

# LIFE AND BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

The following abbreviated biography of Nicholas Sparks is provided to help you become more familiar with his life and the events that possibly influenced his writing. Read this section on the “Life and Background of the Author” and keep it in mind when reading Nicholas Sparks’ *The Last Song*, thinking of any thematic relationship between Nicholas Sparks’ work and his experiences.

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## Personal Background

Nicholas Sparks was born in 1965 in Omaha, Nebraska, the second of three children. His father, Patrick Michael (Mike), was a graduate student for much of Nicholas' early life, so the family lived in a number of college towns before settling in Fair Oaks, California, when Nicholas was eight. Nicholas' mother, Jill Emma Marie (Jill), worked as both a homemaker and optometrist's assistant. Nicholas, his older brother Micah, and his younger sister Danielle were all born within a three-year period, and the closeness in age created a strong bond between them.

## Education and Work Experience

Nicholas excelled in high school, graduating as valedictorian of his class and earning notice as a middle-distance runner. He accepted a full athletic scholarship to Notre Dame but found himself hampered by an injury the summer after his freshman year. With time on his hands, Nicholas wrote his first novel, *The Passing*, which was never published.

Nicholas graduated *Magna Cum Laude* from Notre Dame in 1988 with a degree in business finance and then married his wife, Cathy, in 1989. Shortly after his wedding, his mother passed away at the age of 47 from a horseback riding accident. That same year, Nicholas wrote his second novel, *The Royal Murders*, which also remains unpublished. Over the next three years, Nicholas worked in a number of industries and experienced two bright spots: the birth of his son Miles and the chance to coauthor *Wokini*—a spiritual allegory that sold over 50,000 copies—with Olympic gold medalist Billy Mills. In 1992 and 1993, Nicholas experienced more change, more joy, and more tragedy. He moved his family to North Carolina, where his second son, Ryan, was born in 1993—but he also learned that his younger sister had developed cancer—an illness that would later claim her life.

## Early Published Works

At the age of 28, Nicholas decided to give his literary career a real chance. To that end, he spent the second half of 1994 writing a novel he called *The Notebook*, scheduling his writing time around his family. A year later, while living in Greenville, South Carolina, Nicholas was offered a contract by a young agent with no published novels to her name. Despite her inexperience, however, Theresa Park was able

to not only sell the manuscript to Warner Books but also to secure a \$1 million advance, much to the Nicholas' shock . . . and elation! Ms. Park also secured a sale of the film rights.

The next year brought a further mix of success and tragedy: Nicholas' father died in an automobile accident at the age of 54, just a month before Nicholas embarked on a 45-city tour to promote *The Notebook*. That novel eventually spent 55 weeks on the *New York Times* hardcover and paperback bestseller lists and was translated into 35 languages. In 1997, *The Notebook* was nominated for an ABBY (American Booksellers Book of the Year Award), but it did not win.

Nicholas has written 17 books and seen six of his novels made into movies. He lives in North Carolina, where he continues his prolific writing career and lives with his wife Cathy and their five children, Miles, Ryan, Landon, and twins Lexie and Savannah.

## Career Highlights

Each of Nicholas' novels has become an international bestseller. After *The Notebook*, additional novels followed in rapid succession, starting with *Message in a Bottle*, published in 1998, and *A Walk to Remember*, published in 1999. After that came *The Rescue* in 2000, *A Bend in the Road* in 2001, *Nights in Rodanthe* in 2002, and *The Guardian* and *The Wedding* (a sequel of sorts to *The Notebook*) in 2003. Nicholas Sparks coauthored *Three Weeks with My Brother* with his brother, Micah, in 2004, and then returned to solo works with *True Believer* and *At First Sight* in 2005, *Dear John* in 2006, *The Choice* in 2007, *The Lucky One* in 2008, *The Last Song* in 2009, and *Safe Haven* in 2010.

In 1999, *Message in a Bottle* became the first of Nicholas' novels to be released as a movie. With stellar casting—Kevin Costner, Paul Newman, and Robin Wright Penn—the movie grossed more than \$120 million and hit the number-one box office spot. A movie version of *A Walk to Remember* was released in 2002, followed by *The Notebook* in 2004 and *Nights in Rodanthe* in 2008. Two movies based on his work were released in 2010—*Dear John* and *The Last Song*, for which Nicholas wrote the screenplay along with his former college roommate Jeff Van Wie. *The Lucky One* began filming in late 2010 with a projected release date of 2011, and *Safe Haven* is expected to start production in 2011 for a 2012 release.



# INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVEL

The following section is provided solely as an educational tool and is not meant to replace the experience of reading *The Last Song*. Read “A Brief Synopsis” to enhance your understanding of the work and to prepare yourself for the critical thinking that should take place whenever you read any work of fiction or nonfiction. Keep the List of Characters and Character Map at hand so you can refer to them as you read the original literary work—this helps refresh your memory if you encounter a character about whom you’re uncertain.

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## A Brief Synopsis of *The Last Song*

*The Last Song* is the story of Ronnie Miller and the summer that she spends with her father at Wrightsville Beach. At the start of the summer, she is a rebellious 17 year old who resents her parents for their messy divorce; she is particularly annoyed that she is being forced to spend the summer with her estranged father, to whom she has not spoken in three years. She is so angry that she has abandoned the one thing that she and her father used to share in common—playing the piano. She has no desire to spend the summer in North Carolina; she has no desire to get to know Will Blakelee, the good-looking beach volleyball player who literally bumps into her during her first day in the South; and she has no desire to reconnect with the father who walked away from her, her mother, and her brother. However, a run-in with the wrong crowd combined with a nest of endangered loggerhead turtle eggs results in Ronnie’s unexpected maturation. The summer she initially dreaded ends up being an opportunity for her to learn about faith, family, and love.

## List of Characters

**Veronica “Ronnie” Miller** The 17-year-old protagonist; at the beginning of the novel, Ronnie is angry at her parents, who are separated, and resents having to spend the summer with her father. During the summer, however, Ronnie gains a new appreciation for family, life, faith, and love, as she develops from a rebellious teenager into a responsible young woman.

**Steve Miller** Ronnie’s estranged father. They used to share a passion for the piano and writing music; now they share nothing. Steve has one summer to reconnect with his daughter. During this same summer, Steve engages in his own spiritual journey as he struggles with the question of what it means to experience the presence of God, and he develops a lasting and special relationship with his son.

**Will Blakelee** The “eye candy” beach volleyball player who is definitely not Ronnie’s type . . . or is he? After literally bumping into Ronnie, Will’s path continues to cross hers until they cautiously and carefully explore their mutual attraction. The only problem is the secret that he is keeping, a secret that might irreparably destroy their young love.

**Jonah Miller** Ronnie's 10-year-old brother. Unlike Ronnie, Jonah is looking forward to spending the summer with his dad. Not only does Steve teach Jonah how to build a stained-glass window, but he also teaches his son about love and trust. It is clear that Jonah has learned from his father when he unexpectedly assists Ronnie in her time of need.

**Blaze** A Wrightsville beach girl whose real name is Galadriel. Initially, Blaze befriends Ronnie when she first arrives in Wrightsville Beach, but jealousy and insecurity cause Blaze to betray this budding friendship. In the end, Blaze has the opportunity to redeem herself, but will she?

**Marcus** The resident bad boy and fireball thrower. Although Marcus is interested in Ronnie, she does not fall for his charm. A self-centered manipulator, Marcus' primary concern is taking care of himself.

**Pastor Charlie Harris** The local minister. Pastor Harris served as Steve's surrogate father and piano teacher as well as Steve's oldest friend. He provides both Ronnie and her father with spiritual guidance and strength during their journeys of self-discovery and faith.

**Scott** Will's best friend. Because Scott saved Will's life, Scott is able to convince Will to keep his secret.

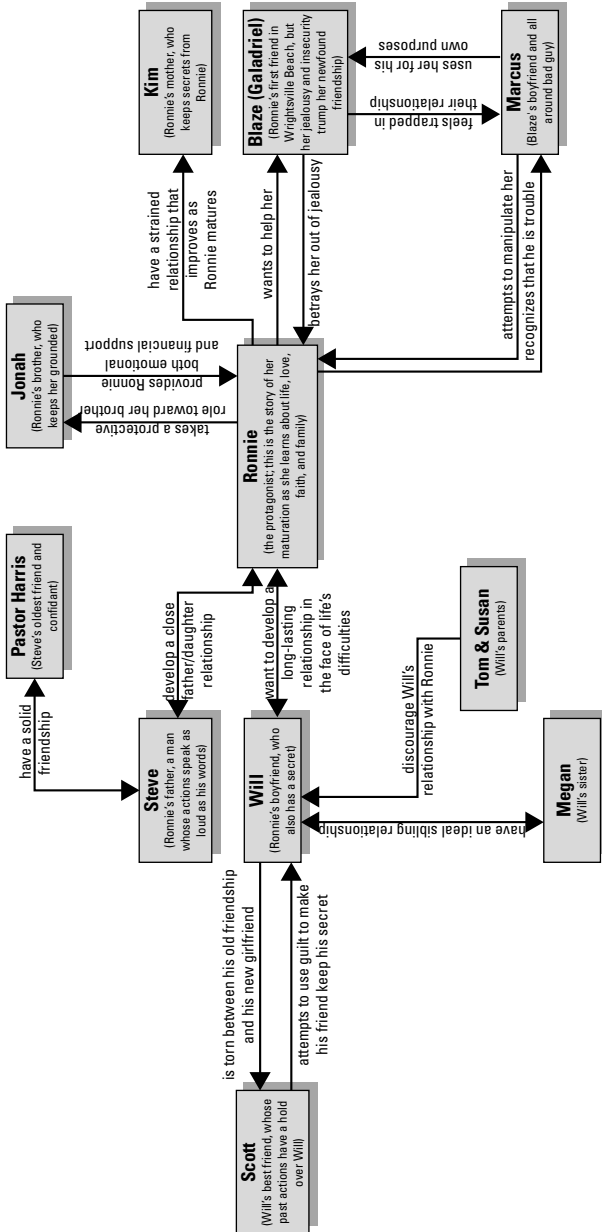
**Kim** Ronnie's mother. Unbeknownst to Ronnie, Kim is responsible for two of the important life lessons that Ronnie learns.

**Megan Blakelee** Will's older sister. Rather than holding a grudge about the interruption of her wedding, Megan uses it as an opportunity to show understanding. She is a minor character who plays a major role in attempting to reunite Ronnie and Will.

**Ashley and Cassie** Friends of Scott and Will. Ashley is Will's ex-girlfriend who will seemingly do anything to get him back, and Cassie is the girl Scott seems to have his eye on.

**Tom and Susan** Will's parents. Susan believes that Ronnie is beneath her son's station in life and is hesitant to encourage any relationship between the two.

**Teddy and Lance** Marcus' flunkies.

The Last Song **Character Map**



# CRITICAL COMMENTARIES

The sections that follow provide useful tools to supplement your reading of *The Last Song*. First, in order to enhance your understanding and enjoyment of the novel, we provide quick summaries in case you have difficulty as you read the original literary work. Each summary is followed by commentary, which highlights literary devices, character analyses, themes, and so on. Keep in mind that the interpretations here are only one way of understanding the text and should be used to jumpstart your thinking. No single interpretation of a complex work like *The Last Song* is infallible or exhaustive, and you'll likely find that you interpret portions of the work differently from the author of this study guide. Read the original work and determine your own interpretations, referring to these notes for supplemental meanings rather than definitive answers.

# Prologue: Ronnie

## Summary

*The Last Song* opens with Ronnie staring out of her window, remembering the installation of a stained-glass window over a month ago. She wonders if Pastor Harris is already at the church and thinks of how the beach had fascinated her younger brother Jonah during the summer. As she ponders these things, her silence is interrupted by her mother. Ronnie's mother encourages her to talk about what is on her mind, commenting that Ronnie has been mostly silent for the past couple of days.

### From Nicholas

**Reports indicate that the screenplay for *The Last Song* was completed before the novel. Did you already know how the two versions needed to be different? For example, fleshing more of the characters in the novel and changing the nature of the fire—did you know how these elements had to differ?**

*I've written screenplays before, and there is a difference between writing a screenplay and writing a novel. Screenplays, in my opinion, are much easier. The structure always remains the same, and in a screenplay, you're allowed to "tell" not "show."*

*Most of the creative work took place while crafting the screenplay. By that, I mean the specific elements and actions within the story. When it came to writing the novel, I was essentially working from a long, detailed outline. Still, while I thought it would make the novel easy to write, the novel had its own challenges.*

*The novel, unlike many I've written, has multiple characters and shifting viewpoints. At the same time, it's important that each character "sound" different in the way they speak, each character had to see the world in different ways, each character had to have his or her own story, complete with a beginning, middle and end. At the same time, I was aware that my readers span the spectrum in age; thus, I did my best to make the novel appealing to all age groups.*

Bits and pieces of information about the past summer are mentioned—a betrayal, an arrest, falling in love, turtles—and then Ronnie shares a newspaper clipping with her mother. The newspaper article tells the story of a church that was destroyed, presumably through the careless use of illegal fireworks. The aforementioned Pastor Harris was the man injured in the blaze.

Then Ronnie prepares to tell both her mother and readers about her summer.

## Commentary



Literary  
Device

*The Last Song* begins after the major action of the plot has already occurred, so most of the novel is actually told as a flashback.



Style &  
Language

*The Last Song* is told not only from Ronnie's perspective but also as a limited-omniscient, third-person narrative, with the perspective changing from chapter to chapter.

Ronnie refers to holidays in the Prologue, and she must mean Christmas—there is the mention of Christmas trees, as well as the fact that last month was November. This not only helps to establish the setting but also provides two important contrasts: the first is the contrast between this year and last year—it was last New Year's Eve when a fire destroyed the church; the second is the contrast between summer and winter.



Character  
Insight

Specifically, the novel is about Ronnie's maturation. Thus, it is a *bildungsroman*—a coming of age novel—about the moral and spiritual development of the protagonist, Ronnie.

### From Nicholas

**Much of your fiction has autobiographical elements to it. How difficult was it to write with Miley Cyrus in mind?**

*It was less difficult than you might imagine, at least when it comes to "picturing" a specific actress. In the end, after all, I was writing a story about Ronnie Miller, not Miley Cyrus, and it was up to Miley to become Ronnie, not the other way around. Still, Ronnie Miller was a challenging character to create, if only because she was such an angry character at the beginning of the novel. While being angry, however, it was also important to make her likeable. That balance was tough to attain.*



Style &  
Language

In addition to providing background information, Ronnie's conversation with her mother builds suspense—one of the primary purposes of the Prologue. Ronnie admits that she was wrong, not only about her father but also about everything, but readers do not know what “everything” is, nor do they know what happened to her father. Although many things are mentioned, readers actually learn very little about Ronnie—they know that she is 18 years old, but know nothing of her love, her arrest, or even her father.

