

# **13 Little Blue Envelopes Study Guide**

## **13 Little Blue Envelopes by Maureen Johnson**

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# Plot Summary

13 Little Blue Envelopes by Maureen Johnson is a story about a shy, young, seventeen-year old girl named Virginia (Ginny) Blackstone who embarks on a European adventure of a lifetime. It is a trip that could be called a treasure hunt with a twist. Ginny is given a series of instructions which are sealed in thirteen separate envelopes.

Each envelope contains a destination, a series of tasks, or the name and address of someone that Ginny must approach by herself. It begins with a simple trip to New York where at the 4th Street Noodle Penthouse - the last known address of her Aunt Peg - Ginny has been instructed to pick up something that has been left for her. On arrival, she is given a series of envelopes. To be fair, she has had a bit of preparation. Peg instructed her to bring all that she needs to travel excepting what most normal people would bring. Her instructions are rather explicit. She is to pack only what she can easily carry, ignore all guidebooks and maps, and contact no one from the U.S. after she has left. Though unnerving, and out of character for Ginny, Aunt Peg is her favorite Aunt and Ginny remembers every visit with her as an adventure. Therefore, when Peg tells her to get on a plane to London and look up a friend of hers (address provided), Ginny is nervous, but willing to play along.

Thus begins a wild ride through multiple countries to meet a variety of characters that becomes a journey of self-discovery. Ginny discovers Harrods in London - a place she will return to many times; meets famous painter/artist Mari Adams in Edinburgh who inks a temporary tattoo on her shoulder; gives offerings to the Vestal Virgins in the Roman Colosseum; checks out the masters at the Louvre in Paris; sees the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam; watches the midnight sun in Denmark on a houseboat in the middle of nowhere; and swims in the oceans of Greece. She will fall in love; discover that she has a new relative; have everything she owns stolen requiring a call to London for rescue; and discover that there are many kinds of wealth in the process.

All of these adventures begin with a letter and directions; a bank card from London with five hundred pounds at her disposal, and a request that she open the letters in order - only after having completed the tasks or arrived at the destination in the previous one. Not only does Ginny take up the challenge and play by the rules, but she does it all at the behest of her favorite aunt Peg who died of a brain tumor three months previous to her initial departure, and whom she hadn't had contact with in more than a year. The book is a fast-paced experience with never a dull moment that could give anyone the desire to break out of the box!



# Part 1: Pages 7 - 22; and Part 2: Pages 23 - 36

## Part 1: Pages 7 - 22; and Part 2: Pages 23 - 36 Summary

13 Little Blue Envelopes by Maureen Johnson is a story about a shy, young, seventeen-year-old girl named Virginia (Ginny) Blackstone who embarks on a European adventure of a lifetime. It is a trip that could be called a treasure hunt with a twist. Ginny is given a series of instructions which are sealed in thirteen separate envelopes.

Ginny Blackstone hasn't been to the 4th Noodle Penthouse in over two years. Alice knows immediately why she is there, and brings out a brown package with her name on it, postmarked from London. The strangest part of the package she received was the fact that Aunt Peg had already been dead for three months, taken by cancer. Inside the package are a series of envelopes numbered from two to thirteen. The second one had 'Open Me On The Plane' on it, so after Ginny boarded, she did. This letter contained Aunt Peg's explanation for leaving and why she selected Europe. She instructed her to open the envelopes in order, and only after the task in the previous one had been accomplished. It was the only way it would work. Her first stop was England and the letter included instructions to find 54a Pennington Street and included an ATM card for Barclays Bank. The PIN would be given to her when she arrived at 54a and asked what the occupant had given the queen. When that mystery was resolved, she was free to open the third envelope.

Ginny stands staring at the London tube map and uses the 10 pound note Aunt Peg enclosed to buy a ticket. The train leaves the station and she can't help feeling as though a Dicken's novel has collided with the space station. She finds the address and the man who answers the door introduces himself as Richard. He gives her a quick tour, telling her she can stay in Peg's room. Then he gives her a choice of having a rest, or joining him at Harrods where he works. Ginny opts to join him. Richard takes her on the tube, and Ginny suffers from sensory overload at first. They arrive at Harrods and Richard takes them into a staff entrance. He suggests she just look around and if she got lost, she was simply to tell anyone to call Special Services and ask for Mr. Murphy. She goes out the door and is immediately swept into the crowd. Directionless, she simply follows the throng, looking at a variety of departments that appear to have no relation to each other beyond the roof they were under. Finally, she steps out of the aisle and into a chocolate counter, asking the clerk to call Mr. Murphy for her and give him the message that she has to go.



## Part 1: Pages 7 - 22; and Part 2: Pages 23 - 36 Analysis

Ginny always felt as though she was more interesting around her Aunt Peg. She was rather shy and tried hard to blend in wherever possible, which was almost impossible with a thirty pound green and purple backpack. It is a June afternoon when Ginny arrived at the 4th Noodle Penthouse to pick up the package left to her by Aunt Peg. The smell is immediately familiar and she half expects Peg to come in any second, but of course that is impossible. The proprietor, Alice, passing on greetings for Peg, and Ginny can think of no reason to correct her. To Ginny it is still surreal. She can't believe her Aunt is actually gone. Her visits to Peg had been infrequent, but magical. Peg had always been flighty, so when her phone stopped working, no one panicked. The postcards began several months later, from England, France and even Italy, but contained no explanations. Then came the letter - three months after Peg's death - that would take Ginny to the noodle house and beyond. The second of thirteen notes Ginny opens on the plane to England as instructed, and it reveals the reasons Peg left for Europe. Her instructions are to go to 54a Pennington Street and ask the occupant what he gave the queen which will provide her with the password to an ATM card for Barclays Bank (also enclosed). Arriving in London, Ginny is overwhelmed by how busy it is, and how different.

She reaches the address Peg gave her, and a man who introduces himself as Richard opens the door. He lets her in, explaining that he wasn't sure if or when she was coming. She gets a quick tour and is told she can stay in the room that had been Peg's which Ginny discovers looks amazingly like her apartment in New York had, and then Richard announces he has to go to work. She was welcome to join him, he invites, and though Ginny is tired and would rather have just slept, she agrees. They head to Harrods where Richard works in Special Services. He tells her to feel free to wander about and to simply have him called when she has had enough. Ginny spends the next hours being swept along in a throng of people, and seeing shops that range from a helicopter service to boat sales and from a Princess Diana memorial to Egyptian artifacts. Her mind can hardly absorb all that she is seeing. Finally, overwhelmed and exhausted, she backs into a chocolate counter and asks the clerk to call Richard Murphy.



## **Part 2: Pages 37 - 50; and Part 3: Pages 51 - 58**

### **Part 2: Pages 37 - 50; and Part 3: Pages 51 - 58 Summary**

Ginny wakes the next morning, still in her clothes and can't believe she slept so long. Peg's letter had told her not to bring guidebooks, but she packed according to their suggestions with neutral colors and comfort in mind. She has a bath and braids her wet hair, joining Richard in the kitchen. He suggests they meet at Harrods for lunch and tells her where he keeps the spare key. Hoping the coins she had would get her to Harrods, she grabs the directions he left her and leaves. She manages to get on the right numbered bus and get herself to Harrods. When she meets with Richard at Mo's Diner, she asks him what he sold the queen. He explains his role in Harrods is to provide whatever special orders or special customers require. When the queen came, she wanted pants - large underwear pants, he tells her. Then he tells her she can stay as long as she likes and admits that he was the one who sent the package to her. Then he shows her where to find one of many ATM's. Since Aunt Peg was perpetually broke, Ginny has no idea what to expect, but when she asks the machine for one hundred pounds, it happily obliges her, giving her a balance of eighteen hundred and fifty-six pounds remaining.

The next envelope instructs Ginny to withdraw five hundred pounds and after finding an artist she likes in London, to be their mysterious benefactor. The next envelope isn't to be opened until she has accomplished this task. The following morning, she tells Richard about her task. He picks up a local magazine and begins making suggestions. He accompanies her to a cafe called Izzy's where the artist created a series of paintings called Sheila studies. All hung around the cafe, and featured Sheila in a variety of poses. Ginny's immediate impression was that they were ugly, and she couldn't believe they were priced at two hundred pounds apiece. The next artist listed in the paper was a demolition artist who liked to cut odd objects in half. Thinking about it, Ginny asks Richard where she can find street performers. He suggests she try Covent Garden. She rides with Richard, and finds no shortage of performers, so she gives it an honest attempt, but still didn't find an artist that impressed her or made her feel as though she should part with the five hundred pounds. She wanders around, about to give up when she sees a sign advertising 'Starbucks: The Musical.' She purchases a ticket and goes in to watch.



## Part 2: Pages 37 - 50; and Part 3: Pages 51 - 58 Analysis

When Ginny wakes and remembers where she is, it takes her a minute to convince herself not to panic. She finds Richard in the kitchen and discovers that she had slept through an entire day. She takes him up on the offer of a bath, despite being unusually self-conscious about even going into the bathroom in a stranger's home. He leaves her for work shortly after inviting her to join him there for lunch and telling her where she can find the spare house key. Ginny looks around and realizes that Aunt Peg must have been there for months, judging by the amount of decorating she had managed to do. She opened the package with the envelopes and notices that the next one in line has a painted picture of a Monopoly Community Chest on it. Then she remembers that she can't open it before seeing Richard again and getting the PIN for the ATM card. She grabs the directions he left her, and heads to Harrods for lunch. When she gets on the red bus with the right number, she sits near the front. She finds the right diner and Richard already waiting inside. He tells her a bit about his job, which amounts to being a gopher for anyone who is anyone, including but not limited to the queen herself. She had come in without warning looking for large pants - underpants. Richard had taken care of her. When she gets to the ATM, the machine spits out the hundred pounds she asks for, and when the blue notes with the queen's head on them dispense, she has to laugh at Aunt Peg's way of ensuring she never forgot the PIN. The balance, to her surprise, was over eighteen hundred pounds.

Her next envelope asks her to be a fairy godmother on Aunt Peg's behalf. She is to withdraw five hundred pounds and donate it to a deserving artist of her choice. There are no further criteria to guide her choice, and she is left to ponder how she will find an artist worthy of such a gift. She tells Richard about Peg's task, and though Richard has some ideas, none of them pan out. She decides to try a street artist of some kind, and Richard suggests she go to Covent Garden. Once there, she discovers a plethora of artists, and is beginning to understand that this is not going to be an easy task. She has almost given up when she sees the advertisement for a musical titled 'Starbucks'. She buys a ticket, and goes in to watch.





## Part 3: Pages 52 - 70

### Part 3: Pages 52 - 70 Summary

There were only about ten people in the theater and Ginny almost leaves, but the lights dim and a man appears on stage introducing himself as Jittery Grande, who turned out to be their host. Ginny knew the show wasn't exceptional by any standards, and it didn't really make a lot of sense. In fact, it seemed like nothing more than a series of disjointed and random things going on. Even so, Ginny discovered she was enjoying herself. When it is over, she picks up a program and finds that the creator was also the artist and knew that she would be giving him the rest of the money. She thought about just putting the money in an envelope and leaving it for him, but that didn't seem right. The most efficient way seemed to be to simply buy sixty two tickets. The ticket clerk informed her that there were only twenty five seats so Ginny takes as many as she can. Since she was a student, she got a discount and was only charged five dollars per ticket. She then bought out the next night as well, and would have continued to buy out Thursday as well, but the show wasn't on that day. Friday was the last day, and she bought that out as well. She still had one hundred and forty two pounds remaining to dispense. A sound causes her to turn around where a 'Sold Out, Forever' sign had just been placed in the window.

