

Закр́тый клуб

Читаем вместе по-английски

'The Longest Ride' by Nickolas Sparks



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Lesson 29

The Longest Ride

Chapter 14, Part 2

The Longest Ride

Chapter 14, Part 2



The Longest Ride

Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- On our second afternoon in town, Ruth **struck up a conversation** with the owner of one of the galleries, and that was when I first learned about **Black Mountain**, a small, almost **rural**, town just down the highway from where we **were honeymooning. More accurately**, I learned about Black Mountain College.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- Though I'd lived in the state all my life **up to that point**, I'd never heard of the college; for most people who spent the rest of the century in North Carolina, a **casual** mention of the college would **elicit blank stares**. Now, more than half a century after it closed, there are few people who remember that Black Mountain College even existed.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- But **by** 1946, the college was entering a **magnificent** period –perhaps the most magnificent period of any college, anywhere, at any time, ever–and when we **stepped out of** the gallery, I could tell **by Ruth’s expression** that the name of the college was already known to her.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- When I asked her about it **over dinner** that night, she told me that her father had interviewed there earlier in the spring and **had raved** about the place. More surprising to me was that its **proximity** was one of the reasons she had wanted to honeymoon in the area.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- Her expression was **animated** over dinner as she explained that Black Mountain College was a liberal arts school **founded** in 1933, whose **faculty** included some of the most **prominent** names in the modern **art movement**.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- Every summer, there were **art workshops–conducted by visiting** artists whose names I did not recognize–and as she **rattled off** the names of the faculty, Ruth grew more and more excited at the thought of visiting the college while we were in the area.
- How could I say no?

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- The following morning, under a **brilliant** blue sky, we drove to Black Mountain and followed the signs to the college. **As fate would have it**—and I have always believed it to be fate, for Ruth always **swore** she knew nothing about it **beforehand**—an artists' exhibition was being held in the **main building, spilling out** onto the **lawn** beyond.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- Though it was **open to the public**, the crowds were relatively **sparse**, and as soon as we **pushed through** the doors, Ruth simply stopped **in wonder**. Her hand **tightened** around my own, her eyes **devouring** the scene around her.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- I watched her reaction with curiosity, trying to understand what it was that had so **captivated** her. To my eyes, those of someone who knew nothing about art, there **seemed to be** little difference in the work displayed here from that at any of the **countless** other galleries we'd visited over the years.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “But there was a difference,” Ruth **exclaims**, and I get the sense that she still wonders how I could have been so **dense**. In the car, she is wearing the same **collared** dress she wore on the day we first visited Black Mountain. Her voice rings with the same sense of wonder I’d witnessed **back then**.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “The work... it was like nothing I had ever seen before. It was not like the surrealists. Or even Picasso. It was... new. Revolutionary. A giant **leap of imagination**, of vision. And to think that it was all there, at a small college **in the middle of nowhere!** It was like finding...”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- She **trails off**, unable to find the word. Watching her struggle, I finish for her.
- “A **treasure chest?**”
- Her head **snaps up**. “Yes,” she immediately says. “It was like discovering a treasure chest in the **unlikeliest** of places. But you did not understand that yet.”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “At the time, most of the artwork I saw **struck** me as a collection of **random** colors and **squiggly** lines.”
- “It was Abstract Expressionism.”
- “**Same thing,**” I tease, but Ruth **is lost in the memory** of that day.
- “We must have spent three hours there, **wandering** from one work to the next.”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “It was more like five hours.”
- “And yet you wanted to leave,” she says **reproachfully**.
- “I was hungry,” I reply. “We didn’t have lunch.”
- “How could you even think of food when we were seeing **such things?**” she asks. “When we had the chance to talk to such amazing artists?”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “I couldn’t understand a thing you said to them. You and the artists **were speaking a foreign language.** You would talk about intensity and **self-denial,** while **throwing around** words like Futurism, Bauhaus, and synthetic Cubism. To a man who sold suits **for a living,** these words were **gibberish.”**