The Prologue also lists people who play a significant part in the narrative—Ronnie, Pastor Harris, Ronnie's father, Jonah, Kim, Blaze, Scott, Marcus, Will, Brian—and significant events, such as the fire and the turtles, without providing too many details. The Prologue raises more questions than it answers.



Literary  
Device

Unbeknownst to first-time readers, two important symbols are introduced in the Prologue. The first is the light shining through the stained-glass window. The physical light comes to have a second, figurative meaning, as Ronnie has metaphorically come to see the light, a Christian allusion. The second is a symbolic action. Ronnie's mother gathers her daughter's long hair into a loose ponytail. Ronnie admits that this is a comforting action, and it is an action that is repeated throughout the course of *The Last Song* and is used to develop Ronnie's character.



Theme

The Prologue serves as an introduction to some of the work's themes, such as faith, fate, love, and loss.



Character  
Insight

Additionally, Ronnie's feelings of confusion at the end of the Prologue express the emptiness people feel when bad things happen to good people.

## Glossary

**Bottle rockets** a type of firework

### From Nicholas

#### What elements of *The Last Song* are autobiographical in nature?

*I have two teenagers, so I certainly drew from my own experiences as a parent in those instances. Will's character was drawn heavily from my oldest son Miles (who loves to fish and drive his truck in the mud), while Jonah is very much like my third son, Landon. Ironically, Steve, the father, was challenging because he was such a passive character. He's nothing like me at all.*

# Chapter 1: Ronnie

## Summary

Chapter 1 takes place six months prior to the Prologue. Ronnie and her brother are being driven to North Carolina to spend the summer with their father. Ronnie, who is accustomed to living in New York, dreads having to spend her summer in North Carolina and is doing her best to make the drive miserable for both her mother and her 10-year-old brother. Ronnie mentions the *incident* and reveals that she is annoyed about her lack of independence.

Ronnie has been ignoring her father since he left her family three years ago, refusing to talk to him on the phone or to be available when he visits New York. She has recently had trouble in school and regularly violates her curfew. She was also involved in an *incident*. Although Ronnie refuses to discuss the *incident* with her mother, Jonah reveals, in true 10 year old fashion, that Ronnie was arrested. She also mentions her father's piano playing, Juilliard, and her own piano playing, which she abandoned after her father moved out.

## Commentary



Early in the chapter, Ronnie is described as feeling “like a prisoner.” This feeling of being trapped, of helplessness, is a motif that is developed throughout *The Last Song*. Many characters experience these feelings, and they choose different ways and means to address them.



In what may potentially be seen as an editing mistake, Ronnie is annoyed that her mother “conceived three months earlier than she should have.” However, if Ronnie’s mother had actually conceived three months later, Ronnie would be even younger. This may actually be an important bit of characterization. As a 17 year old, Ronnie thinks she has things all figured out: no one can talk to her, explain things to her, or rationalize with her. She is convinced that she is right, even though she is in fact incorrect. This attitude is not unusual for an adolescent.

The chapter also provides a realistic portrayal of personal relationships—specifically Ronnie’s relationship with her mother, her brother, and her father. Ronnie’s voice is that of a disgruntled teenager, one who is trying to find her place in the world, one who is without a sense of purpose and direction, yet is unwilling to accept guidance from anyone else, particularly from her parents.



The image and tone at the end of the chapter set up an important contrast for Ronnie’s development. Her sagging figure in the front seat suggests that she wants nothing to do with her mother, her brother, or her father. She sees no value in family. Everything is “depressing” to her. This image is of Ronnie at her starting point, and *The Last Song* chronicles her growth.

## Glossary

- Mozart** a prolific and influential Austrian composer, considered by many to be the best of all classical composers
- sonata** a composition for one or two instruments, typically in three or four movements in contrasted forms and keys
- Carnegie Hall** a famous concert hall in New York that was named for and endowed by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie

## Chapter 2: Steve

### Summary

This chapter shifts to the perspective of Steve, Ronnie's father. As it begins, he waits for his children's arrival while playing the piano.

There is not much in the house where Steve now lives. Steve's life has changed a lot since his father died—he quit his job, divorced his wife, and toured the country, attempting to earn a living as a professional musician. The former owner of the house, an artist, had left it to the church when he died, and Steve is living there rent-free until the church is ready to sell it.

While he is waiting, Steve reflects on his life, feeling like an observer rather than a participant. Thinking back on his decisions, he does not fix the blame on anyone but himself. He also desires a relationship with God, though he is unsure whether God still desires a relationship with him.

#### From Nicholas

#### Are you the type of parent that Steve is?

*Not at all. Steve is a passive character, I tend to be more active. Steve has more patience than I do, especially when it comes to putting up with an angry daughter. I suppose if we're similar at all, it would have to do with the fact that he loves his children as much as I love my own.*

*But as I said, he's passive. When he learns that his wife is having an affair — and literally sees them out together — his response wasn't to confront them. It was to walk away and pretend it never happened. I can't say that I would have responded in the same way. At the same time, Steve admits that he sometimes feels more like an "observer" than a "participant" in life. For me, life is all about participation: the things we do, the emotions we show, etc.*

The town Steve lives in now is actually the one he grew up in. Steve passes the time until the time his children arrive reflecting on his past and thinking about his hopes for the summer. When they do arrive, Jonah is excited to see his father, but Ronnie is less than thrilled.

Kim reveals a number of things to her ex-husband, including her impending marriage to Brian. Kim also says that, although Ronnie ignores her curfew and refuses to speak to her mother, she also sometimes helps her brother with his math when he struggles. Ronnie was arrested for shoplifting recently—an arrest that Ronnie claims is unwarranted, although she had shoplifted in the past. Although Steve expresses unwavering confidence in his daughter’s innocence, Kim is not as certain.

Kim leaves to return to New York even though neither she nor Steve knows exactly where Ronnie is, and then Jonah and Steve go off to explore the workshop. Steve tells Jonah about the stained-glass window that he is building for the church to replace the one that was destroyed in the fire. Steve and his son reconnect as Jonah reveals details about his life with Brian, his mother, and his sister. At this time in Jonah’s life, everything is “awesome.”

## Commentary



Playing the piano is part of Steve’s identity, an identity he is willing to give up for his daughter. This is the beginning of the development of the piano as a symbol—for Steve, for Ronnie, and for their complex relationship.



The pictures on Steve’s piano are significant because they represent what is truly important to him—his family—even though he hasn’t been around recently. Steve’s life has not turned out the way he planned. The empty house is symbolic of the emptiness that Steve feels—out of place and alone.



The pain in Steve’s stomach foreshadows his illness and indicates the nervousness he is feeling. In another seemingly throwaway line, readers learn that Steve knows in the upcoming fall, his breath “would come out in little puffs.” On a first read, the information is practically meaningless; however, looking back, readers, like Ronnie, realize the significance of these signs.

What happened in Steve's marriage is revealed but not why it happened. This is important for plot development as well as the development of Steve's character. Stylistically, information is being withheld from the reader in the same manner in which it is being withheld from Ronnie.



Steve's introspection is that of a man who is facing his own mortality and realizes that the thing he thought was most important in his life—his music—was not. Now he knows the most important thing is his relationship with his children, a relationship he wants to repair before he dies.

Steve's description of his daughter exists to paint a picture for the reader as well as himself. Ronnie's first words to her father reveal that she believes he defines their relationship solely through the piano.



The incident with the shoplifting is a case of the boy who cried wolf. Her mother clearly does not believe her, yet her father does. Steve is quite understanding about Ronnie's words and actions. It could be because he is essentially an outsider, but it could also be because of his unconditional love for his daughter.

This chapter is important for the development of Jonah's, Steve's, and Ronnie's characters. Each one of them is an individual with a somewhat vested interest in the others. Their characters are developed not only through their own words and actions but through what other characters say about them.

## Glossary

**Juilliard** one of the most prestigious performing arts conservatories in the world, located in New York City

**Tchaikovsky** Russian composer of the Romantic era

## Chapter 3: Ronnie

### Summary

Ronnie is now at the Beach Seafood Festival. Although she is disenchanted with the festival and the pier in its entirety, she is intrigued by the abandoned puppies at the SPCA booth. While talking with the woman at the booth, Ronnie hears the roar of the crowd watching the beach volleyball tournament.

As Ronnie makes her way toward the tournament, she admires the physiques of the tanned athletes. She silently roots for the team she considered the underdogs, but after realizing that the players and the fans know each other, the game becomes less interesting to her. As she turns to leave, one of the players bumps into her, causing her to spill her soda all over her face and shirt. The shirt that Ronnie is wearing was from a concert that she went to without her mother's permission with a person her mother didn't approve of. But Ronnie is only partially rebellious—she does some things that are out of line but not others.

Just as Ronnie is cleaning up her shirt, she accidentally bumps into someone and the rest of her soda immediately soaks the rest of her shirt. The person she meets is Blaze. Ronnie and Blaze share their given names, Veronica and Galadriel, respectively, and seem to hit it off. Blaze suggests that Ronnie purchase a *Finding Nemo* shirt. Ronnie sees three guys approaching, and as she turns to ask Blaze about them, she realizes Jonah is by her side. He offers to remain quiet regarding her whereabouts for money, and Ronnie begrudgingly pays him. She ends up purchasing the Nemo shirt in order to sneak past her father.

Blaze and Ronnie sit together and talk about their lives and how out of place they feel in Wrightsville. Blaze's parents are divorced, and she does not like living with either of them. Blaze points out a boardwalk performance featuring three thug-like guys. The leader of the three is Marcus. After he tosses a fireball toward Ronnie, who ducks out of the way, a police officer rushes toward it, threatening to bring the group to the station the next time he catches them. They leave, and after only a brief hesitation, Ronnie chases after them.

## Commentary



Character  
Insight

In this chapter, readers see another side of Ronnie: You see how out of place Ronnie feels in this small, seaside community as opposed to her home in New York. Her feelings for the abandoned puppies demonstrate the warmth that was alluded to by her mother but which has remained hidden up to now.

In more typical fashion, Ronnie's initial reaction to both the boys playing volleyball and the girls cheering for them demonstrates Ronnie's judgmental tendency.



Character  
Insight

In contrast to her tendency to be judgmental, it is important to note that Ronnie does not drink or do drugs, even though she has had the opportunity to do so. This instance is another glimpse into the complex personality of the protagonist—one whose outer persona is actually quite different from the person within.



Literary  
Device

Although the reference to *Finding Nemo* may appear to be merely an allusion to popular culture, the story of Nemo, the fish who feels abandoned and misunderstood by his father, is about repairing a strained parent-child relationship, such as the one between Ronnie and her father.

### From Nicholas

**Ronnie appears to have a number of contradictions — outwardly rough yet sensitive and caring toward animals and children. What enabled you to capture the complexities of character that make her so real to readers?**

*I've learned that people are never "all good" or "all bad" and that teenagers epitomize the contradiction even more than most people, simply because they're trying to make sense of those contradictions even to themselves. Ronnie is mad at her dad (but she loves him), she is mad at her parents for making her spend the summer with her dad (but she couldn't do anything about it), she loves her younger brother Jonah (but Jonah can still drive her crazy), and she doesn't want to be judged by the way she looks (though she judges Will in exactly that way). Being a teenager means confronting those issues head on. Teenagers move away from simply accepting their parents' values to learning how to incorporate (or reject) those values in their own lives.*

This chapter also introduces Marcus, the story's villain. Marcus's presence also drives the conflict of the plot as well as being important for character and thematic development.

## Glossary

**Prada** an Italian fashion label that specializes in luxury goods, often leather

## Chapter 4: Marcus

### Summary

Later in the evening, after the show on the pier, Marcus is thinking about how girls tend to follow him. He considers girls to be predictable and stupid. The only reason Marcus is keeping Blaze around is because she is good in bed. He sends her out for fries and then makes a move toward Ronnie. He offers to go to Florida with her.

Marcus wants to see how far he can push Ronnie, for that is how he treats all people. Blaze does his bidding; his two stooges, Teddy and Lance, are either unwilling or unable to think for themselves, and Marcus is clearly running the show while only taking care of himself.

### Commentary

This short chapter is told from Marcus' point of view. His initial comments reveal the type of character he is—arrogant, sexist, manipulative, and intent on demeaning others. Marcus' burning of a classmate's boat is significant, not only because it demonstrates what type of person he is, but because it foreshadows future events.

## Chapter 5: Will

### Summary

Chapter 5 opens with Will thinking about the weight of a secret that he is carrying. His friend Scott apparently started the fire that destroyed the church, and Blaze, Marcus, Teddy, and Lance witnessed the accident.

After bumping into Ronnie, Will cannot get her off his mind and wants to be alone, so he leaves his friends after the match. Ashley, his ex-girlfriend, tracks him down. Ashley makes it clear that the two of them, along with Scott and Cassie, could have a good time at her house, because her parents are not home. Will feigns tiredness and declines the offer.

When Will and his friends stop for something to eat, they run into Marcus and his cronies. Marcus taunts Scott, using the words “bottle rocket” to get to him. They start to fight, but Ronnie breaks up the ruckus because of a young boy who was knocked over during the commotion. After the altercation, Marcus’ gang splits for Bower’s Point as Ronnie’s father approaches. Ronnie has no desire to leave with her father and follows the gang. Officer Pete, who knows Steve, confirms that Marcus is bad news. Will tells Steve and Officer Pete that Ronnie went to Bower’s Point. Will’s friends don’t understand why he offers that information, and Will isn’t quite so sure himself.

#### From Nicholas

**Keeping secrets and the effect that they have on both self and others seems to be another important thematic topic. Please comment on the value or lack thereof of keeping secrets.**

*There are many kinds of secrets and some are important to keep while other secrets should be anything but. The challenge comes in when someone thinks it’s important to keep a particular secret because they think it’s the right thing to do but it ends up harming another person in the process. The Last Song explores all these types of secrets and the consequences of them. Secrets, like life, can sometimes be messy.*

## Commentary



This chapter sets up the characters' relationships as well as the conflict for the major plot points. It also builds the reader's suspense through the repetition of general mentions of "that night" six months ago. This chapter is also told from Will's perspective and immediately follows Marcus' chapter, which highlights the differences between the two male characters. Unlike Ronnie's initial assessment, Will is not as shallow as Ashley, and he doesn't want to hurt her unnecessarily. Clearly, Will is nothing like Marcus.

Scott has been Will's best friend since kindergarten, but Will also refers to a "more important reason" for owing Scott, without revealing what that reason is. Readers now know broadly of two events—the fire and Will's reason for keeping Scott's secret.



Scott twists cultural movie references into double entendres. Specifically, he makes sexually suggestive comments out of movie titles. When talking about his desire to hook up with Cassie, provided Will agrees to hook up with Ashley, he mentions her desire in *Romancing the Stone* and to *Free Willy*. Scott's character appears to be between Marcus' misogyny and Will's altruism; he is a hormonal teenage boy.