After leaving, Ginny realizes the flaw in her plan. Though she'd bought out all the tickets, she effectively ensured that no one else would see him perform. Unable to think of what to do, she went to Harrods to talk to Richard. She asks him how she can most efficiently give away the seventy two tickets she purchased. Richard suggests that she go to where people would be waiting to get into shows such as the West End. Ginny follows his advice, but knows almost immediately that between the rain and the photocopied tickets, she would never find seventy two people who would want to go. By mid afternoon, she'd only given away a total of six tickets. She goes back to the theater where she still can't even give them away. She sits on a bench and pens a note in her notebook to her best friend Miriam, and tells her in a rambling, round-about way that she is interested in a guy named Keith, telling her a bit about him. She encloses a program for her to look at and tells her she misses her like mad.

### Part 3: Pages 52 - 70 Analysis

Though Jittery wasn't particularly good, it didn't stop him from putting himself out there and Ginny found himself enjoying the show. The next morning Ginny finds herself evaluating the choices she made where clothing and footwear is concerned. She is sorry that she ever read the guidebooks that recommended white sneakers. She not only didn't blend in the way she generally preferred to, but actually stood out. White sneakers appeared to be the official shoes of the obvious tourist. Shorts didn't help either and Ginny realizes that this is likely one of the reasons Aunt Peg instructed her to avoid the guidebooks entirely. Frankly, she felt like a freak. Having bought all of the



tickets available to her for 'Starbucks', she was still faced with having to find a way to give him another one hundred and forty two pounds. It may seem as though this would be easy, but Ginny didn't feel as though she could just stick the money in an envelope with his name on it.

Ginny was also starting to question her decision to purchase all of his tickets. For one thing, it meant that no one would see his show but her. In buying him out, she consigned him to certain anonymity, although that wasn't her intention at the time. Finally, Ginny decides that all she can do is give the tickets away, but she isn't sure how to go about that either. Finally, she went to Harrods to ask Richard, and though accommodating, he had no concrete suggestions beyond going to a theater district such as the West End and simply offering them up. Since she had no better plan, she followed his advice, but still didn't manage to give away more than six and those were to Japanese tourists that she was almost positive understood no English. Frustrated, she returned to the theater hoping to give them away there, but even the college students weren't overly receptive. Eventually, she sat on a bench and wrote in her notebook to her best friend, Miriam, although one of Aunt Peg's rules was no contact with home or anyone across the ocean. She began by reviewing her history with the opposite sex and then admitting that she's actually become interested in someone. She tells her about Keith, listing his obvious attributes, and encloses a program from the theater. After that, she adds that she misses her like crazy.



## Part 3: Pages 71 - 92

### Part 3: Pages 71 - 92 Summary

Ginny is one of only three people who are in the theater the second night and the cast on stage outnumbered the audience. Keith gave added value to his performance, climbing his plastic palm tree and even diving into the seats. At the end, he jumps into the seat beside her before she can make her escape and asks her what possessed her to buy him out and then try to give the tickets away on the street. He introduces himself, and suggests that at the least he owes her a drink. She orders a Guinness, having seen it on the mirror on the wall, and Keith goes to get it for her. He gets himself a coke, telling her he doesn't drink and again questions her reasons for creating a sellout for his production. She finally tells him she got a small inheritance and wanted to do something useful with it. He describes his younger years as a hooligan, and how an arrest helps to turn his life around. Then he announces that he is taking his show to the biggest alternative theater festival in the world in Edinburgh, and invites her along, wrangling her into helping him pack up after the show the following night. Then he walks her to the tube.

The entire set fit into a Volkswagon after the show - the last of it packed around Ginny as she sat in the passenger seat. When they arrive at Keith's place, he helps to pull her out from under the contents and takes her up to his room. She is surprised to discover the guy she tried to give tickets to outside Goldsmith's is Keith's roommate. Once his roommate leaves, Keith teases her about the tickets again, and flustered, she puts the remainder of the five hundred pounds on the table and tells him she should be getting home. Keith is at a loss for words, but drives her back to Richard's in silence. Ginny couldn't believe she'd behaved so stupidly. Richard is already in bed when she gets there, so she quietly gets the key and lets herself in. Then she picks up the next letter.

### Part 3: Pages 71 - 92 Analysis

Ginny attends the second almost vacant production of Starbucks, and Keith introduces himself when it is over, telling her that because of her, he is the first one in recorded history to have sold out that theater. He tells her that necessitates that he buy her a drink, and offers to take her to the pub. When Ginny admits she's never been in one, he's astounded, and assures her that this is what they do in England. Ginny stops him at the entrance to the pub, nervous because she is too young to get in legally, and he assures her that since she is American, if she acts as though she belongs there, everything will be fine even though she is only seventeen. She orders a Guinness, not knowing what else to order, and after the first sip she can't convince herself to drink any more. Keith finishes it for her. He tells her about his childhood, his hooligan years, and his redemption by way of theater. Then he invites her to join him and the troupe at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh. She agrees and suggests that she give the remaining



tickets to the international office which will dispense them for her. He walks her to the tube after assurances that she will be at Goldsmith's the following night.

After the show the following evening, Ginny helps Keith pack up and then goes back to his place. She meets his roommate David and his girlfriend Fiona, who leave shortly after introductions. Keith tells her that they fight all the time. Fiona wants him to go to Spain with her where she has a job as a tour guide, but David wants to go to cooking school and has already been accepted. Ginny is amazed that Fiona would just accept a job in another country. In a sudden change of conversation, Keith leans toward her, romantically asking if it was a command performance she was seeking. Flustered, Ginny reaches into her pocket and pulls out what remains of the five hundred pounds she was to give away, and drops it in a crumpled heap on the table. He can't understand why she is just giving him one hundred and forty two pounds, and then suggests she should get back. He drives her, but the ride is strained and silent. She couldn't understand what possessed her to break a romantic moment with a clearly inappropriate financial gesture the way she did. She gets out thinking that Miriam was going to kill her. She lets herself in and picked up the next letter.



## Part 4: Pages 93 - 114

### Part 4: Pages 93 - 114 Summary

The next letter from Aunt Peg instructs her to once again follow in her footsteps and go see Mari Adams who is Peg's idol. She lives in Edinburgh, and the entire task is simply for Ginny to go and see her. Peg claims that Mari is such a Master that she will know what Ginny needs even if she doesn't know herself. Ginny is amazed that her next task will align her with Keith once again, and marvels at Peg's ability to intuit her needs even now. She thinks about the whole situation for some time, and finally just can't sit any longer. Leaving a note for Richard, she retraces her steps to Keith's flat. David is outside, and tells Ginny he has just told Fiona he won't go to Spain with her. A moment later, Keith comes down and opening his car, he tells them it is Brick Lane time, insisting they get in. After too much beer, what began as a catharsis turns into a drunken scene, and Keith announces it is time to go. He asks Ginny to stay with David while he retrieves the car. After he leaves, David asks Ginny to cross the street and get him an ice cream and when she does, he disappears. Keith returns and they search for David in opposite directions, agreeing to return to the same spot afterward. Ginny finds him first, but when David, treating it like a game, runs from her. Ginny follows. Finally, she realizes she will have to play dirty to catch him. She lets out a scream and collapses to the pavement holding her ankle. David stops, and with his attention on Ginny, doesn't see Keith come up behind him. They get him into the car and when Keith gets Ginny back to Richard's, she just takes a leap of faith and invites him to come to Scotland with her. To her surprise, he agrees and they arrange to meet at the station.

Keith sleeps for most of the four and a half hour ride by train and they get out at Waverly Station. Emerging, one of the first things Ginny sees is the castle. Keith looks at the directions and insists on joining her so that she doesn't get lost, and Ginny realizes he is right as they get under way. Mari lives along the Firth of Forth. They knock and a girl opens the door. When Ginny tries to explain why she is there, the girl tells her to hold on, and returns a few moments later to tell them that Mari is working but says that they are to come in. The house was old and paintings adorned every surface. They have tea, discuss Peg's death briefly and then Mari takes them upstairs to show them a particular painting. Afterward, she takes them back downstairs and in ink, draws a 'tattoo' on Ginny's shoulder. She invites them to stay, but they insist they have to catch the train. As they are leaving, she pulls Ginny aside and tells her that Keith is a 'keeper'. Once outside, Keith turns to Ginny and asks that perhaps she tell him exactly what is going on.

### Part 4: Pages 93 - 114 Analysis

Peg's next letter tells her to go to Edinburgh to see Mari Adams, her idol. She describes the city as grand and spooky. Ginny is astounded that even from the grave Peg seemed able to give Ginny exactly what she needs most. She had always been good at that in



the past, calling intuitively when Ginny needed her. Ginny summons her courage and walks to Keith's place, having sort of remembered the route from their earlier trip. She discovers David outside, distraught. He tells her that he's just informed Fiona he isn't going to Spain. Keith takes them to a restaurant and orders a spread that Ginny soon understands is a tragedy meal. Fiona calls, asking for some specific items to be returned to her, and after chugging most of a beer, David begins to talk. When the conversation turns to drunken rambling, Keith takes them home, dropping Ginny off first. Just as he is about to leave, Ginny asks him if he wants to go to Edinburgh with her. Though he is surprised, he agrees quickly, and they arrange to meet the next morning.

It is a four and a half hour ride by train to Scotland and Ginny can't help but compare the way Edinburgh felt wide and open compared to London which felt compact and low to Ginny. Looking at Mari's address, Keith announces that she lives in Leith and insists on accompanying her, telling her that she will certainly get lost on her own. Even so, it takes both of them a little time to sort out exactly where on the Firth of Forth Mari Adams was located. Once inside, they see that paintings fill every wall and each room is painted in a differing, vibrant color. They are led upstairs to where Mari is painting, and she welcomes Ginny warmly. Mari tells Ginny that she was sorry to hear about her Aunt's passing and claims that Peg felt terrible about leaving Ginny behind. Keith is watching this exchange closely, and Ginny feels as though Mari is watching her as well. The incoming sun increases the impression of being under the spotlight. Mari shows them a painting, and reveals a basic truth about the art itself that has Ginny understanding her aunt just a little bit better. She leads them back downstairs where she uses a pen to ink a 'tattoo' of a lion on Ginny's shoulder. She invites them to stay, but they make their excuses and leave. Mari tells Ginny that Keith is a keeper as they are leaving and when the door closes, Keith suggests that Ginny tell him what's up.



## **Part 4: Pages 115 - 126; Part 5: Pages 127 - 132**

### **Part 4: Pages 115 - 126; Part 5: Pages 127 - 132 Summary**

Ginny spends most of the train ride back to London explaining everything to Keith after which he tells her he doesn't like what Peg did to her. Ginny defends her. Keith tells her about his youth and the events that led to his becoming a hooligan. A pregnancy had him willing to quit school and begin working but his girlfriend didn't want to leave school, and ended the pregnancy instead. Now, he is doing what he loves, and he met her, he finishes, putting his arm around her and leaving it there for the rest of the way home. When they are almost home, he pulls out a small Godzilla that he stole from Mari's and Ginny gets angry. When he sees she doesn't want it, he tosses it on the tracks in the tube station, making Ginny even more angry. Unable to understand why she is so upset, he tells her he'll take the bus and disappears into the crowd before Ginny can say anything else.

