

# **A Cure For Suicide Study Guide**

**A Cure For Suicide by Jesse Ball**

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## Plot Summary

A man is suffering from the tragic end of a love affair. His pain is so great that he doesn't want to live anymore. Instead of committing suicide, however, he seeks the cure for suicide. The cure for suicide offers a way to end one's past life and start over. The man, who is later known as the claimant, goes to a person called the interlocutor. He tells his story to the interlocutor and in the end, he's administered the cure which starts as a shot that erases one's memory of their past life. Those who knew then get a letter telling them that these people are no longer a part of their lives.

After all of this the claimant wakes up in a house with a person called the examiner. The two have a nurse or doctor and patient relationship. She teaches him simple things such as what a chair is and then moves to more difficult topics. The claimant makes progress, but shows troubling signs. His memory appears to be coming back through dreams. The examiner tries to make him think that she gave him the content of his dreams, but in the end he does harm to himself and it's obvious that his memory has come back. She has no choice but to recommend that he be fogged (reset, his memory erased again).

The claimant moves to a new village and he gets a new examiner. She appears to be older than his previous one. With her he learns new life lessons and as he progresses, he moves to new villages. Finally he goes to a village in which he learns about regret and distrust. Here he meets a woman named Hilda who tells him what is really going on in the Process of Villages. She offers him the choice of escape. The claimant falls in love with Hilda and she tempts him but at the same time, the examiner teaches him about lying and grief.

In the end, he decides to turn Hilda in (she claims to be a claimant and tries to get him to run away with her) and stay with the examiner. Still, the regret he feels for turning Hilda in is too much and he has to be fogged again.

Finally, the claimant gets a name, Henry, that he's comfortable with and moves in his final village. His examiner recommends that he always have someone to watch him and says that he can't have any real responsibilities. She manages to get Hilda to come back under the name of Nancy. While Hilda, who was a claimant turned examiner, knows what's going on, the claimant believes that she doesn't remember being Hilda and he is taking care of her. The claimant is happy in the end and so is his examiner.



# The Process of Villages: Prologue and Part 1

## Summary

The people who run the Process of Villages have given a woman, called the "examiner" the assignment to monitor a man called the "claimant," based on her previous success. She's to follow First House policies for Gentlest Village, write reports on a daily basis and place them in a desk drawer. Someone will retrieve them. According to the information she has the claimant will be helpless until what is called Mark 1 and the treatment is up to her. Reprocessing decisions are also up to her and the recommendation to move the claimant to Gentler Village will happen when she recommends it.

In the prologue, the examiner arrives and sees the claimant lying down in a bedroom in a house he's been taken to in Gentlest Village. The claimant does not see her.

In Part 1, the examiner teaches the claimant things like the purpose of a chair and how people make decisions. Realizing that the examiner is there to help him, but not knowing why he's there, the claimant poses questions to the examiner to find the answer to this question. She tells him that he's there because he's been sick and almost died, but knowing that this was the case, he came for help.

After about the first week, she realizes that his memory is coming back. This is not a good thing. As time goes on, the claimant learns how to tell the difference between people, gets a new name (Anders), knows what to look forward to when the next day arrives, learns about the examiner's job and starts writing down his dreams, which the examiner tries to make him believe are actually her thoughts that she told him to dream about. Still he wants to know more about his dreams. She wants to be transparent, but is not sure that being transparent will work in this case.

The claimant starts going out of the house with the examiner and they practice how to interact with people and do things like giving directions. The examiner still worries about his dreams and the fact that his memory is coming back. The examiner doesn't want to recommend that he be processed again as that would decrease his ability to act intuitively. On day 19, however, she finds that he has cut himself and does not know her. She rushes out of the room.

## Analysis

This section serves to introduce the main characters, the claimant and the person who is now the main character in his life, the examiner. It also introduces the world in which the claimant exists, symbols, and themes.



Readers walk into Gentlest Village and meet the claimant much as the examiner does. From then on, readers get to know both the claimant and the examiner. Through her encounters with the claimant and her notes, readers learn about the examiner's character. She is there to help the claimant. Her role is like that of a nurse. She's patient and slowly tries to teach the claimant things he needs to know about life. The way in which she introduces the function of a chair and then more complicated topics shows that she is patient, calm, and is there to help the claimant. Her concern about reprocessing him even though his memory is coming back shows that she cares about his best interest. Readers know that it's bad for him to remember his past, but the consequences of reprocessing can also be negative. The fact that she waits until there is no question that she has to have him reprocessed, because he has harmed himself, underscores how much she cares about his welfare.

While readers have an understanding of the role of the examiner, the situation from the claimant's viewpoint is a mystery. Even though they don't know why he is where he is, readers realize that he's in the role of a patient and is not a bad person. He rejoices when he hears of the examiner's progression in the organization and she herself says that she thinks that his situation is due to circumstances in his life. He does, however, need to learn or relearn life lessons and one of these lessons is about choice.

Choice is one of the novel's themes and the chairs and tables introduced in this section symbolize this theme. The claimant learns at the beginning that he chose where he sits. Taken further, this concept also means that one can choose where one sits in life. The choice at this point is simple. Since he is in the gentlest village and readers know that there is another village that he will go to, this section implies that this is the beginning of the choices the claimant will have to make and that the choices may become more difficult when he moves to another village.

Another theme appears as the claimant begins to remember things -- the theme of grief. Readers know that there has been a death in the claimant's life and he hasn't taken it well. As it encompasses him, the examiner considers whether it would be best to reset his memory. Is erasing one's memory of a sad situation the best way to handle grief, or should people go through the process of grief instead of the process of villages? This is one of the questions that the novel raises and readers see a glimpse of this fact in this section.

## Discussion Question 1

Is the village the claimant is in really the Gentlest Village? If so, what makes it live up to that name? If not, what would make it more gentle?

## Discussion Question 2

When the claimant starts remembering things would it be better to truthfully answer his questions? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 3

What does the Gentlest Village make you think of? Is this a place you would like to exist in? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

countenance, implements, ignorance, organisms, balusters, embroidered, tactile, constellations, empathy, contrive, junctures, discriminate, unabated, radiating, basking, pallid, vocation, capacity, intuition, impulsiveness



# The Process of Villages: Part 2

## Summary

The claimant wakes up in a new house after being processed again, but still in Gentlest Village. He finds an old woman sitting next to him. She is his now his examiner. Her observations tell her that he is off to a good start because he wakes up after only 18 hours following his shot. She decides on her approach and writes her initial report.

In the days that follow, the examiner has to teach the claimant everything -- how to dress, how to walk up and down the stairs, how to wash himself. The activities are hard for the claimant to accomplish and he cries when he doesn't succeed. The examiner, however, is very patient.

The claimant always has something to do. When he is busy, the examiner is not around. She finds things for him to do, however, when he's idle. On the days that he comes downstairs, eats and does something that he planned to do, he sees the examiner in the evening and she lights a candle as a form of celebration.

It takes the claimant 7 days to start speaking. Two days after that, the examiner explains his situation to him. When he says that he feels sad, she tells him that he feels rootlessness and tries to help him attach to his surroundings by looking at pictures. He starts drawing and his drawings show a woman in a bed. The bed looks like a coffin. The woman's eyes are closed and her arms are folded. The examiner sees these drawings and writes her report.

