, Jr. The narrative switches between Noah and Allie’s perspectives for much of the book, allowing the reader insights into Allie’s thoughts and feelings as she reconnects with Noah, the country boy with whom she had an unforgettable, passionate, and deeply romantic summer fling back in 1932. Though it has been 14 years since that summer at the start of the novel, Allie finds herself pulled toward memories of Noah after seeing an article about his renovation of a sprawling **house** in New Bern, North Carolina. Allie becomes determined to seek him out and tell him about her engagement to the wealthy and powerful Raleigh lawyer Lon Hammond, Jr. in person. As Allie journeys to New Bern, she is anxious and uncertain about what she’s doing and where her life is headed. But as she reunites with Noah and gets to know him anew, she becomes more confident in herself; more romantic and instinctual in her words and actions; and more connected to the carefree, **artistic**, spiritual young girl she once was. Despite Allie’s mother, Anne’s, resignations about Noah and Allie’s own internal conflict, she ultimately chooses to be with Noah instead of Lon—they’ve been married for 49 years in the novel’s frame story. Together, Noah and Allie have four children, and Noah supports Allie in her career as a renowned painter. Allie’s character arc ties in with all of the novel’s major themes: as a young woman she confronts ideas of love, destiny, and social class. In the frame story of the novel, the older Allie is suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and is

forced to reckon with the unhappy intersection of memory, pain, and mortality. Though the older Allie loses her memories of the love she and Noah once shared, it is ultimately revealed that she and Noah together composed a **notebook** containing the story of their romance—and when Noah reads it to Allie, she often returns to herself and enjoys fleeting moments in which her memories come back and guard her against the pain of her encroaching mortality. Introspective, sensual, amorous, and deeply intelligent, Allie’s journey demonstrates just how important passion, instinct, and a surrender to the power of love can be in the course of one’s life.

**Lon Hammond, Jr.** – Lon Hammond, Jr. is Allie’s fiancé; he’s an intelligent and hardworking lawyer who comes from a wealthy, powerful family who made their money in the cotton industry long ago. Allie describes Lon as caring, gentlemanly, hardworking, and steady—yet as she reconnects with Noah 14 years after their summer fling, she finds herself comparing Lon to Noah in more nuanced ways. Lon has never understood Allie’s ambitions as an artist—when she’s showed him her **paintings** in the past, he’s reacted with indifference or confusion. Lon is a hardworking provider, but his hours are so long and his cases so demanding that he and Allie rarely talk deeply about their lives, memories, or opinions—Lon is barely even home for dinner once a week. Allie also begins to realize that while she does love Lon, the love she feels for him is chaste—she has no passion for him. Though scheduled to be wed in three weeks, the two of them have never had sex. Most of what the reader knows of Lon comes through Allie, though there are two short chapters which show Lon’s inquisitive, analytical brain at work as he puzzles over Allie’s sudden trip to the coast to go “antiquing.” It is clear that while Lon genuinely cares for Allie, he sees her as a practical match or even a possession—he does not appreciate the fullness of who she is as Noah does. When Allie tells Lon that she wants to be with Noah, Lon is gracious, understanding, and even wishes Allie well, demonstrating that he is exactly the cool, logical gentleman she has always known him to be.

**Anne Nelson** – Anne Nelson is Allie’s strait-laced mother. Anne disapproves of Allie and Noah’s summer fling in 1932, believing that Noah is “too poor” to be a suitable match for her daughter. As a result of her fear about Allie and Noah becoming serious, Anne confiscates the many **letters** Noah sends to Allie after the Nelson family departs New Bern at the end of the summer, keeping them from Allie for 14 years. When Anne learns that Allie has traveled to New Bern under the guise of antiquing to reconnect with Noah, Anne follows Allie out to the coast to deliver the letters to her and to warn her that Lon, too, has figured out what Allie is up to and is on his way. Though Anne defends her actions 14 years ago, in giving the letters to Allie, she also concedes that Allie must be in charge of her own fate. She encourages Allie to follow her heart as she makes a decision between Lon and Noah. Although Anne is buttoned-up

and slightly cold, she's perhaps a secret romantic at heart; Allie believes that her mother ultimately wants her to choose love over logic and emotional fulfillment over material wealth.

**Gus** – Gus is an elderly black man who lives down the road from Noah. The two are friends as well as neighbors—the two men spend several nights a week together playing music, drinking, and talking on Noah's porch. Gus is old and wise, and he rightly assesses Noah's longing for the "ghost" of his first love, Allie. Gus urges Noah to see that he'll never be able to forget such a great love, and to embrace rather than resent the fact that his love for Allie will stay with him forever.

**Morris Goldman** – Morris is the kind and funny Jewish owner of a scrap yard in New Jersey. Noah goes to work for Morris after leaving New Bern to find work during the Great Depression and soon becomes the man's favorite employee. When Noah enlists in the army to fight in World War II, he receives a letter from Morris that entitles Noah to a small percentage of the scrap yard business. After fighting in Europe, Noah returns home from Europe to find that Morris has both liquidated his assets and died, leaving Noah his share of the company—over \$70,000. The money from the generous Morris enables Noah to buy and renovate a large plantation **house** back in New Bern.

**Janice** – Janice is a nurse at the nursing home where Noah and Allie live in their old age. Though normally a rule-follower, Janice has a soft spot for Noah, and she sometimes allows him to visit Allie's room after hours after admitting how moved she is by Noah and Allie's enduring love.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Fin** – Fin is one of Noah's best childhood friends from New Bern. A sweet and fun-loving boy who befriends Allie during her summer in New Bern, Fin later dies in 1943 while fighting in World War II.

**Sarah** – Sarah is one of Noah's childhood friends from New Bern.

**Dr. Barnwell** – Dr. Barnwell is the doctor who first diagnoses the elderly Allie with Alzheimer's disease. A kind and empathetic man, Barnwell takes care of both Allie and Noah in the nursing home where they live.

**Martha Shaw** – Martha Shaw is a war widow and Noah's neighbor in New Bern. Noah regularly helps Martha, a single mother of three, with home repairs and small favors. In return, Martha often brings over homemade food and baked goods.

**Clem** – Clem is Noah's excitable three-legged dog.

occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## LOVE AND DESTINY

In the world of *The Notebook*, love overcomes all: class, logic, and even disease. Nicholas Sparks portrays love as an unstoppable power with the ability to change and bring purpose to one's life. Indeed, when Noah Calhoun and Allie Nelson meet in New Bern, North Carolina in 1932, it is love at first sight. After a summer of love, they are torn apart when Allie's family leaves town and Allie's mother begins confiscating the letters Noah writes—but 14 years later, they find one another and discover that their love is stronger than ever. By showing how love comes to define Noah and Allie's lives, Sparks ultimately suggests that love is a force which can steer one's destiny.

Sparks uses Noah and Allie's states of mind at the start of the novel to show how their lives have been defined by their love for each other—regardless of whether they want to accept that fact or not. When readers meet Noah, it is October of 1946—over a decade since his love affair with Allie. He lives alone in a renovated **plantation home** with only a three-legged dog for company. During conversations with his neighbor, Gus, Gus can tell that Noah is still hung up on his "first love." "No matter what you do," Gus warns Noah, "she'll stay with you forever." Though Noah tries to write off Gus's words, everything about Noah's life—a life lived on pause—demonstrates their truth. Sparks uses Noah's self-imposed physical and emotional isolation to show how his life is defined by his love for Allie—even if he hasn't heard from her in 14 years. Noah lives alone in a giant old house that he's spent years working day and night to repair, and he admits that he worked so hard on the house in order to distract himself from the "ghosts" of his past—namely, Allie. Sparks uses the image of the house to demonstrate Noah's longing to continue building his life with space in it for Allie: he fixes up a place they both loved in hopes that one day she will return to him.

Allie, too, is living a life defined by Noah's absence at the start of the novel, further demonstrating how love can be a long-lasting, influential, and guiding force in one's life. Even after an affair has ended, a past love can still define one's destiny. Though Allie has, at first glance, moved on and found love with the wealthy lawyer Lon Hammond, Allie embarks on a trip to New Bern weeks before her wedding to see Noah one last time. Allie has chosen to risk her wealth, her status, and her reputation by coming to visit Noah, yet she finds that the love she and Noah shared years ago is a more profound force in her life than anything else in her present. Allie is compelled to drive to New Bern to tell Noah about her engagement after seeing his picture in the paper alongside an article about his renovated house. Within hours of reconnecting with Noah, exploring the



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes

house, and telling him about Lon, she admits to Noah that there is something missing in her life—she tells Noah she is still “look[ing] for the kind of love [the two of them] had.” While Allie has tried to move on, her life remains defined by her love for Noah. Allie privately admits to herself that she has created a psychological divide “to separate the pain from the pleasure”—in other words, Allie has attempted to use her relationship with Lon to distance herself from the pain of losing touch with Noah.

Sparks goes on to show how love has the power to guide one through even the most difficult decisions. After reconnecting, Allie and Noah experience a tumultuous series of events, as Allie’s mother, Anne, and Lon both show up in New Bern. Anne quickly realizes that Allie has never stopped loving Noah, and she even advises Allie to “follow [her] heart”—but Allie fears disappointing and hurting Lon. As she leaves Noah’s house and heads downtown to meet with Lon, Allie has no idea what to do—but when she reads Noah’s old **letters** in the parking lot of the inn where Lon is waiting for her, Allie is reminded of the overpowering force of the love she and Noah once shared, and she allows this love to guide her as she heads inside to tell Lon her decision. Then, portion of the story set in 1946 ends abruptly and the narrative flashes forward to the present, where Noah and Allie, elderly and frail, live together in a nursing home. This demonstrates that in spite of all the uncertainty Noah and Allie’s relationship faced, love won out over everything after all. In Sparks estimation, the details are unimportant: all that matters is that for Allie and Noah, love was ultimately a powerful enough force to blot out all indecision. Tired of their lives being defined by each other’s absences, Allie and Noah allowed their love to take the reins of their lives and define it in a different way. Decades later, the flash-forward shows, they are still together, and their lives still revolve around each other—even as Allie struggles with Alzheimer’s and Noah faces down a third bout of cancer. This demonstrates Sparks’ argument that love is a powerful enough force to subsume all else and steer two people’s lives forever.

“I am who I am because of you,” Noah writes to Allie in a letter shortly after he learns of her Alzheimer’s diagnosis. Even in the face of an unpredictable turn of fate, Noah maintains that it is the love he and Allie share—not any other outside force—which has been, and will remain, the defining force of their lives. As Sparks tells their tale, he suggests that just as love transforms his characters’ lives, it can alter the life of anyone willing to surrender to it.



### WEALTH AND FULFILLMENT

Allie and Noah, the central lovers in *The Notebook*, come from very different social backgrounds: Allie is a socialite, while Noah comes from a modest, working-class background. The main obstacle to their love is the external pressure Allie faces to marry a wealthy, socially

powerful husband—and as the novel progresses, Sparks shows how irrelevant money, status, and social standing are in the face of deeper pursuits. Sparks ultimately argues that while money and status are seen as traditional markers of success, society should instead measure a person’s true wealth by how meaningful and fulfilled their life is: the loving relationships they have, the meaningful work they accomplish, and their connections to nature and their innermost selves.

Noah’s disregard for money and his focus on hard work demonstrate Sparks’s argument that the fullness of one’s life cannot be measured by what’s in a person’s wallet or by how powerful their connections may be. Thinking about money bores Noah, who’s a passionate nature-lover—he has always enjoyed “things that [can’t] be bought, and he [has] a hard time understanding people who [feel] otherwise.” Though Noah came into a small fortune after the war, when his old boss Morris Goldman died and left him a portion of his scrapyard’s earnings, Noah used the money not to buy fancy things or seek social advancement—instead, he poured the savings into fixing up an old **house** mostly on his own, creating a home and tending to the rivers and fields surrounding it. Noah, who was raised in a humble household by a hardworking single father, knows at a young age that one’s life should be measured not by wealth but by spiritual fullness and connection to things larger than social status and material possessions. He doesn’t worship money the way Allie’s family does—and when he finds himself financially secure due to Goldman’s generosity, he doesn’t hoard the money. Instead, he uses it to pursue a deeper connection to the things he cares about: nature, stillness, and hard work.

While Noah’s working-class background and love of nature have instilled in him a disdain for money, socialite Allie’s wealthy parents have taught her that money and social status are the most important things in the world. Allie is from a well-to-do Raleigh family—and as such, she’s expected to marry a man who will elevate her own position and her family’s as well. Though Allie loves Noah, her parents disapprove of the match and discourage her from pursuing him beyond their summer fling. “It wasn’t that they didn’t like him,” Sparks writes; “it was that he was from a different class, too poor, and they would never approve if their daughter became serious with someone like him.” Allie’s family measures success only in terms of wealth and status. They see nothing in Noah, even though his life is rich in other ways: he is spiritual, artistic, thoughtful, and deeply connected to nature and hard work. None of those things are important to the Nelsons—yet as Allie begins to reckon with the choice she’s about to make in marrying the wealthy, powerful Lon, she digs deep within herself and finds that the qualities Noah possesses are more important to her than money. With Noah, Allie can know true love—and she yearns to measure her life not in the material wealth she stands to accrue, but in the spiritual and emotional growth love can

provide for her.

In spite of the pressures placed upon her shoulders by her parents, Allie ultimately decides that love, passion, and spiritual and artistic fulfillment are more important to her than money or status. She leaves Lon and pursues a life with Noah, dedicating herself to **art**, family, nature, and the small pleasures of a simple life. While Allie doesn't live the high-society lifestyle with Noah that she would have with Lon, Sparks shows how her life is richer with the one she loves. At the end of their lives together, Allie and Noah are confined to a nursing home—yet as Noah reminisces about their lives together, poring over old **letters** he and Allie exchanged and thinking about the children they've raised, he finds himself content in his choices and bolstered by the happiness Allie found with him. With Noah's love and support, Allie became a famous painter and a devoted mother—she experiences true fulfillment in her life and never stops to wonder about or pine for the fleeting material riches a life with Lon might have brought her. Her love for Noah—as well as her immense inner strength, her artistic fulfillment, and her connection to her children—are the things that brought her happiness rather than money or status.

Sparks knows that love is a powerful force—but he also knows that in a society where success is measured in terms of the tangible, people often choose the pursuit of material wealth over spiritual or emotional wealth. Through *The Notebook*, Sparks argues that society should encourage people to evaluate success not in terms of financial or social capital, but by the love they've shared and the relationships they've built.



### MEMORY, PAIN, AND MORTALITY

The frame story of *The Notebook* is set in a nursing home, where the older versions of Noah and Allie are living out their final days together in the midst of great suffering. Allie has been struggling with Alzheimer's for four years and, on most days, has no idea who she is or who Noah is to her. Noah, meanwhile, lives in constant pain due to rheumatoid arthritis and several battles with cancer. As both characters confront their imminent mortality, Nicholas Sparks demonstrates how vital memory is in the final stages of life, or in any stage of life accompanied by great suffering. As he shows Allie struggling to hold onto her memory—and Noah's efforts to cling to the past and their stories for the both of them—Sparks argues that memory is a shield and a balm in the face of pain and mortality.

Noah and Allie are, in the frame story and present timeline of *The Notebook*, an elderly couple confined to a nursing home. Allie and Noah have shared “a lifetime of memories”—yet Allie, deep in the throes of Alzheimer's disease, cannot remember who Noah is or what he means to her. By shifting from the 1946 narrative in Noah's titular **notebook** to the present day in the novel's final section, Sparks shows how past memories help

the elderly Noah and Allie shield themselves from pain, fear, and uncertainty as they approach death. “We are in the final minutes in the day of our lives,” the older Noah says of his and Allie's current circumstances, “and the clock is ticking. Loudly.” The “clock” of mortality is constant and deafening in Noah's ears. The only thing that comforts him are the memories of the love he and Allie shared, the **art** and writing they created, and the children they raised together. He is devastated, however, by the fact that Allie cannot share in these memories with him due to her Alzheimer's. Though Noah can help shield himself from the fear of mortality by retreating into memories of happier times, the woman he loves cannot. This creates within Noah the need to help Allie access her memories, even in the face of her debilitating disease—he knows that the only way to help her feel less alone and less afraid is to trigger within her the knowledge that she has lived a full, beautiful life and created a legacy to be proud of.