## Glossary

**Demure** affecting modesty, prim, coy

### From Nicholas

**Scott's references to movies are an interesting way to develop his character. What inspired you to use this technique? Some of the references seem too old for his character, like *When Harry Met Sally* and *Romancing the Stone*. How do you account for this?**

*Teenagers, in reality, talk about the opposite sex and sex. To ignore this simple reality is to ignore the reality of being a teenager. I knew I had to incorporate this element, with the added constraint that it was going to be a Disney movie. Disney has its own standards, of course, and I was well aware of them. This seemed like a way to accomplish both: Teens and parents would "get the joke" while younger viewers wouldn't. Many movies meant for children (everything from Shrek to Toy Story) do exactly the same thing.*

# Chapter 6: Ronnie

## Summary

Ronnie is angry because she had the cops called on her. Storming into the house, Ronnie confronts her father, who unsuccessfully tries to redirect the conversation toward the topic of Marcus. Looking for a response, Ronnie hurls a photograph across the room. Steve responds by sending his daughter to her room. As she storms down the hallway, he calls after her, wishing her “good night” and telling her that he loves her. To make matters worse for Ronnie, she has to share a room with Jonah. Even as she barks at and ignores her brother, Ronnie notices that he clutches his teddy bear, a nervous habit he has, which softens her.

Ronnie is annoyed that she is awakened by the sun at 8:00 a.m. After she fights with Steve and he learns that she is a vegetarian, Ronnie leaves to explore the town and is unimpressed with what she finds. She runs into Blaze, who informs Ronnie that she spent the night on the beach at Bower’s Point and has not eaten since the morning before.

## Commentary



Ronnie’s anger stems from embarrassment. When angry, she tosses the word “hate” around very easily. Ronnie is looking for a reaction from her father, and when she gets silence, she sees her father as weak.

The softer side that Ronnie shows toward Jonah only lasts so long, because the next morning she is her typical volatile self, yelling at her father and brother. Although she talks about being old enough to make her own decisions, she is seemingly incapable of having a calm, rational, adult conversation.



Ronnie assumes Steve’s piano playing is intentionally directed at her. This example is another instance of her self-centeredness. This scene is yet another indication of Ronnie’s impetuosity and immaturity.

## Glossary

**Edvard Grieg** Norwegian composer/pianist of the Romantic period

**Anna Karenina** Russian novel by Leo Tolstoy

## Chapter 7: Will

### Summary

At work the next morning, Scott attempts to clarify the difference between Will's "hooking up" and "getting back together" with Ashley. As they change the oil in a customer's car in Will's father's oil and brake shop, Will cautiously mentions Ronnie, who Scott immediately dismisses.

During the day, Will's thoughts keep returning to Ronnie and the tender side that she exhibited during the fight, protecting the young child. It seems to him that she is everything that Ashley is not.

### Commentary

The first part of the chapter continues to develop Scott and Will's characters and relationship. Scott's reference to *When Harry Met Sally* is intended to illustrate his opinion that men and women can have a primarily physical relationship, yet the reference seems to be supporting Will's point of view that Ashley does want to get back together—Harry and Sally eventually get married.

Will does not put Ronnie in a box and assumes that she does not judge people quickly either, but he is incorrect, for unbeknownst to him, she already labeled him. This chapter sows the seeds for a blossoming romance between seemingly polar opposites.

### Glossary

**Mojave** desert in the southwest United States

**Sahara** the world's largest desert, found in Northern Africa

## Chapter 8: Ronnie

### Summary

The narrative returns to Ronnie and Blaze, who are headed toward the diner to get Blaze something to eat. Ronnie admits to herself that Wrightsville may have some small town charm. At the diner, Blaze asks about Marcus and tells Ronnie that she used to dislike Marcus until a couple of years ago when he was there for her. She also tells Ronnie that when she responded to her old gymnastics coach with a “whatever,” he said that was teenage code for “F\$%# you.”

Ronnie and Blaze then talk about the worst things they have ever done. Blaze admits to using Roundup to destroy a neighbor lady’s flower beds. Ronnie initially admits to not talking to her dad for three years, but Blaze dismisses that, so Ronnie admits to shoplifting.

Just as Ronnie steers the conversation to why Blaze did not go home last night, Marcus, Teddy, and Lance arrive. The boys end up eating most of Blaze’s food, but Blaze doesn’t say or do anything about it.

Ronnie sees that Blaze allows Marcus to treat her like dirt, seeing parallels between Blaze and her friend Kayla back home. Ronnie and the reader learn that Teddy and Lance are brothers who work at the motel that their parents own, the same motel where Marcus lives.

Marcus invites Ronnie to a party that night, and when she does not answer him, he gets up and leaves the diner.

### Commentary



Character  
Insight

Ronnie’s wanting to give up vegetarianism is indicative of her attempts to find her place in the world, trying to establish what her beliefs are and why.



Character  
Insight

Blaze, who previously mentioned that her stepdad encouraged her to explore college, now shares fond memories of visiting the diner with her biological father. These details demonstrate that Blaze is choosing to ignore positive role models and influences in her life, paralleling the development of Ronnie’s character.

Blaze's gymnastics coach had an interesting take on the word "whatever." He seems to have taken a word used solely as a dismissive comment and has extrapolated a meaning that is much harsher; now, his obscene understanding is the meaning that Blaze associates with the word "whatever."

A significant development occurs as Ronnie and Blaze elect to share secrets: Ronnie's revelation that she was twice caught shoplifting enables a jealous Blaze to strike back at her new friend.



Marcus again demonstrates that he is rude, inconsiderate, self-centered, and egocentric. In his world, everything is "all about Marcus, all the time."

## Glossary

**Babe the Pig** title character of a 1995 movie about a pig that wants to be a sheepdog

## Chapter 9: Steve

### Summary

Steve and Jonah have a nice yet uneventful first full day together. Steve teaches his son how to cut glass; they have lunch together and search for seashells. As soon as it gets dark, Steve is going to take Jonah to the beach to watch spider crabs.

Jonah notices a picture of Steve's parents, who have died, and comments that Steve looks like his father. Jonah asks Steve if he misses his father. Later that night, when Steve is tucking Jonah into bed, Jonah asks Steve what type of dad his father was. Steve answers that he was "complicated."

Steve then remembers being at his father's hospital bedside six years earlier. Steve attempts to connect with his father by communicating honestly and openly, but his father dismisses his words as "womanly." When talking to Kim on the phone later that evening, Steve lies to her, telling her that his father said he loved him.

The narrative then recounts Steve's youth. Steve, an only child, had a mother who grew a garden in the front yard and a father who worked as a trim carpenter who could fix anything. Steve's father had one passion in life: playing poker. But that wasn't really something he shared with his son. One time, when Steve was visiting home from NY, he went to the Elks with his father, though his father knew he didn't think the evening would be fun.

Steve's mother died unexpectedly, and in the hospital, Steve's father spoke very matter-of-factly about his own impending death. Steve's father accuses Steve of not wanting to make decisions, which he sees as a primary shortcoming in his son's life.

The narrative returns to the present, with Steve waiting for Ronnie to come home. Steve thinks about the marriage counseling session he and Kim attended, but soon realizes that he hasn't seen Ronnie in 16 hours and is concerned for her wellbeing. He enjoyed the day with Jonah and longs to spend time with his daughter, too.

The chapter closes with Steve alone at the piano, feeling exactly as he felt in the office of the marriage counselor—empty.

## Commentary



This chapter connects the past to the present as readers learn about Steve's life. Two narrative threads intertwine as Steve waits for Ronnie while remembering the rocky relationship he had with his own father. In this chapter, readers learn more about Steve—as a musician, a husband, a son, and a father—than either of his children know.

This chapter develops Steve's character, and it also builds suspense. Although readers learn much about Steve, some unanswered questions still exist. For example, it creates suspense when the counselor tells Steve, "We all know what happened and why you're here," although the readers do not know. It seems that Steve had an affair, but no details are given. Thus, the narrative is simultaneously providing answers while raising new questions.

The image of Steve alone at the end of the chapter shows that Steve sought solace through his music but that he still feels alone. Steve knows that music itself isn't enough. He acknowledges that his time with Jonah is a treasure and that this is what he wants with his daughter, too, though the opportunity is seemingly slipping away.

## Glossary

**Freemasons** members of a widely distributed secret order (Free and Accepted Masons), having for its object mutual assistance and the promotion of brotherly love among its members

**Elks** members of a fraternal organization (Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks) that supports or contributes to various charitable causes

**Shriners** members of a fraternal order that is dedicated to good fellowship, health programs, charitable works

**Texas hold 'em** a form of poker in which each player can use any or all of five shared cards in combination with either or both of two private cards to form the best possible hand of five cards

# Chapter 10: Ronnie

## Summary

At Bower's Point that evening, Ronnie is unimpressed when the gang begins to drink alcohol. She begins to think about her day with Blaze, exploring the town, and then going back to Blaze's house to watch *The Breakfast Club*. Ronnie noticed that Blaze's mom left her a note and some money. Marcus interrupts Ronnie's thoughts, taunting her for not drinking, and then asks her to take a walk on the beach with him. She refuses and walks away.

Ronnie heads to her father's, and when she gets there, Steve is playing the piano. Although it is 2:00 AM, he offers her food instead of yelling at her or lecturing her.

The next morning, Steve is playing the piano again, and Ronnie is convinced that he has an ulterior motive—perhaps to forge a bond with her or convince her to start playing again. She yells at him that she can't even stand the sight of the piano. Steve is confused by her outburst and tells her that playing the piano makes him feel better, but Ronnie storms out.

Two hours later she finds Blaze at the record store. Blaze accuses her of asking Marcus to take a walk and attempting to kiss him and refuses to listen to Ronnie's denials. As Ronnie follows Blaze out the store, the alarm sounds. Her bag is searched, and the merchandise that Blaze had been looking at appears in Ronnie's tote bag: Blaze set Ronnie up.

## Commentary



*The Breakfast Club* is an excellent example of how effective allusions can be. On the surface, this detail of how Ronnie and Blaze spent their afternoon is unimportant. The plot of the film, however, foreshadows the development of Ronnie's relationship with Blaze and Ronnie's own growth throughout the novel: It is about five teenagers who seemingly don't have anything in common, but who, after

spending a day in detention together, gain an understanding of one another and themselves and learn that they do not have to conform to the labels they have been given by others.



Steve's response to his daughter's 2:00 AM arrival is not what Ronnie expects—Ronnie doesn't know her father as well as she thinks she does. The next morning, when Steve tries to talk to Ronnie about how she spent the previous day, Ronnie refuses to listen to him. Her anger and self-centeredness prevent her from realizing that Steve is being honest when he tells Ronnie his reason for playing.



In this chapter, look out for a few important thematic topics—strained relationships, the sharing of information, insecurity, jealousy, attacking out of frustration, and revenge.



Blaze's character is also developed in this chapter. Blaze is jealous of the attention Marcus is showing Ronnie and readily believes his lies.

This latest shoplifting incident demonstrates that Ronnie might have been telling the truth about her most recent arrest for shoplifting—she was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

## Glossary

**Bob Marley** Jamaican reggae singer

**Ritchie Valens** Mexican-American singer, songwriter, and guitarist of the 1950s

### From Nicholas

**Students, especially if they reread *The Last Song*, should notice all the foreshadowing, particularly Steve's illness and Marcus' involvement with the church fire. Can there ever be too much foreshadowing? Why or why not?**

*Foreshadowing is an art. It's important to be fair to the reader all along, without the reader being necessarily aware of it. Sometimes, authors do too much foreshadowing (giving the ending away) and sometimes doing too little (making a story that's unfair to the reader with an ending that doesn't seem real). It's a balancing act.*

# Chapter 11: Steve

## Summary

In response to Ronnie's outburst, Steve and Jonah build a plywood wall in the alcove to block the piano. They go kite flying afterwards.

With an afternoon storm approaching, Steve calls Jonah inside. On their way back to the house, Steve notices loggerhead turtle tracks, and they follow the tracks to a nest of eggs buried in the sand behind their house. As they are talking about endangered and extinct animals, the phone rings. It is Ronnie calling from the police station.

Officer Pete explains the charges to Steve. Although Ronnie insists she did not do it, she refuses to identify who did. Steve tells her, "I believe you." Back home, Steve and Ronnie talk on the beach. Steve makes a distinction between trust and love. Ronnie asks about protecting the nest from raccoons, and her father says she has to have faith.

Steve calls the local aquarium to get a cage, but Ronnie is concerned for the well-being of the eggs, so she camps out all night to protect them. Steve is restless and concerned, but eventually checks on Ronnie before going to bed.

## Commentary

Jonah notices that after they build the plywood wall, the room is smaller and Steve will be unable to play, two sacrifices Steve makes for his daughter, even if she does not immediately realize their significance.

Storm clouds approach while Steve and Jonah are on the beach—two storms are actually coming, one literal and one metaphorical.

On the surface, Steve's comments about faith are in regards to the raccoons and the eggs; but the comment also refers to Steve's faith in his daughter, her faith in him and others, and his faith in God. In fact, faith, along with trust and love, are themes that recur throughout the novel.



Character  
InsightCharacter  
Insight

Steve's explanation to Ronnie regarding his reason for building the wall around the piano ties into Steve's belief that people should be judged by their actions. His actions are purely selfless here, although it will take some time for Ronnie to realize this.

Steve's reaction to Ronnie's arrest is a turning point in his relationship with Ronnie. He does not call Kim immediately or overreact, but he trusts her—something Ronnie will soon come to appreciate.

## Glossary

**Stoic** of or pertaining to the school of philosophy founded by Zeno, who taught that people should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and submit without complaint to unavoidable necessity

**Scapular** a loose, sleeveless monastic garment, hanging from the shoulders

**Cumulous** relating to a cloud of a class characterized by dense individual elements in the form of puffs, mounds, or towers, with flat bases and tops that often resemble cauliflower

**Loggerhead** a large-headed sea turtle, now greatly reduced in number

**Pod** the name for a small herd, or group, of dolphins

### From Nicholas

**The thematic topics of faith, love, and friendship intertwine throughout *The Last Song*. Which of these is the most important? Why?**

*Love is always the most important. Without love of any kind—whether it's romantic love, family love, love between friends, love of certain activities—life has little meaning. The Last Song is a novel that explores the importance of all of these.*

## Chapter 12: Ronnie

### Summary

After spending the night camped outside, Ronnie wakes up sore and remembers the events of the previous day. On her way to the house, she remembers that she left her book on the beach. As she returns to get it, she notices someone in a Blakelee Brakes uniform. That someone is the volleyball player from two days ago. Ronnie finds out that he volunteers for the aquarium and works at his father's brake shop. He introduces himself as Will, but Ronnie does not tell him her name.

