

The Elegance of the Hedgehog Study Guide

The Elegance of the Hedgehog by Muriel Barbery

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Plot Summary

The *Elegance of the Hedgehog* is a novel by writer Muriel Barbery. In this novel, Renee Michel is a concierge who believes that every concierge is perceived as unintelligent by those for whom they work. For this reason, Renee goes to great lengths to hide the fact that she often spends her days reading Marx and Tolstoy. It is not until Renee meets new tenant, Kakuro Ozu, that she finally finds a person with whom she can truly be herself. At the same time, Paloma Josse is struggling with the same sort of identity crisis. She is a highly intelligent girl who feels she must hide her real thoughts from those who do not understand her. In befriending both Renee and Kakuro, Paloma finds a way to relate to the outer world and find pleasure in life. The *Elegance of the Hedgehog* is a novel of personal identity that will inspire the reader to face life head on, rather than hiding behind masks that are designed to deceive not only the outside world, but ourselves as well.

Renee Michel is a concierge who goes to great lengths to hide her extraordinary intelligence from the tenants of the building where she works. When Renee's husband was alive, it was easy for her to hide her intelligence through his common habits, but after his death, Renee has found it more difficult to hide her lack of interest in television and her love of Marx and Tolstoy. However, Renee has found that the wealthy prefer to ignore what is right in front of their eyes and instead believe in what they perceive to be true. In this way, Renee has been able to hide just under the radar for more than twenty years.

In the building where Renee works, there is a twelve-year-old girl who has decided to end her life on her thirteenth birthday. Paloma Josse, the daughter of a diplomat and his bored wife, feels as though no one ever sees the true her. Paloma has decided that it would be easier to end her life than to continue fighting for some kind of recognition from her parents, sister, and peers. Therefore Paloma has chosen to end her life after setting fire to her parents' apartment in an attempt to force her family to see beyond their great wealth.

After the death of a tenant in the building, the widow decides to sell the apartment. This creates a great deal of excitement because there has not been a new tenant in the building in more than two decades. When Renee is introduced to the new tenant, Kakuro Ozu, she makes an offhand comment that alerts Kakuro to her love of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Kakuro is intrigued and later invites Renee to dinner in his apartment. At the same time, Kakuro befriends Paloma after learning that she is studying Japanese in school.

Renee and Kakuro become great friends. Renee is relieved to finally have a friend with whom she can be completely herself and who understands and shares her interests in literature, art, and philosophy. However, Renee struggles to reconcile herself with this relationship because her past has taught her that the social classes cannot mix without leading to some kind of disaster. Therefore, when Kakuro asks Renee to dinner at a restaurant to celebrate his birthday, she turns him down.



Paloma, who has begun coming to Renee's apartment to escape the chaos of her own home, forces Renee to share her reasons for refusing Kakuro's invitation. When Renee relates the story of how her sister died after being used and deserted by a rich man, Paloma goes to Kakuro with the information. Much to Renee's surprise, Kakuro assures Renee that she is not her sister and he has no plans to use and abuse her. Renee suddenly finds herself looking forward to the future for the first time. However, Renee's future is cut short when she is hit by a truck. Paloma, filled with grief by Renee's death, promises not to take her life, but to learn from Renee's experiences and live a fulfilling life.



Preamble, Marx: Chapters 1-2 and Profound Thought No. 1

Preamble, Marx: Chapters 1-2 and Profound Thought No. 1 Summary

This novel was originally written by Muriel Barbery in French. The translation was written by Alison Anderson.

In Chapter 1, the son of a tenant in the building where Renee Michel is the concierge comments that Marx has changed the way he sees the world. Renee suggests that he read *The German Ideology*. The young man stares at Renee as though she has gone insane because concierges are not supposed to understand such things. Renee quickly tells him to say hello to his mother, content in the fact that his wealthy outlook on life will allow him to forget what Renee had said previously.

In Chapter 2, Renee has been concierge of the building at number 7, rue de Grenelle for more than twenty years. All of Renee's clients are exceptionally wealthy, therefore they have the belief that all concierges, who are far below them in social class, are unintelligent. Renee likes to keep up this charade, therefore she hides her intelligence by leaving the television on all day and keeping conversations with clients to a bare minimum. However, Renee loves to read, is a big fan of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, and is currently making her way through several writers on philosophy.

In *Profound Thought No. 1*, Paloma Josse is a very intelligent and precocious twelve-year-old girl. Paloma knows that her future as a wealthy person will require her to live in something of a gold fish bowl. For this reason, Paloma has decided to end her life on her thirteenth birthday. As a great fan of everything Japanese, Paloma at first thought of committing suicide in Japanese tradition, but ruled it out because she has no desire to suffer. Instead, Paloma intends to take an overdose of her mother's sleeping pills after setting fire to her family's apartment to rid the world of this example of wealth.