By exploring the unique challenges Allie faces in her old age as she struggles with Alzheimer's, Sparks hammers home the ways in which memories can help one face down mortality—and how the absence of comforting memories can exacerbate one's fears toward the end of life. On most days, Allie has no idea who Noah is—or who she herself is. Noah reads to her from the notebook containing the story of their lives nearly every day, hoping for one of the rare moments when Allie's memories are triggered and she remembers who they are to one another. Noah does this for himself because he misses Allie terribly—but it soon becomes clear that he also takes on the burden of recalling their story of their lives for both of them. “Help me remember who I am,” Allie begs Noah one afternoon when he finishes reading to her. “Or at least, who I was. I feel so lost.” Allie's plea indicates how lost she feels without her memories. Even in her disoriented state, she knows that something is missing. Noah is the only one who can restore to her the memories of happier times—memories which will help ease her pain, confusion, and sense of loss. There are rare days when Noah, after reading the notebook to Allie, finds himself rewarded when Allie breaks through the haze of her dementia and suddenly remembers who Noah is and all they've shared together. In these moments, Noah feels “young again,” no longer “deformed” or in pain—he is “the luckiest man alive” for the short time Allie is able to remember him. This shows that Noah's uncertain project of stirring up Allie's memories benefits them both. When they are able to rejoice in the memories of their lives together, they both feel comforted—and, for just a little while, they are able to feel insulated from the ravages of time and disease and the steady creep of mortality.

Toward the end of life, when memories are all one has, recollections of days gone are a shield against the encroachment of death and the constant reminders of life's fleeting nature. Noah and Allie find relief in remembering the

life they built together and the legacies they will leave behind. Even as their bodies and minds deteriorate, their fight to remember their shared past together gives them purpose and hope.



## COMFORT AND LOGIC VS. PASSION AND INSTINCT

When Allie returns to New Bern, North Carolina to visit Noah—and to revisit her past—she finds herself swept up once more in the passion that marked her carefree teenage years. Reminded of the intense, overpowering, almost instinctual love she had for Noah years ago, Allie finds herself faced with a decision between the comfort and sensibility of her engagement to the wealthy Lon Hammond and the passion associated with her relationship with Noah. Through Allie's profound struggle, Nicholas Sparks explores the wide gulf between the safety of the status quo and the terrifying but thrilling draw of the unknown. Ultimately, Sparks suggests that the right choice is not always the easiest one—and that sometimes, one must leave comfort and logic behind in order to experience life to the fullest.

Throughout *The Notebook*, Sparks uses the central conflict of Allie's need to choose between two suitors, Noah and Lon, to illustrate how painful the choice between a safe, logical option and an uncertain but impassioned, instinctual decision can be. While Allie initially believes that “passion [...] fade[s] in time, and things like companionship and compatibility [...] take its place,” after reconnecting with Noah, she begins to see how important passion, instinct, and feeling truly are. At the start of the novel, Allie seems ready to settle down with her fiancé, Lon. Lon is a powerful lawyer from a wealthy family—he is a strait-laced provider, and a marriage to him would open up a new world of social mobility and material wealth for Allie. Allie's love for Lon is restrained and nearly chaste—she loves him in a quiet, passionless way, and her attraction to him is rooted in his ability to give her the stable yet luxurious life she believes she's always wanted. Lon represents comfort, safety, and logic: to choose him would be to choose certainty, ease, stability, and socioeconomic security. “Though he wasn't Noah, Lon was a good man, the kind of man she'd always known she would marry. With Lon there would be no surprises, and there was comfort in knowing [...] the future would bring [...] the kind of life she'd always expected to live.” Allie thinks these words privately about Lon while weighing her relationship with him against her memories of the passion she and Noah once shared. Allie tells herself that what she wants is what she has “always expected”—she feels that to challenge herself or her values would be to open herself up to the unexpected and the uncertain. Allie, who has been raised to value sensibility, safety, and security, is scared to live an unscripted life. However, as she begins to realize that she's only staying with Lon out of fear for what leaving him would mean, she begins to reconsider the

importance of comfort, logic, and surety in her life.

Though Allie's head tells her to choose Lon, her heart urges her to choose Noah, with whom she once shared a wild summer of love and an intense, powerful connection. Though Noah and Allie were only together for one summer, the times they shared made an indelible mark on Allie—and 14 years later, she's left questioning whether she is making the right decision in marrying Lon. Allie's love for Noah represents the intense, passionate side of her personality—the side she has repressed in order to convince herself that to follow her heart would be reckless and ill-advised. “Poets often describe love as an emotion that we can't control, one that overwhelms logic and common sense,” Noah tells Allie during a journey down the river during their period of reconnection in New Bern. He knows from Allie's confessions about her bland but comfortable relationship with Lon that she is only partly fulfilled. Noah wants to urge Allie to realize her life's true potential—to push herself out of her comfort zone and give herself over to the passion and instinctual connection that has always defined their own relationship. Ultimately, Allie does choose the passion Noah represents over the comfortable but passionless and stale companionship she's found in Lon. With Noah's support, Allie is able to pursue her dreams of being an **artist** and unapologetically take professional, emotional, and financial risks. Allie's life with Noah is colorful and unpredictable—she realizes her long-repressed dream of becoming a famous artist, she experiences life lived through the lens of her and Noah's shared passions for nature and stillness, and before losing her memories to Alzheimer's, she ultimately writes Noah a **letter** thanking him for instilling in her (and in their children) a reverence for life's unpredictability.

As Nicholas Sparks explores the choice between comfort and logic versus passion and instinct, he investigates a nearly universal struggle. Sparks knows that when it comes to love, security, and the metrics by which society measures success, it is tempting to choose the safest, surest route. But through *The Notebook*, he suggests that in order to truly understand the deepest emotions and most profound experiences life has to offer, one must choose to surrender to passion and instinct rather than simply sticking to the status quo.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## WRITING

Throughout *The Notebook*, writing—particularly poetry and letters—symbolizes memory's power to enrich, enliven, and transform one's life in times of pain and sadness. At the start of the novel, writing and poetry are most

important to Noah: in spite of his working-class background and lack of higher education, he's well-versed in Transcendentalist poetry that he learned from his now-deceased father, who taught Noah to read and recite poetry in order to help him overcome a childhood stutter. As an adult, Noah lives alone in a **house** he has renovated top-to-bottom in order to distract himself from the trauma of World War II and the pain of missing his first love, Allie. He uses poetry to calm himself and to remind himself of his childhood—in this way, poetry symbolizes the simplicity and tranquility of the past.

Writing is also an important symbol of the past within Noah and Allie's relationship. After their short-lived relationship in the summer of 1932, Allie's mother, Anne, hides the letters Noah writes to Allie over the years—but Anne eventually gets them back, and Allie reads them. Through Noah's letters, Allie allows herself unfettered access to the memories of the true, pure love that she and Noah shared during their summer together. She at last allows herself to see that what she and Noah shared wasn't merely "puppy love"—theirs was a true, enduring passion, and she decides that she cannot live a life in which she's constantly looking back on her memories in sorrow rather than in joy. Thus, the letters represent the power of memory to transform one's life even years after an event or a relationship is over.

Much later in life, after Noah and Allie reunite and share a life together, the elderly couple lives in a nursing home. Allie suffers from severe Alzheimer's disease, so Noah is left to carry their shared memories for the both of them. As Noah looks over old mementos each day, Sparks makes clear how important letter-writing, poetry, storytelling, and written love notes are as tools which allow Noah—and on occasion even Allie—to retreat into the balm of memory and escape the pain of the present. The notebook Noah reads to Allie each day contains their love story—and some days, Allie is able to remember everything, allowing the two of them fleeting moments of joy, happiness, and shared joy in their memories. Between the notebook, the old letters they wrote to each other, and the poem fragments Noah leaves under Allie's pillows and in her coat pockets, it becomes clear that both Noah and Allie, even in old age, find peace and calm through the memories that the written word allows them to access.



### ALLIE'S PAINTINGS

The paintings Allie creates function as symbols of her innermost dreams and desires—feelings and ideas she struggles to express given her repressed, strait-laced upbringing. Allie is a socialite whose wealthy parents have raised her to believe that money and social status are the most important things in the world. Though Allie exhibits skill as an artist from a young age, her parents discourage her from pursuing painting as a career. As a result, the one finished work

she's ever completed hangs solitary in Noah's **house** for years—a reminder that the girl Noah once knew was stronger and more brilliant than anyone but him ever gave her credit for. Noah loves the "sensual," abstract work Allie creates—but when they reconnect in 1946, he is disappointed when she tells him that she hasn't painted seriously since college. After reuniting with Noah—and realizing that he's kept her painting all these years—Allie finds herself inspired to draw and paint once again. Allie's artmaking is thus a symbol of her pent-up desires at last flowing freely. Art is a release for Allie, and the works of art she makes over the course of the novel's main story, though small, show that her desire to pursue life on her own terms is reawakening.

In the frame story set far into the future, the elderly Noah reveals that after leaving her wealthy fiancé Lon and settling down with Noah in New Bern, Allie began painting nonstop and eventually became a world-famous artist. Allie's works now hang in important museums in Paris, New York, and other major cities around the world, symbolizing the emotional, artistic, and spiritual fulfillment that accompanies surrendering oneself to life's most meaningful pursuits—chiefly, love. Had Allie chosen an easy life as a kept woman living a high-society lifestyle, she might've achieved greater material wealth than she ultimately did—but she never would have pursued her passions or discovered her full potential. Allie's paintings ultimately symbolize the freedom and joy that accompany a surrender to passion, and the fulfillment that comes from a life measured in love rather than in dollars and cents.



### NOAH'S HOUSE

The sprawling plantation home that Noah spends a year of his life renovating is a symbol of the ways in which a belief in love and destiny can guide a person's life. Noah once showed the shabby old house to Allie during their summer of love in 1932, vowing that he'd one day fix it up and live in it. As an adult, Noah uses the first large sum of money he comes into in order to buy the house and the surrounding property. He works on the house and the land around it day in and day out, often pressing on until midnight or later. Whether or not he admits it to himself, Noah is building a house in which he hopes he can one day build a life with Allie. Allie is the "ghost" of Noah's past, and as he completes work on the house, he turns to hard work to outrun her memory while also building a life that continues to hold space for the possibility that Allie will return to him. The house is a physical emblem of Noah's desire to live a life in which reuniting with his true love is his fate. In building the house, Noah imagines each day he toils that he can help destiny along by creating a place suffused with the pent-up love he's had for Allie for over 14 years. The house, constructed around a singular hope for the fulfillment of his destiny—a destiny which centers around loving and providing for Allie, and which ultimately comes true—represents how a belief in love

and fate can shape and define a person's life.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grand Central edition of *The Notebook* published in 2014.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ I am nothing special; of this I am sure. I am a common man with common thoughts, and I've led a common life. There are no monuments dedicated to me and my name will soon be forgotten, but I've loved another with all my heart and soul, and to me, this has always been enough.

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 2

#### Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of *The Notebook*, 80-year-old Noah Calhoun briefly reflects on his life as he begins yet another day in the nursing home where he lives. This passage is significant because it sets up the moral value system by which Noah operates even in his old age—the value system that is so central to the novel's argument that love conquers all. Noah describes himself as “common” and unremarkable, declaring that to the average observer, his life has no special significance. What Noah signals toward the end of this passage, however, is that fame, fortune, and showy achievements are irrelevant to him. Love—true, enduring, total love—is Noah's greatest accomplishment. To him, life is not about proving oneself or achieving accolades or praise. Life, to Noah, is about the profound, generous act of giving one's “heart and soul” to another person. This passage provides a blueprint for the younger Noah's actions throughout the story-within-a-story that will unfold as the novel progresses. To love and be loved has always been Noah's destiny, and as he reflects on the choices he's made in pursuit of that destiny, he finds himself comforted even in a tremendously difficult and lonely hour of his life.

### Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ It would work out for him, he knew; it always did. Besides, thinking about money usually bored him. Early on, he'd learned to enjoy simple things, things that couldn't be bought, and he had a hard time understanding people who felt otherwise.

**Related Characters:** Allie Nelson, Noah Calhoun

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 9

#### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Noah sits on the porch of the sprawling home in New Bern which he has recently renovated from top-to-bottom, Noah considers what is next for him in life. He is running low on funds due to the expensive restoration, but in this passage, Noah makes it clear that he doesn't care about money. Advancements in wealth and status actively “bore” him—he has not undertaken the renovation of the house in pursuit of glory, attention, or even the hope of selling it for a lot of money. Noah is a “simple” man who can't even begin to understand why some people spend their lives in pursuit of material wealth or higher social status.

This passage is significant because it demonstrates that Noah is never influenced or swayed by the draw of money or status. His love for Allie—a socialite—is, then, completely pure and based only on his genuine love for who she is. This passage is important in establishing the profound nature of the love between Allie and Noah. While Allie has been raised to see wealth and class as essential parts of partnership, Noah has a deeply ingrained disdain for the empty rewards of financial success and social prowess. He believes that there are far more important things in life—and as he and Allie reconnect, he will show her how life can be much more fulfilling when love, nature, art, and spirituality take the place of an exhausting race to an invisible finish line.

☞ But he had been in love once, that he knew. Once and only once, and a long time ago. And it had changed him forever. Perfect love did that to a person, and this had been perfect.

**Related Characters:** Allie Nelson, Noah Calhoun

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 12

#### Explanation and Analysis

As Noah reflects on his life while sitting on his porch, he finds himself lost in memories of the “perfect love” he knew in his youth. This passage—and the descriptions of his

relationship with Allie that follow—are important because they illustrate, once again, Noah’s prizing of genuine, authentic, pure love above all else in his life. Having known the perfect love that Allie shows him, Noah feels he has been forever changed. This change is most profoundly reflected in Noah’s belief that his love for Allie is his destiny. The love Noah and Allie shared during the summer of 1932 has altered the course of his life forever—it has influenced the choices he’s made as an adult and confirmed that he will not feel his life is complete until that perfect kind of love is restored to his life.

Noah’s move to New Jersey—and his return to New Bern 14 years later—as well as his decision to buy a run-down house and throw himself into its renovation, are all choices that he’s made based on the impact his love for Allie has had on him. For years, Noah has been trying to simultaneously outrun Allie’s memory while also holding space for it in every decision he makes. Though Noah doesn’t want to live a life defined by the loss of great love, he is a firm believer that his perfect love will return to him. Sparks thus shows how a belief in destiny can define not just a person’s actions, but their entire worldview.

Gus insightfully tells Noah that Allie is the “ghost” he has been running from—the invisible presence which has influenced and defined his life for the better part of two decades. As Gus admits that he has long been aware that Noah is “tryin’ to forget” something painful yet important, he also warns Noah that no matter how hard he throws himself into his work, he’ll never be able to outrun the lasting impact of his first love. The wise and elderly Gus’s words resonate with Noah who has, on some level, always known the truth contained within them.

This passage is significant because it foreshadows the reckoning with the “ghost” of his past that Noah will soon have when Allie returns to New Bern. Noah’s contradictory desires to outrun Allie’s memory while still holding space for the possibility that she will return to him further cements her presence as a “ghost” in his life: she is both there and not there, invisible yet omnipresent, absent from his present but painfully alive in his memories. This passage also introduces a major thread throughout the novel: the idea of memory as a balm against pain and mortality, even as a life lived in service to one’s memories often proves painful in other ways.

“So that’s the ghost you been running from.” When asked what he meant, Gus said, “You know, the ghost, the memory. I been watchin’ you, workin’ day and night, slavin’ so hard you barely have time to catch your breath. People do that for three reasons. Either they crazy, or stupid, or tryin’ to forget. And with you, I knew you was tryin’ to forget. I just didn’t know what. [...] This girl you been tellin’ me about was your first love. And no matter what you do, she’ll stay with you forever.”

**Related Characters:** Gus (speaker), Allie Nelson, Noah Calhoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 14-16

### Explanation and Analysis

Noah and his neighbor Gus spend several nights a week drinking, talking, and playing music together on Noah’s front porch. During these conversations, Noah has alluded to his meaningful summer with Allie 14 years ago, but he has never told Gus the full story of their love. Now, as Noah finishes telling Gus his and Allie’s story for the first time,

[Lon] was handsome, intelligent, and driven, a successful lawyer eight years older than she, and he pursued his job with passion. [...] [Allie] understood his vigorous pursuit of success... [...] In the caste system of the South, family name and accomplishments were often the most important consideration in marriage. In some cases, they were the only consideration. Though she had quietly rebelled against this idea since childhood and had dated a few men best described as reckless, she found herself drawn to Lon’s easy ways and had gradually come to love him.

**Related Characters:** Lon Hammond, Jr., Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 18

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Allie reflects on her relationship with her fiancé, the wealthy and powerful Lon Hammond, Jr. Lon comes from a prominent North Carolina family—his parents are fabulously wealthy, having made their millions in cotton long ago. As Allie describes her attraction to Lon, she uses language tied to the importance of drive, success, and wealth—yet she also invokes the idea of a “caste system” in Southern high society, startlingly comparing the social

hierarchy in which she's been raised to a rigid and immutable framework in which one's birth determines the course of one's life and the opportunities to which one has access. This language demonstrates Allie's frustration with and disdain for the social systems she moves in—even as she is doing her best to game them in her favor by marrying "up" and making a match with Lon.

