

## Synopsis - Overview

Barney and Nick have been friends ever since primary school. Nick is gradually dying from muscular dystrophy.

Nick loves everything to do with the sea. He would have liked to learn to sail. Like many other sufferers of the disease, he retains full control of his hands, and produces exquisite paintings from the photos he takes of sailing boats.

Barney stays by his friend, and learns to take care of him.

But both boys are adolescents. There are the usual pressures for Barney – GCSE exams, needing a part-time job, girls. He also swims for the county. As Nick's health deteriorates more and there is no way he can keep up with Barney, he becomes quite manipulative. He and Barney drift apart.

Barney returns from his first date with Sophie – a girl it has taken him a lot of time and courage to ask out – to receive a 'phone call from Mrs Fletcher telling him that Nick has been taken into hospital. Barney rushes to the hospital, but Nick dies minutes before he arrives.

Barney now becomes depressed himself and his school work suffers. He still cares for Sophie, but cannot express this. He stops being the easy-going character who was everybody's friend. He is dropped from the swimming team. Sophie tries to support him, but finishes with him because he doesn't seem to want her. He is, however, devastated. He takes to skipping school and hanging about the harbour where he and Nick used to take the photos.

An old friend of the family, Jack Mitchell, befriends Barney and invites him to take part in one of the courses at his sailing school. Jack understands that Barney is missing Nick. Those who wept at his funeral seem to have forgotten him now and others think it is a relief that he has died. Barney is able to cry at last, as he remembers his friend and enjoys the sea for him. He feels as if Nick - a strong, healthy Nick is with them as they sail back to the shore.

Nick's mum phones Barney. She wonders whether he would be able to help her clear up Nick's room. Barney agrees. They find the paintings in the drawer. Mrs Fletcher says she would like to keep some, but agrees with Barney that the rest should be displayed. Barney thinks of asking Jack to let him display the pictures in the odd-shaped room at the sailing club. Sophie agrees to be the hostess at the opening of the gallery. Jack decides to start a sailing school for the disabled and use the gallery as a way of helping to raise funds. Barney learns to celebrate his friend's life. The reader is left to guess whether a romance begins again between Barney and Sophie.

We see Barney go through all the stages of grief: denial, anger, guilt, depression, acceptance and finally celebration of life. There is hope at the end.