Preamble, Marx: Chapters 1-2 and Profound Thought No. 1 Analysis

In the preamble, the author has introduced her two main characters and the conflict that will propel the plot of the novel. The first main character is Renee Michel, a highly intelligent woman who has had the misfortune of being born poor. Renee has it in her mind that poor people are not supposed to be intelligent, therefore she hides her intelligence from the people around her, going to great lengths to create an appearance that shows lack of intelligence and imagination as well as a general disinterest in the world around her. To the contrary, Renee is quite intelligent, taking great joy from



reading literature and philosophy, as well as watching artistic movies and studying great art. Renee is a complex person who hides her intelligence behind a mask to keep the world from intruding on her carefully created world.

At the same time, the reader is introduced to Paloma, a twelve-year-old girl who is also highly intelligent. Paloma feels as though her life as the daughter of wealthy people places her in a fishbowl where she does not want to be. Paloma too feels as though the world perceives her in a particular way, but that her true person is not the one in which people see. For this reason, Paloma has chosen to end her life on her thirteenth birthday.

The crisis that will propel the plot in this novel is self-identity. Neither of the main characters of this novel feel as though they can or are perceived by the person they truly are on the inside. Both feel the need to hide for one reason or another. The book, therefore, will take the reader along as each character finds a way to deal with their secrets and their reality.



Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 1-4, Journal of the Movement No. 1 and Profound Thought No. 2

Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 1-4, Journal of the Movement No. 1 and Profound Thought No. 2 Summary

Renee has tea with her friend, Manuela. Manuela is a maid who works for several of the families at number 7, rue de Grenelle. Manuela is from Portugal and is always scheming to go back. Renee thinks of Manuela as an aristocrat who is too refined for her current station in life. As Renee and Manuela gossip about the tenants in the building, Pierre Arthens, a local food critic and tenant in the building, stops by to ask Renee to bring a package to him when it arrives. Renee is somewhat annoyed with Arthens speaks to her as though she is unintelligent.

Journal of the Movement of the World No. 1. While reluctantly watching rugby with her father, Paloma notices how one of the players seems to move without motion. Paloma is fascinated by this man and decides that before she dies she will try to seek out as many of these types of movement without motion as she can.

Renee has never had any formal education, though there was once a teacher who took special interest in her. Since Renee's family was one that never spoke or showed affection, Renee was deeply affected by this teacher, which led to her interest in learning. However, Renee was forced to leave school at the age of twelve to work in the fields on her family farm.

Renee thinks of concierges as poodles, an ugly dog that is annoying, but somewhat necessary. Renee was once married, but her husband died many years ago. Renee feels it was easier to keep up her charade of unintelligent concierge when her husband was alive because he was a common man who did not share her interests in literature, art, and philosophy. Renee still recalls how surprised she was that her husband would be interested in her, an unattractive, but intelligent young woman. Renee still remembers how her husband told her what he wanted in a wife and how it changed her thoughts of herself. Renee compares her marriage to that of the Greniers, a couple who keeps house for the Arthens, and feels she married well.

In Profound Thought No. 2, Paloma tells the reader that her family is a group of people who have lost the ability to feel emotion.



In Chapter 4, Renee has been reading Husserl and his thoughts on phenomenology. However, Renee admits that Husserl is beyond her comprehension despite her extensive reading on philosophy.

Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 1-4, Journal of the Movement No. 1 and Profound Thought No. 2 Analysis

The author introduces Manuela in this section of chapters. Manuela is a maid with whom Renee is friends. In fact, Manuela is Renee's only friend. With Manuela Renee does not have to hide as much of her true self and she feels happy sharing her thoughts and feelings with Manuela. In Renee's mind, Manuela is much like her because she carries herself like an aristocrat even though she is a maid. In this way, Renee feels that Manuela is a step above her and yet still gracious enough to be her friend. This friendship will play an important role in the novel.

Renee tells the reader what she thinks of the tenants of her building. Renee is not terribly impressed with most of the tenants, looking down on them because they are so filled with their own beliefs that they cannot see what is right in front of them. For this reason, Renee feels somewhat superior to the wealthy tenants of the building. Renee also tells the reader how she is mainly uneducated, only learning how to read because a teacher took special interest in the affection starved child she once was. This too is how Renee ended up married to her husband, because he saw past the masks and her ugliness to see the woman underneath. Renee feels that although her husband was not her intellectual equal, he was a good man and they had a good marriage. This is an important distinction to Renee and the reader should make notice of it. It is clear to the reader at this point that like her tenants, Renee has certain thoughts of what it means to be of a certain social class and it is she, not others, who is placing her in a box.

Paloma continues her journals, discussing the strange phenomenon of movement without motion. Paloma also discusses her family, three people whom Paloma sees as lacking strong emotion. Paloma compares her family to her pet cats, giving the reader the impression that like Renee, Paloma sees herself as better than those around her but suppressed by them anyway.



Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 5-10, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 2 and Profound Thoughts Nos. 3-5

Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 5-10, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 2 and Profound Thoughts Nos. 3-5 Summary

In Profound Thought No. 3, Paloma hears a statement at a dinner party that she believes is totally wrong, but which comes with another profound thought. Paloma realizes that in the world it is words that have power, not deeds.

In Chapter 5, Renee has decided that phenomenology is a fraud. Renee has studied Husserl and decided that it is a bunch of nonsense.

In Chapter 6., Renee uses Kant to further her argument against phenomenology.

In Chapter 7, Renee and Manuela are having tea again and they gossip about Madame de Broglie, another tenant of the building. This leads to a discussion about Neptune, Madame de Broglie's sad and deprived dog.

In Journal of the Movement of the World No. 2., Paloma relates how she saw Neptune, Madame de Broglie's dog, attempt to mate with Athena, a cocker spaniel belonging to another tenant named Diane Badoise. As the two owners waited for the elevator with their dogs, Neptune mounted Athena. The two owners tried to separate the dogs and Madame Badoise injured her ankle in the process. Paloma finds the entire episode amusing.

In Chapter 8, although Renee is a big fan of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, she also enjoys modern fiction such as Michael Connelly. Renee also likes modern cinema.

In Chapter 9, one of Renee's favorite movies is the Hunt for Red October. Not only does Renee find this movie to be of exceptional quality, but it is also the last movie she saw with her husband before his death of cancer.

In Profound Thought No. 4, Paloma thinks the only important thing to her mother is her plants and that she ignores everything else. Paloma's mother has been in therapy and taking anti-anxiety drugs for more than ten years.

In Chapter 10, Chabrot, Pierre Arthens' personal physician, rings at Renee's loge and tells her that Maître Arthens is dying. Chabrot is polite and requests that Renee not allow anyone up to see the Arthens except for his nephew.



In *Profound Thought No. 5*, Paloma believes that life is a constant battle in which the only way to learn is to crush all opponents. Paloma's sister Columbe has taught her this. Paloma feels as though it is Columbe's goal in life to crush her.

Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 5-10, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 2 and Profound Thoughts Nos. 3-5 Analysis

In these chapters, Renee tells the reader more about her intelligence by indulging in a discussion of Husserl's phenomenology and why she believes it all a fraud. Later, Renee makes excuses for her enjoyment of simple fiction and movies by relating a touching story about the last time she and her husband saw a movie together. This gives the reader not only insight into Renee's psyche, but also the emotional turmoil that has caused her to become a recluse in her own world.

As the reader learns more about Renee, the reader also learns more about Paloma. In Paloma's journal entries, it soon becomes clear that she feels persecuted by her sister and ignored by her mother, both normal teenager complaints. However, these complaints are compounded by Paloma's incredible intelligence and insight into the world. Paloma feels as if no one truly sees her or understands her, the opposite of what she claims is her reason for wanting to commit suicide, leading the reader to better understand that Paloma is a normal child with normal complaints, a child with similar emotional baggage to that which Renee carries around. These two characters clearly have a great deal in common.



Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 11-18, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 3 and Profound Thoughts Nos. 6-8

Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 11-18, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 3 and Profound Thoughts Nos. 6-8 Summary

In Chapter 11, Manuela comes early for tea because of Maître Arthens' condition. Manuela tells Renee how she saw Arthens daughter on the stairs. This causes Renee to remember Arthens son, a spoiled young man who had a problem with drugs. Renee remembers how he asked her once the name of the flowers she had planted outside the building. Renee recalls how he asked about the flowers and she told him they were called camellias.

In Profound Thought No. 6, Paloma thinks Maître Arthens is a bad man and finds it interesting that news of his death has caused such excitement throughout the building. Paloma also begins to drink tea in the morning, finding it more sophisticated than her father's morning coffee.

In Chapter 12, the impending death of Arthens causes Renee to reflect on the meaning of life. Renee feels that art gives meaning to life.

In Chapter 13, Renee has recently been introduced to the films of a Japanese filmmaker called Ozu. Renee is particularly fond of a movie called The Munekata Sisters. Renee feels that many of scenes are filled with breathtaking metaphor.

In Journal of the Movement of the World No. 3., Paloma is fascinated with television and recently saw a diving contest in which she felt profoundly moved by the failure of two divers to dive at exactly the same time and speed.

In Chapter 14, Chabrot comes to Renee's loge to let her know that Arthens has died and the mortuary will be coming for him soon. As Chabrot leaves, Renee can hear someone playing a Japanese tune on a piano. Renee feels this is very suited to the occasion.

Chapter 15. The Rich Man's Burden. As Renee contemplates her decision to live in solitude, another tenant rings her bell. Renee takes a note from her visitor that has come from another tenant, asking that she pick up some items from the dry cleaner's. Renee is astounded by the bad grammar of the note.