Allie recalls her rebellion against this predetermined course of action as a "reckless" period in her life—an aberration and nothing more—yet her "gradual" and almost resigned love for Lon demonstrates that there is a part of Allie still yearning for more. This passage is significant because it demonstrates Allie's underlying frustrations with the path laid out before her. It sets the scene for a radical break from the prescribed "consideration" for wealth and status as markers of a good match, suggesting Allie will soon realize that there are far worthier criteria to be considered when choosing a partner for life.

☝ Most of the summer, [Allie] had to make excuses to her parents whenever they wanted to see each other. It wasn't that they didn't like [Noah]—it was that he was from a different class, too poor, and they would never approve if their daughter became serious with someone like him. "I don't care what my parents think, I love you and always will," she would say. "We'll find a way to be together."

**Related Characters:** Allie Nelson (speaker), Noah Calhoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Noah recalls the strain and secrecy which infiltrated his and Allie's "perfect love" during the summer of 1932. Though Allie and Noah were deeply in love with each other and spend every moment possible together, her parents disapproved of Noah—and Allie soon began lying to them in order to see Noah without their knowledge. As Noah defensively recalls that Allie's parents didn't dislike him—they simply didn't want their daughter getting "serious" with someone of a "different class"—his frustration with the Nelsons' preoccupation with wealth, status, and class becomes clear.

Noah was raised in a simple, working-class home; he grew up appreciating the beauty of nature, the richness of poetry, and the satisfaction of hard day's work. The fact that Allie's parents could not see through their prejudices and

appreciate these things about Noah obviously hurt him deeply back then, though Allie attempted to assure him that her parents' opinions meant nothing. Now, though, 14 years later, Noah has come to see just how empty a life built around the pursuit of increased wealth and improved social status truly is. He and Allie haven't seen each other in more than a decade. In spite of the pure, genuine nature of their love, Allie's parents' influence has come to rule her life—whereas Noah has doubled down on his belief wealth and status aren't meaningful markers of a successful life.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ "You did a wonderful job restoring it. It looks perfect, just like I knew it would someday."

[Noah] turned his head in the same direction as hers while he wondered about the small talk and what she was holding back.

"Thanks, that's nice of you. It was quite a project, though. I don't know if I would do it again."

"Of course you would," she said. [Allie] knew exactly how he felt about this place.

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun, Allie Nelson (speaker), Lon Hammond, Jr.

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 41

### Explanation and Analysis

As Allie arrives at Noah's house in New Bern, the two onetime lovers reconnect for the first time in over a decade. Allie has come to New Bern after seeing an article in the paper about Noah's restoration of a sprawling old plantation house he once showed to her during their summer of love and swore he would fix up one day. Now, Allie finds herself deeply impressed by Noah's hard work. Noah claims he worked to the point of exhaustion and wouldn't undertake such a project again—but Allie, who still knows Noah's character after all these years, challenges him.

This passage is significant because it speaks to Allie's admiration of the passion that defines Noah's life. Though Allie is on course to marry Lon, a wealthy, powerful lawyer and use his social standing to advance her own, there is a part of Allie that still admires the kind of work Noah does—and even prizes it above her own fiancé's pursuits. Noah works hard for the sake of beauty and personal

fulfillment—he is not chasing wealth, fame, or status, but rather his own inner satisfaction. As Allie encounters the beautiful product of Noah’s hard work, she finds herself prompted to reconsider the value system she’s allowed to dictate the course of her life—a journey which will form the crux of her emotional and intellectual arc as the novel progresses.

☛ "When's the big day?"

"Three weeks from Saturday. Lon wanted a November wedding."

"Lon?"

"Lon Hammond Jr. My fiancé."

[Noah] nodded, not surprised. The Hammonds were one of the most powerful and influential families in the state. Cotton money. [...] "With his name, he must be busy."

"He is. He works a lot."

He thought he heard something in her tone, and the next question came automatically.

"Does he treat you well?"

opposed to the raw passion her relationship with Noah once brought into her life. Noah is disappointed to learn that Allie is choosing security over true happiness, and in asking her about how Lon treats her, he’s hoping to find that Allie does truly love Lon. Noah believes intensely in the power of love—and if Allie really loves someone else, he will put aside his jealousy and accept her decision.

☛ "It's unbelievable, Noah. How long did the restoration take?"

He looked up from the last bag he was unpacking. "Almost a year."

"Did you do it yourself?"

[...] "I started that way. But it was just too much. It would have taken years, and so I ended up hiring some people . . . actually a lot of people. But even with them, it was still a lot of work, and most of the time I didn't stop until past midnight."

"Why'd you work so hard?"

[Ghosts](#), he wanted to say, but didn't.

"I don't know. Just wanted to finish, I guess."

**Related Characters:** Allie Nelson, Noah Calhoun (speaker), Lon Hammond, Jr.

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 43-44

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Noah asks Allie about her upcoming wedding to the wealthy and well-known Lon Hammond, Jr. Noah knows who Lon is—and who his family is—but he is unimpressed by Lon’s name. All Noah wants to know about Lon is whether he treats Allie well. This passage is significant because it demonstrates that Noah doesn’t care a whit for the trappings of wealth, status, and class—all he cares about is love, truth, and goodness. To Noah, the idea that Allie would pursue a loveless marriage because of the social and financial benefits it offers is beyond painful—but if he knows that Lon is a good man who treats Allie well and showers her with love, he can bring himself to accept the match.

There is also a second reading of Noah’s question, one which has little to do with his disdain for wealth and status and much to do with his belief in the power of true love. Noah intuits that Allie has chosen to be with Lon because of the ease and comfort their relationship offers her as

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun, Allie Nelson (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 52-53

### Explanation and Analysis

As Allie continues to admire the beautiful handiwork Noah has done on the plantation house in New Bern, she finds herself in awe of the amount of labor she knows the renovation must have demanded. When she asks Noah about the work, Noah refuses to admit to the physical and emotional toll the labor took on him—or the reason he pressed on so intently for nearly a year’s time. Noah’s private admission that he worked so hard in order to outrun the “ghosts” of his past—in other words, to push aside his painful memories of being separated from Allie—shows that he at last recognizes his own motives in fixing up the house. Noah’s house symbolizes his desire to both outrun or stave off his longing for Allie while simultaneously building a life she might admire—a life in which there is plenty of space for her, should she choose to return after so long. Now that Noah and Allie are reconnecting, Noah feels the possibility of Allie coming back into his life in a serious way. He

modestly accepts Allie's compliments about the house while attempting to hide the real reasons he took on its renovation in the first place.

“Do you remember sneaking over here the night you first told me about this place? [...] I got home a little late that evening, and my parents were furious when I finally came in. [...] My mother had a long talk with me later that night. She said to me, 'I'm sure you think that I don't understand what you're going through, but I do. It's just that sometimes, our future is dictated by what we are, as opposed to what we want.' [...] It was a terrible thing for a girl to learn. That status is more important than feelings.”

**Related Characters:** Allie Nelson (speaker), Anne Nelson, Noah Calhoun

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 58-59

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Allie recalls the night she and Noah snuck out to the countryside to look at the very house they're standing in now. Noah vowed to fix the house up one day—and that promise that he made, both to himself and to Allie, has at last come true. Allie's pleasant memories of exploring new places and dreaming of the future with Noah are corrupted, however, by less joyous recollections of the difficult conversations she had with her parents as a result of her fling with Noah. As Allie repeats her mother's words to Noah now, she reflects on how painful the words were both then and in the present. Her wealthy parents' belief that she should consider status more important than her own emotions has been the driving force of her life so far.

Nicholas Sparks uses *The Notebook* to show how love can—and should—be the most important part of life. As Allie reconnects with Noah, she begins to question more deeply than she ever has the role she wants love to play in her life. Allie soon finds that she wants to fill her life with passion rather than practicality and true love rather than the empty pursuit of wealth and status. She has long felt that her parents' “terrible” advice has impeded her from making the choices she wants to make—now, with Noah, she gets the chance to start over and reconsider her priorities.

“Lon's handsome, charming, and successful, and most of my friends are insanely jealous. They think he's perfect, and in a lot of ways he is. "But there's always going to be something missing in our relationship." [...]

"Why?"

[...] "I guess I still look for the kind of love we had that summer."

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun, Allie Nelson (speaker), Lon Hammond, Jr.

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 61

### Explanation and Analysis

As Allie and Noah reconnect, they enjoy deep and probing conversations about the directions their lives have taken in the 14 years since they've last seen each other. As Allie tells Noah about her relationship with her fiancé, Lon, she finds herself admitting aloud things she's never allowed herself to consider before. With Noah, Allie feels guided by passion and instinct rather than comfort and logic. This permits her to acknowledge what's lacking in her relationship with Lon. While Lon is “perfect” in many ways, he doesn't make Allie feel the raw, intense, unbridled love that she once felt for Noah. This passage is significant because it represents a major turning point in the way Allie conceives of the choices she's made. She's beginning to understand that she's chosen a partner who advances her parents' dreams rather than her own and who satisfies just one part—but not the whole—of her own longing.

“C'mon," he said, reaching for her hand, "I want to show you something.”

She got up and followed him through the door to the living room. He stopped in front of the fireplace and pointed to the painting that hung above the mantel. [...]

"You kept it?"

"Of course I kept it. [...] It makes me feel alive when I look at it. Sometimes I have to get up and touch it. It's just so real—the shapes, the shadows, the colors. I even dream about it sometimes. It's incredible, Allie—I can stare at it for hours.”

**Related Characters:** Allie Nelson, Noah Calhoun (speaker), Lon Hammond, Jr.

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 63

### Explanation and Analysis

When Noah asks Allie if she still paints, Allie—who once enjoyed creating complicated, abstract works of art—admits that she hasn't put brush to canvas in years. Her parents, who found painting an unsuitable pursuit for a girl of Allie's status, discouraged her from pursuing her passion long ago—and she went along with their decree. Now, as Allie realizes that Noah has kept the most complex and challenging work of art she ever made for over 14 years, she recognizes that Noah is the only person in her life who has ever encouraged her to follow her passions rather than keep her dreams and desires bottled up. As Noah gushes about the painting, Allie is reminded of the passion, instinct, and pure, intuitive love which characterized their relationship. In this scene, she begins seriously contrasting the understanding and encouragement Noah offers her with the cold, detached treatment she receives from both Lon and her own parents. Allie has allowed her life to be guided by the pursuit of wealth, status, and class. Now, however, she considers what her life might look like if she pursued a simpler, more authentic way of living—one centered on love, passion, and creativity.

bears his soul to Allie, it becomes clear that he has fallen in love with her all over again—just as he couldn't "control" his feelings back in 1932, he finds that he is helpless against the power Allie has over him now as well. Noah points out that the love he and Allie shared blossomed in spite of the profound differences between them once—what is left unsaid is that now, even though their lives have diverged even further than they already had when Noah and Allie were teens, their love is still as palpable and true as ever before. Noah's speech here speaks to his faith in the power of love to overcome every obstacle and steer one's destiny—as well as his belief that Allie should, for once in her life, surrender to passion and instinct rather than hiding her desires away under the guise of making the most logical, rational decision for her financial and social future.

☝ Would Lon encourage her painting? She remembered showing him one of her paintings a couple of months after they had first started going out. It was an abstract painting and was meant to inspire thought. In a way, it resembled the painting above Noah's fireplace, the one Noah understood completely, though it may have been a touch less passionate. Lon had stared at it, studied it almost, and then had asked her what it was supposed to be. She hadn't bothered to answer.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ "Poets often describe love as an emotion that we can't control, one that overwhelms logic and common sense. That's what it was like for me. I didn't plan on falling in love with you, and I doubt if you planned on falling in love with me. But once we met, it was clear that neither of us could control what was happening to us. We fell in love, despite our differences, and once we did, something rare and beautiful was created."

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun (speaker), Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 102

### Explanation and Analysis

As Noah and Allie take a kayaking trip down the creek near Noah's home, they reminisce about their summer of love back in 1932. Noah finds himself unapologetically declaring how intense his love for Allie was, pointing to the raw, unpredictable, and indescribable passion that lent a "rare and beautiful" quality to the love they shared. As Noah

**Related Characters:** Lon Hammond, Jr., Noah Calhoun, Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 105

### Explanation and Analysis

In this brief passage, Allie thinks about her wealthy and handsome but profoundly logical, strait-laced fiancé Lon—and whether he can give her even a semblance of the things she finds in her relationship with Noah. Whereas Noah has always encouraged Allie as an artist, Lon doesn't even understand Allie's work. Allie is disdainful of Lon's closed-mindedness and turned off by his lack of passion and intellectualism. Throughout the novel, Allie's paintings serve as a symbol of her innermost thoughts and desires—on the canvas, Allie can express her most complex and difficult-to-name feelings. Whereas Noah intuitively understands her sensual, abstract work, Lon can't even puzzle together what her paintings are "supposed to be."

This passage is significant because it highlights the vast

chasm between the passionate, instinctual Noah and the stable, comforting, but overly logical Lon. As Allie reconnects with Noah and finds kinship in their conversations about art, literature, spirituality, and desire, she begins second-guessing whether the safety and ease of her relationship with Lon is worth sacrificing the passion and intrigue she finds with Noah.

●● Though he wasn't Noah, Lon was a good man, the kind of man she'd always known she would marry. With Lon there would be no surprises, and there was comfort in knowing what the future would bring. He would be a kind husband to her, and she would be a good wife. She would have a home near friends and family, children, a respectable place in society. [...] And though she wouldn't describe theirs as a passionate relationship, she had convinced herself long ago that this wasn't necessary... [...] Passion would fade in time, and things like companionship and compatibility would take its place.

**Related Characters:** Lon Hammond, Jr., Noah Calhoun, Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 106

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Allie nervously evaluates her relationship with Lon and justifies to herself the reasons she's chosen to be with him. Throughout the passage, Allie continues piling on Lon's good qualities: he is kind, he is steady, and he will act as a provider to her and any children they might have, allowing Allie to occupy the "place in society" she's always been encouraged to ascend to. Later on in the passage, however, Allie's language changes and becomes much more uncertain. In spite of all the financial stability and social prominence a marriage to Lon would provide her, Allie will, in marrying him, lose out on the "passionate relationship" that she has had to work hard to "convince" herself she doesn't need.

At the end of the passage, Allie tries to reassure herself that simple "companionship and compatibility" outweigh the pull of passion in any relationship—yet her entire visit to New Bern and her reconnection with Noah negates that resigned line of thought. In simply coming to visit, Allie has demonstrated that she does in fact yearn for passion—while her parents, her friends, or society might have taught her that passion fades, her relationship with Noah has concretely shown her that when true love is present, the opposite is true. As Allie vacillates between the steady, sure

language of reason and the inexact but profound logic of passion, she demonstrates her hidden belief that wealth, status, class, and social stability are not worth a sacrifice of the passion that makes life worth living.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

●● "Noah, what are they doing here?"

"I don't know. I know the swans from up north migrate to Lake Mattamuskeet every winter, but I guess they came here this time. I don't know why. Maybe the early blizzard had something to do with it. Maybe they got off track or something. They'll find their way back, though."

"They won't stay?"

"I doubt it. They're driven by instinct, and this isn't their place."

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun, Allie Nelson (speaker), Lon Hammond, Jr.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 108

### Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Noah takes Allie down the river in his canoe toward a surprise. When they come to a small lake, Noah urges Allie to close her eyes—and when she opens them again, the two of them are surrounded by hundreds of beautiful white swans and geese. As Noah explains the birds' presence in the lake, he discusses the ways in which instinct drives these animals to their rightful place. Though the birds are here for now by chance, Noah says, they'll soon realize they don't belong, and their instinct will drive them to where they are meant to be.

This passage can be read one of two ways: Noah might be implying that Allie's relationship with Lon represents her having lost her way and gotten "off track." He might be suggesting that when Allie's instincts drive her to her rightful place, she will find that she belongs with him. On the other hand, the passage also lends itself to a much darker and mournful reading. Noah might be expressing his innermost fears that it is Allie's sojourn to New Bern to reconnect with him that has taken her life "off track" and that her instinct will soon guide her back to her high-society "place" at Lon's side. Either way one chooses to interpret this passage, it is clear that Noah is aware of how both animals and people are fundamentally guided by instinct, passion, and forces unknown.

