"What can you say about a twenty-five year old girl who died? That she was beautiful and brilliant. That she loved Mozart and Bach. The Beatles. And me."

-Oliver Barrett,

Love Story

Overview:

*Love Story* is a 1970's short romance novel by [Erich Segal](http://example.com/erich-segal) that was once the #1 Bestseller for over nine months on the [New York Times Bestseller list](http://example.com/new-york-times-bestseller-list) (Segal). It was originally written as and approved as a screenplay, and then released on Valentine's Day as a novel to act as a kind of preview for the Paramount motion picture version (Fox). It tells the simple story of two students, Jenny and Ollie, of different social classes, who fall in love and do their best to make it work against the odds. It "embodies so much truth and so little that is false or saccharine that it speaks to a whole generation" according to the [Miami Herald](http://example.com/miami-herald) (Segal).

Plot Summary:

The story is narrated by Oliver Barrett IV, a rich, Harvard hockey jock, and begins with, "What can you say about a twenty-five year old girl who died? That she was beautiful and brilliant. That she loved Mozart and Bach. The Beatles. And me?" (Segal 1). He talks about the woman he loved that died young. He gives us a taste of her personality right away and then goes on to take us back to the beginning, when he first met Jenny Cavilleri.

In Oliver's senior year, he began to study at the Radcliffe Library, rather than the Harvard Library. The Radcliffe Library was full of girls, but he tells us that the real reason he went there was because it was "quiet, nobody knew [him], and the reserve books were less in demand" (Segal 2). One day before finals, he goes to check out a book, and the girl working the check out desk gets lippy with him. He describes her "a superior-being type! The kind who think since the ratio of Radcliffe to Harvard is five to one, the girls must be five times as smart" (Segal 2). He ends up asking her out to coffee despite her attitude and proceeds to ask her out again: "Listen, you snotty Radcliffe bitch, Friday night is the [Dartmouth](http://example.com/dartmouth) hockey game" (Segal 6). She goes to his hockey game and afterward they end up having their first kiss and they begin to date. From this point, they fall in love very fast and when Jenny tells...
Kiss and they begin to date. From this point, they fall in love very fast. When Jenny tells Ollie that she plans to leave for Paris to study music, which would inevitably end their relationship, Ollie proposes and she accepts.

The couple decides to meet each other's parents and tell them about their engagement. First, they visit Oliver Barrett the III and Allison, Ollie's high class parents. When Ollie tells his father about the engagement, Mr. Barrett tells Ollie that he's going to cut him off, but Ollie tells him he's going to marry Jenny anyways. This effectively takes Ollie from ridiculously rich to dirt poor. Now, Jenny will have to support Ollie through school. Then, they go to visit Jenny's dad, Phil, who is welcoming and accepting of their marriage. Jenny and Ollie have a small ceremony with a few people and exchange their vows. They then go to a bar for their reception and because it's such a small group, they sit in one booth and spend the night all getting drunk together. “Jenny, we're legally married!” “Yeah, now I can be a bitch” (Segal 74).

The couple "scrounges" to make ends meet for the first three years, but they do make it work. Once Ollie graduates third in his class, he gets a great job offer and the couple move to New York. Since, they're doing okay now, income-wise, the couple decide they want to have a baby, but have trouble conceiving. The couple goes to the doctor and have tests done to check their fertility. In doing this, they find out not only can they not have a baby, but Jenny is dying from leukemia, at just 24 years old. At first, Ollie and the doctor keep it from Jenny, until it's impossible to hide it from her. She gets thinner and weaker, and finally they take her to the hospital, where she undergoes expensive cancer therapy. When it becomes too expensive, Ollie talks to his father for the first time in years to borrow money. He doesn't tell him what it's for though. At this point, Phil moves in with Ollie and they stay with Jenny as much as possible, until finally she dies in Ollie's arms. When Mr. Barrett figured out that Jenny was ill, he made his way to the hospital, but he was too late. He made it just in time for Ollie to walk outside the hospital and tell him. Mr. Barrett tells his son that he's sorry and Ollie tells him something that Jenny said after their first real fight, "Love means not ever having to say you're sorry," and cries in his father's arms (Segal 131).

Main Characters:

Oliver Barrett IV: Oliver is a rich "Preppie," as Jennifer coins him. He is an All-Star, All-Ivy hockey player for Harvard University with a rich Harvard Alumni, ex-Olympian father. He was the heir to the Barrett fortune, before his father cut him off for marrying Jenny in the middle of his college years. He is studying law (Segal).