In Profound Thought No. 7, Paloma is punished when her sister boyfriend, Tibere, and his parents come for dinner because she corrects the father on his description of the Japanese game Go.



In Chapter 16, Olympe Saint-Nice is a tenant in the building. Olympe wants to be a veterinarian someday, so whenever an animal in the building is sick they take it to Olympe. Olympe and Renee are friends. Olympe comes to Renee and tells her how Constitution, the Josse's cat, came down with a bladder infection. What Olympe finds truly amusing is that the vet diagnosed Olympe with an anxiety disorder and put her on Prozac.

In Chapter 17, Renee learns that Arthens' widow is going to sell their apartment. This will be the first sale of an apartment in the building in Renee's tenure because most of the apartments have passed down from family member to family member. Later, on her way to the market, Renee runs into Gegene, a local homeless man who often hangs around the building. Renee tells him about Arthens' death and is surprised by Gegene's profound grief.

In Chapter 18, Renee finds herself thinking of Ryabinin, one of her favorite characters from Anna Karenina, as she struggles with her emotions regarding life and death.

In Profound Thought No. 8, Paloma reflects on a visit to her father's mother at the new rest home where she has been relocated. Paloma finds it unfair that her grandmother, who is an unpleasant person, will live out her life in a very expensive home while some kind person who happens to be poor will be forced to live out his life in less luxurious accommodations. Paloma also finds it difficult to understand her father's guilt for placing his mother in a home, especially such a nice one.

Part 1, Camellias: Chapters 11-18, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 3 and Profound Thoughts Nos. 6-8 Analysis

One of the tenants of the building where Renee lives is dying. Renee is surprised by this man's unexpected illness and death, causing her to think about mortality and the meaning of life. Although Renee does not truly like any of her tenants, she admires Arthens because his clear affection for words. Renee also pities Arthens to a small degree because his only son is a drug addict. Renee recalls the young Arthens asking her about the flowers she has planted outside her loge, a fact that will prove to be important later in the novel.

Paloma also finds herself thinking about mortality and the meaning of life. However, where Renee comes to the conclusion that art makes life worth living, Paloma finds multiple reasons why life is meaningless. Paloma points out numerous inequalities about life and uses them as reasons why she should continue with her plan to commit suicide.

Another character is introduced in these chapters. Olympe Saint-Nice is one of the few tenants who are nice to Renee and they have built a friendship based on their common

love of animals. Olympe is truly a good soul and her relationship with Renee will have importance later in the novel.



Part 2, On Grammar: Chapters 1-6 and Profound Thought Nos. 9-11

Part 2, On Grammar: Chapters 1-6 and Profound Thought Nos. 9-11 Summary

In Chapter 1, one of the tenants of the building, Jacinthe Rosen, introduces Renee to the new tenant of the building. Renee does not hear the man's last name, but is fascinated that the man is Japanese because of her recent interest in Ozu movies. Just as Madame Rosen and the new tenant are leaving, Renee makes a comment about happy families that is a quote from Anna Karenina. The new tenant recognizes it and finishes the quote.

In Chapter 2, as Renee fears that she has given herself away to the new tenant, someone knocks on the door. The visitor is Paul Nguyen, the new tenant's assistant. Paul tells Renee that the new tenant's name is Kakuro Ozu. Renee is shocked that the man shares the names of her favorite author on traditional Japanese teas and her favorite filmmaker.

In Profound Thought No. 9, Paloma finds it interesting that a tenant who has never befriended her mother before because of a difference in politics, suddenly wants to have tea with her mother because the Josses live above the Arthens' former apartment where a great deal of construction is going on for the new tenant.

In Chapter 3, Manuela tells Renee that Monsieur Ozu has fired the Grelier, but has decided to keep Manuela at an increased rate. Manuela is happy because this means she can stop working for Madame Pallieres. Manuela then describes the construction going on in Ozu's apartment. When Renee learns the names of Monsieur Ozu's cats, Levin and Kitty, she suddenly realizes that Monsieur Ozu has a similar affection for Anna Karenina.

In Chapter 4, Renee thinks of how sliding doors in a house offer more continuity than the conventional doors in most French homes. Renee admires Monsieur Ozu for putting sliding doors in his apartment.

In Profound Thought No. 10, Paloma relates how she contradicted a teacher in class who told a student that learning grammar was important because it helped a person get along in society. Paloma tells the teacher that grammar is important because it helps a person learn and understand the beauty of language. The teacher did not appreciate Paloma's view.

In Chapter 5, Manuela continues her discussion of Monsieur Ozu's apartment by mentioning that he has nothing superfluous in his apartment. Renee finds this refreshing while other tenants of the building find it odd.



In Chapter 6, a courier delivers a package to Renee. Inside is an expensive book.

