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The world according to Garp door John Irving

Nicky

A) A short summary of the book:

I have tried to write my own summary, but I found it a bit difficult: it's a very complicated story and there happen so many things, I couldn't describe everything. Then I had made a tolerable, short summary, but nobody could make head or tail of it. I searched for it on the Internet and found very long summaries with a lot of spell errors and a few good ones. I chose for this one, because it describes exactly what the book is about, without describing everything or betray the clue.



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This is the life and times of T.S. Garp, the bastard son of Jenny Fields-- a feminist leader ahead of her times. This is the life and death of a famous mother and her almost-famous son; theirs is a world of sexual extremes-- even of sexual assassinations. It is a novel rich with "lunacy and sorrow"; yet the dark, violent events of the story do not undermine a comedy both ribald and robust. In more than thirty languages, in more than forty countries, this novel provides almost cheerful, even hilarious evidence of its famous last line: "In the world according to Garp, we are all terminal cases."

B) 3 quotes

I chose Helen Holm as my main character, because she is Garp's wife, she plays an important role in his life and in the events in the book.

Here are the three quotes:

1) "Mom?" the girl said to Jenny. "It's me, Mom! It's Helen," she said, bursting into tears; she flung her slim arms around Jenny's shoulders and pressed her wet face to Jenny's throat.

"Jesus Christ!" said Jenny Fields, who was never a woman who liked to be touched. Still, she was a nurse and she must have felt Helen's need; she did not shove the girl away from her, though she knew very well she was not Helen's mother. (p.82)

Helen's mother left her when she was just a baby and her father (Ernie Holm) told Helen, every time she was curious for her disappeared mother:

"One day, you might see a pretty nurse, sort of looking like she doesn't know where she is anymore, and she might look at you like she doesn't know who you are, either – but she might look curious to find out and that will be your mom." Jenny, a nurse, looked curious and confused around the wrestling room, because she was never been to a wrestling room before and she didn't expect there to be a pretty girl with glasses (Helen).

2) "If I marry anybody, I'll marry a writer," Helen said. "But I doubt I'll marry anybody."

Garp had been trying to joke; Helen's seriousness made him nervous. He said, "Well, I'm sure you won't marry a wrestler."

"You can be very sure," Helen said. Perhaps young Garp could not conceal his

pain, because Helen added, "Unless it's a wrestler who's also a writer." (p. 89)

This is the first conversation between Garp and Helen. He starts the conversation with criticising Helen's reading in the wrestlers room. After this Garp decides to be a writer and writes Helen letters. Later he will marry Helen and they get three kids, two boys and a girl.

3) "Don't be a bastard, don't be a prick, Michael," she said. "Don't spoil it." "You always said you wanted to," he said. "But it wasn't safe, you said. Well, now it's safe. The car isn't even moving. There can't be any accidents now," he said. (p.369)

Helen is trying to break up with her secret lover, Michael. Garp found it out and she had to break up with the student while he was taking the kids to the film.

Michael wants her to suck off him as a goodbye, she always had a fantasy about blowing him in the car, but she found it too dangerous. She agrees and then Garp bumps the car by accident and Helen bites three quart of his penis off.

She breaks her arm and she gashed her nose. In the other car, Duncans eye gouged out, Garp's jaw broke and he mangled his tongue and little Walt had died.

C) Interview with Garp, by Helen Holm

1. What was your first opinion of me?

When I saw you reading in the wrestling room, your glasses looked so fogged, I doubted if you could see what you were reading. I found your eyes beautiful and I liked you very much, I couldn't stop thinking about you and I decided that I was going to be a writer so you'd marry me.

2. Which of your books do you like best?

The first edition of The Pension Grillparzer, illustrated by my son Duncan. It was my first story, and the one you always liked most. It has the spirit of pure imagination, that I'd missed for a long time until I started to write My Father's Illusions, a portrait of a father who plots ambitiously and impossibly for a world where his children will be safe and happy. It's a pity I have never been able to finish it.

3. After your death, Duncan and Mr. Whitcomb worked very hard on your unfinished novel and they made a respectable book with illustrations from Duncan. The illustrations Duncan contributed were largely portraits of you. How do you feel about this?

I appreciate that they did this, If I was still alive I had never given the unfinished book out of hands, because it wasn't ready. But I'm sure that Duncan en Mr.

Whitcomb made a good presentation out of my book, and with the illustrations of Duncan, it is in the same line as the father-son edition of *The Pension Grillparzer*.

4. When you were a boy, what was your favourite writer?

That was Joseph Conrad.