☝ *The reason it hurts so much to separate is because our souls are connected. Maybe they always have been and will be. Maybe we've lived a thousand lives before this one and in each of them we've found each other. And maybe each time, we've been forced apart for the same reasons. That means that this goodbye is both a goodbye for the past ten thousand years and a prelude to what will come.*

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun (speaker), Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 121-122

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Allie recalls the contents of a note Noah gave her on one of their last nights together back in the summer of 1932. The very fact that she can recall its contents word-for-word shows how much the note meant to her and speaks to the enduring power of love to steer not just one's destiny but one's memory and one's sense of self. In the mournful note, Noah expresses sadness about the fact that the summer will soon be over and he and Allie will have to part ways—perhaps forever. Nevertheless, Noah doesn't surrender to despair in the note. Instead, he suggests that his and Allie's destinies are entwined not just in this life, but in a larger cosmic sense. He believed then—and, it seems, he also believes now in 1946—that he and Allie are destined to spend their existences, searching for each other and finding shelter in their love for each other. Being parted for now, Noah suggests, shouldn't hurt so much when they can both take comfort in the fact that they are destined to find each other again. This passage speaks to the power of memory to act as a balm in the face of pain, mortality, and loss—in this case, the “mortality” of Noah and Allie's summer fling—as well as the entwined nature of love and destiny.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ "What are you going to do?" her mother asked, pulling back. There was a long pause.

"I don't know," Allie finally answered. They stood together for another minute, just holding each other. [...]

On her way out the door, Allie thought that she heard her mother whisper, "Follow your heart," but she couldn't be sure.

**Related Characters:** Allie Nelson, Anne Nelson (speaker),

Lon Hammond, Jr., Noah Calhoun

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 137

### Explanation and Analysis

Allie and Noah receive an unexpected visitor: Allie's mother, Anne Nelson, shows up at the front door of Noah's house to warn the two of them that Lon, Allie's fiancé, has figured out what she is doing in New Bern and is on his way to town. As Allie confides in her mother about her enduring feelings for Noah, Anne acknowledges that Allie is an adult—and as such, she has a tremendously difficult decision ahead of her. Anne knows that Allie has to choose not just between two men, but between two lives. During her visit, Anne admits to confiscating the letters Noah sent to Allie so many years ago. She reveals she has kept them all these years before returning them to Allie in hopes of making things clearer for her daughter. This demonstrates that while Anne was instrumental in keeping her daughter from Noah—a poor boy from a different class than the Nelsons—Anne harbors some measure of regret concerning her actions.

As Anne departs, Allie believes she hears her mother urge her to “follow [her] heart.” Whether Anne actually says such a thing is up to the reader's interpretation—but if she truly does say these words to Allie, they serve as further proof that Anne regrets the role she played in keeping Allie from her one true love. This unlikely move by the woman who so longed to help Allie ascend to an even higher socioeconomic class that she barred Allie from communicating with Noah demonstrates that in the end, passion and instinct are unstoppable forces that often win out over logic and comfort. Even the practical Anne, it seems, has come to recognize that love, not the desire for money or status, should be the force one follows through life.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ "You can't live your life for other people. You've got to do what's right for you, even if it hurts some people you love."

"I know," she said, "but no matter what I choose I have to live with it. Forever. I have to be able to go forward and not look back anymore. Can you understand that?"

**Related Characters:** Allie Nelson, Noah Calhoun (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 141

### Explanation and Analysis

After an unexpected visit from her mother, Anne, who tells Allie that Lon is on his way to New Bern to confront her about visiting Noah, Allie finds herself with an impossible decision to make. She knows that she will have to choose definitively between Noah and Lon. Though both men are good in different ways, she does not love them equally—and yet after years of being told to prize comfort, logic, and financial security over passion and romance, Allie is deeply confused as to what she should do. Allie tells Noah that she doesn't want to make a decision that will hurt anyone—but this is, of course, impossible, and she knows it. What the decision ultimately comes down to, then is what Allie can bear to live with. Allie does not want to live a life spent wondering about the path not taken—and she is uncertain which choice will allow her to step forward into her life confidently, assuredly, and without any hesitation.

This passage is significant because it represents the warped, painful way Allie has come to think about her own most important decisions: she has constantly lived her life for "other people," as Noah points out, and she struggles to stand in her own power and live for herself. This moment represents a major turning point in Allie's journey: as she faces down her future, she must decide, for herself and no one else, what kind of life she truly wants to live.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ *You and I were different. We came from different worlds, and yet you were the one who taught me the value of love. You showed me what it was like to care for another and I am a better man because of it. I don't want you to ever forget that.*

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun (speaker), Anne Nelson, Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 150

### Explanation and Analysis

In this short chapter, Allie finds herself at last able to read the letters that Noah wrote to her so many years ago. The letters span 1932 to 1935—but Allie never received them, given that her mother, Anne, intercepted each one in hopes of distracting Allie from her memories of Noah. Now, as

Allie looks over Noah's final letter to her, dated March of 1935, Allie at last understands just how pure, enduring, and genuine Noah's love for her has always been. As Allie reads Noah's words about the two of them coming from different worlds, she sees that he never loved her for her money or her social status—he saw their love's ability to overcome class and material wealth as a sign of its power, whereas Allie's parents only ever encouraged her to see their different backgrounds as a liability.

As Allie continues reading the letter, she finds herself even more touched by Noah's statement that she was the one who taught him "the value of love." Allie has always conceived of Noah as being the more romantic and spiritual of the two of them, so for her to read that he sees her as the one who opened up his mind and his heart to the power of love comes as a beautiful surprise. Through this letter, Allie at last grasps the depths of Noah's love for her—and she feels emboldened to call off her lukewarm relationship with her fiancé Lon and follow her heart, as she's always yearned to, back to Noah.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ "I've heard it before, haven't I?"

"Yes," I say again, just as I do every time on days like these. I have learned to be patient.

She studies my face. Her eyes are as green as ocean waves.

"It makes me feel less afraid," she says.

"I know." I nod, rocking my head softly.

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun, Allie Nelson (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 160

### Explanation and Analysis

Noah finishes reading the notebook containing his and Allie's love story to his female companion in the nursing home—who, at this point in the novel, is clearly understood to be Allie herself. Allie finds herself soothed and comforted by the tale, even though she can't recognize it as the story of her own life. As an elderly woman, Allie suffers from Alzheimer's disease, which means that her memories and her sense of self have evaporated. She doesn't know who she is, who Noah is, or what they mean to each other—and,

as a result, spends many hours of her days feeling confused, frightened, and in various states of visual and auditory hallucination.

Now, though, in this passage, Sparks shows how just hearing the story contained within the notebook helps to soothe Allie. Though she doesn't recognize the story as her own, there is a part of her that feels less alone—and thus “less afraid”—after hearing the beautiful tale about the power of love. Noah sees reading the notebook to Allie each day as both a duty and a challenge. He wants to help her access her memories so that she can continue feeling less alone and less afraid—but he also wants Allie back so that he, too, can feel less lonely and less frightened about his impending mortality as they share their memories with each other.

☞ We are in the final minutes in the day of our lives, and the clock is ticking. Loudly. I wonder if I am the only one who can hear it.

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun (speaker), Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 161

### Explanation and Analysis

In this brief quotation, the elderly Noah Calhoun describes being able to hear the “clock” measuring out the final minutes in the “day of [his] life” ticking more loudly with each passing day. Noah, though elderly and infirmed, is completely lucid and aware each and every day. But Allie, the love of his life and his companion of almost 50 years, is locked in a battle with Alzheimer's and is, as such, oblivious to her surroundings. Allie may not be able to hear life's clock ticking, and she is likely unaware that her time is running out.

This passage is significant because it demonstrates the deep layers of loneliness that Noah must face each and every day of his life. His days are painful not just because of his arthritis, his prostate cancer, or his failing faculties—they're painful because he is facing down his mortality more or less alone. Without Allie there to share in the happy memories of their lives together, Noah is forced to turn inward to his memories alone. The past is both a balm against the present as well as a painful reminder of all that is gone. Noah's memories, dual-edged swords though they may be, are the only things keeping him afloat in the midst of such a painful, difficult, and lonesome time.

☞ There is beauty where we sit this afternoon, Allie and I. This is the pinnacle of my life.

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun (speaker), Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 176

### Explanation and Analysis

As Noah enjoys a sunny afternoon wandering the gardens of the nursing home where he and Allie live, he states that spending a nice day with Allie has come to be “the pinnacle of [his] life.” This statement is significant—it ties in with several of the novel's major themes, demonstrating the power of love, the draw of life's simple pleasures, and the soothing nature of happy memories. Noah is a man who has always enjoyed the smaller, simpler things in life: a beautiful sunrise or sunset, a poem, a drink on the porch. Now, in his old age, he finds his investment in life's small moments has paid off. Now that all he has to look forward to are his fleeting moments with Allie, Noah is able to find immense pleasure and happiness even in an otherwise bleak situation. He can take in the natural beauty that surrounds him and appreciate the love he has for Allie—even if she can't remember who he is, Noah still has his memories of their joyous life together. He considers the ability to be with Allie, even in such a difficult situation, the “pinnacle” of his existence. Noah has never wanted money, fame, or glory—all he has ever needed is a simple life alongside the woman he loves.

☞ This is why Allie is considered a miracle, because sometimes, just sometimes, after I read to her, her condition isn't so bad. There is no explanation for this.

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun (speaker), Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 185

### Explanation and Analysis

As Noah reflects on Allie's condition, Alzheimer's, and the ways in which it has impacted both their lives, he stops to relay an important and meaningful bit of information. Allie, he says, is considered a “miracle” by the doctors and nurses who attend her in the nursing home because sometimes,

very rarely, her condition abates and her memories return. Someone in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's shouldn't be able to slip in and out of lucidity at all—but though there is no scientific or medical explanation for Allie's sporadic lucidity, Noah knows that there is a higher explanation: love. Noah has always been a believer in the power of love to steer one's destiny and change one's life—now, having dedicated his life to jogging Allie's memories by reading the notebook which contains their love story to her each day, he sees that love has the power to overcome any obstacle. The "miracle" of Allie's ability to overcome her condition when she hears Noah's voice reading their love story aloud demonstrates how powerful their passionate, genuine romance really is.

☝ I open a drawer and find the flowers I'd once given her long ago, old and faded and tied together with ribbon. They, like me, are dry and brittle and difficult to handle without breaking. But she saved them. "I don't understand what you want with them," I would say, but she would just ignore me. And sometimes in the evenings I would see her holding them, almost reverently, as if they offered the secret of life itself.

**Related Characters:** Noah Calhoun (speaker), Allie Nelson

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 202

### Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Noah opens one of his desk drawers in search

of old letters from and photographs of Allie. Looking at old mementos is Noah's way of softening the pain of his present: by retreating into the past, he surrounds himself with memories of better times. As Noah encounters some old, "brittle" flowers that Allie saved for years after he gave them to her, he reflects on his onetime inability to understand why Allie clung to a dried old bouquet. Noah now understands why Allie kept the flowers for so long—it is the same reason he himself now keeps them in a drawer. Noah, in the pain and loneliness of old age, has come to understand how the past can be a balm against the present. He feels badly now for mocking Allie, who gazed upon the flowers "as if they offered the secret of life itself." Noah now understands that the memories one makes throughout one's life are, indeed, the secret to a happy life—and access to joyful thoughts even in the midst of a difficult present moment.

This passage also demonstrates the ways in which Allie, with Noah, grew to appreciate the simpler things in life: nature, beauty, and simplicity. Over the course of her relationship with Noah, this glimpse into the past shows, she came to value small, ephemeral things over material possessions or social status. A simple bouquet of flowers meant enough to keep for years. Though a small and humble gift, the flowers meant the world to Allie. Both Noah and Allie, this passage shows, have ultimately lived lives dedicated to finding tiny yet meaningful ways to demonstrate their love for one another. It is this knowledge—and the flowers that represent it—which allows Noah to feel fulfillment and joy in his final days, even amid the pain of losing Allie to the ravages of Alzheimer's.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1: MIRACLES

As the sun comes up on a frigid winter morning, 80-year-old Noah Calhoun sits bundled up in his room in the nursing home where he lives and looks back on his life. He wonders how his story will end. His life, he says, is not easy to explain. Though Noah knows he has lived a simple and “common” life by most people’s standards, he’s also loved another person with his entire heart and soul—and this, he says, has “always been enough” for him. Noah knows that he’s chosen the right path. He would not choose to live his life, which he feels is equal parts love story and tragedy, any other way.

Noah has been ill for years—he feels worn out and deflated. This morning, however, he knows that he cannot sit listlessly in his chair because he has to go somewhere. As Noah walks through the lonely, quiet hallways of the nursing home, he hears the sounds of his fellow patients in various stages of distress. As he passes the nurses’ station, he overhears the nurses talking amongst themselves, hoping Noah’s mission today goes well.

As Noah arrives at his destination—the room of another patient—he greets the doctors and nurses tending to the crying woman inside and then sits in his regular chair in the corner of the room. The doctors and nurses leave the room, and Noah is alone with the woman. She doesn’t look at him and doesn’t seem to know who he is. Though the woman doesn’t acknowledge him, Noah puts on his glasses, takes a magnifying lens out of his pocket, opens up a **notebook**, and begins to read aloud from it. Every time he repeats these gestures, he wonders if today will be the day it “happen[s.]” The possibility, he says, is all that keeps him going. Though the odds and science are against him, Noah believes in miracles—and as he begins to read, he hopes that miracles will prevail.

*As readers meet Noah Calhoun, he explains almost immediately the value system by which he’s lived his life. Love has been the most important force in Noah’s whole existence—and even though the end of his life is near, the love he’s known has enabled him to feel no regrets about any of the choices he’s made.*



*Noah is an ill man, yet his sense of determination remains intact. Given that love is the most important thing to Noah, it seems that the driving force behind the mission that steers his days and defines his hours must be love.*



*In this passage, Sparks introduces the titular notebook: an object which folds into the novel’s larger symbol of writing. Within this novel, objects and ideas having to do with the written word symbolize memory’s power to enrich one’s life in the midst of great pain. Thus, it’s clear Noah uses the notebook as a way to connect himself—and his unnamed female companion—to pleasant memories of happier times.*



## CHAPTER 2: GHOSTS

It is October of 1946. Noah Calhoun sits on the wrap-around porch of his plantation-style **house** in his hometown of New Bern, North Carolina, watching the sun set over the nearby river. He wonders if the original owners of the house, which was built in 1772, did the same thing when they lived in it. Noah, who bought the run-down house 11 months ago—right after returning from the war—has spent nearly a year renovating the place. A few weeks ago, a reporter from Raleigh came to take some pictures and interview Noah about the restoration for an article. Though the house is pretty much finished, the sprawling 12 acres around it are still in need of a lot of work.

Noah, tired but happy after a long day of work, reaches for his guitar and tunes it. As he plays, he looks up at the stars and thinks absentmindedly about the funds he's spent restoring the **house** and the surrounding property—he knows he'll be out of money soon and will need to find a job, but he isn't worried about his finances. Money "bore[s]" him—he enjoys the simple things in life. At 31, Noah lives alone with a three-legged hound dog, Clem. He hasn't dated in over a year, and he often wonders if he's destined to be alone forever. Shaking the thought from his head, Noah fetches his well-worn copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and sits back down to read some **poems**. Whitman's musings on nature, solitude, and mortality soothe him.

Noah continues reflecting on his life so far. After having left his hometown of New Bern for 14 years, Noah has recently returned to find the town largely unchanged. Noah's mother died when he was a small child and his father raised him—but last year, his father passed away, and now Noah's only friend is an elderly black man named Gus who lives down the road. Gus comes over several times a week to play music, drink, and share stories. Though Noah is not and never has been married, he has known "perfect love." As the clouds roll in, Noah thinks back to 1932—the year he experienced love that "changed him forever."

*In the previous chapter, Noah alluded to loving someone intensely, and he had a female companion in the nursing home. But decades prior, in 1946, Noah seems to be on his own and to be entirely consumed with fixing up his house. Given this context, and the fact that Noah has just returned from the war and seems to live in solitude, the reader can intuit that the renovation project is perhaps a way for him to distract himself from trauma or simply from loneliness.*



*This passage continues to explore who the younger Noah is and what's important to him. Noah enjoys the simple things in life: music, poetry, and the rewards of a hard day's work. His contempt for money and his love of broken creatures speaks to a gentle spirit—Noah has no time for frivolity or self-possession. He devotes his time to bettering his own spiritual world and the lives of others rather than indulging in the ephemeral trappings of material things.*



*Noah lives a fairly lonesome existence, and it's clear that much of his life has been defined by the losses of those he loves. Nevertheless, Noah seems to be almost contented by the simple fact that he has known one "perfect" romance. This passage thus demonstrates how Noah's love for the girl that got away has come to define, enrich, and steer his life.*



Just after high school graduation, at the start of the summer of 1932, Noah showed up to the local Neuse River Festival to find his childhood friends Fin and Sarah talking to a pretty girl he'd never seen before. Fin and Sarah casually introduced him to the girl. As Noah shook her hand, he knew she was "the one." Their relationship was like a "tornado wind." The girl, whose wealthy family was spending the summer in town on account of her father's work, soon became Noah's best friend and lover. They spent every minute they could together, riding canoes on the river through summer storms and attending town dances. They shared their thoughts about **art**, life, and the future. At the end of the summer, they lost their virginities to each other. Three weeks later, the girl left town—and Noah never heard from her again.