In *Profound Thought No. 11*, Paloma relates a tea date with Kakuro Ozu, whom she previously met in an elevator at the building. Paloma and Ozu talk about Renee and both agree that there is more to her than she allows people to see. They agree to work together to learn the truth about Renee.

Part 2, On Grammar: Chapters 1-6 and *Profound Thought Nos. 9-11* Analysis

A new tenant moves into the building for the first time in more than two decades. This causes a great deal of excitement in all the tenants of the building as well as the employees. Paloma finds it ridiculous until she learns the new tenant is Japanese. Paloma is fascinated with Japanese culture and is happy to befriend the new tenant. At the same time, Renee finds the tenant fascinating, but is concerned that she has revealed too much of herself at their first meeting. Renee is caught between her desire to seek out a fellow fan of *Anna Karenina* and keeping intact her persona of an unintelligent concierge.

As Paloma's relationship with the new tenant grows, she finds in him a kindred spirit. Paloma also discovers that, like her, Monsieur Ozu has doubts about the concierge's apparent lack of intelligence. Paloma once saw Renee with a philosophy book similar to one her sister uses to study for her master's degree in philosophy. For this reason, Paloma agrees to help Monsieur Ozu seek out the truth, giving her a purpose and foreshadowing a meeting between the two main characters of the novel.



Part 3, Summer Rain: Chapters 1-7, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 4 and Profound Thought No. 12

Part 3, Summer Rain: Chapters 1-7, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 4 and Profound Thought No. 12 Summary

In Chapter 1, Renee finds a book in the package delivered to her, an expensive copy of Anna Karenina. The note with the book is from Kakuro Ozu. Renee is so shocked by this gift that she quickly writes a thank you note. When Renee realizes she should have turned the gift down to protect her concierge identity, she discovers that it is too late to take the note back.

In Chapter 2, Kakuro Ozu comes to Renee's door and asks her to dinner. Again Renee is so shocked that she agrees.

In Chapter 3, Renee feels exposed before Kakuro Ozu.

In Chapter 4, Renee tells Manuela about dinner with Kakuro Ozu. Manuela instructs Renee to get her hair done and asks what she plans to wear. Manuela is surprised that Renee does not have a suitable dress for dinner.

In Chapter 5, the next morning Manuela brings Renee a beige dress she has borrowed from her neighbor and good friend who is a dress maker. Renee is bothered that the dress was made for a woman who is now dead, but takes it anyway.

In Journal of the Movement of the World No. 4, Paloma is overwhelmed by the sound of her school's choir in concert. Paloma wonders if the true movement of the world might not be voices raised in song.

In Chapter 6, for the first time in her life, Renee goes to a hairdresser and has her hair cut and styled. Renee is amazed by the fluffy result. Back at home, Renee hides her new hairstyle under a handkerchief to do her work.

In Chapter 7, Renee puts on the dress and shows Manuela. Manuela is impressed and assures Renee she looks perfect for a dinner with Kakuro Ozu. Manuela then shares her joy at having quit her job with Madame Pallieres.

In Profound Thought No. 12, Paloma and her friend, Marguerite, have tea with Kakuro Ozu and his great-niece, Yoko. Paloma watches Yoko and realizes she cannot predict where life will take her as she can with many of her own friends and peers. This makes Paloma feel hope.



Part 3, Summer Rain: Chapters 1-7, Journal of the Movement of the World No. 4 and Profound Thought No. 12 Analysis

Renee realizes that she has been found out by Kakuro Ozu and it sends her into shock. Renee does not know how to deal with a wealthy person who is observant and actually sees her. For this reason, Renee accepts a gift from Kakuro and agrees to have dinner with him. However, the preparations for dinner alone show Renee what a difference there is in her life as compared to Kakuro's. It also highlights for her how isolated she has been for the last fifteen years of her life since her husband's death.

At the same time, Paloma continues to observe the world and attempt to find meaning in it. What Paloma finds is that her life is not as set in stone as she always thought and that there truly is beauty in the world. To the reader, these things seem like reasons for hope, reasons to live, but Paloma has not yet made that leap.



Part 3, Summer Rain: Chapters 8-18, Journal of the Movement of the World Nos. 5-6 and Profound Thought No. 13

Part 3, Summer Rain: Chapters 8-18, Journal of the Movement of the World Nos. 5-6 and Profound Thought No. 13 Summary

In Chapter 8, Renee is careful not to be seen by any of the other tenants as she makes her way to Kakuro's apartment.

In Chapter 9, Renee is surprised to find a reproduction of one of her favorite paintings on the wall in Kakuro's entry way. It occurs to Renee that she should dumb down her interest in the painting to continue hiding her true intellect.

In Chapter 10, Renee thinks about the congruence of art.

In Chapter 11, Renee thinks about the purpose of art.