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “Even after my father explained it to you?” Ruth seems **exasperated**.
- “Your father tried to explain it to me. There’s a difference.”
- She smiles. “Then why did you not **force me to leave?** Why did you not take my arm and **steer** me to the car?”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- This is a question she has wondered about before, whose answer she has never fully understood.
- “Because,” I reply as always, “I knew that staying was important to you.”
- Unsatisfied, she nonetheless **presses on**. “Do you recall who we met that first day?” she asks.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “Elaine,” I say automatically. I may not have understood art, but people and faces **were within my grasp.** “And, of course, we met her husband, too, though we didn’t know then that he would later teach at the college. And then later in the afternoon, we met Ken and Ray and Robert. They were students—or, in Robert’s case, later would be—but you spent a lot of time with them as well.”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- By her expression, I know she's **pleased**. "They taught me many things that day. I was much better able to understand their primary influences after speaking with them, and it helped me to understand much more about where art would be headed in the future."
- "But you liked them as people, too."

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “Of course. They were fascinating. And each of them was a genius **in his own right.**”
- “Which is why we continued to go back, day after day, until the exhibition closed.”
- “I could not **let this remarkable opportunity pass.** I felt lucky to be in their presence.”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- **In hindsight**, I see that she was right, but at the time all that **mattered to** me was that her honeymoon be as **memorable** and **fulfilling** as I could make it.
- “You were very popular with them as well,” I **point out**.
“Elaine and her husband **enjoyed having dinner** with us. And on the final night of the **show**, we were invited to that **private cocktail party** at the lake.”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- Ruth, replaying these **treasured memories**, says nothing for a moment. Her gaze is **earnest** when she finally meets my eyes.
- “It was the best week of my life,” she says.
- **“Because of the artists?”**
- “No,” she answers with a **tiny** shake of her head. “Because of you.”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- On the fifth and final day of the exhibition, Ruth and I spent little time together. Not because of any **tension** between us, but because Ruth **was eager to meet** even more faculty members, while I **was content to** wander among the works and chat with the artists we'd already had the chance to **get to know**.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- And then **it was over**. With the exhibition closed, we devoted the next few days to activities more typical of **newlyweds**. In the mornings we walked the **nature trails**, and in the afternoons we read by the pool and went swimming.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- We ate in different restaurants every evening, and on our last day, after I made a phone call and **loaded our suitcases** in the **trunk**, Ruth and I got into the car, both of us feeling more relaxed than we had in years.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- Our **return trip** would bring us past Black Mountain one last time, and as we approached the **turnoff** on the highway, I **glanced over** at Ruth. I could sense her desire to return. **Deliberately**, I took the exit, heading toward the college. Ruth looked at me, her eyebrows raised, obviously wondering what I was doing.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “Just a **quick stop,**” I said. “I want to show you something.”
- I **wound** through the town and again made a turn she recognized. And just as she’d done back then, Ruth begins to smile.
- “You were bringing me back to the lake by the main building,” she says. “Where we attended the cocktail party on the last night of the exhibition. Lake Eden.”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “The view was so pretty. I wanted to see it again.”
- “Yes.” She nods. “That is what you said to me back then, and I believed you. But you were not telling the truth.” “You didn’t like the view?” I ask **innocently**.
- “We were not going there for the view,” she says. “We were going there because of what you had done for me.” At this, it is my turn to smile.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- When we arrived at the college, I instructed Ruth to close her eyes. **Reluctantly** she agreed, and I took her gently by the arm and walked her down the gravel path that led to the **lookout**. The morning was cloudy and cool, and the view had been better at the cocktail party, but it really didn't matter. Once I **settled** Ruth in exactly the right spot, I told her to open her eyes.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- There, on **easels**, were six paintings, by those artists whose work Ruth had admired most. They were also the artists **with whom** she'd spent the most time—work by Ken, Ray, Elaine, Robert, and two by Elaine's husband.
- "For a moment," Ruth says to me, "I did not understand. I did not know why you had **set them up** for me."