Will explains that he is only taping the area and that someone will be over with a cage in a couple of days. This is not good enough for Ronnie, who saw a raccoon hovering around the nest last night, and Will agrees to call the aquarium about it. Steve calls Ronnie to breakfast, revealing where she lives but also giving her a reason to leave. As she walks toward the house, Ronnie glances back, and Will raises an eyebrow in acknowledgment.

Steve makes a vegetarian breakfast burrito and offers Ronnie a Starbucks coffee, while telling her that he is going to hold off on contacting her mother regarding the arrest. Ronnie asks why Steve is being so nice to her. Steve answers her question with his own: "Why shouldn't I be nice to you?" Ronnie knows the answer to that question but does not say it. As Ronnie and Steve eat breakfast, Jonah stumbles in and comments on how the morning is not typical; he is used to people being mad in the morning.

After Ronnie takes a long nap, she searches for Blaze and eventually finds her. Blaze tells Ronnie that she didn't have anything to do with the shoplifting—which is exactly what she told the police. As Ronnie is walking home, she runs into Marcus near the diner. He offers to help clear up her misunderstanding with Blaze in exchange for her getting involved with him. Upset, Ronnie runs home.

When she arrives, she takes a few moments alone on the porch to compose herself before going inside and pretending that everything is fine. She tries to act normal for the rest of the evening, eating a vegetarian dinner and reading after. She notices that Steve is reading

the Bible. When she goes to her room for the night, Jonah encourages her to cry, but as Ronnie looks out of the window, she sees a raccoon on its way toward the nest. The chapter closes with the anguished cry, "They didn't put up the cage."

## Commentary



As Ronnie recalls the events of the previous day, she refers to the phone call to her father as "awful." This private admission contrasts with her outward attitude and is an important illustration of the difference between Ronnie's internal self and the self that she presents to the world. It doesn't matter how tough, independent, and callous Ronnie wants to appear to be, she actually does care what her father thinks; otherwise, the phone call from the police station would be no big deal.



Seeing Steve read the Bible enables readers to deduce that his faith may be part of the source of his strength—because of it, he can maintain a calm presence and loving self.

Two important questions are raised about the plot in this chapter: Why is Blaze lying? And what control does Marcus have over her?

### From Nicholas

**Steve seems to encompass elements of a three-person God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Clearly you intended this, but how do you answer critics who suggest that this distracts from his humanity and thus weakens his character development?**

*I would argue that the critics are missing the point entirely. While I agree that this might have been an issue in a different novel, in *The Last Song*, Steve is a character who knows that he's dying and has a certain amount of time to earn his daughter's forgiveness or bond with his son. For Steve, there is no tomorrow. Not only that, but Steve is questioning the meaning of life and wondering if there is . . . more. He's questioning whether there's a God. He wants to believe, he wants to think that his time on earth is simply a journey . . . but he doesn't know for sure and it frightens him. Would it have been more realistic to be concerned with the stock market or job prospects? Of course not. He's worried about his kids, he wants to know that they'll be okay. He wants to believe that there is a God. This is entirely normal. I think most people would be exactly the same way.*

## Glossary

**Twilight Zone** a television series that was a mixture of science fiction and fantasy that usually had an unexpected ending

**Placated** appeased through concessions

**Primordial** existing from the very beginning

**Empathy** intellectually identifying the feelings or thoughts of others; not feeling what others feel but being able to understand their feelings

**Psychopathic** those having antisocial behavior who were most likely born with temperamental differences such as impulsivity and fearlessness that leads to risk-seeking behavior and an inability to internalize social norms

**Sociopathic** those having an anti-social personality disorder yet have a relatively normal temperament with erratic criminal behavior

## Chapter 13: Will

### Summary

Ronnie heads over to Blakelee Brakes the next morning, accuses Will of not calling the aquarium, and storms out. Will races out after her. When he finds her an hour later, Ronnie is still mad and blames him for her having to spend two nights watching the eggs and protecting the nest. Will tells her that he called twice and he went to the director of the aquarium that very morning. Although Ronnie believes him, she tells him that that won't help her turtles tonight.

As Will returns to work, he realizes that he likes this new girl. He returns to the nest that night. Not getting a friendly response from Ronnie, he quotes the opening line of *Anna Karenina*. The two continue to banter until Ronnie finally breaks down and reveals her name to Will.

They briefly share an overview of their lives, learning that each is a recent high school graduate. When Will asks about Blaze, Ronnie stiffens for a second but then realizes he does not know anything about the shoplifting charges. Will offers to guard the nest with her, and Ronnie asks why.

The two take a long walk on the beach and both enjoy their silent time together. Will ends up spending the night by the nest, only to be awakened by Jonah the next morning. When Jonah reveals that Will was the one who told Officer Pete that Ronnie went to Bower's Point, Ronnie storms off toward the house. Will stops her, pleads with her, and then offers to show her something that he promises she will like.

That something is an injured loggerhead turtle at the aquarium. They talk about his volunteering at the aquarium, fishing, and mudding, a local activity, and end up spending the day together. Will mentions that his mother is planning his sister's wedding and that his sister lives in New York. They return to the nest and discuss the hatching of eggs, all the while flirting. Will invites her to his volleyball game, and Ronnie accepts.

## Commentary



The quotation from *Anna Karenina* is significant to Will's character development for a couple of reasons. First, it shows that Will is more than just a pretty boy or dumb jock; having studied the Russian novel in school, he is able to quote its famous opening line. But perhaps more importantly, the line itself seems relevant to both families. In both Will's and Ronnie's families, things are not what they seem and contain a mixture of happiness and sadness.

During an early exchange with Will, Ronnie collects her hair into a loose ponytail. As discussed earlier, this unconscious action is comforting to Ronnie. This sign shows readers that Ronnie is warming up to the possibility of getting to know Will.



Mabel, the injured turtle, serves as a symbol for Ronnie—scars and all. Just as Will is helping to nurse Mabel back to health, he may be able to help Ronnie heal her emotional and spiritual scars.

## Glossary

**Michael Jordan** one of the most famous and one of the best players in the history of the NBA; he played for the University of North Carolina and the Chicago Bulls

**The Terminator** the title character of a 1984 movie about a cyborg killer from the future sent back in time to kill a woman before she is able to give birth

**Cipher** a person of no influence; a nonentity

**Osprey** a large hawk that preys on fish; aka a fish hawk

**small red drum** a large edible Atlantic coastal fish

**trawler** vessel used for fishing with a trawl net, a strong fishing net for dragging along the sea bottom

## Chapter 14: Ronnie

### Summary

As Ronnie watches Will play volleyball, she begins to imagine enjoying herself this summer. Ronnie's private thoughts are interrupted by Ashley, who comes over to Ronnie and introduces herself. She mentions the places that Will took Ronnie, making it sound like Will does that with all the girls he is interested in and successfully upsetting Ronnie. Ronnie leaves the volleyball match without saying goodbye.

Back at her father's she begins to pack because she wants to leave, but she realizes that she can't because of the pending charges against her. Will shows up at the house, but Ronnie refuses to talk to him. Instead, she helps with dinner while Will waits outside for her. And he is still there four hours later. Ronnie notices her father reading the Bible again, and Jonah's comment, "How long is he going to sit there?" finally pushes Ronnie to go outside and talk to Will.

In trying to find out what Ashley said to Ronnie, Will reveals that Ashley is his former girlfriend; this is news to Ronnie. Will cannot get an answer from Ronnie and leaves for the beach. As Ronnie watches him leave, she notices a fireball on the beach. Marcus is out there. Even though she is scared of Marcus, Ronnie refuses to back down. She stands in the circle of the porch light and stares into the darkness. When Marcus extinguishes the fireball, Ronnie is nervous that he might approach. But still she stares—defiantly. Marcus decides not to approach the house, and Ronnie goes inside.

### Commentary

Ronnie goes through a few emotions in this chapter. Initially, she is intrigued by her interest in Will, since they don't seem like each other's types. Will and Ronnie are a clear case of opposites attracting, what with Will's determination and Ronnie's stubbornness. She is pleased—that is, until she is upset by Ashley's hurtful remarks. In contrast to Ronnie, whose emotions are clearly on display, her father is more reserved. His comment "if I can" when asked about visiting New York is quite the understatement because he knows that he probably cannot; Ronnie does not understand his remark.

# Chapter 15: Marcus

## Summary

Marcus is thinking through the events of the previous days. Initially he is pleased that Blaze's actions will push Ronnie toward him, but when that does not happen, he gets annoyed. He sees Will outside Ronnie's house, and when Ronnie comes out to talk with him, Marcus recognizes their interest in each other, which annoys him even more.

Finally, after Will leaves, Marcus predicts one of two reactions from Ronnie toward his presence: she will either race toward him or slink away from him. He does not expect or appreciate her staying and standing defiantly.

## Commentary



Character  
Insight

This short chapter provides more insight into Marcus' character and his inability to deal with his feelings. Marcus is annoyed with Teddy, Lance, and Blaze, as well as with himself. Marcus hates not being in control, hence his annoyance and anger.



Style &  
Language

By giving readers access to information that is being withheld from Ronnie, Sparks continues to build suspense and develop his characters.

## Chapter 16: Steve

### Summary

Although Steve recognizes that something is bothering Ronnie when she comes in, he decides to give her space. Jonah tells Steve Will's name, and Steve admonishes Jonah for listening to a private conversation. When Jonah asks how Steve expects to keep track of Ronnie if he does not read her texts, Steve suggests talking as an alternative.

The chapter then flashes back to when Steve was 12, when the piano was his obsession and Pastor Harris basically his only friend. Even though Steve was winning competitions, his father never attended any and his mother only attended the first one.

Pastor Harris taught Steve that God is a friend and that one feels God's presence in one's heart. Returning to the present, Steve takes a moment to watch his children while they are sleeping and remembers how as a teacher he tried to listen to his students when they had difficulties. He loved helping students to reach their own conclusions about their difficulties. Steve concludes that he is alone—and always will be alone—in this world.

#### From Nicholas

**Is it easy to model the love and trust you have for your teenagers, even if they act as if they do not want or even deserve it? Is it easier to parent a 10 year old rather than a 17 year old?**

*Many, if not most, teenagers act out toward their parents because they can. Because they know, deep down, that their parents will continue to love them, no matter how awful they might sometimes act. More than that, acting out is a normal part of development. Teenagers are at that point in life where they're not children, but they're not adults either. They're finding out who they are. It's a challenging time for everyone involved. I wouldn't say, however, that it's easier to raise a 10 year old than a teenager. Both periods have their joys and challenges. They're simply different.*

The next morning, Steve realizes that he misses playing the piano and without music he feels aimless and adrift. To tide himself over until the new church piano arrives at the end of July, Steve imagines that the kitchen table is a keyboard. After composing for a bit, Steve takes a walk on the beach. He wants an obvious sign of God's presence in the world—like a burning bush—but does not find one.

## Commentary



Steve's character development is at the forefront of this chapter. His views on parenting, which center on talking and communication, and his relaxed attitude enable him to allow Ronnie to grow up a bit more easily than her mother does. This is a direct result of his own upbringing—he does not want his children to be parented like he was.



It is significant that sometimes Steve has the characteristics of God the Father, and other times he has the characteristics of an Everyman. This seems to suggest the every person has a god-like quality within them.



Steve misses playing piano, but that he is giving up something so important to him shows his willingness to make sacrifices for his daughter. The chapter is full of references to Steve's medical condition, yet his physical comfort is not Steve's priority this summer: He wants to make this time about his children, and he especially wants Ronnie to have a great summer.



Although Steve may be unhappy with his past and feeling lonely, the end of the chapter indicates that Steve will eventually feel a sense of oneness. Steve longs to know God, and he is confident that he will find peace because he sees now that music is not the most important thing in his life. Even though he made some bad decisions in the past, he now seems to be on the right path to finding a way to fill the emptiness in his life.

## Glossary

**Beethoven** German composer of the early 1800s

**Eroica** the popular title of Beethoven's third symphony

**Concerto** a composition for one or more principal instruments with orchestral accompaniment

## Chapter 17: Ronnie

### Summary

For the first time since she arrived in North Carolina, Ronnie is able to sleep in. When she gets up, Jonah is watching television upside down and eating pop tarts. Jonah tells her that Steve is outside with Pastor Harris. Ronnie looks and sees that Officer Pete is just leaving. After Pastor Harris leaves, Ronnie finds out from her father that the shop owner is going to press charges. Ronnie won't be able to return to New York any time soon.

Steve asks about Blaze, and Ronnie tells him about Marcus. Because they are talking, Ronnie asks her father about why he left the family. She mentions that there was somebody else, and Steve admits he could have tried harder to save the marriage. At the end of their conversation, Steve encourages Ronnie to go talk to Will.

Ronnie builds up the courage to tell Will that he is right and apologizes and tells him what a good time she had the other day. After they share a brief kiss, Ronnie leaves, reliving the kiss and enjoying the day. When she returns home, she tells Steve that it went well with Will, and then Steve tells her a bit about his childhood and his early relationship with Pastor Harris. Then he tells her about the night of the fire and the month that Pastor Harris spent in the hospital. They end up agreeing to have lunch together. Steve suggests that Will be invited over to dinner and that the family “do what we used to do.” But, as usual, he leaves the decision to Ronnie.

### Commentary



Ronnie continues to mature as she faces up to the reality of the shoplifting situation—including the need for her mother to know. It does not matter that she is innocent; she has to allow the judicial process to run its course. She also shows a more mature side as she gathers the courage to face Will and has a conversation with her father. This chapter also gives more information about Steve's childhood and the fire. Now, the readers know most of the reasons that Steve has for wanting to complete the window. Ronnie is taking the first steps toward getting to know her father, although real change takes time.

# Chapter 18: Will

## Summary

Will is at a volleyball scrimmage and Scott is accusing him of not focusing. Scott teases Will about Ronnie, and Will gets frustrated with him. Scott warns Will against getting serious with Ronnie. Soon, though, Ronnie shows up and invites Will to an informal family dinner. He insists on going home to change, and on the way to his house, Ronnie finds a picture of Will's sister and asks about the macramé bracelet he wears. He appreciates the fact that she respects his not wanting to talk about it. The chapter ends with them arriving at Will's home and Ronnie growing quiet at the sight of it.

## Commentary

This chapter is another opportunity for readers to see Scott for who he really is and to witness Will and Scott's relationship in action. In neither situation is Scott particularly impressive—his private self matches his public self.



As Will and Ronnie drive to his house, their playful teasing in the car about duck hunting doesn't turn serious, though it could. Will's refusal to elaborate on the significance of the macramé bracelets is intriguing. All of these are signs of a growing romance and friendship, as Will and Ronnie begin to learn more about each other. It is significant that Will doesn't notice Ronnie growing quiet at the sight of his house—there is a discrepancy in how they understand their socioeconomic statuses.