The next letter from Peg tells Ginny about the Vestal Virgins. The remains of their statues and their temple can be seen in the Roman Forum and this is the next stop for Ginny. When she has made an offering to them, she can open the next envelope. She includes the address of the private rooming house that she stayed in as well. Richard takes her to the airport. He hugs her and tells her if she ever needs anything all she has to do is call. The plane lands in a small terminal and she follows the rest of the passengers to the bus which takes her into the city. From there, she hires a taxi to get her the rest of the way to the rooming house Aunt Peg stayed in. Ortensia leads her to a tiny room two stories up and she gets herself into bed, listening to the traffic of Rome at night.

### **Part 4: Pages 115 - 126; Part 5: Pages 127 - 132 Analysis**

Ginny explains it all to Keith on the train back to London and his response is to tell her it is all a bunch of crap. He says the more he learns about Peg, the less he likes her, and Ginny is quick to defend her, telling Keith that everything interesting that ever happened to her did so because of Peg. She understands his reaction however because he is interesting and has his own stories. As such, he is given to expect that everyone has stories - a fact that Ginny would adamantly argue. Then Keith reveals his 'story.' He tells her about his girlfriend and how she got pregnant at the age of sixteen. Ginny is rather stunned to discover that he is not a virgin. His girlfriend chose to end the pregnancy, but things were never quite the same after. While it took him some time to get over, he announces that it all worked out for the best. He puts his arm around her, and content,



neither of them speak much more on the rest of the trip. When they get to the tube station in London, he pulls a small toy out of his pocket that he had pilfered from Mari's and offers it to her. Ginny is horrified, and they argue. In the end, Keith can't understand why she is so upset, and he leaves her in the tube station, announcing he'll take the bus home instead.

Peg's next letter talks about the goddess Vesta and what the job of the priestesses called her Vestal Virgins was. The only drawback is the thirty years of celibacy they had to commit to. Other than that, they were treated as divinities, given a place to live and revered everywhere. When Richard takes her to the airport, he looks as confused as he did the first day she met him. He comments that it seemed they hardly had a chance to talk. He is still standing there after she enters security, and the sight of him makes her sad for some reason. When Ginny gets to Rome, she begins to feel some excitement. The streets are lined with sculptures, and fountains, and pillars. She can almost see people in their togas standing there. She manages to make her way to the rooming house where Ortensia opens the door and shows her to her room. After Ortensia leaves, Ginny feels very alone.





## Parts 5 and 6: Pages 133 - 158

### Parts 5 and 6: Pages 133 - 158 Summary

Waking up in Rome, Ginny discovers that the streets are so busy and the drivers are so fast that she is afraid to even cross the road. As such, she decides to stay on her own side of the street. She spots a tour group and follows them, noticing how they stood out as tourists. She knew she didn't look much better. She follows them into a metro station where a map reveals a stop marked Coliseo. There, she follows another tour group and eventually finds herself standing in front of the remnants of the virgins. She rummages around in her bag, looking for a suitable gift to give them, and finally settles on a US quarter. She tosses it on the grass between them, and opens Aunt Peg's next letter. The letter talks about the power women have, and how all great artists faced struggle or conflict at some time in their lives. She tells Ginny that along with guarding the fire, one of the other vestal symbols was bread or anything baked. As such, her next task is to find a Roman boy and invite him out for cake. She knows this might be hard for her, but is sure the Romans will help her.

Ginny has no desire to ask a Roman boy out. Thirsty, she notices a tour group stop and drink from an old fountain, and decides it is likely safe to do so. As she fills her water bottle, a group of young girls surround her, and in the next instant a Roman boy gets up and begins yelling in Italian. Ginny apologizes, not understanding what the girls are saying, and the guy begins waving his book at them. They run from him and he comes back to her, satisfied, telling her they were gypsies and intended to steal from her. Nothing is missing from her bag. Deciding he is a good candidate, she invites him out for cake. He agrees, but for coffee and not cake. They sit down, which costs extra he tells her, and have a coffee during which he tells her about himself. When he learns she has never had a gelato, he makes it his mission to find her one. He takes her to a shop where dozens of flavors are on display. When he asks how she came to be in Rome, she tells him she flew there on her own. He has trouble believing she is all by herself, and tells her that she should meet his sister, who lives in Trastevere - the best place in Rome.

Ginny and Beppe arrive in the picturesque neighborhood of Trastevere and he takes her to the third floor apartment that he and his sister share. When Ginny asks where she is, Beppe sidesteps the question, telling her that his sister is a doctor. He pours her a glass of wine while they wait for her to return. When he kisses her the first time, she is conflicted, and when it is obvious that his intentions go further, she tells him she has to go. He seems confused by her attitude, and apologizes for not being more clear. In no time, he is trying to undo the button on her shorts and again she pushes him away and tells him to stop. She leaves, and makes her way back to the Colosseum, going back to the virgins. There, she removes the button that Beppe worked so hard on, and offers it to the virgins telling them it is a gift from one virgin to another.



## Parts 5 and 6: Pages 133 - 158 Analysis

Ginny remembers that her aunt, while whimsical and charming, could also be a bit flaky sometimes, and waking up in Rome, she wonders about the intelligence of the 'no map' rule Peg had imposed. She manages to find her way to the Colosseum. Standing in front of the virgins, she feels guilty that she can look at something so important but just not understand why. The story behind them is certainly interesting, but it is still little more than a bunch of broken statues. In fact, thinking about it, she is a little annoyed that she's been sent to see the virgins at all. Is this her Aunt's idea of a job? They make her think of Keith, and the memory stings. She rummages through her pack and finally throws a quarter in beside the virgins on the grass, feeling stupid about the whole thing.

The next letter talks to her about the strength of women, and mentions that in some cases, dating can be bad for you. Sometimes, it just seems worth it, however. Peg tells Ginny that she wanted to struggle, like a real artist. Whenever she felt too comfortable, she moved on, even breaking up with guys as soon as it got serious. She left New York because she was just too happy there and because of that, had become stagnant. Her next task for Ginny is to find a Roman boy and invite him out for cake, and yes, she is aware that Ginny will struggle with this task. It turns out to be easier than she thought. While getting water from a fountain, a group of young gypsies approach her and she is rescued by a young man who warns her that they were trying to steal from her. Ginny decides he is as likely a candidate as any one, and extends the invitation. He accepts, specifying coffee, rather than cake, but it doesn't matter to Ginny. She had managed to ask a guy out, and he had accepted. Nothing else mattered. They sat in a small cafe and enjoyed a coffee while Beppe tells her about himself. Then he takes her out for gelato, which she admitted she had never tried, and insists that she meet his sister who lives in Trastevere. Ginny just goes with the flow.

Beppe's sister isn't home when they get there, but Ginny marvels at how quaint the neighborhood of Trastevere is. Everywhere she looks are nooks or overflowing window boxes, shutters and faded signs. Laundry is strung on lines between the buildings and tourists all around her are taking photographs. Beppe can't believe it when she admits she doesn't have a camera with her. They go up to the apartment, and Beppe's sister isn't home. He casually tells her they'll wait for her, pouring her a glass of wine, but it soon becomes evident that he did not invite her to meet his sister. Instead, his hands become increasingly busy and Ginny increasingly uncomfortable. She stops him twice before finally leaving and Beppe shrugs it off as though she is just one more uptight American girl. Ginny makes her way back to the virgins and leaves a more appropriate offering - the button on her shorts that Beppe was so intent on opening. It is a gift from one virgin to the others.



## Parts 7 and 8: Pages 159 - 180

### Parts 7 and 8: Pages 159 - 180 Summary

The next letter tells Ginny to get on a night train for Paris and stay on the Left Bank, in Montparnasse. Aunt Peg lists an impressive group of artists that have been there, and insists that she go to the Louvre where she can get her next assignment in the correct kind of atmosphere. She manages to get a ticket and her couchette is shared with five others. Ginny spends the time writing a letter to Miriam in her notebook. She tells her about how she put the run on Beppe, and that she is now on a train to Paris. She manages to find a hostel once there and is warned that the doors are locked at ten each night. She heads to the Louvre feeling somewhat alone and chooses one of the three wings at random, wandering through Egyptian rooms. She finally finds a tour and follows them to get out. Then she sits on a bench and opens the next letter. In it, Peg tells Ginny how she was flat broke in Paris and managed to convince a cafe owner to allow her to redecorate for a minimal sum and a place to sleep. Her next project therefore, she tells Ginny, is to find the cafe and have something delicious when she gets there. Ginny finally manages to make her way outside, and standing on a bridge she feels as though it is a perfect night - except for the fact that she is alone, and lonely, so she heads back to the hostel.

While one of her Aunt's rules was no contact with the states, she had said nothing about England, so Ginny looks up Keith and sends him an email telling him where she is and that she wanted to say hi. She is amazed when he responds, asking where in Paris she is. She tells him, but there is no reply afterward. She goes up to her room and sleeps until the loudspeaker wakes her in the morning. Bothered by her lack of towels or clean clothes, Ginny does the best that she can and heads out to seek the infamous cafe. The job is going to be difficult as there are cafe's everywhere. By asking questions at the market, she is given the name of a likely cafe - The Little Dogs and is pointed in the right direction. When Ginny tells the owner that her Aunt did the decorations, he treats her like family. He tells Ginny that while he was uncertain at first, Peg's unusual remodeling turned his failing restaurant into a boutique restaurant with a long reservation list. After food and some conversation, she leaves him to get ready for the evening rush. She heads back to the hostel, opens the door and hears "Oi, Mad one!"

### Parts 7 and 8: Pages 159 - 180 Analysis

Ginny gets on the train and sits in a couchette with several others. A few hours pass before one of the women mentions bed in two different languages. Everyone gets up edging Ginny out of the room and when she gets back in, six big shelves have been pulled out as beds. Ginny gets an upper bed and is hardly settled in before the lights are turned out. In the morning, she gets up to use the washroom, and when she returns, the beds are once again folded back into chairs. An hour later, they are in Paris. When she's found a room at a hostel, and learned the strict times for in and out, she heads for the



Louvre as per Peg's instructions. After wandering around in the Egyptian wing for a while, she finds her way to paintings where she has always been more comfortable. Then she sits down to open the next letter as Peg wanted. In it, Peg tells her about how when she was in Paris, she passed the same cafe every day. The smells were marvelous, but the paint was peeling and chipping and the tables were plain. She offers her services to the owner, telling him that while he is closed for a month, she will redecorate for him in return for a small amount of money and the opportunity to sleep in the cafe. He agrees. For a month, she stays there, painting all the time, making curtains, and smashing old plates to create a mosaic. She wants Ginny to find that cafe. She leaves the Louvre, and stands in the gathering night, watching the perfect postcard France around her, and the loneliness hits her like a rock. She makes her way back to the hostel.