One day, the examiner introduces the claimant to stories. The goal is to help him learn how to make emotional contracts. Finally he gets a new name and she tells him that they are going to move to a new house. As it turns out, they have been in several different villages. In the new village he will meet people. The fact that he has a name symbolizes his progress.

## Analysis

This section serves to raise several issues and makes one think about how society functions, which is something that the claimant has to learn if he is to successfully re-enter life.

One issue that this section highlights is the meaning of a name and how one's name influences one's identity. The claimant gets a new name as a reward for the progress he's made. He can't keep his old name because it ties him to the very thing he wants to forget -- his old life. Now that he has reached a milestone, the examiner validates his existence by giving him a name. His new name is Martin which is of Mars (The Roman God or war) and means "warlike." Unlike the last time he got a name, the examiner does not go into a long story about why he has that name. She only tells him that if this



name doesn't fit him, they will move and he will get another name. This implies that part of his recuperation involves finding a name that he can live with.

Another issue is the importance of story telling in establishing relationships. We all have stories and it's thought that stories bring us all together. Even though some think that one sees themselves in stories and thus people think that they should respond with their perspective, the fact is that sometimes people just tell stories and the point isn't to have the audience participate in the storytelling. Sometimes it's enough to simply listen or just experience happiness from being told a story. This is something that the claimant needs to learn even though readers don't know exactly why.

This section also helps readers understand what is going on in the story. Once again, the claimant seems to be remembering his past, as evidenced by his drawings which show a woman who appears to be dead. Readers now know that this is troubling even though they may not know why. However, this information makes it easy to understand why the claimant has been in several different villages and helps to explain his current state in which he has to relearn everything. He keeps on remembering and when he does he has to be reprocessed and move to a new village.

Readers also understand that some sort of rehabilitation is going on and the importance of the claimant not having an idle mind. When he's busy, the examiner leaves him alone, but when he's not, she's there to give him something to do.

One of the big questions that this section raises is to what extent would one go to to forget something or to change their life. The claimant is like a baby at the beginning of the section, a result of having to be processed multiple times. While the examiner is there to take care of the claimant and he is still alive, is this really living? This section makes readers ponder that question.

## **Discussion Question 1**

The claimant has undergone real setbacks in his ability to function because had had to be processed again due to the return of his memory. What price would you be willing to pay to start over?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How does your name contribute to your sense of identity?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How do you view memories of sad events? Are they part of the healing process or are they detrimental?





## Vocabulary

belied, fervently, proportions, cavities, rudimentary, insomuch, involved, meticulously, carousel, province, republic, ragamuffin, petrified, court-martialed, itinerant, convene, kettle, forfeited, altered, shriveling



# The Process of Villages: Part 3

## Summary

The examiner and the claimant go to a get together where the claimant meets a woman named Hilda and a man she says is her husband. His name is also Martin. Martin invites the claimant to come over some time. The claimant feels awkward talking to them, but realizes that he likes Hilda and he discusses his feelings and the meaning of relationships with the examiner. They also come up with a story to explain why they are there, deciding to say that they are studying plants.

One evening, he and the examiner go to Hilda's and Martin's house for dinner. The claimant feels comfortable at first because the house is the same as his. Things change, however, during the evening when Hilda calls him into the kitchen, stands close to him, and tells him to meet her tomorrow night. He agrees. Then, after dinner, Martin, Hilda's husband, tells the claimant that Hilda lies. The next evening, the claimant sneaks out of the house to meet Hilda. Once she's sure that he's not an examiner she tells him that these people have robbed them of their identity and reveals what goes on in the Process of Villages. She also kisses him and tells him to be true to her. They agree to meet again.

The claimant doesn't tell the examiner what is going on. He tries to make her think that he's happy because his drawings are getting better and he becomes sarcastic at times. He and the examiner go to a Botanical Society meeting and the claimant realizes that he's having problems communicating with people. He tries to improve because he wants to be perfect for Hilda. The examiner notices and tells him that he was both careless and reckless. She also brings up the concept of lying. The claimant starts to feel guilty because he's been hiding his meetings with Hilda from the examiner, but still doesn't say anything about his conversations with Hilda.

He meets Hilda again and proclaims his love for her. She tells him more about the Process of Villages. As she speaks though, she sees a change in his expression, slows her speech down, and tries to comfort him. He feels that everything is hopeless. She kisses him, but as she does so, he feels as if he is another bedroom with another woman, but then he returns to Hilda. He asks her what her real name was and she said it was just dirt.

The next time he meets Hilda, she talks about leaving and gives him some pages she says she tore out of the book that the examiners keep. He believes that she gave it to him because she loves him and wants him to believe her. He starts thinking about everything and doesn't know if he should just listen to Hilda's story or try to understand it. He's torn between helping her and staying in his comfortable surroundings. His feelings get more complicated when the examiner takes him to a cemetery and they talk about death. He realizes that the examiner is old and could, herself, die soon. This makes him feel closer to her.



The claimant skips his next meeting with Hilda, but still feels torn. He goes to Hilda's house, but different people live there. He thinks that she must have been removed and wonders if Martin caught her or whether he, himself, had actually given her away. Later that evening, Hilda comes to his window. He goes outside to meet her and she tells him that she was taken away, but had escaped. The examiner comes out to see what is going on. Hilda hides. The claimant doesn't want to lie to the examiner and goes inside the house with her. He hears Hilda scream from outside.

The examiner has the papers Hilda had given him. He realizes that he must have given them to the examiner. He starts to cry as he realizes that he had exposed Hilda. Thinking about her pains him to the point that the examiner decides that they need to move. Before they leave, he gets a new name. This time it is Henry Caul. He's given something to drink, falls asleep and men in a white truck take him away.

## Analysis

This section is one of revelation and tests. It reveals what happens in the Process of Villages. It also reveals element of the claimant's character as well as that of the examiner's. In addition to these revelations, readers realize that the "Hilda" chapter in the claimant's life is a test. Many of the things his examiners have talked to him about in the past now come into play. His level of awareness is growing and he has more complicated choices to make. Overall, this section supports the themes of choice, grief, memory, and identity.

In case readers were just as confused as the claimant is at times about exactly what goes on in the Process of Villages, Hilda explains everything including how they get there, the role of the examiner, the fact that they may have more than one examiner and the fact that they move around from house to house. Now the claimant knows everything and he has choices to make. Will he stay or will he go? Will he believe her or just listen to her story? Will he tell the examiner what is going on?

His torment helps paint a picture of his character and also gives readers insight into why he might be in the village. His identity comes from the perception of others. When the examiner asks if he is getting used to his name he says that now he is. This, however is only after Hilda pays attention to him. He tries harder to participate in the conversation at the Botanical Garden meeting not because he wants to improve for himself, but because he wants to be worthy of Hilda. Still, his feelings for Hilda aren't strong enough to make him want to escape his cozy environment, even though he knows the truth about what is happening to him and the type of place in which he's living. He also has problems letting go. Hilda is rather new to his life, while his examiner has been around for some time. When he learns about death and grief and realizes that his examiner is old enough to die soon, he's drawn to her. Now she is the one he doesn't want to disappoint. She's the one he chooses to stay with -- just as he will stay with the woman he keeps on remembering. His memory of the mystery woman is so strong that he even thinks of her when he's in Hilda's arms.