5. What was your favourite teacher at the Steering School?

That was Mr. Tinch, a frail man with a stutter and a bad breath. But what he said, though odorous, was kind. He applauded my imagination and he taught me good old grammar and a love of exact language. He gave the suggestion to my mother to go to Vienna, and we did and there I wrote my first story.

6. Did you have many friends at the Steering School?

No, I didn't have any friends. This oddity never struck my mother as odd. In his distant and polite fashion, Ernie Holm was the first friend my mother ever had.

7. Where did you learn to cook so very well?

I learned it myself in Vienna. My mother had never learned how to cook, she spent eighteen years eating in the Steering dining halls and in Vienna she couldn't read the directions. In Vienna, I discovered how much I liked cooking. Since then I have always cooked for my mother and later for Helen and the children. When I had a bad day, because I couldn't write anything, and that was often, the only thing that went good was my cooking. I tried to make the whole day good with my cooking.

8. What inspired you to write *The Pension Grillparzer*?

When we arrived in Vienna, we wanted to live in all the districts. But we quickly tired of lugging our typewriters from pension to pension. It was this experience that gave me the material for my first major story. I hadn't even known what a pension was before I came to Vienna, but I quickly discovered what it was and it inspired me.

I saw a four-member circus unload from Hungary, or Yugoslavia, at a railroad station, and I tried to imagine them in my story. There had been a bear who rode a motorcycle, around and around a parking lot. A small crowd gathered and a man who walked on his hands collected money for the bear's performance in a pot balanced on the soles of his feet. That occurrence was the thing I was searching for the progress of my story.

9. Did you like Jenny's book *A Sexual Suspect*?

I don't have a good opinion about it, because I think that life had been better for us all when it was never published, thanks to that book she is killed, I think. The book unfolded so much, it made some people change and some people very angry. She is murdered by one of those angry people. As for my mother, she felt only that

women, just like men, should at least be able to make conscious decisions about the course of their lives; if that made her a feminist, she said, then she guessed she was one.

But the book itself isn't bad, though it's about my life too and took a lot of privacy from me. I felt very embarrassed because of the 'lust' chapter. It was one thing to be a famous child born out of wedlock, quite another to be a famous case history of adolescent need, my private randiness (the whores) become a popular story. And it made me very angry, when my mother wrote: 'Lust makes the best men behave out of character.' She didn't know anything about that, she never felt it, not once. How could she say it?! I thought.

10. Have you ever slept with Mrs. Ralph?

No, not once. When I went to her house to get Duncan, she tried to seduce me, she was naked. I found it a nice lady and she gave me an erection, but I haven't slept with her because of you, Helen. I didn't want to hurt you another time.

11. Have you ever felt pity on Michael Milton?

No, I found it such a prick and it served him right. I have never known that the remaining quarter of his penis had to be removed in a operation. But that doesn't make sense to me, I banished him out of my mind. I had a lot to think about and I grieved over the loss of Walt.

12. Why did you take Ellen James in the family?

I felt such a compassion for that girl, she was raped and untongued when she was just twelve years old and both her parents were killed in an accident and she had no other family. I knew what my mother would have done if she were still alive and I knew Helen wouldn't mind, and of course Roberta would always be of help. So I decided to take her in the family.

13. Did you immediately recognize Pooh Percy in the wrestlers room?

No, when I saw the nurse, I mistook her for the kindly nurse named Dotty who had helped me escape from the first feminist funeral. I was simply judging her by her hair, which was iron-grey and in a braid, coiled like a rope around her head, and it was a wig, of course. The nurse smiled at me and I felt so comfortable with the nurse and I smiled back. When I looked up at the nurse again, I saw the gun. When I saw that I noticed that it wasn't a real nurse's uniform, it was a Jenny Fields Original with the characteristic red heart sewn over the breast. Then I saw her breasts, they were small but they were too firm and youthfully erect for a woman with iron-grey hair; and her hips were too slim, her legs too girlish. When I looked at her face, I saw the family resemblance: the square jaw line that Midge Steering had given to all her children, the sloping forehead that had been the contribution of Fat Stew and recognized Pooh Percy. I hadn't felt the Under Toad the whole day.

14. What did you want to tell me when you were dying?

I wanted to tell you not to be frightened of the Under Toad anymore. With my smile I tried to reassure you and I wanted to say not to worry, so what if there is no life after death? There is life after Garp, believe me. You have still your memories, never forget that, my eyes tried to tell you.

15. Did you find it a nice way of dying?

Yes, I once said that I would suicide myself, it would establish my literary seriousness and my fame. But this was even better than a suicide, the violent death was very good for business. It was a death, which in its random, stupid, and unnecessary qualities, comic and ugly and bizarre, underlined everything that I had ever written about how the world works. It was a death scene, only I could have written.