Once there, she sees the row of computers available for use. She sits down and for the first time almost breaks her deal with Aunt Peg and contacts Miriam - even though Peg had insisted no contact with the States. Peg had said nothing of contacting people in Europe however, so she uses her computer skills to find Keith. She sends him an email, after spending considerable time trying to decide its content and finally settling on an innocuous sentence announcing she is in Paris and just wanted to say hi. To her surprise, he responds, asking where, but after she tells him there is no further communication so she finally just goes upstairs. Trying not to invade the privacy of the girls from Minnesota who share her room, she climbs into bed and tries to sleep. The loudspeaker wakes her the next morning and she rummages through her bag for clothes that are the least dirty, and something she can use as a towel, thinking about how she should have taken the time to do laundry while she was at Richard's. Once cleaned up, she begins asking around about the cafe her Aunt redecorated. She is told to talk to a man at the market who seems to know the cafe she describes and directs her there. When she enters, she can immediately see Peg's influence, but the owner is quick to tell her that without a reservation he cannot accommodate her. She tells him she is Peg's niece and his demeanor changes. He gives her something to drink and offers her food, telling her about how Peg convinced him to allow her to stay there. He admits he had no idea what to expect, and the resulting redecorating had taken his cafe from a failing business to a thriving, reservation only exclusive cafe. He is eternally grateful, telling Ginny she can come back any time, and inviting her Aunt to return as well. She hasn't got the heart to tell him Peg is gone. She leaves, and at that moment, somehow Paris loses its charm. Now, it is busy and impersonal. She returns to the hostel, and walking in she hears someone call out.



## Parts 7 and 8: Pages 181 - 198

### Parts 7 and 8: Pages 181 - 198 Summary

Keith tells her he had already been waiting for her for two hours, and she can hardly speak. He tells her that fate conspired to bring him to Paris, and asks her what Peg has her doing there. She explains that she had been searching for a cafe and Keith admits he's starving. They leave the hostel and walk along the Paris streets. They see a cemetery and Keith is quick to hop the fence, encouraging her to follow. He brings up the incident of the toy in Scotland, and Ginny tries to explain why it made her so angry that he had taken it. As she is doing so, he gets up and begins flailing his arms. She can't help but ask and he tells her that he is dancing on the grave. He says you always hear about people doing it, but never see it. He asks how Peg died and she tells him about the brain tumor. He looks at the stone they are sitting against to find an inscription for the death scene of Romeo and Juliette. She asks him if he's interested in her because of the supposed inheritance, and he tells her how he feels. Then he lifts her face to his, looking deeply into her eyes before kissing her gently. Time passes and a light interrupts their romantic moment. A man in uniform takes them to a guardhouse. She closes her eyes and clings to him.

When Keith tells her to open her eyes, they are on the sidewalk again. Ginny can hardly believe they were not arrested. A clock in a store tells her that she has missed her curfew, and jokingly Keith pulls out his metro ticket and tells her to have a good night. He laughs and invites her to come back to where he is staying, but the commuter train to that area is no longer running either. They walk until they find a park that Keith believes they have found The Tuileries. They walk through the park, and coming to a fountain, Keith announces they have found their hotel. He settles on a bench and they lie in opposite directions, using Ginny's pack as a pillow. Before she knew it, she was asleep and the next thing she knew it was morning and people were milling about ignoring them completely. She wakes Keith and they find a cafe for breakfast. He tells her about the show and writes his IM on her hand before leaving to get ready for his afternoon performance. As soon as he leaves, her mood plummets. She pulls out her notebook and begins another note to Miriam, telling her about his visit and admitting that she is in love with Keith.

### Parts 7 and 8: Pages 181 - 198 Analysis

Ginny is so stunned to see Keith standing there that she is tongue tied. He tells her he's been waiting for her for over two hours, and reveals the events that brought him to her. Still, she can hardly breathe, let alone speak intelligently. He questions what she is doing in France, and she tells him about the cafe, reminding him how hungry he is. They leave the hostel, and begin walking around Paris, as Keith catches her up on the news since she left. When it gets dark, they are still walking. Keith and Ginny sneak into a cemetery and sit against a gravestone talking about everything from the theft of the



toy from Mari's to why he is with her. When Keith explains that he is with her because she is mad, and pretty and pretty sane for someone who is mad. Ginny hears the word pretty connected to her, and can't even look at him at first. He picks up her chin, and looks into her face before pulling her to him and kissing her in a way that makes her melt inside. She feels herself being drawn down beside him, and unlike anything she felt with Beppe, she feels warm, safe, and welcoming. She isn't sure how much time goes by before they are interrupted by the security guard who takes them to the guard house. Ginny is mortified, and embarrassed, but Keith seems unconcerned. Ginny is convinced they are being arrested and her mind plays the horrible scenario out in her mind.

She is stunned when they are let go, and Keith laughs when Ginny tells him they could have been deported. Instead, they are simply asked to stop trespassing. The next issue reveals itself when Ginny sees a clock and realizes she is past curfew. Keith teases her, but then assures her that he wouldn't leave her alone. They find a park and stretch out on a park bench near a fountain. Ginny is asleep in no time and wakes to people's voices. She wakes Keith, and they walk to a cafe for breakfast, after which he announces he has to go to prepare for his show. As soon as he has written his IM on her hand and left, the loneliness descends on Ginny again. She sits down and pens a note to Miriam, telling her all about the visit he paid her. The whole incident seems magical to her. He came all the way to Paris to find her, and their evening's escapades. She also admits to being in love with him and missing Miriam like crazy.





## Part 9: Pages 199 - 216

### Part 9: Pages 199 - 216 Summary

Peg admits that when the cafe was finished, she felt as though she was done with Paris. She heads for Amsterdam to see a friend named Charlie, which is where she directs Ginny to go next. She is also to go to the Rijksmuseum, find Piet and ask him about the painting "The Night Watch". Ginny finds Charlie's address on Westerstraat with little trouble. She knocks and is told by the owner, Thomas, that Charlie doesn't live there. Ginny finds a hostel called The Apple which has a cafe out front that seems devoted to a Bob Marley kind of lifestyle. Her room is up three flights of the steepest stairs she has ever seen. The building is old and everything is in a state of disrepair and one look in her locker was enough to have her leaving again.

She stops in a grocery store and picks up a Stroopwaffle. Everything feels contaminated and she puts the food away in favor of searching for another hostel. By seven, she has gone quite a distance, and has yet to find a place that has room and remains in her price range. She approaches HET KLEINE HUIS HOSTEL AND HOTEL AMSTERDAM, thinking that if accommodations aren't available there, she will head back to the train station, having done all she can. The rooms are all rented, but an American asks her if she has anywhere to stay, and when she admits she hasn't, he tells her to wait returning minutes later to announce she can stay with them. The Knapps, from Indiana, give her space in a room with Olivia and invite her to dinner with them, but she politely declines, citing fatigue. Instead, Ginny showers and returning to the room can't resist the temptation to look at some of Olivia's books and perhaps listen to her iPod - both left on Olivia's bed. The door opens just as she's put everything back, guiltily. Olivia picks up her iPod, closely examining it before sticking it in the front pocket of her bag and loudly pulling the zipper shut. Ginny closes her eyes, and rolls towards the wall.

In the morning, Mrs Knapp wakes them both and gives Ginny their itinerary. As their first stop is to be the museum, Ginny joins them. With planned precision, they go through the museum and their third stop is The Night Watch. The painting is massive and Ginny lets the Knapp's go ahead, agreeing to meet them later. Unable to find anything that says Piet, she rejoins the Knapp's who head for the Van Gogh Museum next. From there they stop at Rembrandt's house, the Maritime Museum, Anne Frank's house and finally 'Knapp time' followed by dinner at the Hard Rock Cafe. After dinner, they take a glass topped sightseeing boat for a night cruise and then mercifully for Ginny, the day is over.

### Part 9: Pages 199 - 216 Analysis

Aunt Peg's next letter begins by explaining why she admires the Dutch so much. Part of her admiration is based on the fact that the Dutch are in a constant battle to keep the sea at bay. They create new land using drainage that creates canals throughout the



area. It shows determination, she tells Ginny. They also changed the way painting is done beginning in the 1600's by capturing movement and light in ways never accomplished before. She tells Ginny about her friend Charlie in Amsterdam, and that she wants her to go there. Ginny is also to find Piet at the Rijksmuseum and ask him about Rembrandt's 'Night Watch'. Ginny's first impression is that Amsterdam is wet and looks more like a village than a city. She manages to find Charlie's address, but he no longer lives there, so Ginny begins the search for accommodations.

This proves more difficult than she would have imagined, and most places in her price range are full or so disgusting that she won't stay in them. Finally, as she is ready to give in and return to the train station, she is offered a shared accommodation with the Knapp family. The Knapp family is from Indiana, and Ginny is welcomed and given a bed in a room with Olivia. While the Knapp family gets dinner, Ginny showers and then 'borrows' Olivia's iPod and thumbs through her magazines, enjoying the normalcy of it until Olivia returns. Something about her mannerisms tells Ginny that she knows Ginny was using her things, and feeling guilty, Ginny turns to the wall and tries to sleep.

The next day is a whirlwind of sightseeing that begins with the Rembrandt Museum. Ginny finds The Night Watch, and spends some time examining the huge painting. She is unable to find anything resembling Piet however, and gives up, resigning herself to the rest of the day with the Knapp family. They seem tireless, and are methodical in their approach to everything. Each stop has a time limit, and the schedule is strictly adhered to. Ginny is exhausted by the time 'Knapp time' is announced and they return for a rest before dinner. After that, they head out for dinner and an after dinner boat ride. Ginny is suitably exhausted by the time she falls into bed.





## Part 9: Pages 217 - 232

### Part 9: Pages 217 - 232 Summary

Ginny spends three days following the schedule as set out by the Knapp's. Exhausted, she is thrilled when they announce that the fifth day is a 'free day'. She wants to email Keith, and still has to find Piet. Olivia offers to share a day pass at an internet cafe, and give Ginny directions to it. She begins by sending Keith an email, and surf the net for a bit until Keith comes on line and asks her how a'dam is. At the same time, Miriam's IM lights up and Ginny almost answers out of habit, but then remembers Peg's instructions - NO communication to the US. She quickly answers that while prohibited, she misses her terribly too and that things are complicated. She asks about Keith, but Olivia arrives and Ginny is forced to sign off. She goes back to the Rijksmuseum. Ginny learns that Piet is a guard. She finds him and asks him about the painting as Aunt Peg had instructed, but he has little to contribute and eyes her with suspicion. She goes back to the hotel and is informed that the following day will be a bike ride to Delft - the Knapp's treat!

The ride to Delft is easier than Ginny anticipates, even though it is fifteen miles away. It is a beautiful town, quaint and timelessly Amsterdam like but in miniature. Olivia sits down with her and asks her who she was emailing the day before. She tells him it was her boyfriend, Keith. Olivia admits she was doing the same, but her boyfriend is actually a girlfriend. On their final night in town, Mrs. Knapp produces an itemized list of expenses for Ginny. While aware that she would have to contribute, she was amazed at the detail of the list provided. She tells them she'll have to go to the ATM without looking at the bill, and is told that the morning is fine to settle up. Later, she looks over the bill and is shocked to see it totals almost five hundred euros. She is relieved that the ATM gives her that much the next morning. Then she sits on the sidewalk and pulls out the next letter.