Jennifer Cavilerri: Jennifer is a witty Radcliffe College music major who is set on studying in Paris before she marries Oliver Barrett. She is of Italian descent and has a very close relationship with her father; Ollie refers to it as "Italian-Mediterranean Syndrome" (Segal 53). She and Oliver are the two main focuses of this story (Segal).

Oliver Barret III: Oliver Barrett III is the father of Oliver IV. He is very critical of Oliver and is very wealthy. He doesn't approve of Jenny and Oliver's marriage. His estranged relationship with his son causes some friction between Ollie and Jenny as Jenny doesn't understand them (Segal).

Phil Cavilerri: Jennifer's loving and accepting father. He too is confused by Oliver and his father's relationship. He accepts their marriage and welcomes Ollie into the family (Segal).

Key Stylistic Features/Structure/Form:

Love story is written in a way that gives it several literature related identities. It is said to be written from "telegraphic prose style" to "comedic" (Fox) to "elliptical" (Pelzer 12). The whole story is written in first person with Oliver Barrett telling us the story in a very casual, informal way, similar to Catcher in the Rye but a little less so. It is a very tragic story but there are several moments of laugh-out-loud humor as well. He uses an huge amount of dialogue; the book is mostly comprised of it.

Love story was first envisioned by Segal as a film, not a novel; however, his initial screenplay wasnumerously rejected by several studios as they thought it "too sentimental for the time." Paramount Pictures, the studio that eventually produced the movie version of Love Story, encouraged Segal to create the novel first. (Fox).

Thematic Concerns:

Social Status:
- Overcoming Differences In Social Status- Ollie and Jenny are originally from different social classes
- Fitting Into Your Predisposed Social Status- Ollie feels pressured to be exactly the way his father and his social class expects him to be

Family Relationships:
- Dealing with family estrangement- Ollie and his Father
Dealing with family estrangement - Ollie and his Father

Closeness of Family - Jenny and Phil

Strength of Love: Jenny and Ollie support each other and maintain a loving experience throughout all their struggles

Struggle of Middle Class: Jenny and Ollie struggle to make ends meet when Ollie loses claim to his family fortune and they have to make due while trying to pay for their schooling, home, and other needs on just Jenny's teaching job.

Gender Roles: When Ollie loses his money Jenny becomes the provider.

Dealing with Sickness and Death: Jenny and Ollie know that Jenny is dying and have to face it during the time they have left.

Quotations:

- "What can you say about a twenty-five year old girl who died? That she was beautiful and brilliant. That she loved Mozart and Bach. The Beatles. And me." (The first and most summative lines of the book) (Segal 1)

- "What the hell makes you so smart?" I asked.
  "I wouldn't go for coffee with you," she answered.
  "Listen -- I wouldn't ask you." "That," she replied "is what makes you stupid." (Segal 3)

- "'Jenny, if you're so convinced I'm a loser, why did you bulldoze me into buying you coffee?' She looked me straight in the eye and smiled. 'I like your body,' she said." (Segal 5)

- "Love means not ever having to say you're sorry." (Segal 91)

- "He had then warned his daughter not to violate the Eleventh Commandment. 'Which one is that?' I asked her.
  'Do not bullshit thy father,' she said." (Segal 60)

- (Concerning Ollie's news that he got third in his entire class)
  "'Don't be too cocky,' she replied. 'Third is still only third.'
  'Hey, listen you bitch,' I said.
  'What, you bastard?' she replied.
  'I owe you a helluva lot,' I said sincerely.
  'Not true, you bastard, not true,' she answered.
  'Not true?' I inquired, somewhat surprised.
  'You owe me everything,' she said. (Segal 91)

- "'Listen,' she explained. 'When you have to take your wife to dinner on a weekday, you must be screwing someone!'
  'Jennifer!' I bellowed, now honestly hurt. 'I will not have that kind of talk at my breakfast table!'
  'Then get your ass home to my dinner table. Okay?'
  'Okay.' (Segal 110)

- "And then I did what I had never done in his presence, much less in his arms. I cried." (The last lines) (Segal 131)

Reception/Legacy:

Love Story was on the New York Times Bestselling list at #1 for over a year, and had generally positive critical reception, selling over ten million copies (Fox). In fact, when the novel was published in February of 1970 it was an immediate success, as was it's movie, which was released less than a year later in December. Segal went on to write a sequel, Oliver's Story, another bestseller, seven years later (Pelzer 42).