## Glossary

***The Lost Boys*** a 1980s film about a group of vampires living near a California amusement park town

**Elvira** fictional 1980s character who is a horror hostess

**Vampira** fictional 1950s character who is a horror hostess

**Cruella d Vil** fictional villain from *101 Dalmatians*

**Letterman** late night television host

## Chapter 19: Ronnie

### Summary

Ronnie is overwhelmed at the sight of Will's house and feels out of place, declining a tour. As Will prepares to change, he introduces Ronnie to his mother, Susan. Although Ronnie senses tension and displeasure from Susan, Will does not seem to notice. When Will is changing, Susan mentions the loggerhead nest and that is the extent of their conversation. Thankfully, for Ronnie, Will's father, Tom, enters. As she waits, Tom shows Ronnie his remote-control toy airplane.

Ronnie prepares Will for her family tradition, liar's poker. Jonah wins more than everyone else. Steve and Jonah are on their best behavior the entire evening, and Ronnie realizes that her father trusts her to make her own decision regarding Will. Ronnie also realizes that she made a big mistake avoiding her father for three years. At the end of the chapter, Will and Ronnie agree to go for a romantic stroll on the beach.

### Commentary



The similarities between Will and Ronnie are quite interesting: He does not mention his family name and business, and she doesn't mention being a piano prodigy. Both of them want to be recognized as individuals. It is important to realize that they have different socioeconomic situations but that they also have similar circumstances.

This chapter also establishes the tension between Ronnie and Will's mother. Ronnie already is not liked by Will's friends, and having difficulties with his mother clearly is not going to help. Ronnie realizes that she is an outsider, and for one of the first times in her life, she is concerned about what another person thinks of her.

The time spent at Will's house and at dinner is important to Ronnie's growth—she is appreciative of the fact that Steve did not offer any telling details from Ronnie's past and that he is allowing her to make her own decisions.

## Chapter 20: Will

### Summary

As they walk along the beach, Will reflects on the changes in the area since he was a boy, and thoughts of marriage enter his mind. Although he knows he is too young right now for such things, he thinks about how Ronnie might be the one he wants to spend his life with. He uses his parents' 30-year marriage as his model.

His two years with Ashley, who was rich and beautiful, included her cheating on him with a college guy. That in and of itself did not lead to their break up, but Will began to see Ashley and the way she treated people differently.

Like his sister Megan, Will believes that if the relationship “can’t survive the long term, why on earth would it be worth my time and energy for the short term.” When Ronnie asks, “What are you thinking about?” he notices her attempting to gather her hair into a loose ponytail as he answers.

They have an awkward conversation about money, status, relationships, and truth. Ronnie tells him that Steve is making a stained-glass window; Will reveals he is supposed to go to Vanderbilt in the fall but prefers a school that has a strong environmental science program. As he talks about needing to go to Vanderbilt, Will explains about a car accident that he, his mother, Scott, and a younger brother, Mike were in four years ago. Scott and Will were playing mercy in the backseat; Will made Scott scream; his mother looked back, lost control of the car, which crashed through the guardrail and into the water. Although Mikey was killed on impact, Scott saved Will and his mother.

Will then explains that the letters IMTF on the macramé bracelet stand for “In my thoughts forever” and refer to his dead brother. He tells Ronnie that he does not have the perfect life he assumes she thinks he has.

After Will opens up to Ronnie, she shares her history with her father. She tells him about her not playing piano anymore. They see a

shooting star and make a wish. Though Will does not reveal his wish to Ronnie, readers know that he feels lucky to have found her and that he thinks he might be falling in love with her.

## Commentary



Literary  
Device

Will's revelation about the car accident makes the opening line of *Anna Karenina* seem particularly apt—each family is unhappy in its own way, and this is the Blakelee family's unhappiness. Both Will and Ronnie have had a mixture of happiness and sorrow in their lives, but with each other, they seem to be developing something that will not only enable them to endure the bad times but to create many new happy ones.



Character  
Insight

Details in this chapter reveal the hold that Scott has over Will. Will feels grateful, indebted, and loyal to Scott, and he feels guilty if he doesn't want to do something Scott wants him to. Will has a sense of obligation to Scott, and Scott knows this. Even though Ronnie and Will both have complicated, difficult pasts, in this chapter they begin to move toward emotional intimacy.

## Glossary

**Sultan of Brunei** the head of state and head of government of the sovereign state of Brunei, which is on the island of Borneo in southeast Asia

### From Nicholas

**Does a modern love story, like *The Last Song*, need to have tragedy within it in order to more fully appreciate the beauty of a developing love relationship?**

*There has to be tragedy in some form, if only because love stories are written with the intent of moving the reader through the entire realm of human emotion. The goal of a love story is to make the reader feel as if they've led a "mini-life" between the pages. A story without sadness simply wouldn't feel complete to the reader. It would feel like a fantasy, and that's an entirely different genre.*

## Chapter 21: Ronnie

### Summary

This chapter takes place the next day with Ronnie becoming more comfortable at Will's house. They spend the day at the pool, diving, laughing, and having fun. Will forces Ronnie from the board into the pool, and then they share a kiss. Ronnie sees Susan watching them and notices that Susan is not pleased.

Later, when they leave to check on the nest, they stop for ice cream. Wanting to get Will back for forcing her into the pool, Ronnie nudges Will's cone so ice cream smears on his face. After that, she bounces around the corner and bumps into Marcus, who is accompanied by Blaze, Teddy, and Lance. Marcus mentions Scott and bottle rockets, claims that he was preventing Ronnie from falling, and reveals that he knows she has a court date next Tuesday. Ronnie finally tells Will about all that happened since she arrived in Wrightsville Beach.

Will tells her that Marcus was always messed up but that Galadriel used to be okay. He asks Ronnie if she wants him in court, but Ronnie says no. As they talk, Ronnie asks about Scott and the bottle rocket, but Will refuses to answer. Instead, he changes the topic and asks about the walled-in piano at her father's house.

Ronnie talks to Will about the personal betrayal she felt when her father moved out and how it made her hate the piano. When she arrived for the summer and heard her father playing, she thought he was trying to trivialize the past. Ronnie also tells him that Juilliard will make room in their music program for her if she ever changes her mind.

## Commentary

The camaraderie and good-natured teasing between Will and Ronnie, as well as Ronnie's more carefree behavior, demonstrate their compatibility. Yet Will's ever-present mother watching with her disapproving countenance serves as a reminder that not everyone is going to be in their corner and hints that relationship is not always going to be as easy as a day by the pool.



Ronnie's feelings when her father left were clearly quite strong because she vowed to never play or write again. Ronnie's assumptions about Steve's motives for playing the piano indicate that she thought that leaving wasn't difficult for him and that he thought that they could easily pick up where the left off. She makes these assumptions without even questioning him or sharing her feelings with him. Her ability to share these feelings with Will is a good thing, but until she is able to have honest, adult conversations with her father, their relationship will remain tense.

Ronnie's defensive reaction to Will's question about her gift for playing the piano indicates that perhaps she is second-guessing her decision. Ronnie has been so firm about her decision for so long that it almost defines her; perhaps she does not realize she can change her mind.

## Glossary

**Pasty** pale and unhealthy in appearance

## Chapter 22: Marcus

### Summary

Marcus claims that he is done with Ronnie and that he only wants to party. Teddy and Lance have the booze, and Marcus has picked a rental house for his once-a-summer party. Marcus thinks about his fascination with fire—at age 12 he torched a barn, then a warehouse, then other buildings. The most important things in his life are booze, drugs, music, and girls.

Marcus feels confident because he knows Will's weak spot, though he doesn't say what that weak spot is.

### Commentary



Marcus' emotional response, "screw her," which he repeats, demonstrates the anger that he is feeling—he doesn't know how to deal with not getting his own way. Clearly, Marcus' relationship with females is the antithesis to everything that is developing between Will and Ronnie.



Marcus's history of starting fires not only develops his character but also foreshadows future events. This chapter serves to illustrate the extent to which Marcus is angry and maladjusted.

## Chapter 23: Will

### Summary

Summer is passing too quickly for Will. He is happy with the development of his relationship with Ronnie, recognizing that their differences strengthen their relationship. Although she did not want him in court, Ronnie appreciates that he shows up with flowers afterwards. Her next court date is scheduled for August 28, three days after Will leaves for college.

Ronnie gets a part-time job at the aquarium. She and Will talk all the time, sometimes about serious things. Even though Ronnie's future is not all mapped out, as Will's is, Will feels Ronnie is more in charge of her life than he is.

Raccoons that were successful at infiltrating other nests along the coast convince Ronnie of the need to watch her nest. Will begins to see his mother's prejudice against Ronnie and to resent it, but he is unable to confront her about it. Instead, he stays away from his house. Marcus continues to make snide comments about Scott, and on the beach, Will again mentions attending Megan's wedding. He and Ronnie profess their love for one another and then run into Scott, Cassie, and Ashley. Scott wants Will to be available for pre-tournament scrimmages—the major beach volleyball tournament is at the end of the summer—but Will hesitates. The tournament is the day after Megan's wedding, and because Scott is counting on earning a college scholarship, he really wants to prepare. Ronnie convinces Will that he should attend Scott's volleyball boot camp. Using his sister's wedding as leverage, Will agrees to prepare with Scott if Ronnie agrees to attend the wedding.

They talk about how neither of them wants their romance to end after the summer. Will again encourages Ronnie to talk to Blaze, who he says is a good person. When they go to look at the stained-glass window, Ronnie mentions that it's for the church down the street that burnt down, and Will freezes. As Ronnie shares her dad's story, Will is thinking about what Scott has done and what he himself has and has not done. After Ronnie asks what he was thinking about, he asks for advice on protecting a friend. Ronnie encourages Will to do the right thing, no matter how hard.

After leaving her dad's workshop, they begin to give in to their physical desires, until Ronnie stops Will. The chapter ends with them telling each other that "you're a keeper."

## Commentary



Six weeks go by during this chapter, representing the romantic notion that time flies when you're having fun. Although Ronnie and Will are developing a strong relationship, summer is coming to an end, and the uneasiness about what effect the end of the summer will have on their relationship looms.

Will wants Ronnie to attend his sister's wedding, an important family event, which indicates a certain level of commitment. This chapter emphasizes that Will and Ronnie's relationship is based on friendship and honesty. Nevertheless, Will is unable to tell Ronnie the truth about the fire.



Will would like nothing more than to establish a sexual relationship with Ronnie, but he recognizes that this is not something she is ready for, so he respects her and controls himself.



This chapter provides important insights into Will's character. He struggles with his secret but isn't yet able to do what he thinks is right. This humanizes Will and also shows how similar he is to Ronnie. Suspense and romance are both building as the plot moves toward its climax.

### From Nicholas

**At the start of Chapter 23, time jumps rather quickly. What was the point of glossing over the seemingly "best parts" of the summer?**

*To write more about the relationship at that point would have slowed the novel down and made the story feel repetitive. After Ronnie and Will realized they cared about each other, the reader can "fill in the blanks." Everyone knows what it means to spend time with and enjoy another person's company. At the same time, summer days tend to run together. Summer is typically remembered in more general terms. (I worked, spent time with my girlfriend or boyfriend, hung out with my friends, saw movies.) I think most people would agree with that, and that's what makes the story feel real.*

## Chapter 24: Ronnie

### Summary

Ronnie discovers that her dad has been taking naps and going over to the church to play the new piano. Jonah and Steve are planning to camp out and protect the eggs. Ronnie makes Jonah dinner and then heads down the beach toward the church. Ronnie finds her father playing a new piano in the church, which is undergoing renovations. Listening to her father play, Ronnie reconsiders her father's motives for playing the piano and realizes that her demand six weeks ago was childish.

Steve is having a coughing fit and says it is because the church is so dusty and then explains that the project has stalled due to lack of funding and that Pastor Harris is looking for someone to house the piano.

Steve realizes that he lost track of time and needs to get home to feed Jonah and prepare to camp out with him. Ronnie tells him that Jonah ate, and as they leave, she notices how tired and frail her father looks.

### Commentary



This chapter chronicles Ronnie's development, and she is attentive to Jonah. After taking care of Jonah, Ronnie turns her attention to her father. As she goes to the church to bring him home, Ronnie begins to understand the importance of music in her father's life, recognizes her own mistakes in the past, and for the first times notices the outward signs of how sick he is. Ronnie begins to consider how "childish" her demands regarding the piano were and realizes more fully the extent of Steve's sacrifice for her. As she listens to him compose, she also is proud of his continued ability to interpret music and consider variations.

Although Jonah at times sounds wise beyond his years, this chapter illustrates that he is indeed just a child, one with physical and emotional needs that need to be attended to. It is Jonah who reveals to Ronnie that Steve has been taking naps in the afternoon. This demonstrates how caught up in her own life Ronnie has been during the past six weeks and illustrates how Steve's health is deteriorating. Jonah's concern is that Steve remains in a good mood for their trip tomorrow.

## Chapter 25: Steve

### Summary

Thinking about his composition, Steve realizes that for the first time he is trusting himself rather than trying to recreate some of the past masters. He uses this as an analogy for the way he lived his life, attempting to emulate others rather than trusting himself.

Steve has an honest and open discussion with Jonah about the future. Jonah, who has had a great summer, does not want the good times to end. He suggests either staying in North Carolina or having his father move back to New York, but he knows this will not happen.

The next morning Steve thinks about how God is a mystery, as is the search for God. This thought stays with him as he spends the day with Jonah, visiting a fort, a water park, and Chuck E. Cheese's. Steve has a good but tiring day.

### Commentary



The start of the chapter is background to Steve's creative process, which reveals much about Steve's development as both an artist and a person. His quest to make music parallels his quest to find and experience God. Like Ronnie, he is finally figuring out who he is and where he fits in this world. But as important as these insights are to the development of Steve's character, they are nothing compared to the incredibly important conversation Steve has with Jonah.

Jonah is trying to get a commitment from his father to visit New York and uses the fact that Ronnie has changed to entice Steve.



Steve emphasizes that they all have changed this summer. He realizes that spending time with his children and talking about seemingly unimportant things, like learning to stand on your head, is one of the most important things in life.

Jonah also suggests going to school in North Carolina or Steve moving back to New York and remarrying his mother. In this moment, Jonah is just a 10-year-old boy searching for some stability in his life, one who loves his father, and doesn't want their time together to end.

Steve's realization that the search for God's presence is "as much of a mystery as God himself" provides him with a sense of peace, although he may never understand it.

The foreshadowing about Steve's medical condition intensifies in this chapter. At one point, it reads, "He honestly felt as though he were going to die." This sentence is so important that it is its own paragraph.

The chapter ends with Steve's assertion that the day was good because it was a day "of laughter." Steve spent the day with his son doing things that were important and interesting for Jonah. This is another example of Steve's love and way of parenting.