### Part 9: Pages 217 - 232 Analysis

Ginny is ready for some time off when the Knapp's announce they have a free day after three more days of non stop sight seeing. Ginny wants to spend some time at the Internet cafe and Olivia offers to split a day pass with her. Ginny goes first and sends Keith a message. She is surfing when Miriam comes on, excited to find her there, but when she doesn't answer, Miriam quickly catches on and tells her to log on and off quickly if she is really there. Ginny tries, but the computer is so slow that when she comes back there are several messages from Keith, wondering if he offended her and asking where she went. By the time she answers, he is gone, but Miriam's message says she is touching the screen and misses her so much. Ginny goes back to the museum, missing Miriam, and manages to locate a guard named Piet. She asks him about the painting, but he has no insight to share and Ginny can't understand why she was instructed to talk to him about it.



The next day, she joins the Knapp's on a fifteen mile bike ride to Delft. Tired, she is less than enthusiastic at first, and she can tell that the Knapp's liked her well enough to have her along, but didn't understand her lack of enthusiasm and participatory spirit. When they get there, the elder Knapp's go shopping while Olivia sits with Ginny and confesses she is gay - a fact she is certain would kill her parents dead if they knew, but they tended to miss what was right in front of them. In a flash, Ginny realizes that was what Aunt Peg was trying to tell her. Piet worked in the museum and saw the marvelous painting every day, without really seeing it at all. She decides that Amsterdam is a washout, from being unable to find Charlie to Piet's lack of enthusiasm. The trip is topped by a bill from the Knapp's that totals almost five hundred euros. Thankfully, the ATM is accommodating, and Ginny sits on the sidewalk to read the next letter from Aunt Peg.



## Part 10: Pages 233 - 258

### Part 10: Pages 233 - 258 Summary

In her next letter, Aunt Peg finally reveals that she is sick. She admits that by the time she went to Amsterdam, she was having trouble with her vision, but was too afraid to see a doctor. Instead, she went to Denmark. She gives Ginny an email address, and tells her that if she sends her flight information to it, someone will pick her up at the airport. Ginny does as instructed and is told to wait by the mermaids. Knud walks up to her and introduces himself. He takes her out to his motorcycle, and both she and her pack manage to fit into the sidecar attached. Denmark reminds Ginny very much of Amsterdam as they ride through the streets. He takes her to a houseboat which consists of one room and telling her he is a Viking, he makes her a traditional Danish meal. Then he disappears briefly, and before he returns, Ginny realizes that they are moving. Knud returns, telling Ginny they're going north. A field of windmills is the destination, and when they arrive, Knud explains that they are art and that Peg had come to see this as well. The midnight sun never quite set behind the windmills and they watch it for some time before Ginny falls asleep. Then suddenly Knud is waking her and telling her he has to go. They are back on the dock where they started, and again, Ginny finds herself alone.

The number one hostel in Amsterdam, according to web sites, is called Hippo's Beach, and has a large pink hippo above the doorway. A bunk for one week cost nine hundred and twenty four kroner, the desk clerk tells Ginny, who has no idea what a kroner is in value. He agrees to take euros instead, and converts her bill to one hundred and sixty which Ginny hands over. In return, she is given a cold beer and is invited to join another table of travelers. When Ginny pulls out her Stroopwaffles and adds them to the cheeses, hard rolls and sliced meats on the table, she is referred to as the chosen one - a messenger. There are four of them at the table. Bennett and Emmett, brothers, Nigel, and Carrie are all from Melbourne, Australia where they are students. They have been touring Europe for five weeks, they tell her. Nicknaming Ginny 'Pretzels,' they tell her they will go somewhere special after a nap, and Ginny is happy with the pace. She drops down onto a mattress and is soon fast asleep.

The boys are excited when they wake, eager to get going. Before Ginny can appreciate what is happening, she finds herself volunteered by her new friends to compete in a karaoke contest, facing off against a Japanese gentleman who already had several beer behind him as nearly as she could tell. Horrified, she tries to back her way off stage, but is pushed forward each time. She closes her eyes and begins to belt out the tune until her voice breaks. To her amazement, it doesn't sound half bad and she is the winner. The group of Japanese men her opponent came with insisted on paying for the rest of the night, including their taxi back to Hippo Beach.



## Part 10: Pages 233 - 258 Analysis

Ginny follows Peg's next instructions, and emails the address she provides before heading for Denmark. Knud picks her up, and folds her into the sidecar of his motorcycle, taking her back to his houseboat. It consists of one large room, and he talks about his life as a Viking metal worker and carver as he makes her a traditional Viking meal - fish. Telling her to enjoy, and disappears. It takes only a few minutes before she realizes they are moving. He tells her to relax as they head north. His carving skills are evident by the intricate gargoyles, spirals and dragon's heads that are carved into the wood everywhere she looks. After about two hours, Knud docks next to a field of windmills, but still hadn't explained where they were going or why. He points to the windmills, telling Ginny he thinks he understands why Peg wanted Ginny to come and see him. He describes them as art, and representative as hope for mankind. Behind them, the midnight sun skims the surface of the Earth, never setting, and as they watch, they talk about Peg. Finally, Knud suggests she gets some sleep, and the rocking motion of the boat soon facilitates that. When he wakes her, they are at their starting point once again and Knud is telling her he has to go. He wishes her luck and leaves her alone on the streets of Copenhagen.

Ginny is prepared for a change and heads for the hostel rated as the best in the region - Hippo's Beach. Touted as the Ritz of youth accommodation, it is a quirky blend of fake palm trees and flower garlands in an atmosphere that can only be described as mid eighties. The clerk sets her up in a room with four others who quickly invite her to join their table where they are unpacking cheese, meat and rolls. Ginny adds her Stroopwaffles and is immediately revered and referred to as the chosen one. Ginny can already tell that this group is nothing like the Knapp family she left behind. Relaxed, they include her, but are happy to nap before going out, which suits Ginny just fine. Though the Australian students have no idea how much longer they will be in Copenhagen, it is obvious that they will be good company.

Ginny isn't told where the group is going, but the boys are excited, and Ginny, having recently come from days with the Knapp family providing the itinerary, is content to just go along. She is told that Copenhagen is the Disneyland of beer, and their destination is the equivalent of Magic Mountain. Magic Mountain isn't what Ginny expects either. It is a large hall where they are immediately given five large steins of beer, and Ginny could have been forgiven for thinking they'd fallen through a crack and were now in Germany somewhere. After 30 minutes, an emcee takes the microphone at the front of the hall and asks for volunteers. Ginny's companions, along with the group of Japanese business men beside them became highly animated, resulting in the emcee selecting them to provide two volunteers. Carrie volunteers 'Pretzels', who still doesn't know what she is being coerced into. Finally, one of them admits 'full contact karaoke' is the game. They start chanting her nickname, as does the table next to them and before she knows it, she is on stage. The emcee provided wigs for her and the Japanese representative, and Ginny does her best to back away from the front of the stage, but there is no way out. Ginny didn't sing. Not ever. She certainly never got on stages either. Ito went first and before she could comprehend what was going on, she realized she was singing.

The big surprise was that from her vantage, she didn't sound half bad! She won in a landslide, and returned to the table the karaoke queen. The Japanese table paid for the rest of their evening, including the cab ride back to Hippo Beach.



## **Part 11: 259 - 270 and Part 12: Pages 271 - 284**

### **Part 11: 259 - 270 and Part 12: Pages 271 - 284 Summary**

Aunt Peg once again leaves Ginny to retrace her steps, this time to Corfu hoping it has the same effect for her, and tells her to call her when she is on the boat. At noon the following day, Ginny tells her companions that she is leaving for Greece, immediately. When they ask her why, she finds herself explaining the letters, and how she has just opened number eleven. Carrie asks if they can join her, and Ginny is happy to have company for a change. Within twenty minutes, they were booking train passage. They shop for snacks and get on a train. The ride seems to take forever, but finally they are boarding the boat, just as Peg had. She opens the twelfth envelope when they are under way.

In it, she tells her that since the final envelope is the most important, she leaves when Ginny opens it up to her. Carrie reads the letter and asks her when she will open the last one. Curiosity is running wild, but Ginny isn't ready yet. She promises to open it when they get there. On arrival, they took a cab, Emmett simply telling the driver to take them to a good beach. The driver drops them above a beach and they climb the cliff steps down. Carrie strips and gets into the warm water, while the boys nap, using their packs as pillows. Ginny joins her, and up on the road they watch a scooter with backpackers going by. When they get out of the water, they discover that the scooter actually acted as a getaway for the people who stole Carrie and Ginny's packs. Despite the loss and Carrie's hysterics, Ginny can't help but laugh.

They make their way to the nearest town, and sit in a small taverna. Carrie begins weeping again when she thinks about the loss of her passport and rail pass. Ginny goes to the ATM and to her horror, all it will give her is forty euros. She does the only thing she can think of. She calls Richard at Harrods. He is happy to help, telling her a ticket will be waiting at the airport in Corfu. She returns to the table and tells them she is heading back to London. They exchange emails and before she knows it, she is back in London. Richard hugs her, meeting her at the airport. She asks him what Peg told him, and he finally admits what he has been trying to find the right time to tell her. He and Peg had been in love, and gotten married. Ginny realizes Richard is her uncle, and at that moment, she hates her Aunt. As they pull into the Angel, Ginny follows her Aunt's example and bolts, thanking him for everything on the way out.



## Part 11: 259 - 270 and Part 12: Pages 271 - 284 Analysis

The next letter from Aunt Peg describes how she turned south, going through Germany, Italy, and then in Venice got on a boat. A ferry helps to clear the mind, she tells her and when she reached the island of Corfu, she finally understood it all. She'd already seen her destination, and her future was back the way she came. Ginny tells her companions she has to leave, and when she explains her situation, they see her in an almost magical way. The 'game' as Ginny describes it, is the most incredible thing they've ever heard of, and it is obvious that the Australians see Ginny as a very special person. They ask if they can join her, and Ginny is happy for the company. On the boat, she opens the second to last letter.

Number twelve reveals how Aunt Peg tells her how she met Richard in Harrod's during what amounted to a nervous breakdown, and how he saves her, giving her a place to stay until she could get her feet under her. She reveals their mutual crush on each other, unspoken until Richard finally admits his feelings for her and Peg bolts. This is the route she had taken, and he was who she had returned to. He gave her the medication when she needed it, and took care of her. They finally arrive, and Ginny promises to open the last letter soon. First, they take a cab to the beach and while the boys sleep on their pack, Carrie and Ginny go swimming. A scooter goes by and Carrie suggests they think about renting some as well. She goes to her bag to grab a snack, and Ginny hears her becoming animated soon after. There are only three packs left on the beach, someone having stolen hers and Carrie's. Carrie is almost hysterical. Ginny realizes the scooter they watched likely took the culprits and their bags away. Even her last letter from Peg is gone. She has only what was in her pockets - her passport and her Barclaycard. She passes them to Emmett and returns to the water. After a few minutes, Nigel wades out to see if she's okay and Ginny starts to laugh.

They make their way to the nearest town where Ginny discovers to her surprise and dismay that she has only forty euro to her name. She does the only thing she can think of. She calls Richard who immediately makes arrangements for her to return to London. When she gets there, he hugs her, and listens to her story of the theft of her things. Then, he finally tells her the truth. He and Peg were married, and he is Ginny's uncle. Ginny is overwhelmed, and can't cope with the information. All she can think of is how much she hates her aunt for putting her in this position, and for being dead, and for sending her on this journey. Nevertheless, she does exactly what Peg did - she bolts, yelling her thanks in her wake and leaving Richard much like Peg had.