Praise for Love Story:

- "Sweet, short, sad... It will reach readers on both sides of the generation gap." -John Barkham, Saturday Review Syndicate (Segal)
- "A lump forms in the throat and keeps on growing." -The New York Times (Segal)
- "Segal has tricked us into reading a novel about youth today that has little sex, no drugs, and a tear-jerking ending; and worse, he has made us love it, ponder it, and feel it to be completely contemporary." -Paul Goldberger, Yale '72, The New Journal (Segal)
- "Funny, touching, and infused with wonder, as all love stories should be." -San Francisco Examiner (ErichSegal.com)
- "For someone who is in love, or was in love, or hopes to be in love." -St. Louis Post Dispatch (ErichSegal.com)
"Beautifully written ... profoundly moving." - *Sunday Express* (ErichSegal.com)

"Very simple, immensely appealing ... memorable characterisations that haunt you long after you’ve finished reading.” - *Publishers Weekly* (ErichSegal.com)

“A lump forms in your throat and starts growing until it feels like a football coming up sideways. You either fight it or let it out.” - *New York Times*

"We loved it and we think you’ll love it too.” - *Sun* (ErichSegal.com)

"Erich Segal has managed to compose a story about genuine love among the moderns, keeping it in key with our times and avoiding the sticky bit. If your emotions are still able to vibrate, here is a story that will shake you up.” - Miles Smith, *Associated Press*.

"Simplicity ... Charm ... Compassion and a delicate sense of comedy. It illustrates a particular point: 'Love means not ever having to say you're sorry.' That is well said.” - *Books and Bookman* (ErichSegal.com)

"It's incredible ... A poignant novel of nostalgia and romance." - *The Washington Post* (ErichSegal.com)

**Negative Reviews:**

- "The banality of 'Love Story' makes 'Peyton Place' look like 'Swann's Way' as it skips from cliche to cliche with an abandon that would chill even the blood of a True Romance editor.” - *Newsweek* (Fox)

- "In early 1971, after “Love Story” was submitted for consideration for a National Book Award, the fiction jury threatened to resign in a body unless the novel was removed from contention. It was.” (Fox)

**Inspiration and Controversy:**

In the 1990s, then-vice president, Al Gore, claimed that he had been the inspiration behind the character of Oliver Barrett, and his wife, Tipper, for Jenny (Fox). In fact, Segal stated that the character was based of a young Tommy Lee Jones, Gore's college roommate (Henneberger); however, Oliver’s estranged relationship with his father was inspired by the Gore family. (Segal had met both Jones and Gore in the 60s).

The initial idea for the plot came from one of Segal's students at Yale whose wife had died and the inspiration for Jenny was based of a girl Segal had dated at Harvard.

**Further Reading:**

- Related to *Love Story*:
  - *Oliver's Story* (sequel)-
    - *Book*
    - *Movie*
  - Surrounding the origins of *Love Story* and Erich Segal:
    - *Author of 'Love Story' Disputes a Gore Story* (NYT Article)
    - *Erich Segal, 'Love Story' Author, Dies at 72* (NYT Article)
    - *Erich Segal: A Critical Companion* (Book)

- More novels by Erich Segal:
  - *Man, Woman, and Child*
  - *Doctors*
  - *The Class*
  - *Acts of Faith*
  - *Prizes*
  - *Only Love*
  - *Fairy Tale*

**Works Cited**


Love Stories. 40 Risks Everyone Should Take Before Turning 40. As if 30 wasn’t stressful enough—40 is now here and you might be grasping with the concept of a new decade. If so, consider this your permission slip, bucket list, checklist, and complete guide to taking the risks you were born to make. The Last Thing JFK Said to Jackie Before He Died. 10 Sweet Love Stories About How Presidents Met Their First Ladies. Love Story is a 1970 American romantic drama film written by Erich Segal, who was also the author of the best-selling novel of the same name. It was produced by Howard G. Minsky and directed by Arthur Hiller and starred Ali MacGraw and Ryan O’Neal, alongside John Marley, Ray Milland, and Tommy Lee Jones in his film debut in a minor role. A tragedy, the film is considered one of the most romantic by the American Film Institute (#9 on the list) and is one of the highest-grossing films of all time. It