In Journal of the Movement of the World No. 5, Paloma's mother takes her to see the mother's therapist because of an offhand comment Paloma made to her father. Paloma is fascinated by the therapist because he does not move even when he talks. Paloma tries to make him move, finally finding success by threatening to spread rumors about him. Paloma is disturbed by the therapist's violent reaction even though he falls for her charade.

In Chapter 12, Renee and Kakuro discuss the painting for a moment more and then he shows her his kitchen.

In Chapter 13, Renee is embarrassed when she realizes she needs to use the bathroom but does not know how to ask where it is. Kakuro is kind when she finally asks.

In Journal of the Movement of the World No. 6, Paloma witnesses her mother fight over a pair of panties with another woman at a sale and is not impressed with the final result since one got the panties, but the other has the matching bra. To Paloma it seems as if both women managed to ignore the existence of their right hand for a time causing her to wonder what else a person might ignore.

In Chapter 14, Renee is quite impressed with Kakuro's bathroom and enjoys the toilet paper, curious how much it costs. When Renee flushes the toilet, the room is flooded with music. Renee is so shocked that she has trouble leaving the room for a moment. Kakuro explains to Renee that it is a Japanese tradition to hide the sounds of flushing.



As Renee explains her shock of hearing Mozart in the bathroom, she and Kakuro burst into laughter.

In Chapter 15, over dinner, Renee and Kakuro discuss her lack of education and attempts to hide her intelligence from her tenants. They speak freely with one another throughout the meal and late into the night. Before she leaves, Renee and Kakuro make plans to watch *The Munekata Sisters* together.

In Chapter 16, summer rain begins.

In Chapter 17, Renee thinks with excitement over the past few days and feels like summer rain, like she has been given a new heart.

In Chapter 18, it takes Renee several hours to fall asleep.

In *Profound Thought No. 13*, Columbe has been driving Paloma crazy with talk about her trip to Venice with Tibere.

Part 3, Summer Rain: Chapters 8-18, Journal of the Movement of the World Nos. 5-6 and *Profound Thought No. 13* Analysis

Renee goes to have dinner with Kakuro and is so afraid of making a fool of herself that she is afraid to say anything. However, the ice is broken when Renee becomes startled by music that is triggered by the flushing of the toilet and they enjoy a carefree evening together. In fact, Renee finds herself able to tell Kakuro things she has never told anyone and speak to him of things she has never spoke to anyone about. Renee has lived such an isolated life for some long that she is excited by this new friendship with Kakuro. The reader senses that this relationship has the power to change Renee's life.

At the same time, Paloma continues to observe the people around her and find them wanting. Paloma clearly dislikes her sister for her self-absorbance and feels that her mother does not take anything seriously except for her own needs and desires. With every step forward Paloma makes in finding hope in the world, she finds more reasons among her own family members to continue with her suicide plans. The reader suspects that it will take something huge to make Paloma change her mind about suicide and to see her desire for what they truly are, an escape from teenage angst.



Part 4, Paloma: Chapters 1-10, Journal of the Movement of the World No.7 and Profound Thoughts No. 14

Part 4, Paloma: Chapters 1-10, Journal of the Movement of the World No.7 and Profound Thoughts No. 14 Summary

In Chapter 1, Renee wakes up at seven, just two hours after she has gone to sleep, by a knock on the door. The concierge's loge is not open until eight. Renee opens the door and informs Columbe of this fact before closing it again. An hour later, Paloma shows up at the door to request that a letter Columbe is expecting be brought promptly to their apartment. Paloma hesitates after making her request, so Renee invites her in for tea. As they share their tea, Paloma asks if it would be possible for her to hang out in Renee's loge during the day to escape her family. Renee agrees. Manuela arrives and is surprised to find Paloma there. Before Paloma leaves a short time later, she tells Renee that she knows she is quite intelligent.

In Chapter 2, the package arrives for Columbe a short time later and the envelope is open having never been sealed. Renee takes out the contents and finds that it is Columbe's Master's Thesis. Renee reads through it and finds it wanting.

In Chapter 3, Renee feels that Columbe has focused on the wrong things and that people who have great educations should dedicate their lives to making the world better for others, not with trivial facts.

In Profound Thought No. 14, Paloma prefers her aunt and uncle to her own parents because they seem to have accepted their place in the world and their daughter, who has Down's Syndrome.

In Chapter 4, Paloma's mother asks Renee if it is okay for Paloma to spend time at her apartment.

In Chapter 5, Renee tells Manuela about her dinner with Kakuro and asks her to make pastries for their next meeting. Manuela agrees.

In Chapter 6, Kakuro comes to Renee's apartment and joins she and Manuela for tea. Paloma joins them as well. There is a lively discussion on the differences between French and English culture until Kakuro is called away by a phone call from his daughter.



In Chapter 7, when Renee goes to retrieve the beige dress from the dry cleaners, she is given a purple one by accident. Renee quietly takes the new dress because it is one Kakuro has not seen. Renee feels guilty, but not enough to fix her mistake.