## Part 12: Pages 285 - 304

### Part 12: Pages 285 - 304 Summary

Ginny walks until she arrives at Keith's. Fiona answers the door, and calls for Keith who lets her in. She fills him in on her destinations since they last met and the theft of her belongings. Then she tells him that Richard is her uncle. When she admits she ran after he told her, Keith asks her what is wrong with her, and insists she has to go back and that in the morning he will drive her back there. She reluctantly agrees, turning her back to the wall and sobbing.

The spare key is in the same place, and a letter is waiting for her, asking her to wait until his return. She shows Keith her aunt's room, and he comments on how much it reminds him of Mari's place. He looks at the Manet on the wall, and Ginny draws his attention to the green slippers, as her aunt had done with her many times before, but when she touches them, she feels a bump. On the back, a key is taped, but though they search, they can find no lock it fits. Ginny takes a bath, and making a coffee afterward, it clicks in her mind. Harrods. She tells Keith about the studio her aunt had there, and Keith is stunned. They decide to go.

Ginny takes him to the chocolate counter where the clerk confirms that she would like her to call Mr. Murphy and Keith can't quite absorb the magnitude of her connections. Richard takes her to the room Peg used to paint and they begin checking the cabinets, finally finding the one the key fits. Inside is a collection of rolled up canvases. With them is a card with the name Cecil Gage-Rathbone on it, and message to call now. They gather the twenty seven canvases and take them to Richard's office. There, Ginny calls the number and Cecil immediately knows who she is. He says they'd been expecting her call and could she come on Thursday? Ginny agrees and he asks when he can collect them. Arrangements are made and Keith excuses himself, leaving Richard and Ginny to talk. She apologizes and he offers to buy her some clothing. She realizes as they talk that Richard feels much like she does and misses Peg too.

### Part 12: Pages 285 - 304 Analysis

Ginny is filthy, and her clothes are musty, but she doesn't care. She can feel her face, set in a grimace and she passes through the busy section of town without hardly registering what must have been looks of distaste and side stepping by the great washed populace. She can hear music as she approaches, but is sure that Keith won't be there - expecting him to still be in Scotland performing. She is surprised when Fiona answers the door, and even more so when she calls Keith. Ginny hardly knows what to say to him as he swallows the hint of a smile, taking in her appearance. He invites her in to sit, noting she looked like she needed to. She tries to tell him where she's been, but everything seems to run together in her mind. Finally, she tells him she has nothing left, and asks if she can stay with him for a while. She offers to sleep on the floor, but he





insists she stay where she is on the bed, asking again if she is alright. She tells him the last letter was stolen as well, and that Richard helped her get back. When she tells him that she just found out he is her uncle, and then ran away, Keith asks her what is wrong with her, and insists she has to go back. Deep down, Ginny knows that, but just needs a night. She admits that now it's final. Peg is actually dead. She's really gone - forever. He tells her he will take her back there tomorrow, and she turns her face to the wall and sobs as he strokes her hair soothingly.

The note on the table at Richard's tells Ginny he's glad she came back, and asks her please to stay until he comes home. Keith isn't surprised. Ginny shows him her aunt's room, and he marvels at how much it resembles Mari's work. He notices the Manet poster almost immediately, and asks Ginny about it. Ginny tells him that there was one just like it in her place in New York, and points out the green slippers. She touches them in the upper left corner of the poster and feels a lump. Peeling it back, she finds a small key. Ginny has a bath and after trying the key in every lock they could think of, they sat at the kitchen table, and preparing coffee, the answer came to Ginny. Harrods. When she tells Keith that Peg used to paint there, he jokingly asks her where her bedroom was - the top of Big Ben? She explains Richard works there and they decide that it will be their next stop.

Keith registers no surprise when Ginny has him paged from the chocolate shop again. Keith is growing ever more surprised by the extent of Ginny's connections. Ginny is nervous, and when Richard walks up, she simply holds out the key and explains her theory that it is likely to something in the area she used as a studio. Looking at it, he agrees and takes her up to Peg's room. They have to move several cabinets before they find the one the key fits. Inside are a number of canvases, rolled into scrolls and a card that tells Ginny to call now. They grab the paintings and go to Richard's office to make the call. Cecil Gage-Rathbone is thrilled to hear from her, and sets up a meeting for Thursday - two days away. He also arranges to pick the paintings up that evening. Keith leaves them alone to talk, giving Ginny a chance to say she is sorry she ran off. She tells him that Peg being gone never seemed real to her until he told her they had been married. She can see that he feels the same depth of sadness and they agree that it is nice that they have each other at least.



## Part 12: Pages 305 - 320

### Part 12: Pages 305 - 320 Summary

On Thursday morning, Ginny, Richard and Keith go to the meeting with Cecil Gage-Rathbone. Peg's paintings are on display, and chronicle her illness, making them unique, Cecil offers quietly, but he admits that Peg had already attracted attention prior to her illness, touted as the next Mari Adams. He reveals that Peg had deliberately set them aside, knowing their value would increase after her death. Richard can't take his eyes off the paintings, and before they can collect their breaths, bidding begins. She reaches for his hand and hold it until the bidding stops at seventy thousand pounds.

The next day, it all seems surreal. She gets up and Richard has circled the exchange rate, adding \$133,000 US in the margin. She can't help but feel this isn't all of it. Something is missing. She goes to see Keith who is working on his newest offering, "Harrods: The Musical." She asks him if they are dating or something, and he admits that they are definitely 'something'. In that moment, she knows what the next envelope would have told her to do.

Ginny goes back to Harrods and the chocolate counter, buying the clerk a sixty pound box of champagne truffles for all her help. She walks away smiling and takes Richard to a fancy tea room. She tells Richard that Peg was head over heels in love with him, but frightened and was sorry she ever left. It is obvious from his reaction that he didn't know. He comes over to her and wraps his arms around her. Ginny later sits down and pens a letter to Peg, thanking her, and admitting she was mad at her for a time. Since she won't need to mail the letter, she tells Peg she plans to put half the money in one for Richard whom she is sure Peg would have wanted to have some. She's also decided to go home, she tells Peg, and PS..... she told her for her.

### Part 12: Pages 305 - 320 Analysis

When Ginny, Richard and Keith arrive for the meeting Thursday morning with Cecil Gage-Rathbone, Peg's paintings are all set up in chronological order. It is plain to see where illness changed the tone and subjects of her paintings and Richard and Ginny are both reminded of her death at the sight of them. Somehow, seeing her paintings reveals just how much her illness robbed of her. Richard can't take his eyes from them. When the bidding starts, he puts his head down on the program and Ginny reaches out to take his hand. When the bidding finally stops, they are all shell shocked. The final outcome is both surreal and tragic at the same time.

The next day, it all seems like a dream. Ginny can't help but wonder if this is all that Peg intended. It seems as though something is missing, and she thinks about what else might have been in that last envelope. She goes to see Keith, who jokes about having Ginny finance his newest theater offering. She corners him about their relationship, and



after sidestepping her at first, he admits that they certainly do have 'something'. His admission leads Ginny to realize what it was that the next envelope would have told her.

She goes to Harrods and uses her new found wealth to express her appreciation to the chocolate clerk, and then has her call Richard down one more time. She takes him for lunch, and tells him the truth about how Aunt Peg felt about him. She tells him how much her aunt loved him, and how sorry she was that she ran from him when he finally admitted his feelings for her. She can tell by his face that all of that is news to him, and she isn't even embarrassed when he gets up and hugs her in the restaurant. Later, Ginny decides to write the thirteenth letter herself. In a letter to Peg, she tells her how everything worked out, thanking her for her inheritance and then tells her that she's decided to go home. Lastly, she tells Peg that she told Richard everything for her.



# Characters

## Virginia Blackstone (aka Ginny; Pretzels)

13 Little Blue Envelopes by Maureen Johnson is a story about a shy young girl named Virginia (Ginny) Blackstone who is sent on a European adventure. The trip is a treasure hunt with a twist. Ginny is given a series of instructions which are sealed in thirteen separate envelopes.

Ginny is seventeen - the same age as her Aunt Peg was when she ran away from home. She has deep chocolate brown hair, longer than her Aunt's but the same color and has a remarkable resemblance to her Aunt in enough ways that even Richard comments. Ginny is somewhat taller than Peg was, and larger - perhaps less delicate. Her body has more in the way of curves than Peg had, and no one would think at first glance that Ginny might be a dancer. Still, there resemblance to each other is remarkable. Ginny's birth date is August 18th which makes her a Leo, Mari Adams tells her. She tells Ginny to take off her shirt and in pen, creates a 'tattoo' on one shoulder of a lion in bright gold with a mane that extended out in all directions which eventually turned into blue rivulets.

Ginny was totally different from Peg in other ways however. For instance, where Peg was outgoing and confident, Ginny was shy and bordering on introverted.

## Margaret Bannister (aka Aunt Peg)

Just two weeks prior to attending Mount Holyoke on a scholarship, Peg disappears. A week later she showed up and announced that she wanted to take a year off and let her scholarship go. She spent a year working as a waitress and living with three others in a small apartment. The following year, she attended a college in Vermont, majoring in painting. Aunt Peg died at the age of thirty five, having developed an aggressive form of cancer. Her final legacy to Ginny was to provide her with thirteen envelopes, to be opened in sequence and only after the instructions in the one prior to it had been fulfilled.

She had a slender build compared to Ginny, but their chocolate brown hair was the same color although Ginny's was longer than hers. She managed a regal like bearing making people who didn't know her presumed that she was a dancer. She had delicate features.

Peg has one big secret. She has a brain tumor. Aggressive and silent, it sneaks through her mind, taking her away a piece at a time. At first she runs from it, but then discovers that in the process, she has left her future behind her. While Harrods in London has a reputation for catering to any and all needs, who would have believed that Peg would find love, happiness and a place to work and call home there as well. Peg spends the last part of her life arranging for the adventure of a lifetime for her niece, Ginny. Her



selfless gesture will open Ginny's mind and heart, and leave as big a hole in its wake by her absence.

## Richard Murphy

Richard is the man who answers the door at 54a Pennington Street when Ginny first arrives. He works for Special Services in Harrods department store in London. Richard discovers Peg when she comes apart, having a nervous breakdown in the middle of one of the Harrods stores. As the man whose job it is to find anything and everything a customer may require, he takes it upon himself to help Peg. He opens his home to her when she reveals she is homeless, finds a space for her in an unused area of Harrods for her to paint in, and falls in love with her. For a time, they live in companionable comfort. Then one day Richard reveals his true feelings, and though Peg shares them, her fear overcomes her love for him and she runs. Her travels take her all the way to Corfu, Greece before she realizes the truth - her future is behind her. Retracing her steps, she returns to Richard who welcomes her with open arms. He is the one who loves her unconditionally, cares for her with tenderness and understanding, and then agrees to welcome her niece Ginny, if and when she ever arrives.