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “Because,” I said, “I wanted you to see the work in the natural light of day.”
- “You mean the art that you had bought.”
- That was, of course, what I had been doing while Ruth met with the faculty; the phone call that morning had been to **make sure** the paintings would be set up by the lake.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “Yes,” I say. “The art that I bought.”
- “You know what you did, yes?”
- I **choose my words carefully**. “I made you happy?” I ask.
- “Yes,” she says. “But you know what I am talking about.”
- “That wasn’t why I bought the paintings. I bought them because you **were passionate about** them.”
- “And yet...,” she says, trying to make me say it.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “And yet, it didn’t cost me all that much,” I say **firmly**. “They weren’t who they later became, back then. They were simply young artists.”
- She **leans toward** me, **daring** me to continue. “And...” I **relent** with a sigh, knowing what she wants to hear.
- “I bought them,” I say, “because I’m **selfish.**”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- I'm not lying about this. Though I bought them for Ruth because I loved her, though I bought them because she'd loved the paintings, I also bought them for me.
- Quite simply, the exhibition changed Ruth that week. I **had been to** countless galleries with Ruth, but during our time at Black Mountain College something inside her was awakened.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- In a strange way, it **magnified** a **sensual** aspect of her personality, **amplifying** her natural charisma. As she studied a **canvas**, her gaze would **sharpen** and her skin would **flush**, her whole body reflecting a pose of such intense focus and **engagement** that others **couldn't fail to notice** her.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- **For her part**, she **was completely unaware of** how transformed she appeared in those moments. It was why, I became convinced, the artists responded so strongly to her. Like me, they **were simply drawn to** her, and it was also the reason they had been willing to part with the work I **purchased.**

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- This electric, intensely sensual aura would **linger** long after we left the exhibition and returned to the hotel. Over dinner, her gaze **seemed to glitter** with **heightened awareness**, and there was a **marked** grace to her movements that I hadn't seen before. I could **barely** wait to get her back to the room, where she proved especially **adventurous** and passionate.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- All I remember thinking is that whatever it was that had stimulated her this way, I wanted it never to end.
- **In other words,** as I'd just told her, I was selfish.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “You are not selfish,” she says to me. “You are the least selfish man I have ever known.”
- To my eyes, she looks as **stunning** as she did on that last morning of the honeymoon, as we stood near the lake. “It’s a good thing I’ve **never allowed you to meet** another man or you might think differently.”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- She laughs. “Yes, you can **make a joke**. You always liked to play the **joker**. But I tell you, it was not the art that changed me.”
- “You don’t know that. You couldn’t see yourself.”
- She laughs again before **growing quiet**. Suddenly serious, she **wills me to pay attention to** her words.

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “This is what I think. Yes, I loved the artwork. But more than the work, I loved that you **were willing to spend so much time** doing what I loved. Can you understand why that **meant so much to** me? To know that I had married a man who would do such things?

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- You think it is nothing, but I will tell you this: There are not many men who would spend five or six hours a day on their honeymoon talking to strangers and looking at art, especially if they knew almost nothing about it.”
- “And your point is?”

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- “I am trying to tell you that it was not the art. It was **the way** you looked at me while I looked at the art that changed me. It is you, **in other words**, who changed.”
- We have had this discussion many times over the years, and obviously we are of different opinions **on the matter.**

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Chapter 14 – Ira – Part 2

- I will not **change her mind**, nor will she change mine, but I suppose **it makes no difference. Either way**, the honeymoon **set in motion** a summer tradition that would remain with us for nearly all our lives. And in the end, after that fateful article appeared in the New Yorker, the collection would, **in many ways**, define us as a couple.

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