Noah shakes himself from his reverie. He remembers talking to Gus about this girl recently. Gus pointed out that the girl is "the ghost [Noah has] been running from" by working so hard on the **house**. Gus warned Noah that no matter how hard he worked or how desperately he tried to forget his first love, he'd never be able to—a first love, Gus said, stays with a person forever. Noah returns to reading Walt Whitman for a spell before heading inside and going up to bed.

Meanwhile, a hundred miles away, Allie Nelson sits on the porch swing of her parents' house in Raleigh. She is pondering a decision she's made—she doesn't know if it's the right one, but she is certain that if she doesn't take advantage of the opportunity before her, she'll always regret it. She has told her fiancé Lon that she is heading to the coast of North Carolina to do some antiquing and take a break from planning their massive wedding—but the truth about the trip she has planned is far more complicated.

The next morning, after a short drive from Raleigh, Allie arrives at a small inn in downtown New Bern. She unpacks, eats lunch, and visits some antique shops. By four thirty in the afternoon she is back in her room, her cover story taken care of. She calls Lon to give him the phone number of the inn. He hurries off the phone—he is due in court.

*Noah recounts his relationship with the love of his life quickly and in sparse detail, focusing on the intensity of the feeling they shared rather than the specifics. It is this feeling that's stayed with Noah all these years, steering the winds of his life just as the "tornado" of their initial courtship swept in and changed so much for him. The fleeting nature of the summer romance doesn't lessen the seriousness of Noah's feelings for the girl he once loved deeply—it seems that, in his mind, she'll always be "the one."*



*Gus's words in this passage hit Noah hard. Noah realizes that he has indeed been trying to cut out the memories of the "ghost" of his past by throwing himself into work on the house. However, counterintuitively, Noah has also been using the house as a way of expanding his life while still holding room for the possibility of his first love's return. Sparks thus establishes the house as a symbol of Noah's desire to create a life which has space in it for another person—even though his present moment is defined by loneliness.*



*By shifting the novel to Allie's point of view, Sparks shows that she, too, is struggling with her conflicting feelings about her onetime love for Noah. Allie finds herself instinctually driven to New Bern to find him—even though the logical part of her brain tells her that she's playing with fire by lying to her parents and her fiancé.*



*Allie is being careful to cover her tracks as she arrives in New Bern. Even as she follows the thread of her passion, she remains shrewd and levelheaded to get through the difficult situation.*



Allie has known Lon for four years. When they met, she was volunteering at a hospital in Raleigh, tending to soldiers returned home from war. Meeting Lon allowed her to feel her fears and traumas from tending the wounded were driven away all at once. The handsome, successful Lon has been raised like Allie: to believe that in the “caste system of the South,” one’s family name and material possessions are often the most important factors in considering a marriage. Though Allie occasionally rebelled against this idea as a young woman, she has recently come to see that the security Lon offers her is a positive. As she thinks about their relationship, she begins feeling guilty about having made the trip to New Bern—a place she never thought she’d have the strength to return to.

After taking a bath and dressing in a casual, modest dress, Allie—tormented by how disappointed her parents and Lon would be in her behavior yet determined to follow through with the purpose of her trip—prepares to head out from her hotel room. Before she does, she opens up her purse and pulls out a folded piece of newspaper. She looks down at the article and reminds herself of the reason she’s come back to New Bern.

Noah, meanwhile, enjoys an unseasonably warm day of kayaking and working on the fencing around his property. After work, he enjoys fishing and reflecting on his life, thinking back to his childhood. He recalls how his father taught him to read **poetry** in order to help with a childhood stutter. He thinks back to the canoeing and camping trips of his youth and the pleasure he has always felt being alone in nature. He has always been a solitary person—the only one who ever broke through that barrier was Allie.

Noah continues thinking back over his relationship with Allie as he fishes. He remembers Fin predicting that Noah and Allie’s relationship wouldn’t work out—and how Fin, tragically, turned out to be right. Allie’s parents disapproved of Noah because he was from a different social class. Though Allie promised Noah they’d find a way to be together no matter what—and though Noah promised her their bond would never be broken—she never answered any of the **letters** he sent her after she left New Bern.

*As Allie reflects on her relationship with Lon, she describes the rigid “caste system” in which they’ve both been raised. It’s clear that Allie has disdain for the lifestyle in which she’s come of age—and which her marriage to Lon stands to entrap her within forever. Yet she tells herself that because money, class, and status are important to her and Lon’s families, they should be important to her too.*



*Allie has come to New Bern to find Noah. Though she knows that retreating into the past like this would surely enrage her family and her fiancé, Allie feels compelled by an unstoppable force—her love for Noah—to do whatever she can to see him again now that she’s found him through the newspaper article.*



*Noah uses poetry to hearken back to childhood memories of his father helping him learn to use the written word—it’s seemingly his way of slowing down time and making sense of the world. Poems remain one of Noah’s most beloved pursuits, as they transport Noah back to happier times—times spent with his father and with Allie.*



*As Noah looks back on his summer with Allie, he finds himself full of conflicting feelings. On one hand, he misses the beautiful love they shared—but on the other, he is full of shame and anger as he recalls how Allie’s parents treated him simply because he wasn’t wealthy. Noah vowed not to let wealth, class, and social status stand in the way—yet ultimately, he believes that Allie could not find a way to sustain her love for him in the face of such a vast difference.*



Just a few months after Allie departed, Noah, too left New Bern—both to get her off his mind and to look for work. The country was in the throes of the Great Depression, and Noah was only able to find work up north at a scrap yard in New Jersey run by a kindly Jewish man, Morris Goldman, who had a soft spot for Noah. Over the course of the year, Noah continued **writing** to Allie—but after months and months and months of silence, Noah stopped sending the letters. For eight years he worked for Goldman, and by 1940, he was managing a staff of 30 at the thriving scrap yard. Noah dated several women, but each one told him that he was too “closed off” and absent.

In December of 1941, when Noah was 26, America entered World War II and Noah enlisted in the army. While in boot camp, Noah received a letter from Goldman which entitled him to a percentage of the scrap yard, if it ever sold. After three years in North Africa and Europe, watching his friends die all around him, Noah returned to the states to find that Morris Goldman had liquidated his assets and died. Noah received a check for \$70,000—his share of the business. Noah returned to New Bern and immediately bought an old plantation **house** he’d once promised Allie he’d fix up one day. Within a year, his father was dead.

Noah reels in his fishing line and heads up to the **house**. His neighbor Martha Shaw, a war widow and single mother whom Noah often helps out with repairs, has brought him some bread and biscuits. After a visit to Gus’s, Noah does some shopping at the general store and returns home, where he sits on the porch and reads **poetry** as dusk falls.

Meanwhile, Allie is still in her room looking at the newspaper clipping, which she first spotted three Sundays ago. When she first saw it, she went pale and began to shake. Over the last several weeks, her erratic behavior has alarmed her family and even Lon, yet Allie has blamed her moods on the stress of planning a wedding for over five hundred high-society people. After folding the clipping and putting it back in her purse, Allie takes a deep breath and heads out of the hotel. She drives through town out to the dirty roads and low country beyond, her mind flooding with memories of the summer she spent with Noah in New Bern long ago.

*This passage shows how much of Noah’s life has been dictated by his past love for Allie. He moved out of New Bern to escape her memory, yet he found he could not stop writing to her. He pursued relationships with other women, yet he realized he could not offer any of them the same authentic devotion he was once prepared to offer Allie. His decision to stay up north and continue working is also tied to his desire to stay away from the world in which his and Allie’s love first blossomed.*



*When Noah comes into a large sum of money, he doesn’t spend it on frivolous markers of wealth and status or try to improve his station in life. Instead, he spends the money on a run-down house that is tied to his past. This cements the idea that while Noah has thrown himself into work on the house to distract himself from Allie, his desire to fix it up remains tied to his need to build a life that has space for her inside of it. By fulfilling a promise he once made to Allie, he’s honoring the memory of their love—and holding out hope against all hope that she might come back into his life and see how her love has continued to change him all these years later.*



*In this passage, as Noah enjoys a simple evening, Sparks shows that money hasn’t changed Noah. Though he’s now amassed the resources to build himself a vast home—and still has some money left over—Noah still prefers to spend his time helping his neighbors, reading poetry, and focusing on the joys of solitude.*



*This passage shows how trapped Allie feels by her life back in Raleigh. It’s clear that the idea of living the high-society life Lon is offering her brings her a great deal of stress—so much, in fact, that she’s leapt away from it at the first available opportunity. Still, Allie tries to convince herself that she’s destined for such a world—even as she allows her lingering love for Noah to steer her toward a different destiny.*



As Allie arrives at the **house**, she is taken aback by how dramatically different it looks. She spots Noah on the porch—he curiously steps off the verandah and walks toward her car. As Allie parks and opens the door, she and Noah stare at each other for a long time without moving. Allie is searching for answers—and Noah is face-to-face with “the ghost” who has come to rule his life.

*For both Allie and Noah, dealing with the past has been a difficult endeavor. They have alternately tried to push away the memories of their love, to linger in them, or to reframe them. Now, as each confronts the “ghost” of the other, both of them realize that they must reckon with how their summer of love has come to define their lives.*



## CHAPTER 3: REUNION

Noah and Allie stand still looking at each other for so long that Allie begins to worry Noah doesn't recognize her—or worse, that he's forgotten who she is. Finally, she greets him by saying hello. Noah is dumbstruck—he says he cannot believe that Allie is standing in front of him. Allie feels something twitch inside her, and she grows dizzy. Allie reminds herself that she is an engaged woman—but she cannot stave off the sensation. She finds herself thinking that she has at last come home. Allie and Noah embrace wordlessly and hold each other. Allie begins to cry. She laughs as she pulls away from Noah and begins explaining having found an article about his **home** renovation in the Raleigh paper. Noah compliments how beautiful Allie looks, and Allie blushes.

*As Allie and Noah reconnect, the intense and overwhelming emotions they're both experiencing are palpable. At the same time, there is a rift between them: Allie is engaged, and while she's happy to see Noah, she cannot fully give herself over to the instinctual emotions stirring inside her. Throughout this chapter, Sparks will chart the ways in which Allie and Noah slowly let down their defenses as instinct and passion slowly subsume logic and rationale.*



Noah asks why Allie has come to New Bern. She finds herself swept up in old feelings, but she pushes through them and tells Noah that she has come here to tell him something. Noah asks what she has to say, but Allie says she doesn't know how to find the words. Noah's three-legged dog, Clem, comes rushing out of the **house** and excitedly greets Allie. When Allie remarks upon the dog's missing leg, Noah says that he adopted the dog, who was hit by a car, when no one else would. Allie then compliments Noah on the restoration. He replies that it was hard work—so hard that he might not do it again if he had the choice. Allie tells him that she knows he would. She stops herself, however, reminding herself that the two of them are essentially strangers now.

*As Allie and Noah reunite, Allie glimpses what Noah has made of his life without her. He has meticulously yet lovingly fixed up an old house, he has taken in an injured stray out of the goodness of his heart, and he has committed himself to a simple life of hard yet rewarding work. Allie is comforted in knowing that Noah is just as good as she remembers him being—but again, she's afraid of acting too familiar. Anytime she feels her instinct taking over, she pushes it away.*



Allie says how “crazy” it was for her to just show up, but Noah comforts her by telling her how pleased he is to see her. He suggests they take a walk. He takes Allie by the hand and leads her down toward the riverbank. As Noah watches Allie walk along the bank, he thinks she looks like a “living **poem**.”

*Poetry is Noah's favorite thing in the world. Thus, as he thinks of Allie as a “living poem,” Sparks uses poetry, a symbol of connection to the past, to show how Allie's presence similarly drags Noah backward into old memories.*



The two of them begin catching up, and Allie quickly blurts out that she's come to tell Noah she's engaged to be married—and that the wedding is just three weeks away. When Allie mentions her fiancé's name, Lon Hammond, Jr., Noah instantly recognizes the family name. Lon is part of a powerful, influential family who made their millions in cotton long ago. Noah doesn't ask Allie about Lon's money or his work—all he asks is if he treats her well. Allie hesitates before stating that Lon is a "good man."

As Noah and Allie continue walking, they share memories of their summer together years ago and talk about their present lives. When Noah asks Allie how long she and Lon are staying in New Bern, Allie tells him that she has come here alone—and that her fiancé doesn't know the true purpose of her visit. Noah asks Allie if she loves Lon, and Allie says that she does—but Noah senses hesitation in her voice. He warns her not to go into marriage halfheartedly. Allie sharply retorts that she knows she is making the right decision in marrying Lon. She wonders aloud if she should have written to Noah instead of showing up in person, but Noah says he's happy to see her and is willing to try to be friends.

Noah invites Allie to stay for dinner and offers to boil some crabs he's caught in a trap along the dock. Allie agrees to join him for the meal. As she watches Noah head down to the dock and haul the traps out of the water, she finds herself attuned to the sounds of nature—and deeply attracted to the muscular, strong Noah. Allie joins Noah on the dock, feeling at peace in nature and relieved by having told Noah of her engagement. From the dock, she can spy a tree on which, 14 years ago, the two of them carved their names and then encircled them in a heart.

As dark falls, Noah and Allie head back up to the house. While Noah starts on dinner Allie wanders around the **house**, touring its halls and many rooms and admiring all the work that Noah has done. When she returns to the kitchen and glimpses him again, she struggles to fight the feelings of arousal stirring inside her by reminding herself that she's an engaged woman.

Allie compliments Noah on the renovation. He thanks her for her kind words and tells her about how hard he worked. Though he started the renovation alone, he soon hired people to help him—even with the extra hands, he ended up working each evening until midnight to finish the **house**. Allie asks why he pushed himself so hard, and Noah struggles not to reply, "Ghosts." When Allie asks if he has opened the house to any guests, Noah tells her that she's the first person who's come to see it. Allie is touched and surprised.

*In this passage, as Allie tells Noah about her engagement to her wealthy, powerful fiancé, Noah is unimpressed by the man's recognizable family name. All Noah cares about is whether Allie is being treated well, the way she deserves to be. This passage continues to demonstrate Noah's disdain for the trappings of wealth, status, and class—he's not impressed by money or fame, but by goodness and righteousness.*



*In this passage, Noah and Allie encounter the first rough spot in their reunion. Noah can tell right away that Allie isn't truly in love with Lon, and that her marriage to him is only rooted in the practical pursuit of wealth, status, and class. Allie grows defensive when Noah warns her to think about the reasons she's marrying Lon—yet at the same time, Allie feels so raw and naked in front of Noah that she begins questioning whether coming here was the right decision. Noah can clearly see in Allie the things she doesn't even want to see in herself, and that frightens her.*



*Allie cannot deny her continued attraction to Noah—and it doesn't help that here, in New Bern, she is surrounded everywhere she goes by memories of how deep and intense their love was back in the summer of 1932.*



*Again, Allie finds herself locked in a battle between her raw, instinctual passion for and attraction to Noah and the more logical, reserved part of her brain.*



*In this passage, as Allie and Noah discuss the renovation, Noah tries to avoid telling Allie that he has worked so hard on it to escape his memories of her. At the same time, by admitting that the finished house hasn't yet hosted any guests, he makes it clear that the sprawling, shiny house is—and always has been—for Allie herself.*



Allie helps Noah chop some vegetables for dinner. As Noah watches her, he smiles to himself—he has missed his “surprising” Allie. Like all artists, Allie is fiery, passionate, and totally spontaneous. Noah thinks of a **painting** Allie gave him before she left New Bern that fateful summer—it was a “sensual” and abstract work which Noah has kept safe all this time. Noah puts the crabs in a marinade to soak and invites Allie to join him on the porch.

Outside on the verandah, Allie and Noah reminisce some more about the summer they shared together. Allie recalls the night they snuck over to this very **house**—she came home so late that her parents reprimanded her for spending time with Noah. Allie tells Noah how her mother, Anne, told her that sometimes, one’s future isn’t dictated by what they want but by who they are. Noah recalls Allie telling him about that conversation long ago. Allie tells Noah that she and her mother have not enjoyed a happy relationship since that summer—there is always distance between them. Allie says she does not forgive her mother for teaching her that one’s social status is more important than one’s passions.

Noah asks Allie why she never answered his **letters**. Allie appears confused—she says she never got any letters from Noah. Noah and Allie realize simultaneously that Anne must have checked the mail diligently and kept the letters from Allie all these years. Allie says it was wrong of her mother to do such a thing—but she also suggests that her mother was trying to protect her. Noah boldly asks Allie if she thinks the two of them would still be together if she’d gotten the letters. Allie hesitates before admitting she thinks they would be.