Richard is therefore unsurprised when he finds Ginny on his doorstep, amazed by how much she resembles Peg. He invites her in, and gives her the room Peg called her own to stay in. He gives her whatever she needs, never overstepping his boundaries, and never questioning her motives. When Ginny gets stuck in Greece after everything she owns is stolen, he arranges for her return flight to London, prepared to open his home again. That is what one does for family, after all - isn't it? His timing might be lacking somewhat however as he reveals on the way home from the airport that he and Peg had gotten married, and he was actually her uncle Richard. Ginny, in true style reminiscent of her Aunt Peg, bolts, returning the next day after her boyfriend insists she must. The remaining thirteenth letter Peg wrote for Ginny is stolen along with her bag in Greece, but she still manages to discover the key that unlocks her inheritance, and before heading home, she tells Richard how Peg felt about him, and how sorry she was to have run off and wasted what little time they had together. Richard discovers, as does Ginny, that while Peg is gone, they now have each other. It is Peg's last gift to them both.

## Keith Dobson

Keith is the writer, producer, designer and director of 'Starbucks: The Musical' which catches Ginny's attention when she is seeking an artist to be a mysterious benefactor to. He is tall and thin, and his reddish brown hair is in a constant state of disarray. He has a slightly musty aroma that appeals to Ginny. He is self-confident and charming in his way, able to perform alone on stage with panache.

Keith has been going to pubs since the age of thirteen. At the age of sixteen, Keith's girlfriend Claire whom he is besotted with, becomes pregnant. She opts to finish school



rather than have the child, despite Keith's willingness to quit and get a job to support them. Their relationship changes then, and is never the same. Now, looking back on it, he can see that everything happens for a reason. After all, were it not for that sequence of events, he would not have met Ginny.

Ginny falls in love with Keith. It is not difficult. He is attentive, polite, sensitive, and keeps her company while she goes to Edinburgh to visit her Aunt Peg's idol, Mari Adams. Then he lets her go without drama, and later follows her all the way to Paris to spend a night with her. He is supportive, and handsome, outgoing and adventurous - and he loves her. In this way, his presence becomes for Ginny much like Richard's was for Peg.

## Mari Adams

Peg's idol, Mari lives in Edinburgh. At first glance, Mari appears to be at least sixty years of age. She has long, jet black hair with orange highlights. She wears clothing that appears to be at least one size too small and would normally be unflattering over her slightly plump frame, but somehow she managed to make it look okay. Mari uses black eyeliner liberally as well. Her eyes are surrounded in heavy dark circles of it. She has three small blue stars tattooed right under each eye that from a distance appear to be freckles and has tattoos on her feet as well that can be easily seen with the gold sandals she wore. Closer inspection reveals tattoos on her hands as well, and like her feet, the tattoos appear to be scrawled words. When she realizes that they are being surreptitiously observed, she reveals that they are actually the names of the dogs she has had that have died, and her feet are the names of the foxes that had been her pets when she lived in France. She had spent a great deal of time in their cage with them painting, and tells Ginny and Keith that being locked in a cage is a good experience, and helps to focus your attention.

Mari lived on the streets of Paris for a time, feeling it was just something she had to do - not because her poverty demanded it. She is an interesting woman. Even her doorway is different, painted intricately all around with gold salamanders, birds, flowers and a fox. The door knocker is a giant head of a woman with a huge nose ring.

Mari welcomes Ginny, extolling her time with Peg and through her, Ginny learns a basic truth about artists, in the process understanding her Aunt Peg a little better. Mari reveals that artists want to remember and to be remembered..... it is why they paint.

## Chloe

The girl who opens the door when Ginny and Keith arrive at Mari Adams' home, Chloe wears red denim overalls without a shirt, clipping them up as high as they would go. Her hair is a crisp and bleached white, and is cut jagged and short on the top while being braided long in the back. The overall appearance is that of a mullet/dread cross.



## **Ginny's mother**

Quiet and practical, she was the more serious of the two sisters.

## **Beppe**

Beppe is twenty years old and is a student who is studying to be a teacher in Rome. Ginny meets him when a group of young gypsies surround her and he comes to her rescue, chasing them off before they can rob her. He has golden brown, almost blond hair, and light colored, narrow eyes. He has three sisters, all older than him, and likes cars. Ginny learns that he has been surfing in Greece, and talks about British bands he likes but that she has never heard of.

Beppe takes her to his sisters apartment in Trastevere, but after they arrive it quickly becomes clear that his sister is not expected any time soon. His only interest in Ginny extends to removing her shorts in the quickest time possible, but Ginny bolts. Beppe isn't surprised, believing that all American women are uptight.

## **Michel Pienette**

The man in the market in Paris who tells Ginny where the cafe is that Aunt Peg redecorated. He is gruff and impatient, chewing on his cigar as a customer helps translate Ginny's request for information.

## **Olivia Knapp**

Olivia becomes Ginny's roommate in Amsterdam when she is unable to find a place to stay in her price range. She is tall, and her gold blond hair is cut short. She has wide, blue eyes that are almost doe-like and boasts an all over, even tan that is enviable if not a bit creepy. Olivia doesn't talk much. She remains a pseudo companion for Ginny for a few days while Ginny joins their family for some whirlwind sightseeing. During one of their outings, she confesses that she is gay, and communicates surreptitiously with her girlfriend via the internet while they are on vacation, but that if her parents found out, they would have a stroke.

## **Knud**

Knud is a tall man who has long brown hair and a big brown beard which makes him look mature and imposing. It is a contrast with the jeans, Nirvana t-shirt and leather jacket. He also wears a belt made of chain link metal that has a variety of items hanging from it including what appears to be a large animal's tooth and a large whistle. He has a way of talking that can only be described as loud. Knud drives a BMW motorcycle and the sidecar is where Ginny is to go. Knud takes Ginny to his houseboat where he feeds



her and then takes her several hours north to a field of windmills behind which the midnight sun never set.

## **Emmett and Bennett**

Brothers from Australia, Emmett and Bennett are both blond and look almost exactly the same. They are both sun bleached, and have eyes of faded blue. Emmett dresses more casually than his brother, sporting surfing style clothes while Bennett prefers a button down shirt, though not ironed. They are traveling with Nigel and Carrie who are also students from Australia.

## **Nigel**

A student from Australia, Nigel is of English/Indian heritage. He has joined Emmett, Bennett and Carrie on a whirlwind tour of Europe via rail passes that has them going from one adventure to another. He and his compatriots join Ginny on the final leg of her travels to Corfu, Greece.

## **Carrie**

Close to Ginny in height, Carrie has short brown hair and is also a student from Melbourne, Australia. She is part of the foursome that joins Ginny in her last journey to Corfu, Greece. She is also the only other person besides Ginny to lose her pack and everything she owns on the beach in Greece. While Carrie has what can be described as an emotional breakdown at first, she quickly recovers and before Ginny leaves to return to London, she is already making the best of being 'stuck' in paradise.

## **Cecil Gage - Rathbone**

Cecil is impeccably tailored, and mannered. He is the person that Peg instructs Ginny to contact when Ginny finally finds the twenty seven rolled up canvasses in a Harrods cabinet. He arranges for and conducts the auction of those paintings, transferring the funds as instructed by Peg to an account for Ginny.





## Objects/Places

### 4th Noodle Penthouse

Ginny's starting point in New York. It is where her Aunt Peg lived before she left New York, and where she entrusted the letters which start Ginny on her adventure. This restaurant boasts the best dumplings in the world according to Peg and Ginny.

### 54a Pennington Street

Richard's home address in London, and Ginny's first stop as per her Aunt Peg's instructions. She stays here in what Richard refers to as Peg's room.

### Harrods

The department store where Richard works is a building that seems to go on forever. Built from red brick, it boasts decorative cornices and on the roof is a dome. There are green awnings that are stretched over dozens of huge windows boasting every manner of goods for sale that one can imagine, and more.

### Izzy's Cafe

Home to a series of paintings called 'Sheila Studies' and not Ginny's selection for her mysterious benefactor gift.

### Covent Garden

Located in the middle of London, it is one of the places Ginny goes to search for an artist worthy of her mysterious benefaction.

### Starbucks: The Musical

Created, produced, directed and designed by Keith Dobson, this is the show that Ginny selects.

### White Sneakers

This is the Official Shoe of Tourists.



## **Goldsmith's**

This is the name of the building in which Keith Dobson puts on his production of Starbucks.

## **London Eye**

This is the large Ferris wheel located across from Parliament.

## **Fringe Festival**

Held in Edinburgh, it is the largest alternative theater festival in the world.

## **Leith, Edinburgh**

This is the location that Ginny is sent to by way of Aunt Peg's fourth letter which instructs her to meet Mari Adams - Peg's idol.

## **Vesta**

This is the Goddess of the hearth.

## **Vestal Virgins**

This is the name given to the six priestesses at Vesta's temple who were tasked with ensuring that the ceremonial hearth never went out.

## **Evil Fields**

This is where the Vestal Virgin was taken if she broke her thirty year vow of celibacy. It consisted of a small room which was covered over in dirt once she was led in.

## **Vespa**

This is the kind of scooters women drove around on in Rome.

## **Colosseum**

This is the location where the Vestal Virgin statues are and one of the stops Ginny is instructed to make.



## **Travestere**

This is where Beppe takes Ginny, ostensibly to meet his sister.

## **Couchette**

This is the small room on the train that Ginny takes to Paris.

## **Les Petits Chiens (The Little Dogs)**

This is the name of the small cafe that Aunt Peg redecorates in Paris during the month that its owner is on vacation. She uses old plates, smashed to create mosaics and pictures of dogs of all kinds. She also sews curtains and paints the tables in a variety of colors. The overall effect turns the cafe into a place to go and makes the business a success. Paul, the owner, is thrilled to meet Ginny.

## **Jordaan**

This is the location where Charlie is supposed to live in a canal house and is touted as being one of the 'most beautiful quarters' in Europe by Aunt Peg.

## **Rijksmuseum**

This is the Major Amsterdam museum that Ginny is supposed to go to so that she can see a painting called 'The Night Watch' by Rembrandt.

## **Magic Mountain**

This is a famous location in Copenhagen.

## **Corfu**

This is where Peg sends Ginny last. It is where she ran to when Richard told her how he felt about her.

## **Jerrlyn and Wise building**

The building that Cecil Gage-Rathbone directs them to and where Peg's collection of paintings is auctioned off.



## **Manet**

This is the artist whose painting Peg admired so much that she had it hanging in New York and in Richard's house.

## **Harrods: The Musical**

This is the name of Keith's newest play.



# Themes

## The Cost of Fear

When Peg leaves New York and heads on her tour around Europe, it is a spur of the moment decision. No one would ever accuse Peg of being afraid to do anything. She was a free spirit - ready to go where the wind took her, and prepared to suffer for the sake of her art. No one who knew Peg would ever believe that she could fear anything. In fact, when Peg realizes she is ill, even the thought of death doesn't make her afraid. It just makes her sorry that her time is almost up. The only thing that Peg ever feared in her life was the entanglements of love and commitment. As a result, she never settled down for any length of time, and never had any children of her own. When true love found her, and was returned in kind by her, she ran as soon as the feelings were acknowledged for the first time. It is many miles later before she realizes the error she made and returns to the man who captured her heart. She finally marries him, ostensibly to simplify the legalities of her care and disposition after death, but the truth revealed in her letters show a depth of feeling and love that comes usually only once in a lifetime. Peg loved Richard unconditionally. He was the rock she turned to when her world became unfamiliar and he was the man she trusted to set Ginny on her journey.