In Journal of the Movement of the World No. 7, Paloma hears a rose fall from its stem and she finds it profound. Paloma wonders if life is about noticing the moments of death.

In Chapter 8, Renee goes to Kakuro's apartment for their viewing of the movie and is surprised to find that Kakuro has a whole room dedicated to viewing films.

In Chapter 9, Renee and Kakuro have an enjoyable time, often stopping the movie to discuss its themes. Toward the end of the afternoon, Renee notices a picture of a beautiful Japanese woman. Kakuro explains that this is his wife who died of cancer ten years before.

In Chapter 10, Renee is overwhelmed by the picture of Kakuro's wife, realizing she could never compare to someone so beautiful or intelligent. Paloma comes over the next morning. While she is there, Kakuro comes to ask Renee to go to dinner with him on his birthday. Renee refuses.

Part 4, Paloma: Chapters 1-10, Journal of the Movement of the World No.7 and Profound Thoughts No. 14 Analysis

Renee meets young Paloma finally in this section of the novel. Paloma finds a kindred spirit in Renee and begins spending time in her loge. At the same time, Renee continues to befriend Kakuro, finding him to be the only man she has ever known with whom she feels she can be completely herself. Renee even finds herself doing things she would not normally do in her excitement over her relationship with Kakuro. Renee is like a teenager with her first crush, coming out of her shell and discovering all the wonders of the world. Unfortunately, reality sets in when Renee sees the picture of Kakuro's wife and quickly descends back into her shell to protect herself from hurt she is convinced is right around the corner.

Paloma, at the same time, finds in Renee something of a kindred spirit. Paloma thinks that Renee has found the perfect hiding place, hiding within herself rather than in physical places as Paloma has been wanting to do lately. Paloma is experiencing a kind of awakening not unlike Renee's experiences with Kakuro in her new relationship with Renee, giving the reader hope that this relationship will keep Paloma from going through with her plans of suicide.



Part 4, Paloma: Chapters 11-23, Profound Thought No. 15 and One Last Profound Thought

Part 4, Paloma: Chapters 11-23, Profound Thought No. 15 and One Last Profound Thought Summary

In Chapter 12, Renee relates the story of her sister, who was much more beautiful than Renee, who moved to the city to work for a wealthy family. For a while it seemed the sister was finding success in the city. However, one rainy night Renee's sister came home, pregnant and abandoned. Renee's sister died in childbirth and the child died a short time later. Paloma listens to the story and tells Renee that she has given Paloma hope.

Profound Thought No. 15. Paloma, in listening to Renee's story, now believes that part of being human and living a fulfilling life is in providing comfort to others.

In Chapter 13, after Paloma leaves, Renee calls Kakuro's apartment and leaves a message with Paul that she has changed her mind and would enjoy having dinner with Kakuro on his birthday. Afterward, Renee has a visitor. Jean Arthens, the drug addicted son of Pierre Arthens, has come to see Renee. He has gotten sober and wanted to ask Renee the name of the flower she once told him. Jean says the image of that flower helped him through the worst moments of his rehab.

In Chapter 14, Renee wonders what makes people continue to fight when defeat is obvious.

In Chapter 15, Paul brings Renee a bunch of packages from Kakuro. It is a complete outfit for their date. The act reminds Renee of her favorite scene from Anna Karenina.

In Chapter 16, Tibere comes to Renee in search of Columbe, clearly sent by a mischievous Paloma. The incident makes Renee think of the irony of Tibere's name.

In Chapter 17, Renee takes special care in her appearance for her date with Kakuro. As they leave, Renee is shocked that two of the tenants who pass them at the door do not recognize her.

In Chapter 18, Renee thinks of the irony of people's conscious blindness.

In Chapter 19, the restaurant Kakuro takes Renee to reminds her of a scene from the movie Black Rain. As they begin their meal, Kakuro tells Renee she is not her sister.

In Chapter 20, Renee is shocked by Kakuro's statement.



In Chapter 21, Renee begins to cry from Kakuro's kindness and the promise of a future with him.

In Chapter 22, Renee has trouble sleeping because of her excitement about the future. Renee rises and begins her daily chores, leaving the building at nine to buy some brass polish. On her way, Renee sees the homeless man, Gegene, stand and move unsteadily. Renee crosses the street to help the man.

In Chapter 23, Renee is hit by a dry cleaner's truck. As Renee lies in the street dying, she thinks of the people in her life. Renee is grateful for Manuela's friendship, for Leo the cat's companionship and Olympe's love of animals, sure she will take Leo. Renee thinks of Kakuro as her future, her source of hope. Renee then thinks of Paloma, her kindred spirit who should have been her daughter. Renee has great hopes for Paloma.

