

## RED TOPIC 1

### Love Story Hidden Messages

Every author has intended messages that they want their audience to see in their piece of work. Sometimes authors are not successful in conveying their intended messages and they end up with contradictions and hidden messages. In his novel *Love Story*, Erich Segal presents many of these hidden messages and contradictions. One contradiction is between the main character Jenny's ethnicity and her actions. Two hidden messages are that a girl should give up her dreams to increase her social and economic prosperity, and a man should fall in love with a woman who knows who she is, but only if she is willing to give herself up for him. One way in which the novel contradicts itself is in the issue of Jenny's cultural background; she is presented as an Italian American and yet her actions and beliefs contradict those of a typical Italian American. This subculture is typically Catholic, family-oriented, and set in their ways. Jenny introduces herself to Oliver, her love interest, as "Jennifer Cavalleri, an American of Italian descent (5)." By introducing herself this way, she implies that her ethnicity is involved in her identity. Jenny also wears a gold cross around her neck at all times that, she explains, is "for sentimental reasons, not religious (48)." Jenny has no priest and does not follow the Catholic religion. Her father has no idea of this when he tells Oliver. "Jenny has no doubt told you, we are of the Catholic faith (92)." Jenny secretly denied her faith, one that is embedded in the Italian

American culture. Jenny is obviously not the typical Italian American, and yet she uses her ethnicity to define herself

Her actions and life style contradict her implied identity not only in relation to religion, but also in relation to her closeness to her father. Jenny makes Oliver feel guilty for his hard feelings toward his father. Oliver describes Jenny as adhering "to some atavistic Italian-Mediterranean notion of Papa-loves-bambinos and there was no arguing otherwise (43)." After all, the Italian culture calls for this strong sense of family. Jenny, however, does not feel it necessary to consult her father or even introduce him to Oliver before they decide to marry. Also, Oliver only meets one of Jenny's aunts at her graduation. Jenny only invites her father to her wedding because they have a "genuine concern that our omission of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost would make the occasion far too trying for unlapsed Catholics (103)." Even the tone here is deprecatory towards Jenny's relatives. Also, once Jenny and Oliver are married they never see and rarely call Phil, Jenny's father. Phil asserts "Christ, she should call more often, goddammit. I'm not a stranger, you know (129)." The woman who the novel makes Jenny out to be, a woman who defines herself by her background, and the woman she actually is are two very different individuals.

Along with contradictions, there are also hidden messages in the film; one of these is that high social and economic standing is more important than a person's dreams. Both Oliver and Jenny have dreams for their future.

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Jenny has a scholarship to study with a famous music teacher in Paris. Jenny tells Oliver that "she takes very few American pupils. I was lucky. I got a good scholarship, too. (56)." Oliver also has plans to go to law school and become a well-paid lawyer. Jenny's dream is a once in a lifetime chance, whereas Oliver can wait to go to law school. When it comes down to choosing between Oliver's dream and Jenny's, though, of course Jenny gives up her plans. After all, Oliver is a "preppie millionaire" while Jenny is a "social zero." The novel implies that Jenny's dream is not as important as Oliver's dream because he would be giving up his coveted social stance. They do not even have a debate as to what they should do or if a compromise could be made. Jenny automatically gives up her life to become a part of his. This is because his life is seen by society as the "better life."

Jenny makes the decision to give up much of what she loves in order to reach a place of success. She knows that in the end her hard work will have a big pay-off: economic and social prosperity. Jenny takes a low paying job that has little to do with what she loves, music, in order to support her and Oliver for three years. During this time, she no longer has the time to stay in her music groups and she does nothing for herself. Jenny does not complain and never mentions the life she could have had. This is because in the end Oliver ended up with the "absolute highest salary received by any of the members of our graduating class (144)." At that point, Oliver and Jenny are able to live like "nouveau riche." This new lifestyle is much better than the life Jenny would have had if she had

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followed her dreams. The hidden message is that forfeiting your dreams is easy to do as long as in the end you climb the social and economic ladder. Accompanying this hidden message is another message; a boy should love girl who is assertive and independent, but only if that girl is willing to give up herself for the man. Jenny's attitude and personality imply that she is an empowered woman, yet her actions imply that she would do anything for Oliver. When the audience first meets Jenny, she is very straightforward and honest. She calls Oliver "preppie" and "stupid and rich," yet after talking to him for two minutes she goes out to coffee with him. She remarks "Why the hell should I come to a lousy Hockey game (8)," yet not only does she go to the game, she also waits outside for Oliver for a long time. She tells Oliver that he should stop staring at her and start studying, but then she goes right ahead and has sex with him. All the while, Oliver seems to fall in love with her no-nonsense attitude. He considers her different and unique. Oliver loves the part of Jenny that is assertive and straightforward, but he stays with her because she gives

in.

This is not only seen with Jenny's attitude and actions, but also with her dreams and goals. As mentioned before, Jenny seems to be independent and full of dreams. She gives up her dreams and her independence, however, to be with Oliver. Jenny, however in control of the relationship she seems to be, is actually giving up everything that she wanted. This is also seen when Oliver makes Jenny so mad that she disappears for the 5

day. When Oliver attempts to apologize, Jenny simply says "Love means never having to say you're sorry (131)." There is no attempt to resolve the matter and Jenny does not let her feelings be known. In coming back to Oliver, she gives in to him. Oliver loves her for her sense of self, yet she gives up herself for him. This indicates that a man should marry an empowered woman, but only if she gives up her power to him.

Erich Segal's intended message was that love can overcome all odds, but he ended up with many contradictions and hidden messages. The novel insinuates that a high social and economic stance are more important than a person's dreams and a man should love a woman for being a strong individual only if she is willing to give up her individuality for him.

There is also a contradiction in Jenny's identity as an Italian American and her actions. These are just three, but the list could go on

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