Ginny is unlike her Aunt in that she fears many things. She is shy and somewhat introverted. She fears being put in the spotlight, expressing herself to strangers or in public and is easily embarrassed. In an effort to help Ginny climb out of her shell, Peg sends her on a treasure hunt that will take her on a tour of Europe, during which she will meet the people who affected her Aunt in significant ways, and learn lessons about life and about herself in the process. While in the beginning, Ginny is fearful of almost every aspect of this journey, by the time it is over, she is a different person. At the age of seventeen, she has found love, friendship, family, and adventure - all of which had eluded her before and were the cost of fear.

## The Value of Family

When Virginia first leaves home to follow the instructions as laid out in her Aunt Peg's letter, she feels vaguely disconnected from her family. She can easily be described as a loner, who lives life in the background, and is unwilling to draw attention to herself. She lacks self-confidence and poise, and readily admits that she feels more alive when she is with Aunt Peg than at any other time. Aunt Peg is a free spirit who, just by her very presence, brings out the adventurous and confident side of Ginny that remains otherwise hidden. Peg is easily one of the most important people in Ginny's life. When Peg dies, and Ginny receives the news, it is surreal. Until that point, no one had any idea that she was ill, or that they would never see her again. Even as Ginny embarks on the adventure as laid out for her by Peg before her death, she is unable to completely believe that she won't see her Aunt around some corner or waiting for her in an airport at some exotic destination. Until this point in her life, Peg is the only family that has



made an impact on Ginny one way or the other and her death is simply impossible to accept.

When Ginny discovers that Peg was married, and Richard is now her Uncle, the thought is at first more than she can handle. To begin with, it underlines the fact that Peg will not be returning. It makes her death something real and permanent. Ginny does exactly what her Aunt would have done. She runs. Ginny needs time to absorb what she's been told, and put it into perspective. Having Richard as an uncle is a new connection in her life, and binds her to Peg in ways that she would not have believed or expected. Now, having retraced her Aunt's last journey, she has a new appreciation for family and the value that their love brings to life.

## **Actions and Consequences**

Peg leaves New York, embarking on a European trip shortly after she realizes that something is wrong with her. She never really admits that this is the case until close to the end of her life, but instead, she tells herself that she has become too comfortable.... too complacent, and that in order to create great art, she must struggle. As such, she leaves without a word to anyone. In this case, her actions result in a very specific consequence. She never sees Ginny or the rest of her family again. Peg goes to Europe and has a series of adventures that do in fact help her artistically. She meets her idol, Mari Adams, and as a consequence her artwork takes on a new quality that has the experts comparing her talent to that of Mari after Peg's death. When Richard declares his feelings for Peg, Peg becomes fearful and for reasons she has difficulty articulating, she bolts. She continues her adventure, going all the way to Corfu before coming to the conclusion that her future lay behind her. Her actions in this case cost her valuable time with the man who loves her - Richard.

When Ginny follows in her Aunt's footsteps, she takes a leap of faith, not knowing what will happen as a result. Her actions have wide ranging consequences, changing how she perceives herself, and her level of confidence. By taking this trip, she not only comes to understand her Aunt in ways she would never have known any other way, but comes to understand herself in the process. Her actions will result in a richer, more fulfilling life. It also results in her gaining an Uncle with whom the memories of Peg are shared and kept alive.



# Style

## Point of View

13 Little Blue Envelopes by Maureen Johnson is written entirely in the first-person perspective of the main character, Virginia Blackstone. The story is told reliably and the narration is consistent throughout. Virginia, or Ginny as she is known by all, takes a leap of faith when she follows the directions set out for her in a series of envelopes that are assembled by her now deceased Aunt Peg. Peg begins by directing Ginny to go to her last known residence with her back pack packed and ready to go. She is to avoid guide books and maps of any kind, trusting simply in the instructions that follow. Ginny, a high school student, does as her Aunt Peg requests, and soon finds herself on a plane that will follow in the very footsteps her Aunt took before her. It is an adventure that teaches Ginny to be confident in herself, to believe she is an interesting person in her own right, and opens her mind to the myriad of possibilities that life has to offer. Ginny chronicles her travels, adhering to the instructions laid out for her by her Aunt in thirteen sequential envelopes.

## Setting

13 Little Blue Envelopes by Maureen Johnson is set in a series of destinations that the main character, Virginia Blackstone has been instructed to go to. Having never traveled any great distance in the past, this teenager begins her quest by leaving home and going to the 4th Noodle Penthouse in New York where she picks up a series of envelopes, each containing instructions and each to be opened in order after the task in the one before it has been completed. The first envelope instructs her to board a plane for Europe which Ginny does and is then allowed to open the next one. It sends her to London where she meets Richard in the first of many adventures. Following the instructions as set out by her Aunt Peg, Ginny finds herself traveling from London to Edinburgh, Scotland. From there, Peg sends her to Rome, Paris and Amsterdam, and from there to Copenhagen and then on to Greece where in Corfu her luggage and everything she owns is stolen. Short of funds, she telephones Richard in London, who immediately wires her enough to get back to him. Each stop contains stops she must make and lessons to be learned. While most of her travel is done by plane, Ginny also finds herself on several short train trips and one trip on a houseboat to see the midnight sun beyond a field of windmills. She sees land reclaimed by way of canals, beaches with water that seems impossibly warm, and shops in a store that has absolutely everything a person could want in a lifetime and more. She visits art galleries and distinctly original cafes, all in response to the letters as set out by her Aunt Peg.



## Language and Meaning

While the language used in *13 Little Blue Envelopes* is modern day English throughout, Ginny travels to places in Europe that are very different from anything that she knows. Beginning almost immediately with her trip to London, the author uses words and phrases that are distinctly heard and spoken only in England. Words such as *nicked* instead of *stolen* or *tube* representing the train lend authenticity to her travels. The author does a good job of describing the chaos in Harrods and the difference in traffic patterns that Ginny discovers when she forgets to look left for oncoming traffic. Ginny has an entirely different impression of Edinburgh over London where she sees the region as less crowded and spread out in a pleasing, relaxing manner rather than the hustle and bustle of London. When she returns from Scotland, Ginny is sent to Rome and to France where once again she learns different cultural expressions and mannerisms. In Rome she is amazed by cobbled streets and cafes by the hundreds; pillars, domes, sculptures, and fountains. France is a train ride away where she shares a *courette* with several others and tours the Louvre. The Netherlands are another experience entirely. From Amsterdam where canals are everywhere to Copenhagen and the house boat trip to see the midnight sun, the author manages to paint a picture of Europe that often has the reader following in Ginny's footsteps in their mind.

## Structure

*13 Little Blue Envelopes* by Maureen Johnson is three hundred and twenty pages in length. It is divided into twelve segments that vary in length from twelve to forty nine pages in length. Each of these segments is further divided into several sections. These segments are from four to twelve pages in length, and each division signifies a lesson, direction, or adventure that the main character is directed to. Each of these smaller segments is identified by a key phrase that identifies where or what Ginny is tasked with. At the beginning of each of the twelve main sections is a letter from Aunt Peg to Ginny. These letters not only identify where Ginny is to go next, but also includes instructions for what she is to do when she gets there. These tasks are designed not only to direct Ginny to follow in her footsteps, but also to bring her out of her shell and force her to become more self reliant and confident. The envelopes, which are opened at the beginning of each major segment, are designed to take Ginny on the journey her Aunt Peg took, and hopefully teach her the same lessons her Aunt learned in the last days of her life.





## Quotes

"The people I'd admired had sometimes starved and scraped their way along, but it had helped them create" (Part 1, p. 21).

"I'm supposed to ask you what you sold to the queen" (Part 2, p. 45).

"Sneakers are universally acceptable, and white ones will keep you cool in the summer" (Part 3, p. 61).

"We want to remember, and we want to be remembered" (Part 4, p. 112).

"I would sneak off like a thief in the night, maybe because I knew there was something just a little bit wrong about what I was doing" (Part 5, p. 140).

"From one virgin to another" (Part 6, p. 153).

"She had a vision, and when she spoke, you believed it" (Part 7, p. 179).

"Fate clearly wants us to be together" (Part 8, p. 181).

"I live the entire history of my country and people" (Part 10, p. 237).

"In this, we try for a better future where we do not pollute" (Part 10, p. 239).

"A footprint is made by a shoe, but it is not the shoe itself" (Part 11, p. 259).

"Then one night, he did the worst thing possible - he told me how he felt" (Part 12, p. 269).

"I suppose she probably explained this to you in the end, in the one you didn't read" (Part 12, p. 283).

"The whole thing is weird, granted, but that at least is real" (Part 12, p. 289).

"This work is a record of her illness, which makes it very unique" (Part 12, p. 307).

"In the last letter I read, she told me something. It occurred to me that she may not have told you" (Part 12, p. 317).



## Topics for Discussion

What takes Ginny to New York City? Where does she go? What does she do while she is there? Why is this so important? Who is Alice and what critical fact is she unaware of?

What are the rules that Peg sets out before Ginny's departure? Why are they so important? What makes Ginny adhere to them?

In what ways are Ginny and Peg alike? In what ways do they differ? What about Peg has Ginny always admired and respected? Why?

What is the first stop in Europe that Ginny is instructed to make? What information is it important that she glean from this meeting? What task or task must Ginny accomplish before opening the next envelope? What is the most likely reason that Peg gave Ginny this as her first task?

What difficulties does Ginny encounter in her newly found position as anonymous benefactress? How does she overcome them? What conundrum does her actions create and how does Ginny try to resolve it?

How does Ginny's role as benefactress affect the next task she is given? What truth does she learn about her Aunt Peg and those like her from this second envelope? What semi-temporary gift is she given?

What lesson does Ginny learn in Rome? How and when does this lesson become clear to her? What two offerings does she toss to the Vestal Virgins? Which represents the lesson she learned and why?

What does Ginny learn from her experiences in Paris? What is she instructed to find? Why does this seem like such a daunting task at first? How does completing this task leave Ginny feeling? Why? What changes how she feels?

What hurdles does Ginny encounter in Amsterdam? How long does Ginny stay at the Apple and what is significant about her stay? What alternative is she left with? How does this affect her time in Amsterdam?

In which envelope does Peg reveal to Ginny that she is ill? What symptoms was she unable to continue ignoring? Where does she go afterward? What does Knud show both her and Ginny? Where does Ginny stay while there?

What country does Ginny feel as though she has been transported to when she goes out with her Australian roommates for the evening? Where do they take her? What does Ginny do there at the urging of others that she has never done before? How does it turn out?



What is the significance of the red scooter? How does it affect Ginny's plans and destination? How does Ginny respond to the whole issue? How might her response have been different had this happened at the beginning of her adventures and why?

What does Ginny learn when she returns to London after Greece? How does she take the information? In what way does her response mirror the way her Aunt might have or has behaved in the past?

What does Ginny discover in her Aunt's room? What leads her to it? What does it lead her to? How does she respond to the find?

What is Peg's last gift to Ginny? What other gifts does Ginny get from Peg and how? What does Ginny decide to do with Peg's final gift? What gifts does she dispense afterward in return? In what ways has the entire experience changed Ginny, in your opinion? Why?