## Glossary

- Schumann** German composer and music critic of the Romantic period
- Grieg** Norwegian composer and pianist of the Romantic period
- Saint-Saëns** French composer and pianist
- Fort Fisher** Confederate fort during the Civil War that protected trading routes

## Chapter 26: Ronnie

### Summary

Ronnie goes in search of Blaze. Blaze admits that she knows Ronnie was not hitting on Marcus and that she put the merchandise in Ronnie's bag out of anger, but she is unwilling to do anything about it. Blaze's mother kicked her out of the house, so Marcus is all she has now, and he has forbidden it. Blaze tells Ronnie that she doesn't believe that Marcus is through with her, either. As Blaze begins to walk away, Ronnie extends an offer for a place to stay or get a bite to eat.

The next day, Ronnie struggles with finding something formal to wear to the wedding, and Jonah offers Ronnie the money he has amassed through blackmail and liar's poker. Ronnie finds a gown and even gets her hair done at a salon. On the day of the wedding, she is transformed into someone who looks totally different.

Steve borrows a car from Pastor Harris to drive Ronnie to the wedding, and Ronnie notices all the improvements made on the Blakelee estate for the occasion. Will wears a tuxedo, and he and Ronnie are both impressed with how the other cleans up.

An elderly couple sits in the same row as Ronnie, and she gets a vague sense of recognition, but she cannot place the man. When Megan appears, Ronnie doesn't notice that the man is paying more attention to her than to the bride.

Megan and Daniel recited vows that they have written themselves and mention achieving commitment only through the passage of time. Because he is a member of the bridal party, Will initially has only stolen moments of time to spend with Ronnie. As he is returning for additional pictures, Ronnie notices the elderly man watching her.

Although Scott, Cassie, and Ashley do not include Ronnie in dinner conversation, she does not care. Ronnie uses the time to reflect on the nature of her relationships with Kayla and her mother, and decides that both relationships are going to change when she returns to New York. Ashley interrupts Ronnie's thoughts to tell her that there is no way that Ronnie's relationship with Will could possibly last. Ronnie

finally stands up to Ashley, telling her to never talk to her again without risking losing her teeth.

The truth, though, is that Ashley's words worry Ronnie. When Will approaches her, she voices her concerns to him. His words don't quite reassure Ronnie. As they kiss, she contemplates taking their relationship to a new level physically. Will asks her if she wants to go to his father's boat with him, and she whispers "Okay." As they make their way to the dock, Ronnie notices Susan talking with the elderly man.

As they make their way toward the boat, Marcus interrupts them. He makes a crack about the judge, and then Ronnie realizes the elderly man is the judge from her case. Marcus is trying to get Will to attack him as he moves toward the corner of the tent. Will does, and they fall on the ropes that are supporting the tent. The pegs are torn loose from the ground, and the corner begins to collapse.

Susan blames Ronnie for ruining Megan's wedding. She refers to Ronnie as low class and not good enough for her son. She also tells Will that she knows Ronnie is going to court for shoplifting. Tom takes Ronnie home, and she asks him to tell Will that she won't be seeing him any longer.

The next morning, Megan visits Ronnie and assures her that Marcus was the one to blame for the wedding fiasco. She tells Ronnie that she came over to ask if Ronnie loves her brother. When Ronnie admits that she does, Megan encourages her to change her mind about seeing Will. She reminds Ronnie about the volleyball tournament.

Ronnie arrives just before Will's first game. He is confused about seeing her, and she kisses him, asks him to forget what she said, and tells him to play like he's never played before.

## Commentary

In contrast to the introspective previous chapter, Chapter 26 is full of action as well as plot, character, and thematic development. It begins with Ronnie attempting to reconcile with Blaze, who admits to setting Ronnie up but is unable to do anything about it because of Marcus' threats. Even though this does not change Ronnie's situation, the confession softens Blaze, who is not a bad person but who keeps bad company. Blaze also drops an ominous hint about Marcus' plan when she tells Ronnie that "I don't think Marcus is done with you."



This whirlwind pacing of the chapter gives readers a chance to experience the events as rapidly as Ronnie is experiencing them. This enables readers to better understand the shifting emotions and responses Ronnie is encountering in a single day.

Will and Ronnie's brief break up indicates that their relationship is strong enough to withstand negative outside influences. The only question is whether it is strong enough to withstand their personal problems and issues.



Ronnie's appearance at the wedding provides her with a sense of confidence that enables her to stand up to Ashley. Even though Ashley is verbalizing Ronnie's innermost fears, Ronnie neither wants nor needs to hear this from her, so Ronnie threatens to punch Ashley if she ever talks to her again. Ronnie uses her newfound empowerment to ask Will about the direction their relationship is headed.

Although Will says all the right things about the distance not being too far, his sister living in New York, and Ronnie visiting him at Vanderbilt, Ronnie is not convinced. In what could be seen as a moment of weakness and a chance to find another reason to keep him connected to her, she agrees to go out to his dad's boat with Will. Ronnie's uncertainty about whether she wants to explore a sexual relationship with Will is consistent with her character but Marcus' interruption prevents Ronnie from finding out if she is really ready to sleep with Will.



Readers also get an opportunity to get to know Megan, and she is every bit as wonderful as Will has described her. Megan's concern for her brother is the catalyst to spark Ronnie's return to him. But Megan can only convince Ronnie to go to Will after Megan is certain of Ronnie's feelings for her brother. Megan is serving as big sister, best friend, protector, and confidante all in one.



The vows that Megan and Daniel share reflect an important theme. They speak to the importance of commitment: "Real commitment could be proven only through the passage of time," which applies to other relationships, such as Ronnie and Steve's, Ronnie and Will's, and Steve's and God's. Another important thematic topic is communication. Ronnie privately considers talking to her mom, like the way she has been talking with her father this summer. Ronnie's internalization of this attitude indicates her newfound maturity and growth.

## Chapter 27: Marcus

### Summary

Marcus is thinking about the havoc and destruction he caused at Megan's wedding, proud of himself that he knew Will would react so predictably. Yet for the first time, Marcus has a nagging sense that something was not quite right. He realizes that his hold over Will is not as strong as it used to be and decides that he needs to get away.

Marcus needs to make a lot of money quickly, and the volleyball tournament will have a large crowd, one that he could entertain and make a lot of quick cash. He decides to increase the number of fireballs from six to nine, and orders Blaze to prepare the cloth balls by soaking them in lighter fluid. Neither of them realizes that she is preparing the balls above the shirt she is going to wear in the performance later on.

### Commentary



Style & Language



Character Insight

This short chapter, contrasting with the longer previous one, is important for both character and plot.

Marcus is tired of his “friends” and is going to only look out for himself. This should be no surprise to anyone. What may raise a few eyebrows is his fear of prison. This is an important detail that explains why Marcus needs to act immediately. His feelings of superiority are consistent with the Marcus readers have encountered earlier, and his fixation on making quick, easy money obviously blinds him to what else is going on.

And that something else is the error that Blaze makes while preparing the fireballs. The last sentence of the chapter foreshadows some sort of tragedy for Blaze. Readers know something is going to happen; they just don't know what or to what extent.

## Chapter 28: Will

### Summary

Scott and Will are advancing pretty easily through the tournament. During his quarterfinal match, Will mentally revisits the events of the previous day. He imagines what would happen if he told his mother about Marcus and convinces himself that the resulting chain of events would adversely affect Scott's chances for a scholarship. He does not understand why Ronnie showed up today, but he knows that she is watching and is determined to play his best.

In the finals, Will and Scott face Tyson and Landry, a team that had not lost a match in the past two years and had beaten Will and Scott a year ago in this very tournament. Both teams split the first two games and are having a very close third game. When the score is tied at seven, during a break in the action, Will notices a fireball on the pier. Then, with the score tied at 12, Will, who has been noting Marcus' presence for some time now, glances again at the pier and sees Blaze accidentally catch on fire.

Will rushes to Blaze's side as he notices that everyone in the crowd seems too stunned to react. Thinking that an ambulance couldn't easily cross the bridge and get to the beach, he scoops up Blaze and carries her to his truck. During this time, Ronnie arrives on the scene and assists Will as they transport Blaze to the hospital.

Hours later, as Will is waiting for word regarding Blaze's surgery, he thinks about the police, who wanted to know why he transported Blaze himself instead of permitting the paramedics to do so. In the excitement, Will had forgotten that the paramedics were on the scene.

After Blaze's mom comes out to thank Will, he storms out of the ER, with Ronnie along side of him, and although he doesn't tell her where they are going, she knows it is to Bower's Point to find Marcus.

Darkness prevents Marcus and his crew from seeing Will's approach. Will slams Marcus to the ground from behind and then headbutts Teddy, breaking the thug's nose. Will knocks Lance unconscious with a knee to the face, and then attacks Marcus again. Will tackles Marcus, then head

butts him and starts pounding him with his fists. Only Ronnie's intervention prevents Will from inflicting more bodily harm on Marcus.

The next morning at work, Will has to face Scott. Scott is understandably upset at the forfeiture of the finals and is questioning Will about his decision to ignore the paramedics—he views Will as very egocentric. Will, in return, tells Scott to get over himself and that he is tired of covering for Scott. Will demands that Scott tell the truth.

## Commentary

This chapter shows a shift in Will's character. Initially, he thinks too much about his situation—whether he can tell his mother the truth about Marcus and what Marcus might do to reduce his own potential sentence if he were caught—and does not act.



Character  
Insight

When Will does not think, he behaves more admirably, although he is also being foolhardy. He instinctively races toward Blaze when she accidentally catches on fire and takes her to the hospital without thinking. This demonstrates where his priorities are.



Character  
Insight

When Will races to find Marcus later in the evening, or when he starts a fight with Marcus and his cronies, he is not thinking about his own safety or of Ronnie's safety. Arguably, both of these actions—transporting Blaze and beating Marcus—were the wrong things done for the right reasons.



Character  
Insight

The showdown with Scott the next morning is also very telling. Both friends are mad at one another for basically the same reason—each thinks the other is extremely self-centered and cares little for the wants and needs of the other. Scott's jealousy and insecurity come through, and even though Will demands that Scott own up to what he has done, Scott is unwilling and unable to do so.

In this chapter, Will finally stands up to Marcus and to Scott. He is no longer going to let either of them influence him. Will confided in Megan on the night of her wedding, and now the only person who does not know about the church fire is Ronnie. Will needs to find the strength to come clean to her, too.

## Glossary

**Adrenaline** a hormone, known as epinephrine, that is secreted during times of stress

## Chapter 29: Ronnie

### Summary

The next week is stressful for both Will and Ronnie; Ronnie is uncomfortable with Will's actions, while he is concerned that Marcus might contact the authorities. In addition, Susan is particularly cold toward Ronnie the two times they see each other. Ronnie is also concerned about the end of summer: Will and Kayla are going off to college, and Ronnie is left with uncertainty. Before falling asleep one night, Ronnie has an ominous sense of foreboding.

Soon, Will asks Ronnie what she most wants for her birthday. Although it does not occur on her birthday, the eggs do hatch two nights later. Will and Ronnie manage the crowd that shows up to watch the event.

Ronnie also bonds more with her father. They talk about church, the stained-glass window, his song writing, and Jonah. Ronnie admits that she had a good summer and not just because of Will. As the eggs hatch, Ronnie has numerous feelings. Immediately after Jonah expresses how cool it was to watch the hatching, Steve has a coughing fit, worse than the one he had at the church. Ronnie watches in horror as she hears her father's cough and breathing become heavier and then she and everyone else notices that Steve's face is covered with blood.

### Commentary

Chapter 29 opens a week after the fight. Ronnie is torn between her increased feeling of security with her distaste for violence.

This is the first of a series of juxtapositions between joy and pain that exist throughout the chapter.





Character  
Insight

Steve recognizes Ronnie's conflicting feelings about the hatching: as much as she is looking forward to it, she resents—if only for a little bit—having to share the event with strangers who have had no part in the care of the nest. Steve's observation demonstrates how in tune he is with his daughter and also serves as a validation of Ronnie's feelings, for she needs to learn that being an adult includes balancing competing emotions and feelings.

It is important to recognize that Ronnie is the one who initiates the conversation about Steve's song and the completion of the stained-glass window—she is finally taking an interest in things that are important in her father's life.



Literary  
Device

Ronnie's asking about both the song and the window foreshadow the concern that she will have for the completion of both of these things after her father's death.



Character  
Insight

The conversation that Ronnie shares with her father enables them to get closer than they have been not only this summer but also probably in their entire lives, although her father suffers an attack a little over an hour later.



Literary  
Device

The mention of the circle of life, which refers to the life cycle of all living things (and is also the title of the opening song to the movie *The Lion King*), serves as foreshadowing to Steve's impending death. In the movie *The Lion King*, the young cub has to replace his father as ruler, just as Ronnie is going to have to replace her father as the composer of his final musical creation.

The chapter ends by building suspense as it closes with an image of Steve's face covered in blood.

## Glossary

**Condone** to give tacit approval to

# Chapter 30: Steve

## Summary

The chapter opens back in February with Steve finding out he has stomach cancer, which has spread to his lungs and pancreas. Although the doctor will not give Steve a set amount of time, Steve ascertains that he has less than a year to live. The realization of his impending death hits Steve later, as he stands alone and scared on the beach.

Steve first tells Pastor Harris and then Kim about his condition. When he invites his children to spend the summer, he does not allow Kim to tell them of his diagnosis. In the spring, Steve begins to ponder the nature of God and believes that God exists but desires to experience His presence in the world. Back in the present, realizing he needs to be honest with his children, Steve tells them, “I need to go to the hospital.”

## Commentary

Steve’s health has been foreshadowed throughout the novel, and in Chapter 30, the details regarding his diagnosis are finally revealed. When Steve learns that he had stomach cancer and that it had spread, he is prepared to deal with the unpleasant news because of his previous experience with his own father’s death.

When the doctor and Steve start to discuss the idea of quality of life, the doctor states an important theme of the novel: “Try to make the most of the time you have left.” Scared and alone, Steve turns toward God and begins a quest to experience God’s presence in the world. Steve’s journey is initially personal but ends up involving his family. Because of Steve’s faith and the way he demonstrated it, Ronnie will turn to God in her time of crisis.

## Glossary

**Metastasized** to have spread to other parts of the body

**Oncologist** a specialist in the study and treatment of cancer

## Chapter 31: Ronnie

### Summary

Ronnie lashes out at her father for not telling her about the illness. She accuses him of bringing her to North Carolina for the summer in order to watch him die, but Steve explains that he wanted to watch her live, and he asks for and receives Ronnie's forgiveness. When Ronnie finally looks at her father and notices that he is literally wasting away, she realizes that she was oblivious to the signs all summer.

Ronnie's thought prompts Steve to comment, "Maybe watching you enjoy a carefree summer while you fell in love was what kept me out of the hospital in the first place." Ronnie watches him and feels alone.

Later, Ronnie gets Jonah from the waiting room to escort him to see their father and find out the truth. Ronnie does not want to ever forget her father and realizes that she does not really know him.

Ronnie talks with Pastor Harris, who tells her that he will stay at the hospital that night so Ronnie can take Jonah home. Will spends the night with Ronnie in order to help out. Although Ronnie attempts to push him away, Will refuses to listen to her, and he holds her tight.

