

The Best of Me

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In this New York Times bestselling novel of first love and second chances, former high school sweethearts confront the painful truths of their past to build a promising future -- together.

"Everyone wanted to believe that endless love was possible. She'd believed in it once, too, back when she was eighteen."

In the spring of 1984, high school students Amanda Collier and Dawson Cole fell deeply, irrevocably in love. Though they were from opposite sides of the tracks, their love for one another seemed to defy the realities of life in the small town of Oriental, North Carolina. But as the summer of their senior year came to a close, unforeseen events would tear the young couple apart, setting them on radically divergent paths.

Now, twenty-five years later, Amanda and Dawson are summoned back to Oriental for the funeral of Tuck Hostetler, the mentor who once gave shelter to their high school romance. Neither has lived the life they imagined . . . and neither can forget the passionate first love that forever changed their lives. As Amanda and Dawson carry out the instructions Tuck left behind for them, they realize that everything they thought they knew -- about Tuck, about themselves, and about the dreams they held dear -- was not as it seemed. Forced to confront painful memories, the two former lovers will discover undeniable truths about the choices they have made. And in the course of a single, searing weekend, they will ask of the living, and the dead: Can love truly rewrite the past?

A Q&A with Author Nicholas Sparks

Q

: What was your inspiration for writing *The Best of Me*?

A

: I suppose the inspiration was two-fold. It had been a long time since I'd done a "reunion" story (like *The Notebook*) so it was time to do another. At the same time, I wanted it to be different than *The Notebook* in almost every way. At the same time, I wanted to write a novel about characters in their forties. At that age, people are coming to terms with the decisions and choices they've made in the past. *The Best of Me* was essentially a combination of those two ideas.

Q

: This book deals with falling in love for the first time and how sometimes that love is so strong it can cross the span of time and space no matter what happens. Is that something you believe in?

A

: Yes, I believe it's possible. First love is always powerful, and for some people, that love really does last forever. The problem with that, however, is that over time, the love often becomes romanticized. I wanted to write a novel that explored that concept as well. Neither Dawson nor Amanda are the same people they'd been when they were younger, and little by little, that romanticism diminishes over the course of the story. For them, however, the new reality nonetheless left them feeling the same way about each other as they once had. And yet, they fell in love once more. Or maybe, phrasing it differently, they never fell out of love in the first place.

Q

: Former high school sweethearts Amanda Collier and Dawson Cole reconnect after 25 years when their mentor, Tuck Hostetler, dies and they are summoned back to Oriental, North Carolina for his funeral. One of things that drove Amanda and Dawson apart was that they were from the opposite side of the tracks. Are class differences still a part of everyday life in a town like Oriental, North Carolina?

A

: Class differences aren't as powerful as they once were, but they're still prevalent. I don't know, however, if it's limited to places like Oriental, and nor do I see it as entirely and without question a terrible thing. People who intend to spend their lives together should have things in common, and like it or not, class is, and always has been, part of that, because it shapes the people that we are.

With Amanda and Dawson--and many others in the real world, of course--the class differences were less important than their similarities. Neither one of them got along with their parents, both were intelligent, both had dreams, and over the years, both of them had disappointments.

Q

: Today, we can easily reconnect with people from our past via Facebook and other social networking sites. How often do you think people try to find their first love on these sites?

A

: It's very common. I know people who've reconnected with someone from their past then later married them, but that's probably less common than simply reaching out via social media to an old boyfriend or girlfriend simply to find out what's been going on in their lives. I can understand the draw: First love is powerful because it's a first, and it's almost impossible to forget.

Q

: At the point when Amanda and Dawson reconnect, Amanda has been married almost twenty years and it's clear she is having problems in her marriage. Having been married for 22 years yourself, what would you say is the key to a successful marriage?

A

: For every couple, it's different, because every couple faces different challenges, and every person has differing abilities when it comes to meeting those challenges. The key to any successful marriage is to realize that the commitment you once made to each other is the most important aspect to keep in mind. That simple truth, if truly felt, should be enough to make you realize that you can't put that commitment at risk. If your partner feels the same way, he or she wouldn't put that commitment at risk either.

At the same time, it's important to understand that all marriages have challenging periods. No one is perfect, after all. But if the commitment to each other--which sometimes requires a commitment to change--is truly felt, then most likely, that marriage will be successful.

Q

: This book has a large, spiritual component to it. Tuck sees Clara, his dead wife, and Dawson sees a man in a blue windbreaker, although he is not sure who he is and the reader does not find out until the end. Do you believe in ghosts?

A

: I think I do. I had an experience much like the one Dawson described: at times, I could see unexplainable movement from the corners of my eyes. Quick, instantaneous movements that vanished before I could turn my head. If you talk to the owners of the house where those events occurred, they will swear it was a ghost. Other events occurred in that house as well before the "ghost"--or whatever it was--was finally exorcised from the premises. But that's a longer story for another time.

Q

: There is an absolutely stunning scene that unfolds when Amanda and Dawson go to Tuck's country cottage for the first time. It's very reminiscent of a scene that happens in *The Notebook*. Would you say this book, which examines young love versus middle age love, is the book closest in sentiment to *The Notebook*?

A

: Without question, this is closest in sentiment--at least through the majority of the story - when compared to *The Notebook*. I wanted to do exactly that. At the same time, I wanted to make everything else about the story completely different as well, and I'm hopeful I did that as well.

Q

: Tuck writes letters to Amanda and Dawson to be read after he is dead. They are wise and beautifully written. In this day and age of constant, electronic overload, do you lament the lost art of letter writing?

A

: I do. I love letters as opposed to e-mail. But I'm old-fashioned that way.

Q

: Warner Bros. has already bought the film rights to The Best of Me. You will be a producer on this film along with Denise DiNovi. How often is an author also a producer for the movie version of a book he/she has written? Is this unprecedented?

A

: I'm sure other authors have served as a producer of their work; some have even directed. But it was somewhat unprecedented for Warner to agree to that - and purchase the novel--before I'd written a single page.

Q

: Of all the movies based on your novels, which is your favorite?

A

: I've been fortunate in that all the movies have been well-done and all have been successful, so I don't have a personal favorite. I can say, however, is that, at the current time, The Notebook seems most likely to become a classic.

Photo by Nina Subin

With over 100 million copies of his books sold, Nicholas Sparks is one of the world's most beloved storytellers. His novels include fifteen #1 New York Times bestsellers, and all of his books, including Three Weeks with My Brother, the memoir he wrote with his brother, Micah, have been New York Times and international bestsellers, and were translated into more than fifty languages. Eleven of Nicholas Sparks's novels--The Choice, The Longest Ride, The Best of Me, Safe Haven, The Lucky One, The Last Song, Dear John, Nights in Rodanthe, The Notebook, A Walk to Remember, and Message in a Bottle--have been adapted into major motion pictures.

Other Books

See Me, Colin Hancock is giving his second chance his best shot. At twenty-eight, he's focused on getting his teaching degree and avoiding all the places and people that proved so destructive in his past. The last thing he's looking for is a serious relationship. But when he crosses paths with Maria Sanchez one rainswept night, his carefully structured life is turned upside down. And when Maria, a hardworking lawyer, meets Colin she begins to question every notion she has ever had about herself and her future - and what truly makes her happy. Before the couple has a chance to envision a life together, menacing reminders from events in Maria's past start to surface. And as the threat of violence begins

to shadow her every step. she and Colin will be pushed to breaking point.
? ? ? ? ? . Colin Hancock is giving his second chance his best shot."