Throughout it all, the examiner carefully watches him and even though he feels that he's keeping things from her, readers realize that she knows what's going on. She's not transparent, though. She doesn't tell him that he's going through a test. Instead she stays in character. She poses questions about lying that she doesn't have him answer. She just leaves him to think about it. She raises the issue of grief and death, knowing from his file that this is what he's struggling with and to make his choice more complicated.

There are also hints that Hilda isn't who she says she is. When she's talking to Martin and realizes that it's all a bit much for him, she slows her speech down to calm him.

As readers take in this section they will recognize several lessons. First, that of choice. That's the crux of this entire section. The claimant has to make a decision that is much more complicated than which chair he will sit in or which way he'll turn when he walks out of the house. There is also that of appearance versus reality. Is Hilda who she says she is or is she a liar as Martin, her "husband" claims? There's the lesson of names. There are now two Martins. How will the claimant differentiate himself from the other Martin? Will he try to do so? The claimant remembers what the examiner said about stories. Was he supposed to just listen to Hilda or try to understand what she was saying?

In the end the claimant makes his choice. The test is over and his new identity is sealed.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the claimant meets another man named Martin who is the "husband" of the woman he comes to love?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you think the examiner knows what's going on between Hilda and the claimant? Why or why not. If so, what signs are there that this is true?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think that the claimant made the right choice? Has this choice moved him forward or set him back?

## Vocabulary

sprig, askance, contrive, precipitous, mulled, trivially, retired, amiss, lithe, chiding, antagonism, malady, buffeted, banal, frailties, faltering, triviality, yearning, encapsulated, dynasty, contingent, turmoil, overbore, celerity, scant



# The Process of Villages: Part 4

## Summary

When the claimant and the examiner meet again, he's in a new house. He remembers the examiner and her new name. They take a look at the new house and he gets a new role -- that of a scholar. She shows him a desk where she says she keeps her reports and tells him that he can look at them whenever he wants, but he never does. He likes his new name though and says it out loud, as he likes the way it sounds in his mouth.

The examiner and the claimant talk about what the claimant sees in the village, whether everything has always been the same and how he would feel if he went to a place where things were different. His response makes the examiner make notes. They come up with a new cover -- he's now a scholar. She tell him that he will have new exercises to complete. He says that he wants to proceed cautiously at first and then desperately.

The reports the examiner writes are still available to the claimant, but he does not read them. His self-esteem grows from the praise he gets from the examiner. One day he learns to turn down good things (to help him develop a strong will) and how to say things so that people respect his wishes. He becomes a person who doesn't ask questions and he's comfortable with this. He feels as if he's part of the village.

The examiner starts leaving for longer and longer periods of time and the claimant manages even when things don't go well.

One day, the examiner writes her report in a room that the claimant has never seen. She writes that she has done all that she can do with the claimant. She thinks that it's unfortunate that he's been processed so much because at one time she believes that he was highly functional. Now, however, she recommends that he has constant maintenance and not real duties. She has an examiner in mind who can take care of him from now on.

The day comes when the examiner puts a brass plate on the house's gate with the claimant's name on it. She tells him to take a walk and everyone greets him with his new name. When he returns he finds the examiner with a woman who looks like Hilda, but the examiner calls Nancy. Then the examiner lets him in on a secret. Nancy is really Hilda, but she doesn't remember anything. Henry (the claimant) understands and feels settled with Nancy-Hilda. She is happy, too. All of this pleases the examiner.

## Analysis

In this section, readers get the sense that the claimant's future life has been determined. He's happy with his identity. He even likes the way his name sounds on his lips. He isn't curious enough to look at the reports the examiner writes about him. He's comfortable with his life so what she says doesn't really make a difference as long as he can



continue to live as he's been living. When he gets the plate on the gate of his house, he takes what seems to be a victory lap. He's made it. In his mind, he's also able to take care of others. When Hilda comes back, not remembering the past, he's there to look after her. In essence, he thinks that he is now Hilda's caretaker.

Readers may doubt that this is really the case though. Even though the examiner seems to be transparent by leaving the reports for the claimant to look at, she really is still hiding things from him. She has another room where she keeps the real reports about him. She acts as if he is doing well, but suggests that someone always monitor him in the future and says that he can't have any real responsibilities. Thus, he's a scholar. Readers know that she has requested that an examiner come who is familiar with the case. This examiner is Nancy-Hilda. So the claimant thinks he's taking care of Hilda, but she is really taking care of him.

He's happy though, so does any of this really matter? That is the question the novel raises through the examiner's last report. Is the claimant better off than he would have been if his suicide had not been assisted because, in fact, that is what's going on here. People "die" or at least exit their past lives and are reborn. The claimant's personality has been shaped much as if he were a baby being brought up by his parents. Was his "death" really in his best interest? Was the choice of treatment really the best for him? In the end he finds happiness with Nancy-Hilda because he finds something to replace his memories. Could this have been done without processing him so many times? In addition, what has he really learned? Does he know how to handle death and grief now? Does he know how to make good choice? The answer is probably, no, which is why he will always have to be monitored.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does the claimant feel better with the name Henry than with the name Martin?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you agree with the examiner's final recommendation? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does the examiner tell the claimant that Nancy is really Hilda, but she doesn't remember anything about being Hilda?

## Vocabulary

doctrinal, glean, plight, burnish, mesmerized, rancor, convalescing, staunch, demur, obfuscate, stratagem, stolid, lamentable, meager, contraption, intricate, marvelous, periwinkle, wistful, posture



# A Place You Go Last

## Summary

A nervous man, called a petitioner, has been waiting for about an hour to see a man who has the title of interlocutor. Finally the petitioner goes in and a man, who reminds him of a nice version of his grandfather starts explaining the cure for suicide. The petitioner feels that he has no choice but to continue on the path he's on, but he listens anyway. The interlocutor then explains the Process of Villages which is the way they administer the cure. He tells the petitioner that people once looked down on suicide, but now it's okay to end one's life when you no longer want to live it. He relays the story of a man who never felt as if his life fitted him. He wants to end his life, but the Interlocutor convinces him to consider the Process of Villages which would allow him to reinvent himself. The man now had the choice to start again. The petitioner was there now so that the interlocutor could learn about him and classify him and so that the petitioner could find out why he's really there.

The interlocutor continues by explaining how the process works. He tells the petitioner that people he knows will get a letter that lets them know that he will no longer be a part of their lives. The petitioner can leave at any point during their conversation, but once he starts the cure he will have to follow through with the process. The interlocutor tells him about others who have been there and explains that he has sent people home.

While the interlocutor is speaking, the petitioner realizes that he has to tell his story even though he was hoping he wouldn't have to. So he does.

His story is that of his relationship with a woman named Rana. She mets and started going out with the petitioner, whose name is Clement. He was below her social status and never felt equal to her or worthy of her attention and love. She was terminally ill when they met, but she hid this fact from him. Not knowing about her condition, he convinced her to escape the confines of the city with him and spend some time in the country. Even though she agreed, she was reluctant. They went to her family's country home.

Everyone in the villages knew her and they welcomed her return. Clement learned more about her and her family. She started to plan a future they'd never have, but he didn't know that. Clement went into town one day alone and the people she knew were nice to him. He came back and told her that because he was eager to show that he could fit in and that her people had accepted him. She told him that even though she was willing to go off with him, he could never be part of her family. They actually intermarry because they could only tolerate people like them. Their voices even have to have the same cadence.