Noah asks Allie about Lon. Allie tells him that Lon is the perfect man in many ways—yet there is something that is missing between them. She admits to Noah that she is still looking for the kind of love that the two of them shared during their fateful summer. Noah, uncomfortable, gets up to check on the crabs and start fixing dinner. Alone on the porch, Allie struggles to interpret her own confusing feelings. She feels herself wishing that she weren’t engaged—but then she tries to tell herself that she doesn’t miss Noah, simply what the two of them once were.

*Noah admires Allie for more than just her physical beauty. He understands her larger dreams and aspirations and he appreciates—even eroticizes—her natural talents. Though Allie lives a buttoned-up, strait-laced life, Noah knows that passion simmers beneath the surface of her carefully calculated veneer.*



*As Allie recalls the cruelty and callousness with which her parents dismissed her feelings for Noah, she admits that things in her life have not been the same since the summer of 1932. Allie has never been able to look at her parents—especially her mother—the same way. This demonstrates that Allie, like Noah, is not just hurt but enraged by the ways in which frivolous things like wealth, status, and class have the power to subsume life’s ultimate destiny: the pursuit of love.*



*As Allie and Noah realize that Allie’s mother’s actions prevented them from connecting with each other in the weeks and months after Allie left New Bern, both of them are full of sadness and curiosity. Allie’s admission that she and Noah would likely still be together if her mother hadn’t confiscated the letters demonstrates the intensity of her love for Noah—and it suggests that the two of them still have a chance to right the wrongs of fate which kept them separated for so many years. On some level, Allie and Noah’s love for each other seems to be destined.*



*As Allie tells Noah about Lon, she finds herself surrendering to her innermost fears and giving herself over to instinct. In confessing to Noah that she feels incomplete without the kind of love the two of them once shared, she makes a radical move that flies in the face of the life she’s started to build for herself. She immediately tries to tell herself that her instinctual feelings are confused or invalid, hoping to restore herself to the logic and search for stability that has governed her entire adult life.*



Noah comes back out and sits down. He asks Allie if she still paints, commenting on what a talented artist she used to be. Allie replies that she doesn't **paint** anymore, and when Noah asks why, she refuses to answer. Noah leads Allie to the living room, where she gasps as she realizes that the painting she gave him so long ago is hanging over the fireplace. Allie confesses that though she majored in art in college and received heaps of praise from her professors, her parents didn't think a career at an artist was proper. She admits that she has not picked up a brush in years and doesn't know if she ever will again. Noah tells Allie that she is an artist through and through, no matter what. Allie gently touches Noah's hand, amazed at how after so many years, he knows just what to say to comfort her.

Noah and Allie head into the kitchen to finish up the food and ready the table. As Allie sets out plates and utensils, Noah hurries to his room to grab a shirt for her to put over her dress—eating crabs, he explains, is messy business. Allie feels comforted and aroused as she allows Noah to wrap her up in his shirt. The two sit down to dinner and continue talking about the past. Allie asks Noah about his friend Fin, and Noah reveals that Fin died in the war. As Allie and Noah delve deeper and deeper into their discussion of the past, they talk about the hard times they each had during the war. Halfway through the conversation, Allie realizes that she and Lon never talk this way—they don't truly share their feelings and thoughts the way she and Noah are doing right now.

After dinner, Allie and Noah return to the porch. As Noah sets Allie up in a rocking chair with a blanket, he realizes that over the course of the evening, he has fallen in love with her again. He wonders privately if there might be anything that he could say or do to make her stay with him, but he feels too afraid to be honest with her. Allie asks Noah to read some **poems** to her. He begins reciting some verses from memory, and Allie feels soothed as she listens to Noah's voice. She realizes that Lon never has—and likely never will—evoke such feelings in her. She has never had sex with him, and their relationship is devoid of the passion that defined her romance with Noah. Allie realizes that Noah has gone quiet, and she delights in the idea that he is thinking about her while she's thinking about him.

Allie finds herself growing tired. She tells Noah it's time for her to get back to the hotel. He helps her out of her chair and walks her to her car. She starts to remove the shirt he gave her to wear over her dress, but he urges her to keep it. Noah tells Allie that he had a good time tonight and asks to see her again tomorrow. Allie deliberates for a moment, but she quickly tells Noah that she'd like to see him the next day too. He asks her to come over at noon so that he can take her somewhere special for a surprise. Allie ducks into her car and drives away.

*This passage demonstrates, yet again, how much Allie has allowed her life to come to be ruled by logic, repression, and the pursuit of the comfort and safety that accompany material wealth. In doing what's expected of her and trying to attain these things, Allie has abandoned her instincts, her natural talents, and her deepest passions. But Noah wants to stoke the part of Allie that still longs for these things—and Allie finds herself grateful for the permission Noah grants her to miss the parts of her life that were once so bright.*



*As Noah and Allie share more and continue redeveloping the intimacy they once shared, Allie finds herself realizing that this part of a relationship is missing in her partnership with Lon. While Lon fulfills other things for her—financial security and a socially proper life—Allie finds that the emotional aspect of their relationship is lacking. She misses being able to share herself so passionately and freely with another person.*



*As Allie continues reflecting on the differences between her relationships with Lon and Noah, she admits to herself that her love for Lon is chaste and passionless. She doesn't desire him the way she desires Noah. Rather than discounting this realization as unimportant, Allie instead decides to actually consider what entering into a marriage devoid of any passion would mean. Just being around Noah excites her—and she finally allows herself to see that this is an important part of love and partnership.*



*Allie came to New Bern to see Noah and tell him about her engagement. Now, having reconnected with him and said her peace, she still feels like she wants more time with him, and she hungrily jumps at the opportunity to see him again. The longer Allie spends with Noah, the more deeply she finds herself surrendering to passion and instinct over logic.*



As Noah returns to his rocker, he replays the evening in his head over and over. As he thinks about how much he loves Allie—and about the fact that she’s engaged to someone else—he is overcome by his own longing and begins to cry.

*Noah's emotions, too, are running deep. He realizes that he has never stopped loving Allie, admitting to himself for the first time in a long time just how badly he still wants her.*



## CHAPTER 4: PHONE CALLS

Meanwhile, in Raleigh, Lon is growing agitated. He has called Allie’s hotel from his office several times—once at seven, once at eight thirty, and again, just now, at a quarter to ten. He wonders where she could be. As Lon thinks about Allie, he uses his brain—trained, as a lawyer, to focus on tiny details—to try to figure out where she could be and what could be going on.

*Though Lon is a minor character in the novel, this brief chapter offers some insight into what kind of man he is. He genuinely loves Allie—yet there is clearly a part of him that doesn’t feel secure in her devotion to him.*



As Lon thinks carefully about Allie’s behavior in recent weeks, he finds himself not annoyed or concerned but more in love with her than ever. He admires her fiery, no-nonsense attitude as well as the way she’s always seemed to know him better than he knows himself. Suddenly, a strange detail pops into Lon’s mind. He remembers that Allie told him she was going to New Bern—and he recalls her mother Anne, years ago, telling a story about Allie’s “puppy love” back in New Bern. Lon is perturbed. He begins to fear that Allie has returned to New Bern to seek out her old love. Determined to do anything to keep her, Lon picks up the phone and dials her room once again. For the fourth time that night, Allie does not answer.

*Lon does truly love and admire Allie, yet as he considers the idea that she might be surrendering to the pull of her mysterious past, he becomes ignited with desperation. Lon wants to remind Allie of the stability that their life together offers her—yet there is a part of him that is afraid her old passions will win out over the commitment she’s made to Lon and to their future.*



## CHAPTER 5: KAYAKS AND FORGOTTEN DREAMS

The next morning, Allie wakes early. Though she wore Noah’s shirt to bed, enveloped in its soft texture and comforting smell, she hasn’t slept well at all. Nevertheless, Allie is in a good mood as she steps out of bed, recalling the early mornings she and Noah once spent going out on the river in his canoe at dawn.

*Allie is behaving like a young girl in love. She has allowed herself to be fully swept up in the passions her enduring love for Noah allows her to access.*



Meanwhile, Noah is already up and on the water in his kayak, as he is almost every morning. As he makes his way down the river and breathes in the fresh cool air, he feels calm and happy amongst the magical sights, sounds, and smells of nature. As Noah paddles up and down the river, his thoughts turn to Allie and Lon—he wonders what has made Allie decide to come to New Bern. He continues mulling the question over as he paddles back home. As Noah ties his boat up, he looks at the sky. The clouds above portend rain later in the day. After a shower and some chores, Noah sips coffee while staring at Allie’s **painting** hanging over the fireplace. He marvels at the power she has on him after all these years. Realizing it is nearly noon, Noah begins anticipating her arrival.

*Noah, too, finds himself helpless against the passion Allie arouses within him. He is afraid that if he puts too much hope in the idea that they could be together once again, he’ll be disappointed—and yet he cannot stop himself from harboring amorous thoughts of Allie and pining for the passion they once shared.*



After bathing and dressing, Allie spends the morning walking around downtown. As she takes in the quaint shops and businesses along the main street, she is reminded of simpler times. She thinks of what her life looks like now: bridge at the country club, meetings with her local women’s league, and dinner with the overworked Lon just once a week. Allie stops in at an art gallery and takes in the beautiful **paintings**. Inspired by the works, she heads to a department store to purchase some simple art supplies. She goes back up to her hotel room, sits at the window, and paints a scene of the shops below—and then she completes a thoughtful sketch of Noah. Just before noon, she rolls the sketch up in her bag and heads out the door.

In the lobby, the hotel clerk tells Allie that she missed several calls the night before from a Mr. Lon Hammond—Allie is horrified, frightened that Lon could have found out the true purpose of her visit. She knows she should call him right away, yet she is surprised to realize she doesn’t want to. She checks the time and quickly realizes that Lon is likely in court anyway. She tells the clerk to let Mr. Hammond know, should he call back, that she’s out shopping. Feeling better, Allie goes out to her car and starts the drive to Noah’s. Minutes later, unbeknownst to Allie, Lon calls the hotel from the courthouse.

*After reconnecting with Noah, Allie finds old desires stirring—not just for Noah, but for the passion and joy she once derived from painting. This demonstrates that the romantic, instinctual part of Allie is reanimating. She is questioning the value of a safe, comfortable life and reconsidering the ways in which she’s prioritized financial and social security over true happiness.*



*Though Allie is worried that Lon has figured out the purpose of her visit, she’s so focused on getting back to Noah that she pushes her initial fears from her mind. Allie has, at this point, completely abandoned the logic and stability that her relationship with Lon represents and has instead surrendered to the passion, instinct, and drive for personal fulfillment that a relationship with Noah would offer her.*



## CHAPTER 6: MOVING WATER

Allie pulls her car into Noah’s driveway. As she steps out, Noah finds that his feelings for her—and his attraction to her—have grown overnight. Allie kisses Noah on the cheek and immediately asks where her surprise is. He chuckles at her impatience. He tells her that the surprise may not happen—he wanted to take her somewhere, but storm clouds are rolling in. Allie says she wants to go anyway—she doesn’t care if it rains. Noah says they should leave right away. On the way down to the dock, Allie asks where they’re going, but Noah insists on keeping it a surprise.

As Noah paddles the two of them out onto the river, Allie watches him row and finds herself physically aroused by his muscular frame—but also emotionally touched by his unique connection to nature and his complex personality. Embarrassed by her feelings, Allie tries to break the silence by talking. She asks Noah what he remembers most from their summer together. “All of it,” Noah replies, before going on to explain that he could not pick one moment over another. Noah tells Allie that the **poets** describe love as an uncontrollable, overpowering force—and that is what he felt when falling in love with Allie. Allie is taken aback by Noah’s words. She is overwhelmed but not uncomfortable, and she thanks him for the beautiful sentiment.

*Noah is reserved about testing fate and expressing the depths of his love for Allie—this apprehension is symbolized by his nervousness about encountering the storm the clouds portend. Allie, however, has surrendered totally to instinct—she wants to pursue passion, fulfillment, pleasure, and beauty, and she encourages Noah to help her access those things.*



*As Allie and Noah talk candidly about their summer of love, it becomes clear that they both still feel the “uncontrollable” things they felt back then. To surrender privately and individually to the knowledge that they still love each other is one thing—but to admit those feelings aloud is another. Noah and Allie are still too shy or scared to do that exactly, but their flirtatious questions and whimsical memories betray their innermost desires.*



As silence descends upon the two of them once again, Allie finds herself grateful for the man Noah has become. She has seen men over the years destroyed by war, time, and even money—but Noah, in spite of it all, has remained true to himself and held onto his passions. While the rest of the country is rushing to heal from the wounds of the depression and the war, Noah is taking his time. Inspired by Noah’s faithfulness to the things he loves, Allie realizes that she is meant to be a **painter**. She becomes determined to give art another shot, no matter what Lon, her parents, or anyone else might think.

Allie thinks back to a time several years ago when she showed Lon one of her abstract **paintings**—he didn’t understand the work at all. Allie knows that Lon is a good but simple man—with him, there are no surprises, simply the comfort of knowing exactly what the future holds. With Lon, she can live the kind of life she has always expected to live. Allie has long told herself that while passion fades, companionship lasts forever—but now, with Noah, she questions her own logic.

Noah guides the kayak toward some trees and navigates it around a large fallen trunk. He announces that they have arrived at their destination. He urges Allie to close her eyes. She covers them with her hands, listening to the water for several moments. Finally, Noah tells Allie to open her eyes.

*Noah is helping Allie to reacquaint herself with dreams and hopes she thought she’d lost forever. Allie is part of a social class which is focused on how to improve, how to move on, and how to amass more wealth, security, and social clout. Slowing down and returning to her relationship with Noah allows Allie to make space within herself for the desires she’s shoved to the side in order to please those around her.*



*Allie continues to weigh the concessions she’s making in marrying Lon against the benefits that a marriage to him might afford her. She feels Lon will never truly understand her—yet all her life, she’s been told that personal fulfillment is not an important consideration to make when it comes to marriage. Allie no longer unthinkingly believes what she’s been urged to value in a partnership: she is beginning to see that passion and true happiness are more important than a false standard of comfort and security.*



*Noah’s carefully considered surprise for Allie demonstrates the kind of carefree, spontaneous joy he wants to bring into her life. Noah is trying to show Allie that she can have everything she wants with him.*



## CHAPTER 7: SWANS AND STORMS

When Allie opens her eyes, she finds that she and Noah are sitting in the middle of a small lake. Their canoe is surrounded by thousands of beautiful white swans and Canada geese. The two of them look at the birds in silence for a while and feed them some bread that Noah has brought along. When they hear thunderclaps in the distance, Noah begins steering them back toward the creek. Allie, still amazed, asks Noah what the birds are doing here. Noah says that they migrate south each winter to a nearby lake nearby and must have been thrown off-track—he tells Allie he has faith they’ll find their way back there, driven by their instincts.

*In this passage, Noah uses the shocking presence of migrating birds to express his hopes—or his fears—about instinct. Noah may believe that Allie is like the birds: in coming to New Bern, she’s gotten “off-track.” Or, he may secretly harbor hope that she’ll realize her life with Lon is what’s “off-track.” Regardless, Noah’s faith in the birds finding their way back to where they belong reflects his long-held hope that Allie would find her way back to him.*



Rain begins to fall. Though the drops are light at first, Noah and Allie are soon caught in an all-out downpour. Allie tilts her head back and laughs, enjoying the feeling of the rain on her face, neck, and body. She feels aroused as she senses Noah watching her enjoy the storm—and looking at her soaked-through dress. After leaving the canoe at the dock, Allie and Noah head for the **house** hand in hand. Allie thinks about sleeping with Noah and wishes she could feel his hands all over her body. She realizes that she has fallen in love with Noah all over again—or that maybe she never fell out of it in the first place.

Up at the house, Noah fetches Allie some loose cotton pants and a shirt to change into. Allie goes up to Noah's bedroom to get dressed, feeling aroused as she strips naked in the room where he sleeps. She puts on Noah's clothes, hangs up her wet dress, and brushes out her soaking hair. She heads downstairs to find Noah building a fire, and she silently watches him work for several minutes. After the fire begins roaring, Noah turns around, surprised to see Allie in the room. He offers her some tea, but she asks for bourbon. As thunder booms outside, Noah fixes the two of them drinks. Allie sits on the floor in front of the fire, and soon, Noah joins her.

As Noah sits on the rug beside Allie, he finds himself captivated by her and full of longing to touch her. He tries to distract himself by asking her what she remembers best about their summer together—the same question she asked him earlier. Allie is quiet for several moments before answering that she remembers the wonderful feeling of making love with Noah. Both of them reminisce about the shyness they felt in the moment. Allie squeezes Noah's hand and tells him that she loved him that summer more than she has ever loved anyone.