Later that night, Ronnie looks through Steve's Bible and ends up praying herself—for the first time in years.

### Commentary



Chapter 31 chronicles Ronnie's reaction to the news of her father's illness and impending death. She thinks it is not fair and focuses on how the news is going to affect her. Talking with her father enables Ronnie to begin to understand his decisions. They initially have divergent views regarding living and dying, but Steve has had a longer time to come to grips with his cancer, so they are at different stages of grief.



To capture the emotional upheaval that Ronnie is feeling, Sparks uses anaphora—the repetition of the sentence beginnings, in this case “She needed”—to illustrate the way Ronnie is mentally processing the news and what effect Steve’s impending death has on her life. Three effects are achieved with this usage:

1. The repetition of “she” puts the emphasis is on her, for the antecedent of the pronoun clearly refers to Ronnie.
2. The repetition of the verb “needed,” in contrast to the verb “wanted,” demonstrates how emotionally invested Ronnie has become in the relationship with her father.
3. The list of what follows “she needed” moves from the concrete to the abstract, from time to love to a sense of eternity.



After listing what she needed, Ronnie thinks, “She knew it wouldn’t happen.” The juxtaposition of what she wants and what she knows reinforces the range of emotions that Ronnie is experiencing.

This chapter also shows how Ronnie has matured: For once, she is thinking of others, admitting to having made bad choices, and accepting help. As Ronnie processes the information about her father’s illness, she feels alone and scared. Ronnie does not know this, but these are the exact feelings Steve had when he first got confirmation of his cancer. And like Steve, Ronnie also turns to God.

## Glossary

**Chemotherapy** the treatment of disease by means of chemicals that have a specific toxic effect cancerous tissue

**Malignant** a tumor that invades surrounding tissues, is usually capable of producing metastases, may recur after attempted removal, and is likely to cause death unless adequately treated

**Hospice** a healthcare facility for the terminally ill that emphasizes pain control and emotional support for the patient and family

**Portending** signifying

## Chapter 32: Will

### Summary

The narrative again shifts to Will, who can relate to what Ronnie is going through as he remembers his brother's death—he remembers feeling guilt and numbness and anger and disbelief, as well as wanting to be left alone but also needing to know that he was not alone in the world.

Will's reflections turn toward Steve and his parenting style. Will would like to be a father like Steve has been. Although Will offers to stay and help Ronnie and Jonah, Ronnie refuses to allow Will to change his college plans. Instead, he gives her the macramé bracelet.

In his anger, pain, and frustration, Jonah becomes obsessed with completing the stained-glass window, hoping that this will somehow help his father. But he is too small to reach everything by himself, so he teaches Ronnie and Will how to help him with the window.

The next day Pastor Harris gives them a report about Steve's condition. Will notices the reverend's scarred hands and realizes that he has to come clean to Ronnie.

Will confesses his secret, and Ronnie reacts with a variety of emotions, including anger, hurt, fear, and repulsion. Ronnie refuses to listen to Will as he tries to explain his reasons for covering for Scott and his uncertainty with what he is now going to do. Convinced that she doesn't really know Will at all, Ronnie demands that he leave, effectively ending their relationship.

That night, his last night at home before leaving for Vanderbilt, Will asks his father for a favor, no questions asked.

### Commentary



Literary  
Device

Will's view of Steve as an ideal father reinforces Pastor Harris' previous comments about a father not expecting perfection. As an outsider, Will is able to provide a more objective opinion than Ronnie,

who has all sorts of emotional baggage to deal with. Will sees how important it is that Steve “loved his kids and somehow trusted they were usually smart enough to make the right decision.”



In this chapter, Will helps Jonah and Ronnie complete the stained-glass window, thus supplying physical as well as emotional support during this trying time. When Pastor Harris says, “I have faith,” he is foreshadowing how the church renovations will get completed. Will’s motivation for asking his dad to help him is the only thing that remains unclear: it may be out of love, guilt, sense of what is right, a sense of responsibility to Jonah (or Steve or Pastor Harris), or some combination of these.



The motivation for Will’s actions may not be as important as the outcome of the action. Asking for help from his father is one way of accepting responsibility for his actions, which is an important theme explored in this chapter. Ronnie’s statement to Will, “Truth only means something when it’s hard to admit,” is a clear statement of the value and necessity of truth.

What is not as clear is what to do when friendship conflicts with social responsibility. Ronnie sees this as a black and white issue, whereas Will is more emotionally invested in the situation and sees the shades of gray.

Her final words to Will, “I don’t trust you, Will. You need to go. Leave!” are a result of her sense of betrayal mixed with her pain at knowing that she is going to lose her father. Ronnie is unable to lash out at her father or her brother, so she lashes out at Will.

## Glossary

**Solder** to join metal objects with any of various alloys fused and applied to the joint between them without heating the objects to the melting point

## Chapter 33: Ronnie

### Summary

This chapter opens in the hospital, right after Jonah and Ronnie have told their father about completing the window. After sending Jonah to the soda machine, Steve tells Ronnie that her trial has been postponed until October. Steve then asks how Jonah is really holding up. He also asks about Will, but Ronnie isn't ready to talk about what happened yet.

Ronnie asks her father about what used to lessen his pain, needing to know that her father sacrificed playing the piano in order to fulfill her childish demands.

Jonah returns with Kim, and the next morning Ronnie reveals that she is not going to return to New York. Kim attempts to dissuade her by telling her that it is not her responsibility, but Ronnie counters with "Then whose is it?" Ronnie tells her mother that Steve is her father, regardless of the fact that he had an affair. But Kim's guilty face betrays her secret—*she* was the one who had an affair. Ronnie's shock quickly turns to anger, and she says that whatever happened between the two of them is in the past, and now her father needs her.

Jonah walks in as Ronnie announces her decision to stay and decides that he is also staying; Ronnie realizes this would be a mistake. She does not want her brother to watch their father die. Jonah closes the chapter screaming, "That's not fair!"

### Commentary

Jonah's comments about being patient ("even they [Ronnie and Will] made mistakes") demonstrate the effect Steve's parenting has on his son. It also continues the themes of faith and forgiveness that have run through the novel so far.



Character  
Insight

Ronnie is overwhelmed by her father's forgiveness regarding her selfish desire to have him board up the piano. She is upset that she acted selfishly, but Steve makes her see that he had no problem making that sacrifice and that he had an incredible summer, one that may not have turned out the way it did if he had not boarded up the piano. Ronnie's decision to stay to care of her father is the first of many important decisions she makes as an adult.



Theme

Learning how to deal with someone who has been dishonest is another important thematic topic in *The Last Song*. Ronnie learns that her mother has been lying to her regarding the affair—a lie that was part of the reason Ronnie refused to talk to Steve for three years. The issue of honesty has come up in many of her relationships: with her father, with Will, and now her mother. She is able to dismiss her mother's lie because more important things are in the forefront of her mind.



Theme

Another important issue raised explicitly in this chapter and throughout the entire novel is the issue of fairness. When Jonah screams "that's not fair" at the end of the chapter, he is absolutely correct: Life is not fair. As soon as Ronnie truly understands that life is not fair, she will find it easier to make some important decisions.

## Chapter 34: Steve

### Summary

This chapter opens in the past with Steve making an unannounced visit home during a tour to surprise Kim. By chance, he passed by a restaurant where Kim and Brian were having lunch. Steve observed the casual comfort that his wife shared with this stranger, but the touches and kisses revealed that he wasn't a stranger to Kim. Instead of confronting his wife and making a scene, Steve returned to Penn Station to catch a later train to Richmond. When he called his wife that evening, he didn't mention what he had seen.

As Steve waits for Ronnie and Jonah to return to the hospital, he remembers the images of his discovery of the affair and of his father's emaciated body. Although he has no desire for Ronnie to see him that way, he knows her mind is made up. And he is afraid. Steve has been praying regularly for the past few weeks. One of the things he prayed about was his children's futures.

He also realizes that he is seeing Jonah for the last time. Jonah also realizes that he is saying goodbye to his father and cries inconsolably. Steve uses the stained-glass window as a tangible symbol of his love. He tells his son that the light shining through their window—or any window at all—will be a sign that he is still with him.

### Commentary



Character  
Insight

Steve's reaction to Kim's affair reveals much about his character. He demonstrates the depth of his love for Kim by never telling his children about her affair. It is also telling that Steve has been praying for his children and not for himself. Even as he nears the end of his life, Steve's attention is on his children and their comfort instead of on his own.

Steve tells Jonah that his presence will continue in Jonah's life as long as Steve stays alive in Jonah's memory. Steve also teaches Jonah something about faith—that “the Father is always with you, if you have faith, if you look for the light.”

## Chapter 35: Ronnie

### Summary

Ronnie sees her mother and her brother off and then returns to the hospital. When Steve falls asleep, Ronnie takes a walk and runs into Pastor Harris, who asks Ronnie to pray with him. Ronnie begins to pray often, asking for the strength to care for her father. When she finally gets to take him home, she shows Steve the completed stained-glass window. Later that evening, after calling Jonah, Steve sits down to read his Bible and Ronnie sits with him. Ronnie reflects on how she used to try to provoke her father and how she took his refusal to get angry as a sign of weakness; she now realizes that she was wrong.

Kim sends Ronnie a package: the letters that Ronnie refused to open from her father—all 19 of them. She reads them from first to last.

Ronnie finds out from Pastor Harris that an unnamed benefactor showed up to complete the repairs on the church. Pastor Harris encourages Ronnie to have faith that God will speak to her. Ronnie wants to find that special something to do for her father before he dies, but she does not know what.

One day Ronnie is able to share with Steve some of the details about her relationship with Will—mostly the good times and even the wedding fiasco. But she is not able to discuss what she said to him the last time she saw him.

By the end of September, Steve is progressively getting worse—literally wasting away to nothing. Steve now spends the majority of his time sleeping and reading his Bible. Often he and Ronnie visit the construction site. One time Ronnie sees Mr. Blakelee there.

After completing *Anna Karenina*, Ronnie begins to read *Doctor Zhivago*. Eventually, she tells her father about her last night with Will. To her surprise, her father tells her that she was being too hard on Will, pointing out that she has been doing the same thing he had done, and he doesn't think she should say anything to Pastor Harris.

Steve also tells Ronnie that she needs to “learn how to forgive.” Ronnie finds a letter recently written by her father in the stack. Time passes, and Steve’s health continues to decline.

One day, Ronnie and Steve return home to find Blaze and her mother waiting for them. Blaze thanks Ronnie for taking her to the hospital and also reveals that she has admitted to the District Attorney that she put the materials in Ronnie’s bag. The DA is not going to charge Blaze because she has information about a series of crimes that Marcus committed, including the fire at the church. Blaze reveals that Marcus started the fire, not Scott.

Ronnie realizes that Blaze’s confession means that what Ronnie wanted would have ruined Scott’s life for nothing. Blaze tells Ronnie that she will help her whenever she wants asks to be called by her given name, Galadriel.

Ronnie continues to nurse her father through Halloween and into November; during this time, she keeps trying to get to know him better.

Steve and Ronnie make one last visit to the pier, and after, Steve shares with Ronnie that he has a DNR—a “do not resuscitate” order.

Steve lives long enough to see the window installed at the church, and Ronnie reads her father’s final letter. Thanksgiving passes, and Ronnie finds the unfinished song that Steve was working on in the summer. She works on it and in the morning realizes that her dad is in bad shape. Ronnie calls an ambulance and he regains consciousness in hospital.

### From Nicholas

**The subplot of *The Last Song*, particularly Blaze’s story, parallels the main storyline. From an artistic perspective, why did you do this?**

*Primarily, Blaze’s story was meant to do two things: Add additional drama and show the consequences of making poor decisions. At the same time, Blaze eventually learns from her mistakes. I tend to believe that most people do. I know I’ve learned more from my mistakes than my successes. I also liked Blaze’s character, because like Ronnie, hers was a story of redemption. I think redemption is one of the great themes in literature.*

She asks her father for one last thing, borrows Pastor Harris' car, and calls Galadriel, and they take down the wall. Ronnie makes all sorts of last minute arrangements with the hospital staff and with Galadriel, and when she takes her father home, she shows him the piano and tells him that she completed his song, that it became "our song" and she wants to play it for him.

## Commentary



During this chapter Ronnie learns the value of prayer. Reading the Bible, like reading any good book, provides a new insight each time the reader returns to it again. This return to faith helps Ronnie and teaches her to list her gifts. Nicholas Sparks uses format and spacing to draw attention to the importance of these gifts.



Ronnie continues to mature as a young adult. When she talks to Jonah, she reassures him about their father's condition because she knows it's more important for him to have happy memories of his father than for him to know the truth. Ronnie is doing for Jonah what Steve did for her. Steve also teaches Ronnie about the importance of practicing forgiveness. He recognizes that Ronnie is being too hard on Will and on herself.



The tearing down of the wall is important both practically and symbolically. With no wall in place, Ronnie is able to perform for her father one last time, and Steve is able to die at home. This symbolizes how the wall between Galadriel and Ronnie, as well as the wall between Ronnie and her father, has been torn down.

Ronnie's decision to finish her father's composition truly makes his last song a joint effort. The last song refers to the final song that both Steve and Ronnie wrote and the last song that he hears. His song becomes "our" song as Ronnie creates something that will live on after Steve's death.

## Chapter 36: Steve

### Summary

Steve listens to the composition that he and his daughter created together and is at peace. He compares life to a song and finally feels God's presence in the world.

### Commentary



Steve's last chapter is the realization of what he has been searching for: the nature of God, who is "love in its purest form." Everything that Steve had longed for, he already had—time with his music, his son, and his daughter.

As important as it is for Ronnie to play, it is also important for Steve to listen, so that they shared something together. Steve created the stained-glass window with his son and a musical composition with his daughter. Both are tangible things that will serve as a reminder of their time together.

#### From Nicholas

**Initially, it seems very obvious that Ronnie is the protagonist of *The Last Song*; yet, some of the most important ideas about God and love and parenting are experienced and learned by Steve. Would it be fair to consider him a co-protagonist, especially because of the number of important chapters told from his point of view?**

*Steve is, without question, intrinsic to the story. It's hard to write a quality father-daughter story if the reader doesn't understand—and sympathize with—the father. In addition, Steve's character provides the drama and tragedy in the story. The reader needed to care about him.*

## Chapter 37: Ronnie

### Summary

Ronnie is unable to talk about her father's death less than a week later, but she is able to share details about her recital. Steve's body is cremated, and the sparsely-attended funeral takes place at Pastor Harris' recently reopened church. After the service ends, Ronnie waits in the pew until the sunlight comes through the stained-glass window.

When Ronnie turns to leave the church, she sees Mr. and Mrs. Blakelee waiting for her. She embarrasses Mr. Blakelee by thanking him for his donation to the church. The Blakelees tell Ronnie that someone is here to see her. She exits the church and sees Will talking with Galadriel.