She got weaker while they are in the country, and as she did so Clement realized that she was sick. He suggested that they go back to the city, but she said she was not



ready yet. One morning he woke up and she was dead next to him in the bed. He called her family and they picked them up. They dropped Clement off outside of the city, however.

They blamed him and were jealous that Rana had spent her last days with him. They didn't understand their relationship. To them, he was only special because he didn't know about her illness. Her family didn't even allow him to go to the funeral, which started while he was there telling the interlocutor his story. The Interlocutor says that Rana has had two funerals. Clement says that he doesn't want to live. The Interlocutor has him sign the necessary papers to go through with the process. Clement gets a shot and two orderlies take him away.

During the telling of his story, Clement asks the interlocutor whether he had ever pushed anyone towards the cure for suicide. He says that he did once, early on in his career, but it had been a mistake and he not longer did so.

## Analysis

This section serves to explain Clement's backstory and provide more information about the cure for suicide. It not only gives readers an understanding of how the process works, but also addresses the theme of assisted suicide.

"You almost died, but realized that you reached out for help." That what the examiners tell the claimants. Now readers know the type of events that causes them to enter the Process of Villages. Some come because their life doesn't fit their hopes. Some come because they have done all they have desired to do in life and don't see what else they can do, but can't just stop and do something else. Some feel that they should be living a different life, but have to get of their present life to do so. In Clement's case, his grief and inability to move on after Rana's death means that he has to do something. He wants to die, but instead of actually committing suicide, he decides to look for help -- the Process of Villages. In this section readers realize that even though the petitioner is still alive, the process is really a form of assistant suicide.

The cure for suicide is assistant suicide in the sense that the claimants no longer exist in their previous lives. They are dead to those who knew them. They are also dead to themselves. They shouldn't remember because their memory causes pain and destructive behavior. When it becomes too much for them they are fogged, a process that kills their ability to function in the real world. Biologically they are alive, but their spirit, functionality, and real self dies with each fogging.

The theme of choice is also present. While he's in the office, the petitioner can still leave. The Interlocutor also has a choice. Should he let the person go through with it or should he send him or her home? Early on, the interlocutor realized that he should not directly sway people. In essence, people come to the interlocutor asking to end their lives as they currently know them. He says yes or no. If he says yes, he kills them in the eyes of those who knew them and in their own memories.





Readers also begin to understand Clement's treatment. At first he has a young examiner, but does she remind him too much of Rana? Maybe. So his next examiner is old which also helps him learn about death and grief and forge a tighter bond with his examiner because he fears that she will die, as Rana had died.

Clement's longing to belong also makes sense now. Rana told him about how her family worked as a whole and that he would always be an outsider. He tries to show that he could belong, but she proceeded to tell him that he can't. He needs to belong though and he needs to be the one helping something instead of being helped. For him, the Villages works as a united force. He's part of it. This makes him happy. The idea of taking care of Nancy-Hilda fills his need to take care of someone. This also makes him happy. In the end, he has a life he can exist in, but even his examiners wonder if it could have been done differently.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Was Rana right not to tell Clement about her illness? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Would you continue to date someone even though you always felt as if you had to prove your worth to them?

## **Discussion Question 3**

In your opinion, did Clement make the correct choice. Why or why not?

## **Vocabulary**

interlocutor, petitioner, breakneck, deplorable, wretched, repertoire, lamentable, consonant, existential, capitulate, incontrovertible, finite, tinged, ruthlessly, valkyrie, effulgent, adamant



# The Train Was Traveling

## Summary

Examiner 2387, who readers know as Hilda, walks through a train looking for someone she's been instructed to meet. Finally she finds the person she's looking for. It's the claimant's examiner and she's asked that Hilda meet her. Hilda thanks her for that. The claimant's examiner asks Hilda to repeat what she had said to the claimant on the night she left. Hilda gets her conversations confused at first but then repeats it.

The older examiner claps and tells Hilda, who was once a claimant herself but is now an examiner, that her performance had been great and had impressed higher ups. They think that she's very talented. The claimant's examiner, however, thinks that there was more to Hilda's performance than talent. She believes that she really did love the claimant and that she had truly wanted to help him escape. She also thinks that Hilda has the type of personality that wants to rise up and will keep pushing and pushing an issue until someone stops her. She goes on to tell Hilda about the claimant's new life and asks her if wants to join him.

In essence, Hilda doesn't have a choice because she's been given her orders and the train is headed towards the claimant's village. She does have a choice, however, in the manner in the state in which she arrives and when she joins the claimant. Before letting Hilda speak, though, the older examiner tells Hilda about a play she once saw called *The Onion Knife*. It's the story of a woman who's upset with her lover because he lost her onion knife, something she told him to never do. In an effort to get it back, she puts up fliers advertising that she will lie down with whoever finds and returns her knife. This angers her lover and he wonders how she can offer to do such a thing. He tells her that he loves her and that losing the knife shouldn't be such an issue. She tells him to find the knife. The next day an older man comes to the house. He's found the knife. The woman is happy and puts the knife away and gives the man his reward. The play ends.

After telling the story, the older examiner tells Hilda that anything can be the consequence of something else and goes on to tell her that she's going to give her a choice. She goes out into the hall and comes back with a leather bag. She returns carrying a leather box and tells Hilda that the claimant has lost function since she last saw. Hilda's role is to take on the task of marriage. She's to live with the claimant and be his permanent custodian.

The older examiner knows that Hilda can do the job and she believes that the claimant also loved Hilda, but she wonders whether Hilda will be happy in her role since the claimant has lost so much function. So, she's giving Hilda the choice of arriving as she is now, going under the name of Nancy and pretending that she does not remember being Hilda and becoming his custodian or the older examiner can inject her. When Hilda wakes up, she will no longer be an examiner. She'll just be Nancy, will recover in a separate house and will join the claimant later, in a more honest fashion.



Hilda stutters, the train arrives, and the older examiner starts to say what they say to people who are about to be fogged and then she asks Hilda what she chooses.

## Analysis

This section raises the question of how much choice people really have in their lives. Do people have choice over all aspects of their lives or is their destiny already decided and people seem to have choice, but can really only choose how they will reach their final destination?

It also looks at the consequences of one's actions.

In this section readers see Hilda on a train. The train is going to the claimant's village. She is going there, there is no question about that. The only question is how will she arrive. Here she has a choice. She can go as an examiner, but that has the downfall of being with the claimant under false pretenses. Or, she can be fogged and live with him, not as an examiner, but essentially as an equal. Either way, she will arrive at the same destination. She just has to choose the path she will take to get there.

Her situation addresses the issues as to whether people really have choice or if their choice is limited. Has some higher force already decided what a person's destiny will be? Can people only decide how they will reach in predetermined outcome. This chapter seems to say that that's the way it is. Even when making choices there are trade-offs.

The other point that this section draws attention to is the fact that actions have consequences. In the story that the examiner tells, the woman's lover has to suffer the consequences of losing, and not being able to find, the onion knife. His girlfriend had warned him not to lose it, but he did anyway. Now he had to find it or suffer the consequences.