Allie tells Noah that she became sad when she never got any **letters** from him. She reveals that she came to New Bern to ask about him—but he had already left to go up north. Allie assumed he'd left New Bern to try and escape his memories of her, so she never tried to contact him again. In every relationship she has ever had, though, she has found herself looking for Noah. She confesses to writing him many letters that she never sent. Noah says he wishes she'd sent them, but Allie confesses that she was afraid she'd be different from how Noah remembered her. Noah says that she is—but because she's sweeter and better than he remembers. Noah declares that he loves Allie and always has. Before Allie can respond, a log in the fire snaps. Noah gets up to add another log and stoke the flames.

*The way in which Allie surrenders to the storm and laughs represents how she's also surrendered to her love and desire for Noah. As they hold hands on their way back to the house, Allie is consumed by desire for him. As she thinks of having sex with him, no thoughts of Lon intrude upon her fantasy: she is completely in the moment, no longer under the sway of the false stability of her life back in Raleigh.*



*The arrival of the storm signals a turning point in Allie and Noah's reunion. The storm has represented the uncertainty between them all day, and as the clouds that have been threatening to burst thunder and crash, Sparks heightens the tension between Allie and Noah. By illustrating the ways in which their walls have come down, Sparks shows that Allie and Noah never really fell out of love with each other—they were simply held back by life's twists and turns. Now, they have arrived at the moment of destiny that will forever define their paths going forward.*



*As Allie and Noah continue to reminisce about the past, their conversation turns from the abstractly romantic to the distinctly sexual. Allie is no longer interested in holding back her feelings or desires—she wants Noah, and she is determined to tell him just how much. She is ready to surrender herself to her love for Noah and let it take her wherever it is destined to.*



*Allie and Noah lay bare their souls in a way they haven't yet during their reunion. As they take advantage of the opportunity to be totally honest with each other about their longing, it becomes clear that both of them feel their love has—and has always had—the power to steer their fates.*



When Noah sits back down beside Allie, Allie confesses that she has never had sex with another man—Noah is the only person she’s ever been with. She is flooded with memories of the last time she and Noah saw each other on her last night in New Bern—he said little, but he gave her a note which declared that their souls were connected and that even if they never met again, they’d see each other in the next life. Now, Allie believes that Noah may have been right. As lightning cracks, lighting up the sky, Noah and Allie kiss at last.

*Allie has finally accepted that the love, desire, and longing she feels for Noah is worth risking it all. Allie has tried to tell herself that passion doesn't matter for so long—but now that she's reconnected with Noah, she realizes just what she's been missing. Her connection with Noah is deeper than the physical, however—she longs for the kind of fated, destined feeling that their love has always possessed.*



Noah and Allie have sex tenderly, slowly, and passionately. They spend the entire day in front of the fire in each other’s arms, drinking, talking, snacking, and having sex again and again. That night, as they fall asleep together on the floor, they declare their enduring love for each other. Noah tells Allie that he never wants to be apart from her again.

*Allie and Noah at last give into their enduring desire and love for each other. However, when Noah declares that he wants to be with Allie forevermore, it becomes clear that in order for that to be a possibility, Allie will need to definitively sever herself from the life she's built with Lon back in Raleigh.*



## CHAPTER 8: COURTROOMS

The next morning, back in Raleigh, Lon, another lawyer, and the judge in the case they are arguing sit together in chambers. Lon makes an unusual request to postpone the trial for a day—he has an urgent matter to attend to. The judge asks the other lawyer how he feels about the move, and the other lawyer says his clients are willing to postpone. The judge says that while he doesn’t like Lon’s request, he knows Lon is a good man—and such a request must mean he has something very important indeed to deal with. The judge agrees to adjourn court until Monday. Lon, relieved, thanks the judge. Lon heads straight to his car and begins driving to New Bern.

*Lon instinctively knows that something is wrong—and in this scene, he shows that he, too, is able to put aside logic and protocol in order to chase his passion for Allie. Lon's impending journey to New Bern represents a threat to Noah and Allie's blissful happiness—though they have surrendered to their passions, they cannot ignore the real world and its pressures for much longer.*



## CHAPTER 9: AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

While Allie sleeps in the living room, Noah goes to the kitchen to make a hearty breakfast for them both. He brings it to her, and as soon as they both finish eating, they have sex again before taking a shower together. For the rest of the morning, they wander the property together hand-in-hand, checking the land for signs of storm damage. At noon, they go inside to make lunch. While doing the dishes after the meal, there is a knock at the front door. Noah goes to answer it. When he opens the door, he is shocked to find himself face to face with Anne Nelson—Allie’s mother. Allie calls cheerfully from the kitchen, asking who’s there, and Noah tells her.

*Noah and Allie's peaceful, idyllic morning is interrupted by an intrusion from Allie's "other" life—her real life. In having sex, Allie and Noah have made a decision with real consequences, and they do not even get to enjoy a full day of seclusion before they're forced into a reckoning with those consequences.*



Anne, Noah, and Allie sit together at the coffee table in the living room. Allie asks how Anne found her, and Anne tells Allie that she knows her daughter better than Allie knows herself. She saw Allie's reaction to the article about Noah weeks ago and has noticed her erratic behavior since. Anne says she has come here alone—she didn't tell Allie's father or Lon about her trip. Anne turns to Noah and tells him that she always liked him—she just never thought he was right for Allie. Noah says he doesn't see how both things could be true.

Anne turns to Allie and tells her that Lon called the house last night deeply concerned after being unable to get a hold of Allie for two days in a row. Anne warns Allie that Lon is on his way—and that he has everything figured out. Anne has come ahead of Lon to warn Allie, but she did not tell Lon where she suspected Allie was. Allie thanks her mother for keeping her secret.

Allie asks Anne what she should do. Anne says she doesn't know—but she encourages Allie to think long and hard about what she wants. Noah leaves the room to allow the two women to talk alone. After he is gone, Anne asks if Allie loves Noah. Allie says she does. Anne asks if Allie loves Lon. Allie says she loves Lon too, but in a very different way. Anne acknowledges the difficult decision Allie has to make and promises that no matter what Allie decides, she'll always love her.

Anne reaches into her purse and retrieves a bundle of **letters** tied together with string—they are the letters Noah wrote to Allie. Anne has saved them all these years. Allie silently takes the letters, overwhelmed. Anne tells Allie she's going to return to Raleigh—Allie has a big decision to make and needs space to figure things out. Anne asks Allie what she's going to do, and Allie admits she doesn't know. As Anne walks out of the room, Allie believes she can hear her mother whisper to her, "Follow your heart."

## CHAPTER 10: CROSSROADS

Noah walks Anne to the door and bids her goodbye. He knows that Allie needs to be alone, so he leaves her in the living room while he goes to sit on the porch. After a while, Allie comes outside to join him. She apologizes for her mother's sudden appearance, claiming she had no idea something like this would happen—but Noah says he never forgot they'd have to deal with the consequences of their choice sooner rather than later. Noah asks what he can do, but Allie insists that she must figure out the way forward alone. She has no idea what to say to Lon, though, and she is unsure of whether she should tell him the truth of what's happened with Noah.

*This passage shows how Anne's arrival is not about shaming Allie or dragging her back to Raleigh—it is, at least in some way, about helping to heal the mistakes of the past. Noah remains skeptical of the woman who essentially barred Allie from seeing him simply because of his socioeconomic background—he doesn't trust the rules and regulations by which Anne lives her life.*



*Anne's motivations are more complex than they initially seemed to be. Anne wants to protect Allie and give her the chance to prepare herself for Lon's arrival and get a head start on making the enormous choice that lies before her.*



*This passage shows that Anne supports her daughter and wants her to be happy. Anne has, perhaps, been shaken from her complacency by Allie's bold move—she now recognizes that in order for her daughter to flourish, she must stand behind her no matter what path her life takes.*



*As Anne returns the letters to Allie—and perhaps even urges Allie to "follow [her] heart"—it becomes clearer than ever that Anne regrets interfering in Noah and Allie's relationship. She knows what a powerful force love is—and she wants to give Allie the chance to let her life be steered by love rather than by obligation.*



*As the moment of truth nears, Noah becomes withdrawn and resigned while Allie becomes sad and anxious. Allie knows that in surrendering to her desire for Noah she has jeopardized not just her relationship with Lon, but the entire future she imagined would come along with it.*



What Allie wants, she says, is Noah—but she also wants a happy ending that doesn't hurt anyone. Noah somewhat angrily tells Allie that she can't live her life for other people—she has to do what she wants. Allie says she's aware of that, but she adds that she wants to make a decision she can live with for the rest of her life. Noah asks if she could leave him without looking back. Allie says she couldn't. Noah points out that such a life wouldn't be fair to Lon. He begs Allie to see that they are adults now and can make their own decisions. As tears fill Allie's eyes, it becomes clear just how deeply conflicted she is.

Noah tells Allie that he already knows she won't stay—even though she wants to. Allie, crying, begs Noah to understand. Noah says he doesn't want to understand. He reminds her that if she leaves, they'll likely never see each other again. Noah embraces Allie and tries to keep himself from crying as he promises her that no matter what she decides, he'll never forget the days they've shared.

Allie goes inside to gather up her things. When she emerges from the house once again, she gives Noah the **drawing** she made of him back at the hotel. Noah appraises the drawing and tells Allie that she really is a true artist. He walks her to her car and opens the door for her. Noah tells Allie that he loves her, and Allie says that she loves him, too. She gets into the car and starts the engine. As she does, Noah mouths “stay with me” through the window. Allie begins crying, but she nevertheless puts the car in gear and begins to drive away.

As Noah watches Allie's car leave, he grows dizzy with disbelief. Though he wants to shout for her to turn around, he forces himself to remain silent. As the car passes out of sight, Noah fears he has lost Allie forever. He notices that Allie, like Anne, did not look back even once after setting out.

## CHAPTER 11: A LETTER FROM YESTERDAY

Exhausted and sad, Allie drives toward the hotel with tears in her eyes. She has no idea what she is going to say to Lon, but she knows she must come up with something. As she arrives at the parking lot of the inn, she sees Lon's car in a front spot. She parks her own car across the lot from his even though the spot next to it is open. Then, she shuts off the engine and fixes her face in the mirror.

*In this passage, Noah attempts to shake Allie out of the misplaced desire to return to her life as it was before. From their conversations over the last several days, he knows that she will not be truly happy with Lon. Allie, however, has endured a lifetime of being conditioned to make logical, “safe” decisions which prioritize the well-being of everyone but herself.*



*Noah has attempted to use the last few days to remind Allie of the pleasures of a simple life—yet in the end, he believes his attempts to remind her of the passion and happiness that are possible with him have ultimately failed.*



*Allie knows she can't express to Noah all she wants to say—she can't explain the many lives and fates that are bound up in whatever decision she makes, and she can't make him understand that she's been brought up with a flawed but deeply-ingrained set of priorities. Instead, Allie gives Noah a drawing of him in order to communicate her innermost feelings of love, passion, regret, and sadness.*



*Noah is devastated as he fears that he has just said goodbye to Allie for the last time ever. He believes that Allie's allegiance to logic, to the pursuit of wealth, and to the social class into which she was born have at last outweighed her love for him.*



*Allie is not doing well with the decision she seems to have made. She clearly regrets leaving Noah behind—she's not excited to see Lon at all, and she's only fretting about the pain, pressure, and perhaps punishment that seeing him will bring.*



Allie is almost ready to go inside—but before doing so, she decides to open one of the **letters** from Noah. She reaches into her purse for the yellowed packet of letter and pulls a letter from the bottom of the pile—it is the final letter Noah ever wrote to her. Allie opens the envelope and begins reading, picturing Noah writing the letter as she does so. In the letter, which is dated March of 1935, Noah expresses to Allie that he has at last accepted that things are over between them. He writes that though he and Allie came from different worlds, only she could show him the true power of love. He is not bitter, he says—on the contrary, he wishes Allie only love and happiness in whatever she does.

Allie reads the letter three times before putting it back into the envelope. Knowing she cannot delay going into the inn any longer, Allie puts the letters back into her purse and steps out of the car. She still has no idea what she is going to say to Lon—but when she opens the front door, enters the lobby, and sees Lon standing there, the right words come to her at last.

*Reading Noah's happy wishes for Allie from 1935—a time when he thought she no longer wanted anything to do with him, when he accepted that she was happy with her life without him in it—makes Allie realize just how deeply Noah has always loved her. He truly wants what's best for her, no matter where she ends up. This forces her to see what a good man Noah is and how invested he is in her happiness regardless of whether or not she finds it with him.*



*This chapter ends on a cliffhanger without answering what Allie decides to do—whether she rebukes Lon or decides to pursue a life with him—but it heavily foreshadows the idea that Allie will end up choosing love and desire over the stale, passionless foundation that Lon offers her.*



## CHAPTER 12: WINTER FOR TWO

The story ended, the elderly Noah closes his **notebook** and removes his glasses from his tired eyes. He looks at the woman sitting across from him—she is staring out at the courtyard, where families and friends are visiting other patients. Noah watches the serene scene outside with his companion, all the while knowing how painful it will be for his fellow patients when their loved ones leave for the day.

Noah **reads** to his companion each and every morning without fail—it is something he must do for a “romantic” reason, he says. Though he and his companion spend their days together, their nights are spent alone—he is not allowed to see his companion after dark, and though he understands the reasons why, he sometimes sneaks out of his room and into hers to watch her sleep peacefully. Her face in sleep is more familiar to him than his own—the two of them have been married for nearly 49 years.

Noah knows that soon his life will be over—his pain grows every day while his capacity for thinking and **writing** decreases. He still loves poetry and often reads to his friends in the nursing home. He has gained a reputation as a caring man who can get through to anyone, and he visits his fellow patients each night. He often tells his friends stories from the early days of his marriage, regaling them with tales of adventures to **art** shows in New York and Paris. He reads poems too, feeling his favorite verses tell his friends just as much about him as personal stories—he wants them to know who he is.

*As Sparks switches back to the frame story—many years removed from the fateful weekend in October of 1946—it becomes clear that Noah is weary of this story even as he hopes it will bring his companion comfort. Noah occupies a world that's painful to live in, both physically and emotionally, and it has taken a toll on him.*



*Though Noah still will not reveal the identity of his companion, Sparks slyly hints to readers that Allie is the woman to whom Noah reads the notebook each day. Noah's faith in Allie's need to hear this story—even in her confused state—is as much for her benefit as it is for his own. Memory is now the only way that Noah can be with Allie, even as she sits across from him in the nursing home.*



*As Noah wrestles with his impending mortality, he turns to sharing poems and memories with his fellow patients in order to stave off his existential fears and make something of his final days. Noah, who has always felt that poetry connects him both to the past and to his deepest self, uses poems to help others experience the same balm against fear and worry that the soothing, meditative works of poets like Whitman have always inspired in him.*



Back in the present, Noah inches closer to his companion and sits in the chair beside her bed. He takes her hand. She softly rubs his fingers with her thumb, and she tells him that the story he read to her was beautiful—then she asks if Noah himself wrote it. He tells her that he did. The woman says she feels she’s heard the story before, and she admits that hearing it makes her feel less afraid. She asks if it is a true story, and Noah says that it is. The woman asks which man Allie married. Noah replies only that she married “the one who was right for her.” He assures his companion that by the end of the day, she’ll know which man Allie chose.

The woman says she has another question for Noah, but she is afraid it will hurt his feelings. He tells her to ask away, even though he knows her words will scar him. The woman softly asks Noah who he is. Noah is heartbroken—his beloved Allie can no longer recognize him.

Noah and Allie have lived at the Creekside Extended Care Facility, a nursing home, for more than three years. They came here after boarding up their beloved **house** in New Bern, unable to bring themselves to sell it. Though Noah was initially skeptical of Allie’s desire to go live in a home, he now appreciates her foresight—the “clock” of their mortality ticks more loudly each day. Noah’s rheumatoid arthritis, failing kidneys, low heart rate, and prostate cancer make his days painful.

Noah and Allie have four living children—the fifth they lost as an infant. Their children often come to visit, but Noah finds that his happy memories of his children are just as comforting as their actual visits. He wonders if Allie dreams of them—she does not know who they are any longer. Noah thinks often of his own father, and he wonders what his daddy would think of how his life has turned out.

Noah, still reeling from Allie’s question, replies that his name is Duke. Allie apologizes for not knowing him and admits that she doesn’t even know her own name. She begs “Duke” to help her remember who she is. Noah tells Allie that her name is Hannah—that she is a lover of life and an **artist** who has led a full, happy existence. She has wanted for nothing, he tells her, because her needs have always been spiritual. He recites a portion of a Walt Whitman **poem**: “Nothing is ever really lost, or can be lost,” the poem begins. When Noah finishes, Allie asks him if he wrote the poem. Allie asks Noah to stay with her for a while. He promises her he’ll stay as long as she wants, and he asks her to take a walk with him.