Ronnie is not exactly sure what she wants to say to Will. Will reveals that he is off to Europe and Ronnie announces that she is going to audition at Juilliard. Ronnie apologizes to Will for what she said at the end of the summer, and he surprises her by explaining that the reason he remained distant was to give her time with her father—time that he was not able to have with his brother.

#### From Nicholas

**Will doesn't call Ronnie more than twice because, as he says, "I knew your dad needed you, and I wanted you to concentrate on him, not me." What elements in *The Last Song* prepared readers for this comment and enabled them to find it consistent with Will's character?**

*Will knew he'd been wrong in covering up his friends' crime and that Ronnie was right to have called him on it. At the same time, she said she couldn't trust him—and part of him believed that, too. Ronnie needed time with her father, she needed time to heal, and Will knew those things as well. Will was what you might consider, "an old soul" in a teen's body. All teenagers know such a person, so again, he feels real.*

Will then notices that Ronnie is wearing the macramé bracelet, and he tells her that he will call her when he returns from Europe, where he will be spending the Christmas holidays. Ronnie nods in agreement, convinced that he is walking out of her life forever.

## Commentary

There are not many people at the funeral, but almost all of the important people from Ronnie's summer are there.



This shows that it does not matter how many people one touches in one's life—what is important is the depth of one's relationship with those people.

For Ronnie, “IMTF” now can refer to Mikey, Steve, and perhaps even Will, although it seems unlikely that she will actually never see him again.

# Epilogue: Ronnie

## Summary

Although Ronnie experiences the emotional upheaval of dealing with the death of a loved one, she uses the knowledge of her father and their summer together to go on living rather than mourning him for too long.

Ronnie and her mom no longer fight, and Jonah is concerned that his mother is sick too. Ronnie reassures him that they have not stopped fighting because of that. She now spends most of her time with her brother and practicing the piano.

Ronnie auditioned at Juilliard and now practices daily there. She is torn between wanting to hear from him and wanting to be able to just move on. But Will surprises Ronnie: He calls her to tell her that he is coming to New York—he is actually calling from Juilliard. He has decided to transfer to Columbia.

## Commentary



The epilogue ties up all the loose ends and provides a satisfying closure to the story. Over the course of the novel, Ronnie learned to “embrace life and flourish,” for life is for the living. True to form, *The Last Song* has a happy ending, and life does go on.

## Glossary

**Columbia** New York’s oldest university and member of the Ivy League

### From Nicholas

Ronnie develops an understanding of various love relationships throughout *The Last Song*—toward her father, toward Will, toward herself, and toward her God. Could she be considered a modern *Everyman* for contemporary teenagers who are trying to find their place in the world?

*Of course. That’s why she feels so real as a character. Because every teenager goes through exactly the same thing.*

# CHARACTER ANALYSES

The following character analyses delve into the physical, emotional, and psychological traits of the literary work's major characters so that you might better understand what motivates these characters. The writer of this study guide provides this scholarship as an educational tool to which you may compare your own interpretation of the characters. Before reading the character analyses that follow, consider first writing your own short essay on the characters as an exercise to test your understanding of the original literary work. Then, compare your essays to those that follow, noting discrepancies between the two. If your essays appear lacking, that might indicate that you need to reread the original literary work or re-familiarize yourself with the major characters.

<b>Ronnie .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Steve.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Will.....</b>	<b>80</b>

## Ronnie

Veronica “Ronnie” Miller, the protagonist of *The Last Song*, comes of age in this novel, progressing from a self-centered teenager who is mad at the world—but mostly her parents—to a caring, mature young woman who finally learns to focus on her family, talents, and gifts.

At the beginning of the novel, Ronnie is a sullen recent high school graduate. She is not yet 18, so legally must abide by her parents’ wishes. Ronnie has had a few shoplifting incidents, but generally stays out of trouble. Ronnie’s parents are divorced, and Ronnie hasn’t handled the situation very well. When her father left his family three years earlier, Ronnie blamed him. She quit playing the piano to get back at him, even though she is very talented. She also refused to see him when he visited or to read the letters he sent. Ronnie takes her parents’ divorce personally and is unable to address her negative feelings towards her father.

Ronnie is sent to her father’s house for the summer with her younger brother Jonah, but she is determined to not have a good time and to spend as little time as possible with her father. Subconsciously, she wants to hurt her father in retaliating for his leaving, but Ronnie also has a sensitive, softer side, which she occasionally reveals.

Ronnie moves toward maturity as the novel progresses. *The Last Song* is about growing up, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Only when she allows herself to accept help and criticism from others does she begin to change. But the maturation process is slow—it takes Ronnie the summer to learn this.

She also learns the value of love and faith. Throughout the course of the summer, Ronnie learns from family and friends, who serve as a catalyst for her growth. She learns the value of communicating from Will; from her father, she learns that love is more of a verb than a noun; and she teaches herself that when you take time for other people, other people will take time for you.

## Steve

Steve is almost an ideal father. Even though he is dying, he keeps his illness a secret and puts the wants and needs of his children ahead of his own. Through his words and actions, Steve demonstrates to his children, but most significantly to Ronnie, what it means to love

another. And Ronnie is able to learn from her father's words and actions as she grows into an upstanding young lady.

Many questions remain about Steve's actions surrounding the divorce—Should he have left his family? Should he have confronted Kim about her affair? Should he have let Ronnie know the truth about his reasons for leaving? But just as Ronnie takes a journey of maturation, Steve is on his own journey: his quest is to find God.

In a sense, Steve is an “Everyman” who is facing his mortality and trying to attain spiritual and emotional peace before he dies. His questions, uncertainties, and fears are those of all people, but particularly of those who realize that they will not be alive much longer.

In another sense, Steve is a symbol for God's love. Steve, like God, loves unconditionally, trusts in his children, and knows his children better than they know themselves. His words and actions model the essence of love. Just as Steve yearns for the presence of God in the world, not realizing that he was experiencing it during the summer with his children, Steve becomes a symbol of how to live your life, though Ronnie is also too blind to see it until the end.

## **Will**

Initially, Will also appears to be too good to be true. He seems to have it all—good looks, athletic ability, a family of means, good friends, and a good job. But Will has secrets, and these good things are only what are on the surface.

Will is privately dealing with various kinds of guilt: guilt about the untimely death of his brother; guilt about the origins of the fire; guilt about not acting on his knowledge; and guilt about not telling Ronnie the truth. He is admirable but by no means perfect—a well-rounded character.

There is a moment of irony when Ronnie discovers that Will was not avoiding her when he went away to school. He was giving her the gift of time, which was the best thing he could have possibly given her. When he comes back for Steve's funeral, Ronnie isn't sure whether he is giving her the brush off when he claims that he will call her after he returns home from Europe. Fortunately, Will surprises her in New York, demonstrating both a thoughtful and playful side, indicating that even though summers always come to an end, their love is enduring.

# CRITICAL ESSAYS

On the pages that follow, the writer of this study guide provides critical scholarship on various aspects of Nicholas Sparks' *The Last Song*. These interpretive essays are intended solely to enhance your understanding of the original literary work; they are supplemental materials and are not to replace your reading of *The Last Song*. When you're finished reading *The Last Song*, and prior to your reading this study guide's critical essays, consider making a bulleted list of what you think are the most important themes and allusions. Write a short paragraph under each bullet point explaining *why* you think that theme or allusion is important; include at least one short quotation from the original literary work that supports your contention. Then, test your list and reasons against those found in the following essays. Do you include themes and allusions that the study guide author does not? If so, this self test might indicate that you are well on your way to understanding the work. But if not, perhaps you will need to reread *The Last Song*.

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## Significant Allusions in *The Last Song*

An allusion is an indirect reference. Sometimes the reference is to a person; other times it's to the Bible, a historical event, or another literary text. Mythology, the arts, religion, and popular culture are also some of the most common forms of allusions. The purpose of an allusion is to enrich the text in which the allusion is made. Although knowledge of the allusion is not imperative to the understanding of the text, understanding the allusion provides a richer experience for the reader.

In *The Last Song*, Scott references a number of movie titles in practically every conversation he has. These allusions indicate that he relates to these characters and the plots. His references, like the movies themselves, often contain double entendres and sexual innuendo. Often, his references are to Ronnie.

The cinematic allusions associated with Ronnie are used to demonstrate the depth of her character as well as foreshadow significant events in the plot. The story of Nemo from *Finding Nemo* is about a child reconnecting with an estranged father, providing readers of *The Last Song* with clues as to Ronnie and Steve's reconciliation. And *The Breakfast Club*, a movie about outsiders and misfits who bond during a Saturday detention, provides hints at the restoration of the friendship between Ronnie and Blaze.

In addition to movies, the two novels that Ronnie reads—*Anna Karenina* and *Doctor Zhivago*—indicate the important thematic topics of jealousy, faith, family, and relationships. They also explore the relationship between happiness and pain and between loneliness and love, and the importance of individuality. Stylistically, *Anna Karenina* is a realistic novel that shifts its point of view from the perspective of different characters; the reference to it can also be considered an allusion to the form of *The Last Song*.

The most significant allusions in *The Last Song* are Christian in nature. Readers who are unfamiliar with them will only notice Steve reading the Bible and working on a stained-glass window for the church and will easily dismiss these details. But those who have read and studied the Bible will notice the similarities between Steve's love and the love of both God the Father and Jesus Christ. The way Steve and Ronnie turn to the Lord in times of trouble and the ideals of forgiveness permeate the pages of *The Last Song*, indicating that

the characters are learning from one another—and ultimately from God—the best way to live their life here on Earth in order to prepare for the afterlife, for people should desire to know God in both this world and the next.

## The Value of Popular Fiction

During the past decade or so, the emphasis of literary studies has been moving away from the studying of specific works and moving toward students' participation and involvement with writing. This shift has included the idea that students need to take an active role in discovering knowledge rather than being passive receptors of information. Traditionally, the great works of literature have established what is in the literary canon, and those works needed a teacher to decipher, explain, and interpret them for the uneducated masses. However, contemporary theory prefers teachers to be the “guide on the side” who encourages students to make connections with literary texts that students find significant, compelling, and worthwhile. Few debate the importance of reading aesthetic texts. What is debated, however, is the types of texts in which high school students should experience this aesthetic reading.

The adolescent and adult worlds are not one and the same; the primary concerns of young adult readers are not the same ones that adults have. High school readers who may not be ready for *Anna Karenina* can still discuss the thematic topics of young love, societal bounds, and faithfulness. Popular fiction titles like *The Last Song* are more accessible than many other adult titles in the literary canon. Unlike many more traditional titles, *The Last Song* is straightforward and accessible. This is empowering to the readers: readers who can relate to the characters can readily affirm or contradict what they read. The point of reading literature is to engage in idea as well as to develop literacy. Contemporary, popular fiction titles like *The Last Song* should be used in classroom settings as a bridge from childhood to adult reading. Although some students may cross that bridge earlier than others, all students deserve the opportunity to read something that resonates with them.

## CliffsNotes Review

Use this CliffsNotes Review to test your understanding of the original text and reinforce what you have learned in this book. After you work through the review and essay questions and the fun and useful practice projects, you are well on your way to understanding *The Last Song*.

### Q&A

1. Where is Ronnie going to spend the summer?
  - a. Daytona Beach
  - b. Virginia Beach
  - c. Wrightsville Beach
2. What novel is Ronnie reading that Will has already read?
  - a. *Anna Karenina*
  - b. *Doctor Zhivago*
  - c. *War and Peace*
3. Will shows Ronnie which injured animal at the aquarium?
  - a. dolphin
  - b. jellyfish
  - c. loggerhead turtle
4. Who rescued Will and his mother from the car accident?
  - a. Marcus
  - b. Mikey
  - c. Scott
5. The day after the wedding fiasco, who gets Ronnie to admit that she does indeed love Will?
  - a. Jonah
  - b. Megan
  - c. Steve

Answers: (1) c. (2) a. (3) b. (4) c. (5) b.

## Review Questions and Essay Topics

1. Forgiveness is an important thematic topic in *The Last Song*. Which act of forgiveness is most significant? Why? What do all of these individual examples of forgiveness say about the role of forgiveness in our lives?
2. Authors develop characters in a variety of ways, but one of the strongest ways to develop a character is through his actions. One of Steve's strengths as a father is the way he leads by example. What other characters reveal more about themselves by what they do rather than by what they say?
3. A symbol is any object that not only has meaning in and of itself but also represents something else. Some of the most important symbols in *The Last Song* include fire, the loggerhead nest, the piano, and the last song. Select a symbol from the novel and trace its use throughout the novel. Analyze its effect on character, plot, and thematic development.
4. *The Last Song* explores various notions and aspects of loss—physical, emotional, spiritual, literal, and metaphorical. Select two central characters from the novel and compare/contrast their reactions to what they lose and how they deal with that loss.
5. Various types of love and relationships—such as paternal, brotherly, romantic—exist throughout *The Last Song*. Select one specific relationship and trace its development through the course of the novel. What thematic significance does this relationship have on the text as a whole?

## Practice Projects

1. *The Last Song* is about relationships, music, and the unifying effect music can have on relationships. Which art form is most important in your life? Instead of writing an essay, use that genre to explore an important theme of *The Last Song*. Share your artistic creation with your classmates.
2. Write a chapter from the perspective of each one of the minor characters—Jonah, Scott, Pastor Harris—in *The Last Song*.
3. After reading and discussing the novel, watch the movie version of *The Last Song*. Keep track of the differences between the movie and the novel. Determine *why* the differences exist and *what effect* these differences have on the development of character, plot, and theme.

## CliffsNotes Resource Center

The learning does not need to stop here. CliffsNotes Resource Center shows you the best of the best—links to the best information in print and online about the author and/or related works. And do not think that this is all we have prepared for you; we have put all kinds of pertinent information at [www.cliffsnotes.com](http://www.cliffsnotes.com).

### Books and Periodicals

This CliffsNotes book provides a meaningful interpretation of *The Last Song*. If you are looking for information about Nicholas Sparks, check out these other publications:

Gaston, Elaine. "Sparks Writes about Life Choices." *The Sun News* (Myrtle Beach), September 23, 2007.

"Nicholas Sparks." *Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series*. Volume 151. Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 354–359.

"Sparks, Nicholas." *2001 Current Biography Yearbook*. New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 511–514.

Sparks, Nicholas. *The Last Song*. (2009). New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2010.

### Internet

Check out these Web resources for more information about Nicholas Sparks and *The Last Song*:

"Nicholas Sparks Homepage": [www.nicholassparks.com](http://www.nicholassparks.com)

"Reading Group Guide": [www.readinggroupguides.com/guides\\_1/the\\_last\\_song1.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides_1/the_last_song1.asp)

Touchstone Pictures' *The Last Song*: [touchstone.movies.go.com/thelastsong](http://touchstone.movies.go.com/thelastsong).