Hilda had had a role to play. She did that, but her personality caused her to play it too well. The older examiner realizes that a part of Hilda really did want the claimant to escape. For her, it wasn't just a test. She's a rebel and she'll keep on going and going until someone makes her stop. Now she has to pay the consequences for her actions. Maybe she disturbed the claimant more than she should have or maybe it's just because her actions caused the claimant to remember Rana again and feel such deep regret for turning Hilda in that he had to be fogged again, but whatever it was her actions set off a sequence of events that can't be retracted. The claimant is in the state that he's in now because of Hilda and now she has to pay the consequences by taking care of him.

## Discussion Question 1

Was it necessary for the older examiner to give Hilda the choices she gave her to make her go back to the claimant or would she have done it on her own?



## **Discussion Question 2**

Why did the older examiner tell Hilda the story of the onion knife?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What choice did Hilda make in the end?

## **Vocabulary**

disingenuous, aperture, inclination, unencumbered



# Characters

## The Claimant/Clement/Anders/Martin/Henry

The character of the claimant/Clement/Anders/Martin/Henry serves as the novel's main character. Through him and his experiences, readers learn about the cure for suicide and see the thread of the themes of choice, identity, and grief that run throughout the novel.

Clement is the claimant's real name. He's the person who sees the interlocutor in the section called "The Place You Go Last" who's first referred to as the petitioner.

He was Rana's boyfriend/lover and was asleep, next to her, when she died. When he decides to go through with the cure for suicide, he loses his given name and starts over. Clement is now dead. Fogging should erase his memory and those who knew him receive a letter making it clear that he's no longer with them. In trying to remake his life, his examiners give him different names -- representing how one's identity is tied to one's name. He had to discard the name Clement because it represents his past life, the one that is over. When he is ready to start over, because he has problems dealing with his life in his current identity, he gets a new name.

It's interesting that his given name, Clement, means "gentle." He is, in fact, a gentle man and this is the root of his problem. He's a gentle soul who feels that he's not worthy of the attention of strong women like Rana and Hilda and who's so devastated by the loss of Rana, and later Hilda, and filled with regret that he has to undergo multiple resets.

His new names try to create a manly identity for him. Anders has the connotation of manly. Martin has the connotation of warlike. These names, however, do not fit him. As Anders, Rana still dominates his memory. He doesn't want to stir things up, as Martin, when Hilda tempts him to do so. In the end, the name he feels most comfortable with is Henry, meaning "house, home, world." With this name, he gets his final name and sets up his world with Nancy/Hilda in a village that recognizes him as who he is. It's a place in which he finally fits, something that he didn't feel as if he did during the end of his life as Clement.

The claimant/Clement/Anders/Martin/Henry starts the novel as a devastated, but functional individual. In the end he's someone without pain, but also without function. Is this really living? He made a choice filled with consequences when he decided to go through with the cure for suicide. Did he make the right choice? Does pain have a purpose in our lives in that it helps shape one's identity? Can someone who is in pain even make a choice in which there is no going back? He needs to forget, but feels that he can't do it on his own. Is there a way that he could have done so as Clement?



His treatment tries to teach him the lessons that he could not master as Clement. He learns to make choices. First small ones, like where to sit and which way to go when he leaves the house. Later he's faced with bigger ones, such as whether or not to escape with Hilda. Through Hilda he also learns about regret. It is also through Hilda, though that readers realize that his heart is resilient. He is able to love again.

## Rana

Even though readers only learn about Rana through the claimant's memory, Rana is one of the novel's main characters because she's at the root of the claimant's need to start over. He just can't overcome the grief and pain he feels as a result of her death. This inability is what makes him seek the cure for suicide, and the fact that he can't move on from her memory causes him to have to be fogged to the extent that he can no longer function as a productive member of society.

In life, Rana is a well-to-do woman with a strong personality and a station in life that allows her to be haughty and selfish in a way that people accept because she has a likable personality. She's from a family that intermarries and has a brother who died "before his time" from an illness that runs in the family. When she discovers that she, herself, is terminally ill, she's determined to live as if she's fine. It's during this period that she meets Clement. He's poor and has no idea about her illness. She makes sure that no one tells him about it and plans to see him when she's feeling well so that he never suspects that she's sick.

When Clement innocently suggests that they go to the country, she commits suicide in a way by saying yes and exerting herself there, away from a doctor's care. What's even more ironic is that Clement helps her as he's the one who pushed for them to go to the country. The fact that her parents blame him and express their feelings by not even inviting him to her funeral only makes matters worse.

Rana is the woman the claimant sees in his dreams when he's Anders and the woman he envisions when he's with Hilda under the name of Martin.

## The Old Examiner

All of the examiners have a nurse/patient relationship with claimants. It's the role of the examiner to teach the claimant and reinforce life lessons that they need to learn with the hopes that they will some day function as normal human beings. It's like a nurse who helps a patient recover in a convalescence home.

This examiner seems to stay with the claimant through several moves and restarts. She's an actress who teaches the claimant through deceptive and false ways. Readers may even wonder whether she's deceiving them. Is she really old, for example? She rolls the claimant over when she first sees him with a show of strength that suggests that she's younger and when she talks to Hilda on the train, she straightens her posture and talks in a different voice.



As Hilda teaches the claimant about deceit, the older examiner lets him think that he's hiding information from her, but she knows everything. It's almost as if she's the puppet master of a puppet show. She pushes the "right" buttons at the appropriate times -- talking about lying, grief, and death. She also knows how to approach the subjects in a way that lets the claimant come to his own conclusions and she knows when to come out looking for the claimant when he's outside with Hilda.

Still, even though her methods are deceptive (the claimant never knows that everything that's going on is a test), she still cares about the claimant's well being. She disagrees with the practice of fogging claimants too much and she tries to make his, and Hilda's, lives as good as they can be. She realizes that the claimant needs a place that makes him feel that he belongs and one that lets him take a lead role (even though he's no longer able to do so in the real world).

She also realizes that Nancy/Hilda has issues even though she's now an examiner. Since Nancy/Hilda and the claimant love each other, putting them together is a good solution for both of them, so this is what she does. Readers know that she's pleased with her efforts as she clasps her hands as she watches them sit together towards the end of the novel.

## Nancy/Hilda

Readers later know Hilda as Nancy. She was originally a claimant who became an examiner. She takes part in the claimant's education when readers know him as Martin. Her job is to create doubt in Martin's (the claimant's) mind and teach him about distrust (everyone isn't who they say they are) and later, when he doesn't "escape" with her, he learns about regret -- a feeling that resonates with the reason he's there.

Hilda resembles Rana. She's free-spirited, impulsive, and in control. The claimant even thinks of Rana when he's with Hilda. He also tries to improve himself and impress her. When he realizes that he's not keeping up with conversations, he tries to do so to make himself worthy of her, as he tries to show Rana that he was worthy of her.

As Nancy, Hilda's going to have to take on a different role. She has to pretend that she doesn't remember him and that he's in control all the while taking care of him for the rest of his life.

In the end, she has the choice of taking this role in a "false" way or to truly forget everything, no longer be an examiner, and go into the relationship as the claimant's equal.

## The Interlocutor

The interlocutor is the person who implements the cure for suicide. In terms of assisted suicide, he's the one who assists those who are seeking to commit suicide -- in this case, those who want to end their current lives and start over. He learned early on not to



encourage people to take this step. Now he lets people talk. He learns about them to create a file detailing what they need to overcome based on what they couldn't handle in their past lives, and if it seems as if this is the only option for them short of actually committing suicide, he gives them the shot that starts the process.