*Allie doesn’t recognize herself in the romantic story Noah has just read to her—but even so, there is something about the story which comforts her and lessens her fear. Though Allie doesn’t know that the story is actually a shared memory, it still allows her to feel excited, happy, and curious on a day when she might otherwise have only felt scared, alone, and confused.*



*Noah is devastated by Allie’s question even though he knew it was coming long before she asked it. Noah must now endure each day with the knowledge that not only does his wife not recognize her own life—she doesn’t recognize Noah or his role in it, either.*



*Noah and Allie are both nearing the ends of their lives. Regrettably, they are far from the beautiful house Noah renovated so long ago—the house, it turns out, in which they lived out their 49 years together. The fact that Noah and Allie don’t sell the house signifies that how difficult it is for them to accept that they will never return there and fill its halls with their love once again.*



*Because Allie cannot access her memories, the burden of remembering their past as well as the job of maintaining their present connections falls solely to Noah. But in recalling happy memories for Allie, Noah reaps the therapeutic benefits of remembering as well.*



*Noah doesn’t want to overwhelm Allie with the painful knowledge that she cannot remember her own life story. Instead of upsetting her, he decides to tell her some things that are true in order to remind her of the beautiful life she had without flooding her with information she cannot handle. Invoking the Whitman poem he loves helps Noah to comfort both Allie and himself with the knowledge that although Allie can’t remember their story, nothing about the lives they’ve lived together is truly “lost.”*



Allie, Noah reveals, became a famous artist who was widely lauded as one of the most important Southern painters of the 20th century. Her **paintings** now hang in galleries around the world. Noah still keeps the first painting she ever made for him on the wall of his room in the nursing home.

*With Noah's encouragement, Allie found faith in her artistry and committed her life to her greatest passion. She was rewarded for her faith and her hard work—she achieved far more fame, success, and both material and spiritual wealth than she ever would have if she'd made the "safe" choice of marrying Lon and resigning herself to a scripted, passionless life.*



Noah never could have expected the turn his and Allie's final years would take. When Allie began acting distracted and forgetful, he dismissed her slips of the tongue and occasional confusion about the date as ordinary. But one day, when Noah found Allie in her car three blocks away, crying and unable to find her way home, he knew something was terribly wrong. Six days later, after a series of tests, Allie and Noah's physician Dr. Barnwell called them both into his office and informed them that Allie was in the early stages of Alzheimer's, a degenerative brain disorder which affects memory and personality. Allie and Noah crumpled into tears upon receiving the news while Barnwell expressed his sincerest condolences.

*The terrible news of Allie's Alzheimer's diagnosis—and Allie and Noah's mournful reactions to it—demonstrate just how important memory is in a human life. To be connected to the past is to find strength in the challenges one has faced, to find joy in the successes one has had, and to find guidance in the mistakes one has made. Losing access to all of that is a death in and of itself—being unable to use memory as a balm against the uncertainty of old age is a tremendous loss for both Allie and Noah.*



Upon returning home, Allie got to work instead of sinking into despair. She made arrangements to enter the nursing home, rewrote her will, composed burial instructions, and wrote **letters** to her friends, her children, her neighbors, and, of course, to Noah. When Noah reads Allie's last letter to him, he is reminded of the many letters he wrote her over the years. The letters are a living document of the romance and passion that has always defined their relationship—romance and passion that has lasted over 40 years. The letters encompass everything—joy, sorrow, desire, and reverence.

*As Noah recalls how important letter-writing and documentation became to Allie as soon as she realized what was happening her, Sparks cements the symbol of writing as representative of one's ability to connect to the happy, comforting memories the past contains.*



Several nights ago, as Noah found himself sifting through these **letters**, he began reading the last letter he wrote to Allie. The letter, written outside on their porch, tells of how Noah summoned all their children—visiting the house to provide support and comfort in the wake of the news about Allie's diagnosis—into the kitchen in order to tell them the story of the day in 1946 when Allie returned to New Bern.

*This passage shows how, during a time of great strife in his family, Noah used a story from the past—his and Allie's amazing love story—to help both his children and himself cope with the fear, uncertainty, and pain of Allie's diagnosis.*



In telling his children the story of their reunion, Noah fills in the blanks about what happened between Lon and Allie at the inn. When Allie walked into the lobby and saw Lon, she took him on a walk around town and explained that she could not marry him. Lon accepted the news with grace and understanding. Noah and Allie's children responded to the story emotionally, then spent hours with Noah telling stories of the thing they remembered most from watching their loving parents as children. Noah found himself touched by their recollections and more aware than ever of the fact that loving Allie made him into the man he was.

Presently, Allie and Noah wander down to a small creek to watch some geese on the water. Allie asks Noah if he was ever married. He says he was, and he begins to describe his beautiful wife—the only woman he ever loved. Allie hesitantly asks if Noah's wife is dead. Noah replies that she is alive in his heart and always will be. Allie asks why Noah is spending the day with her and being so nice to her, and Noah replies that he's with her because he's meant to be. Allie calls Noah a "mysterious stranger." Noah playfully retorts that women are supposed to love mysterious strangers. They laugh together and then return to silence as they watch the geese on the water. When Noah puts his hand on Allie's knee, she does not react or push him away.

Noah explains that he is often purposefully vague in his answers to Allie, occasionally going so far as to offer her different names, because he has gotten into sticky situations before while trying to rouse her memories, hurting Allie or confusing her further. The "waterfall," or huge influx, of information required to bring her up to speed is too much for either of them to bear.

As Allie and Noah walk back up to the main building at dusk, Allie playfully tells Noah that she believes he is her secret admirer. In a small garden near the entrance, Noah picks some flowers for Allie and she smells their fragrant blooms. Allie holds out a small slip of paper and says that she found it beneath her pillow. She holds it out to Noah, who reads it: it is a **poem** about "awaken[ing] love." Allie produces another—this one, she says, she found in the pocket of her coat. It is another people about two souls becoming one. Noah does not acknowledge that he is the one who has left the poems for her. At the doorway, Noah and Allie stop and look at each other. Allie explains that she wants to stare at her companion's face so that she doesn't forget this day.

*By filling in for readers what happened between Allie and Lon at the inn, Sparks demonstrates how Allie, in the end, chose passion and true love over logic and the pursuit of wealth and social status. Noah and Allie's children, amazed by the story of how their parents overcame all obstacles in order to be with each other, emotionally express their reverence for Noah and Allie's commitment to each other in spite of all the unknowns. Sparks uses their emotional reaction in order to signal to his readers just what an awe-inspiring force true love is.*



*This scene parallels the scene from the past in which Noah brought Allie to a lake filled with swans and geese—both in terms of its physical and emotional context. In both scenes, Noah is cautiously hopeful that Allie will soon return to him. In the past, he hoped she'd follow her instincts back to a relationship with him—and in this scene, too, he hopes that her instincts will help her back to him even though her memory and sense of self are both severely compromised.*



*Noah doesn't want to hurt or upset Allie—he knows that it is too much for her to bear to receive a primer about the contents of her own life each and every day, and it has become easier in practical ways—though more emotionally painful—to leave Allie in the dark unless she comes to her memories on her own.*



*In addition to reading the notebook to Allie in hopes of jogging her memory, Noah tries to get through to her in other ways. Poetry has always been Noah's passion, and by leaving Allie a mixture of poems by famous writers and thinkers as well as verses of his own invention, Noah attempts to rouse Allie from her mind's slumber and evoke in her the same happy memories he feels when he reads poetry.*



Allie's disease is no doubt advanced—she does not know who she is, and many mornings, she cries for hours. Sometimes she sees small people or gnomes in the corner of the room, and she often refuses to eat. In spite of all the setbacks Alzheimer's has brought, however, Noah insists that Allie is a "miracle." Sometimes, after Noah reads the **notebook** to Allie, her condition improves—and sometimes she even comes back to herself and remembers everything about her life. None of Allie's doctors can come up with an explanation for these miraculous reprieves from her disease—but Noah knows that the power of love is stronger than their training and their books.

Noah leads Allie back to her room, where the nurses have set up a candlelit dinner for the two of them. As Allie spots the beautiful display, she turns to her companion and says she knows how the story in the **notebook** ended. Allie, she says, went with Noah. Noah confirms that she did. He helps Allie take her seat at the table, anxiously waiting to see if she will have a breakthrough. As an old song begins to play on the radio, Allie gives Noah a look that seems to come from another life—he smiles back at her and knows she has returned to him. He feels strong and proud. He tells Allie he loves her. "I've always loved you, Noah," she replies.

Noah is thrilled, but he knows that Allie will not stay this way. Over the course of their dinner, she also seems to realize that she is on borrowed time. She tells Noah she is afraid to forget him again. Noah soothes her by promising her he'll never leave her side. As the night grows darker, Noah listens to the ticking of the clock and waits for the "thief" to come.

Sure enough, after dinner, as Allie and Noah hold each other, Allie begins to blink and shake her head, staring at the corner of the room. She quietly tells Noah that there are tiny people in the corner staring at her. Noah realizes that Allie is slipping away. He tries to talk her through her fear, but Allie can no longer recognize Noah. She begins screaming, asking who he is and what he's doing in her room. She orders him to stay away from her. Noah feels a terrible pain in his side. He presses a button to call for the nurses, and within 30 seconds, they arrive to sedate Allie.

*This passage is emblematic of Nicholas Sparks's argument that pure, genuine love conquers all. He shows Noah's love for Allie to be a healing force which not even science can explain. Though far-fetched to say the least, this idea hammers home the depth of Sparks's assertion that love has the power to steer the course of one's life and alter one's destiny.*



*Noah's hopeful mission has at last come to fruition: Allie returns to him, fully conscious once again of who she is, who Noah is, and the memories of the decades they've shared together. Noah's efforts are not rewarded like this each day—tonight is truly special, and Allie, too, seems to recognize just how hard-won their fleeting moments together are.*



*Allie and Noah both know that the joy they feel in being "reunited" is temporary. Nevertheless, they choose to use these moments to devote themselves to their passionate love for each other and try to fight off the cold logic of knowing what comes next.*



*Noah's goal each day is to break through to Allie and help her return to herself through the notebook. However, Noah also knows that each time he meets this goal, he will have to once again witness Allie slip away from him. Allie's pain and deep confusion in this moment is palpable—and whether such terror is worth the fleeting moments of lucidity is impossible to say.*



Noah spends the rest of the evening alone in his room. Dr. Barnwell, who is making rounds, comes to visit Noah and talk with him. When Dr. Barnwell asks Noah about his day with Allie, and Noah tells him that he and Allie talked for over four hours, Barnwell is visibly impressed by how their connection overpowers Allie's disease. Noah tells Barnwell that in spite of his progress today, he feels alone. Barnwell tries to comfort Noah by telling him that no one is alone, but Noah retorts that he himself is alone—and that Barnwell is too, whether or not he knows it.

The following week, after several frustrating days of being unable to get through to Allie, Noah wakes up one morning to look at some old photographs and **letters**. He finds he cannot concentrate very well—he has a bad headache. He closes his eyes for a few moments to shake off the pain, but the throbbing in his head becomes worse. His hand begins to tingle and go numb, and his eyesight suddenly blinks out. Noah knows he is having a stroke. As he loses consciousness, his last thoughts are of Allie lying lost, confused, and alone in her bed down the hall.

Noah swims in and out of consciousness for days. When he is awake, he is aware of being intubated and hooked up to many humming, beeping machines. He hears his doctors talking about the complications he could face when he wakes up. He tries to blot out the pain and uncertainty by focusing on memories of Allie. Several days later, when Noah finally regains consciousness for good, he wakes up to find Dr. Barnwell sitting near his bed, smiling.

Two weeks later, Noah is able to leave the hospital. The right side of his body has been weakened, but he is grateful that he is not fully paralyzed. Noah returns to his room late at night with the help of a nurse who tells him how much all the other nurses and patients have missed him. After she leaves, Noah sits by his window and watches a storm rustle through the trees. Lightning lights up the sky and Noah contemplates how alone he is—even though Allie, the love of his life, is just down the hall. He stands up and effortfully goes over to his desk, where he looks through old pictures, **letters**, and a bouquet of dried flowers he gave to Allie long ago. He remembers being unable to understand why she kept them for so long, even as they grew brittle and frail.

*Though Dr. Barnwell tries to congratulate Noah on the progress he's able to make with Allie, complimenting the fortitude of their connection in the process, the disheartened Noah feels more alone than ever before. He lashes out by suggesting that everyone in life ends up alone—but of course, given Noah's romantic sensibility, this is not his true perspective.*



*Even when Noah realizes that he is in danger, his thoughts are only of Allie. He is her steadfast companion and one of her primary caregivers—without him, he knows that not only will Allie's level of care suffer, but she will no longer have access to the memories of their lives that Noah holds within him.*



*When Noah is sick in the hospital, struggling to return from the brink of death, the only thing that brings him any comfort is his vast store of memories of Allie and their life together. Noah's memories are, once again, a balm against his fears about his own mortality.*



*As Noah returns to the nursing home, he finds himself lonelier than ever before. He knows his stroke has brought him even closer to death, and though he longs for comfort from Allie, she cannot give it to him. As Noah contemplates the dry, brittle bouquet Allie saved for so many years, he reflects on his own value even at the end of his life.*



It is nearly midnight when Noah sits down with the last **letter** Allie wrote to him before her mind began to go. The lengthy letter describes the day she came back to him at last, after meeting with Lon at the inn in New Bern and telling him the engagement was off. She recalls how kind and accepting Noah was when she returned—and how, since that moment, they never parted again. Allie writes about how foolish she felt in the days that followed for even imagining she could ever be with another. Allie goes on to express her gratitude for how sensitive, kind, and generous Noah is, especially when it comes to their beloved children. She thanks him for encouraging her work as an **artist** and for being a friend as well as a lover.

At the end of the **letter**, Allie writes that while Noah might think she’s “crazy” for writing down their entire love story in the notebook, she knows it is important to have a record of their incredible romance. She is afraid to lose her memories—yet she promises that no matter what, she will find a way to come back to him in spite of her disease. She urges him to read the enclosed notebook to her to help jog her memories—and to be gentle with her on days she can’t push through.

Noah puts the **letter** aside and goes out to the hall. He sees that the night nurse, Janice, is seated at a station in the hall. This late at night, patients are not supposed to be out of their rooms. Nevertheless, Noah shuffles down the hall. Janice stops him and asks him if he’s going to see Allie. He says that he is, but Janice tells him that he shouldn’t. Noah tells Janice that it’s his and Allie’s 49th anniversary today. Janice grows somber and tells Noah that while the doctors don’t understand how Noah is able to beat Allie’s disease some days, the nurses do: love, she says, is the answer. Janice tells Noah that she is going downstairs for some coffee and won’t be back for a while—essentially giving him permission to head down to Allie’s room.

Noah slowly walks down the hall toward Allie’s room, feeling stronger and more powerful with each step. When he at last reaches her room, however, he is exhausted from the walk. His heart beats strangely and erratically as he enters Allie’s still, quiet room. He sits on the edge of her bed and slips a **poem** beneath her pillow. Unable to help himself, he reaches out and touches her face. Allie opens her eyes, and Noah waits for her to begin screaming or crying—instead, she simply stares at him lovingly. Noah bends his head to kiss Allie, and she responds. As moonlight filters through the window, Allie tells Noah how much she’s missed him and begins, slowly, to unbutton his shirt.

*This letter, which fills in the last of the blanks about how Allie and Noah began their lives together immediately after she finished breaking things off with Lon, shows how both of them sensed the fulfillment of destiny when they finally realized that there were no more roadblocks between them. Allie ultimately found true safety, stability, and fulfillment with Noah—and she didn’t have to sacrifice her passion in order to find success.*



*This letter reveals that Allie and Noah composed the notebook together, planning from the beginning to use it as a way of potentially jogging Allie’s memories and reminding her of the love she and Noah have shared for over 50 years. Both Noah and Allie turn to writing in order to spur on memory—the only balm they have in their old age against the frightening, steady crawl of mortality.*



*Noah’s encounter with Janice demonstrates that others notice just how profound and beautiful Allie and Noah’s bond is. Janice and the other nurses are aware that sometimes, love’s power overcomes unbeatable odds. For this reason, Janice wants to allow Noah the chance to visit Allie—she knows that while it’s technically against the rules, a visit from Noah might do Allie more good than any other treatment available to her.*



*In the final scene of the novel, Noah finds that Allie remembers him—and desires him—even without the help of the notebook. This is yet another unprecedented miracle, one which Allie and Noah plan to take advantage of for as long as it lasts. Their love and passion for each other can truly withstand anything: disease, pain, heartbreak, and separation. Noah described his life story as a kind of tragedy in the novel’s opening chapter, yet here, he and Allie come to as happy an ending as either of them could hope for.*





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