## **Theresa (The First Examiner Readers Read About)**

Theresa is the first examiner readers meet. The claimant is her patent. It is through her that the author first introduces readers to the cure for suicide. Readers know she is good at what she does because she's been given the claimant's case due to her past success. Her kind, patient, and careful treatment of the claimant makes readers root for both hers and the claimant's success.

She realizes that the claimant's memory is coming back but does everything she can to not have to fog him again. She tries to make him think that his dreams are based on events she told him to dream, but it doesn't work because she doesn't want to fog him more than necessary. Sadly, she has no choice when he tries to hurt himself.

## **Martin (Hilda's "Husband")**

Hilda's "husband's" name is Martin. The claimant has the same name in this village. Martin is there to help teach the claimant his next lesson -- that of distrust, choice, and the ability to carve out your own identity even if others have your same name and that your name doesn't have to create your identity. Hilda's Martin has the opposite personality to that of the claimant's. The claimant is quite and gentle whereas Hilda's husband is loud and confident.

## **Rana's Family Members**

Rana's family members represent belonging. Belonging is so necessary to them that they intermarry. They never accept the claimant and even Rana tells him that he will never belong to her family.

## **The Villages**

The different villages have different personalities. In the Gentlest Village, everything is basic. It wraps claimants in a cozy blanket that has him relying on the examiner and making very simple choices. As the claimant gets better he moves to villages with different personalities and their names imply the progression. For example, after leaving the Gentlest Village claimants can enter Gentler Villages.





## **The People in the Claimant's Final Village**

Everyone in the villages is a claimant or an examiner. The claimant's are undergoing the cure. Examiners are there to work with them in various ways. They are assigned to a claimant and/or they take part in roles to help claimants.

When the claimant takes his walk around his final village, everyone knows what is going on and they greet him and make him feel at home. The claimant is happy to belong. This village is his cure.

## **The Men in the White Coats**

The men in the white coats who take the claimant away when he moves to a new village are a reminder of the sinister undertones of the cure for suicide. These men arrive mysteriously at night and remove drugged claimants. At the same time, they remind readers of the clinical elements of the cure for suicide. It's almost as if they are the men in the white coats at a mental hospital or the people taking a patient off to surgery. They are there to transport people who have some sort of medical problem.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## A Chair

The chair serves as two symbols. One is choice. There are many chairs in the house the claimant lives in and he can choose which chair to sit in. The other is the chair you decide to sit in in life. What do you choose to be your identity? Whatever it is, is the chair that you decide to sit in. There are many chairs, however, and one is free to move from one chair to another.

## A Table

What one can do with a table is another symbol for choice. The table is also used to as a symbol of what appears to be real and what is truly real. Is a brown table really brown or is it really even a table?

## The Villages

The villages symbolize lessons that the claimant needs to learn if he's going to be productive again.

## Rana's Family

Rana's family is a symbol of belonging. It is a tight knit clan that others can't penetrate. Those in the family belong. Those outside don't. Rana makes it obvious that the claimant doesn't belong. Belonging though is something that the claimant longs for.

## The Train Carrying the Old Examiner and Hilda

The train represents the journey one takes during one's life. This journey is predestined. Hilda can't choose where she's going, however. She can only choose how she gets there.

## Painting and Pictures in the Houses

The paintings and pictures in the houses are symbols of culture. They also symbolize self expression. Art is self expression and as such has many interpretations. The paintings are in the house to allow the claimant to learn that it is okay for him to express himself -- something that he may have been reluctant to do after Rana told him that he had insulted her father after expressing his opinion.



## **The Names Given to the Claimant**

The various names given to the claimant symbolize the identities the examiners are trying to give the claimant as a name symbolizes one's identity. The claimant's first name represents the nature that he still maintains in spite of the foggings. That name is Clement. He then gets names that try to make him more manly. Those don't fit, though. His final name, the one he settles with, goes back to his true identity. His last name is Henry and it means "home."

## **The Interlocutor**

The interlocutor symbolizes the person who helps someone commit suicide. Petitioners go to him, tell him about their pain, and he kills their life as they previously knew it.

## **The Cure for Suicide**

The cure for suicide is a symbol for assistant suicide. The petitioners go to someone and request that they get the cure for suicide which includes a shot that kills them in their life as they know it.

## **The Transitory Roles of the Examiners**

The different roles the examiners play symbolizes the various phases that the claimant goes through during his rebirth and the lessons he needs to learn.

## **The Claimant's Love for Hilda**

The fact that the claimant falls in love with Hilda represents the resilience of the heart. He has no memory and can only function in limited ways. He can, however, still experience love.



# Settings

## The Villages

The claimant moves from village to village. They act as a convalescence home that allows claimants to reenter life. Each village that the claimant goes to poses different challenges that he must overcome. He also gets new identities in the villages readers know that the claimant has been in. Everything is controlled in them and they are made up of claimants and examiners.

## The Interlocutor's Office

This is the place where people petition to end their lives and where, if it's agreed that this is what should be done, they do so with the assistance of the interlocutor.

## Clement's Old Apartment

When people knew the claimant as Clement, his apartment was a reflection of him. He didn't own much, had a hard time paying rent and even his few belongings were stolen. When he showed it to Rana, he only had a few pieces of furniture with stickers to show where items had been. It was nondescript, as he thought he was, and someone else (Rana in this case) had to fill it in for him -- in essence to bring it to life. The same thing happens when he's reborn. Others have to fill in his life and try to find an identity for him, as now he's the blank slate who's been robbed of his memory.

## Rana's Village in the Country

Rana's village is a place where the claimant tries to show that he's on equal footing with her. In fact, his idea to go to the country was a way to escape the identities that they had in the city. It is where she died and he also dies in villages. However, he's content in that he finally belongs.

## The Train that Hilda and the Older Examiner are On

At the end of the novel, Hilda and the older examiner are on a train that represents the journey of life and the idea of predestination versus choice. Hilda is on a journey and the route and end point have already been determined for her. Within that, however, she has the choice of the state in which she will live her life.



# Themes and Motifs

## Choice

From the very beginning of the novel, the claimant learns about choices. He can choose where to sit. This lesson is not only literal, he learns that he can really choose which chair to sit in, but also figurative as he can choose which chair to sit in in society. He doesn't have to let someone else make him feel as if he belongs in a certain place as readers learn that he did in his relationship with Rana.

Later, his examiner gives him the opportunity to make more complicated choices such as which way to turn when he leaves the house. Finally he has the ultimate choice of whether to leave with Hilda or stay. Whatever he chooses, there will be consequences and he has to learn how to deal with these. When he "turns Hilda in," he feels regret. That's the consequence of his action and is a life lesson that he has to learn.

His decision to seek the cure for suicide was also a choice. Once he decided to go through with it there was no going back, much as there was no going back for Rana once she chose to go to the country with the claimant. Both faced the consequences of their choices. One could argue that Rana truly lived while she was free in the country, but in the end, it is where she died. The claimant also dies from the viewpoint of being able to function in society, but maybe this is what he wanted after all. Maybe he couldn't escape his identity, that of a gentle man and even though others saw more in him as the examiners do and Rana and Hilda must have done, he chooses not to see it in himself and thus live a subdued life.

The novel also explores the question of how much choice people really have. At the end of the novel, the older examiner and Hilda are on a train. The train is taking Hilda to her destiny. She has no choice in where she's going and what she is to do once she gets there. She does have an element of choice, though. Her choice lies in how she's going to exist in her role. Is she going as an examiner and lead a kind of false life with the claimant or is she going as almost his equal (allowing herself to be fogged and no longer being an examiner). She can choose the state in which she arrives, but her destiny has already been decided.

## Identity and Belonging

For the claimant, identity and belonging is a major issue. He's poor, but not stupid, as exemplified by the vocabulary he uses when he tells his story towards the end of the novel. Still, he feels that he's beneath Rana and undeserving of her. This feeling is so strong that he's reluctant to take her to his apartment and it leads to his suggestion that they go to the country. He's impressed by the fact that everyone in the village in the country knows her and likes her and when he goes to the village alone, he returns with tales of how people talked to him in a manner that showed that they accepted him.



Rana, however, makes sure he knows that he'll ever belong. She tells him about her family and how he's already made a mistake in talking to her father. She tells him that they can be together, but he will only be able to go to certain family events. Her family demonstrates how much of an outsider he really is by dumping him outside of the city center (they don't want to be seen with him) and not inviting him to her funeral.

Part of the claimant's recovery involves finding an identity that will help him cope with life. His real name means gentle and he is indeed a gentle soul who feels things deeply and can't handle the regret, grief and pain that he feels as a result of Rana's death and her family's treatment of him. Examiners give him stronger names -- those that mean manly and war like -- but these don't fit him either. The one that finally suits him is the one that means home and house, Henry.

In a way he's come full circle as this is also a gentle sort of name. It's as if the process can erase his memory, but not his true self. In the end, he's happy because he belongs to the village, just as Rana belonged to her village and her family.

## **The Role of Grief and Pain in One's Life**

The novel treats grief and pain as things that are a natural part of life and as such are things that people should expect to enter their lives. This concept does not only apply to the grief and pain caused by the death of a loved one, but also to the grief and pain caused by the end of a relationship.

The examiner tells the claimant that "all bonds are conditional." He shouldn't get bogged down in memories. However, this is exactly what he does and this weakness leads to the constant need to fog him. The interlocutor basically gives him the same advice when he says "memory is not the heart of the endeavor." Forgetting is a good thing. It helps humans move on. Pain, in fact, shapes a person's character.

The claimant, however, is so caught up in feelings of grief, that he feels for the examiner because he realizes that she is old and could die soon, even though she shows no signs of being sick. This thought draws him closer to her -- so close in fact that he decides to stay with her instead of running away with the woman he loves, Hilda. Still, turning Hilda in made him feel regret which causes him pain and he has to be fogged again.

The claimant simply can't let go and that's one of the reasons he can't function in society. He never learns how to handle grief and pain.

## **Assistant Suicide**

The novel's title, "A Cure for Suicide" leads readers to believe that in some way those who want to commit suicide are cured so they don't do any harm to themselves. In reality, the cure for suicide can be viewed as a form of assisted suicide.



Petitioners are people who come to ask that the interlocutor end their life as they know it. He assists them by giving them a shot. It doesn't kill them physically, but it erases their memories and identities. When done often enough it makes them unable to function as members of society in the real world. So they must exist in fake wonderlands created specifically for them.

The interlocutor says that he made the mistake once of encouraging a person to go through with the cure for suicide. However, does he do the right thing by letting those who come to see him go through with it just because they can't deal with the circumstances of their lives? Even the examiners think that it is not good for the claimants to be fogged as many times as they are.

While the cure for suicide has good intentions, are the results really the best for the claimants? Is it just an easy way out for those in pain -- pain that isn't even physical in nature? Should anyone else assist someone in their death? The examiners know that each time they fog someone, they are killing them a bit more. The readers see that the examiners try their best to avoid fogging him and do so only when it's absolutely necessary because of his actions. While the claimant is still living, the cure for suicide is harming him, as he's losing functions every time he's fogged. The examiner even laments that he could have been a functional member of society, but in the end can't be given any responsibilities and must always be taken care of.

Is it right for other people to do this to someone? Do the people who request it really understand the consequences and the fact that there's no going back once they decide to go down that road? As unlikely as it may seem at the time, those who are in chronic pain or are faced with a terminal illness could be ending their lives prematurely by asking someone to help them die. A cure could be found and one often hears of people who were told that they only had months to live but were still alive years later.

Then there's the guilt that one imposes on those who assist in the suicide. When Rana agrees to go to the country with the claimant, she's in essence committing suicide and the claimant is assisting her by taking her away from the place in which she can get medical assistance if needed and putting her in a place where she exerts herself more than normal. Even though he has no idea that she's sick at first, he's full of regret when she dies. Do those who assist in suicide feel regret afterwards and how do they deal with it?

The claimant's story shows one answer to these questions. He can't live with his grief and regret. His choice to go through with the cure ends with what some may see as his demise, but he is settled and has finally seems to reach a point of calm. So the real question is -- can anyone judge for someone else?



## How to Live and the Consequences of Starting Over

The concept behind the cure for suicide gives people who want to end their lives for whatever reason an option that doesn't involve physical death. They can simply have their memories erased and start over.

People choose this option for different reasons. Some people do it because they've already reached the pinnacle of their career, but are bored. As their identity is set in such a strong mold, it would be impossible for them to toss it all away and start on a different track. The option, though, of having the people they know realize that they are "dead" to them, but still allowing them to start anew seems to be the perfect solution. Some choose this route because they were born with social disadvantages and got off to a wrong start as a result. Still other choose it because of life events that make them want to wipe everything out and start anew.

What are the consequences of starting over, however? Living in this day and time is different from the past when things were more simple and transparent. Fitting in means conspiring, as the examiners do and as Rana does when she creates a world in which she's healthy and plans a future that she knows she and the claimant will never have, all the while leaving the claimant in the dark. Relationships these days are conditional, as the examiner tires to teach the claimant. This is the world the claimant has come from. This is what he needs to learn if he's to return as a functional human being.

While the examiners try to teach him these lessons, there are serious consequences associated with the process. When memories return they are fogged, a process that erases memory but also erases functions. The claimant chooses this method, but in the end he's not the person he could have been, Even the examiner says so. He's essentially a zombie. Not one who feeds off other, but one who lives in the lull of the cure.

Is this a good thing or does it depend on the person? Hilda seems to recoil at the thought of being fogged again, yet the claimant seems to be perfectly happy in his world. However, is his world really living?

Can some people really not handle life's challenges these days? What should be done with these people -- those who don't want to kill themselves, but need to learn how to deal with life? Is the cure for suicide a good concept with a faulty implementation in that people lose function?

While one may wish to start over, doing so has consequences and once the process starts, there's no going back. Is it better just to learn how to live with the cards you're dealt? This is something that readers must decide for themselves.





# Styles

## Point of View

The author starts the narrative using a third person point of view. In doing so, he lets readers into the village and allows them to learn lessons as the claimant learns them. He also give readers the same sense of mystery the claimant has. Why is he there? What is happening? Readers learn to trust the examiner as she and her notes are the only way for them to learn about the claimant's process.

The third person narration lets readers view the protagonist in a voice that's the story's not the character's.

Things change, however, when readers finally learn the claimant's backstory. Then it is important to learn about the claimant's character. This is best done through the claimant's own voice. He needs to tell his own story. Thus the point of view switches from third person to first person as the claimant makes his case to the interlocutor, himself, and the reader that the cure for suicide is his best option.

## Language and Meaning

As the claimant is a patient who has no memory and is undergoing rebirth and learning how to deal with life much as a child does, the language is simple in the parts of the novel in which the claimant is in the villages. He's given professions, but nothing very difficult or technical. Thus, the word choices are not technical or filled with jargon. The dialogue is sparse. It mimics that of a patient in rehabilitation after some type of injury when they have to be taught step-by-step how to perform activities they used to know how to do or a child who is learning about aspects of life.

There is a drastic change in language when the claimant tells his own story. The language in this part of the book is rich. The contrast between the sparse dialogue when the claimant is a patient and the rich language before he undergoes the cure, shows the potential that he had and highlights the devastating results of the cure. The claimant went from being an intelligent man with deep thoughts to a vegetable.

The use of language artfully raises the issue as to rather the cure for suicide is really a cure after all.

## Structure

The novel starts after the claimant has started the cure for suicide process. It contains several chapters within a section called "The Process of Villages." Each chapter in this part consists of sparse dialogue that is broken up so that readers don't have to take in too much at once, much like the patient himself. The chapters also divide based on the

claimant's situation. New chapters correspond to chapters in his life after being fogged. These sections contain a lot of white space, making the pages easy to read and given them a clean look -- much like a hospital.

The author then stops the narration and switches to the past and the claimant's story in "The Place You Go Last." This section not only jolts the reader by switching the narration from third person to first person, but also because of the writing style change. All of a sudden the sparse dialogue and one sentence paragraphs end. The claimant tells all in a run on monologue. In essence, he spills his guts, only taking a breather as designated by the presence of lines.

Once readers understand why the claimant is where he is, the author gives insight into as to why Hilda comes back as Nancy. Here the author returns to the sparse dialogue because here readers return to the world of the process. In addition, Hilda was once a claimant and the older examiner explains the current situation to her as if she were still one.



## Quotes

The feeling of longing and sadness,' continued the examiner. 'It is part of life's balance, to give things their proper worth.

-- The Examiner (1, Part 7 paragraph 31)

**Importance:** This quote supports the theme that experiencing grief and sadness is part of life.

You can be strong and delight in all the fine things that you invent -- all the fine things you did together. And you can imagine how a person might use this process to get over a difficult grief, and live a happy life.

-- The Examiner (1, Part 7 paragraph 31)

**Importance:** In this quote, the examiner tries to help the claimant learn how to deal with his memories of Rana in a healthy way.

It isn't sadness that you feel. Sadness is a feeling of loss. There is something one wanted, and one doesn't have it -- or there is a way one wanted things to be, and things aren't that way. That is sadness. Instead you feel rootlessness.

-- The Examiner (2, Part 6 paragraph 11)

**Importance:** Here the examiner shows the need for people to feel attached to something in order to be fulfilled. The claimant's life and identity was wrapped around Rana. Now that she's dead, he doesn't feel attached to anything. Part of his rebirth and recovery involves establishing a sense of belonging and identity. The process tries to give him this through his name, professions, and the villages he lives in as well as making sure he always has something to do.

Much of the speech we do is largely meaningless and is just meant to communicate and validate small emotional contracts.

-- The Examiner (2, Part 6 paragraph 42)

**Importance:** Later in the novel, readers learn about a conversation that the claimant had with Rana's father in which he expressed his opinion. Rana later tells him that his response showed how he could never fit in with her family. By telling the claimant about the nature of conversations, the examiner is trying to teach him that he doesn't always have to respond to everyone and explain himself. Sometimes it's just enough to listen because conversation is one way in which people validate emotional contacts.

There are some doors -- when you go through them, they close behind you.

-- The Examiner (2, Part 7 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** This quote relates to the theme of choice and consequences. One has choices, but they also have to remember that once they make some choices, they can't go back and must face the consequences of that choice. She talks about this in terms of



what she thinks of when she wears different costumes and plays different roles. This is an idea she repeats when she talks to Hilda at the end of the novel. The younger examiner's actions in the role of Hilda set her on a road that she now must travel.

It means that they have declared that the other is of great importance to him or her. Life is life. It is not the sets of rules people make.

-- The Examiner (3, Part 2 paragraph 15)

**Importance:** In saying this, the examiner is trying to teach the claimant that loss and pain is part of life. Something may exist today, but as people can make choices and life is fluid, they can choose something else at a later date. When it comes to couples, one might choose one person today and another one at some later point. As long as people remember that bonds are conditional, they won't be hurt and take is personally when something like that happens.

Do you know the law? The simplest explanation is always the correct one."

-- The Examiner (3, Part 2 paragraph 24)

**Importance:** This quote implies that it's best to accept things at face value -- to see them for what they are instead of making assumptions and trying to put a spin on them.

The examiner always said, distrust things that are too easy.

-- The Claimant (3, Part 5 paragraph 30)

**Importance:** This goes to the root of the claimant's current situation. Things are easy for him. Too easy. He doesn't have to do a thing. His existence is also full of manipulation. The point of his current village is to raise his awareness of the fact that it's not natural for things to be too easy. When they are, something's not right. He's learning about distrust and the lessons are taking place in the house as he talks to the other Martin and Hilda.

It would be dirt, that's all. Just dirt. Not even worth putting in one's mouth.

-- Hilda (3, Part 15 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** The claimant wants to learn more about Hilda by knowing what her name was before she had become a claimant. She tells him that it was not even worth saying implying that she was nothing before.

But if life is just that, just being reasonable, then there is nothing in it -- nothing worthwhile. So, the yearning that we have to keep dead things living -- or to make unreasonable things reasonable. That is why a person should live.

-- The Claimant (3, Part 29 paragraph 17)

**Importance:** The claimant is in the midst of becoming aware of what's going on around him and is happening to him. He's also becoming aware of how people deal with death and is trying to make sense of it all. His statement shows his romantic view of life. Just before that, he says that when someone is dead, it's best to move on, but at the same



time, if life is just making things reasonable, then there is no point living it. This is his problem. He doesn't see the paradox in what he has just said. He thinks both sides are incomplete -- meaning that he can justify them in his mind.

You will do it because it is a part of life also that you must train for -- to have a strong will and be able to turn down good things.

-- The Examiner (4, Part 5 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** The claimant felt as if he was beneath Rana, yet he willingly took all that she gave him. He kept the furniture she bought for his apartment. He had no problem staying in her family's house in the country even though going to the country was his idea. This is one of the reasons he always felt as if he was the lesser of the couple. With a stronger will, he would have been able to turn down her gift of furniture as well as her offer to stay in her family house in the country and maybe worked to provide things himself. His acceptance of Rana's gifts also taint her family's opinion of him and their relationship. They see him as someone who's not only ignorant of her illness but someone who takes advantage of her position in life.

Forgetting is the precious balm that helps us to travel on, past the depredations of memory.

-- Ther Interlocutor (A Place You Go Last, Part 4 paragraph Line 15)

**Importance:** The interlocutor has detected the claimant's problem and tries to tell him that forgetting is what helps humans continue on and endure harsh memories.