In One Last Profound Thought, Paloma learns of Renee's death from Kakuro. Together they go to Renee's apartment to pick an outfit for her burial. On their way, they hear beautiful music playing and think that Renee would have appreciated it. Paloma is deeply saddened by Renee's death, feeling as though she is experiencing true emotion for the first time in her life. Paloma makes a promise to Renee to live a long and productive life.

Part 4, Paloma: Chapters 11-23, Profound Thought No. 15 and One Last Profound Thought Analysis

The reader finally learns why Renee has felt the need to hide her true nature all her life and the basis of her poor opinion of the wealthy. Renee's sister died because of a love affair with a rich man who left her pregnant and destitute. Renee is afraid that if she allows someone to know her true self, if she trusts, that she will end up like her sister. For this reason, Renee has spent her whole life hiding her true self and trusting no one. With Kakuro, Renee finally learns this is unnecessary. In fact, in Kakuro, Renee has found a truly kind man who cares deeply for her and will protect her from hurt. Ironically, however, Renee dies before this friendship can reach its true potential.

In helping Renee with her insecurities and her fears, Paloma finds a purpose in her life. Paloma is thrilled with the idea that by helping someone like Renee she can change her own future and create a better world. With Renee's death, Paloma discovers that she has never truly felt deep emotion, but now she has. Paloma feels a deep connection to Renee and because of this she makes the decision to continue her life despite its hardships, to honor her friendship with Renee. It is a bittersweet ending, but it is also an ending filled with hope for young Paloma, that she will not end up living the same secretive life as Renee.



Characters

Renee Michel

Renee Michel is a concierge at number 7, rue de Grenelle, an apartment building catering to wealthy families. Renee has an idea that wealthy people expect their concierges to be unintelligent, common people. For this reason, Renee has carefully constructed her appearance and the appearance of her loge to fit with this idea. However, Renee is in fact a very intelligent woman who enjoys to read literature and philosophy. Among her favorite novels is *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy.

When one of her tenants dies, the apartment is sold. This is the first time in Renee's twenty-seven years at the building that an apartment has been sold rather than passing down to a family member. Hence, there is a great deal of excitement surrounding the new tenant, Kakuro Ozu. When Renee meets Kakuro, she quotes the first line from *Anna Karenina* and is surprised when Kakuro recognizes it and finishes the line. In time, Renee and Kakuro begin a friendship that seems to have potential far beyond Renee's experiences. Renee is frightened by this fact and nearly ends the relationship. However, Renee overcomes her fears and looks forward to a future with Kakuro.

Paloma Josse

Paloma Josse is a twelve-year-old girl who lives in Renee's building. Paloma is unhappy with her life and the behaviors of her family members. Paloma is embarrassed by her family's wealth and future she sees for herself. For this reason, Paloma has decided to burn down the family's apartment and then to take her life on her thirteenth birthday. As a nod to Japanese culture and to leave behind something profound, Paloma begins keeping two journals, one of profound thoughts and one of observations of movement in the world.

As Paloma gets closer to her birthday, she begins making more and more profound observations, many of which show hope in a world she had though was beyond hope. When Paloma befriends both Kakuro and Renee, she finds kindred spirits in them. Therefore, when Renee dies in a random accident, Paloma makes a promise to her that she will fulfill her purpose in life rather than commit suicide.

Kakuro Ozu

Kakuro Ozu is a wealthy Japanese business man. Kakuro buys an apartment in Renee's apartment building and immediately begins to suspect that Renee is much more intelligent and well read than she wants people to know. Kakuro seeks Renee out when he moves into the building, inviting her to dinner in his apartment and later dinner at a restaurant. When Renee turns down Kakuro's invitation to a birthday dinner in a restaurant, he is confused until Paloma tells him how Renee's sister died after being



taken advantage of by a rich man, explaining both to Kakuro and the reader why Renee has felt the need to hide behind a pretense. Kakuro tells Renee she does not have to hide and that he is hoping they will have a strong friendship that might lead to more. This makes Renee very happy in the final moments of her life.

Manuela

Manuela is Renee's only friend. Manuela is from Portugal and she is always scheming to find a way to return to her country. Renee sees Manuela as an intelligent woman who is far more refined than her station in life as a maid. Renee counts on Manuela for many things because Manuela is her only friend. Manuela seems to return the sentiment, helping Renee all she can when Kakuro shows interest in her. Manuela is one of a few people who is devastated by Renee's death.

Olympe Saint-Nice

Olympe Saint-Nice is a young girl who lives in Renee's building. Olympe wants to be a veterinarian when she grows up, therefore everyone in the building often brings her their sick pets. Olympe has befriended Renee over the years because of their love of cats. When Renee dies, she hopes that Olympe will take her cat, Leo.

Columbe Josse

Columbe Josse is Paloma's sister. Columbe is much older than her sister and studying philosophy in graduate school. Columbe is a typical teenager, however, with her focus on sex and other things that interest young people. Renee finds Columbe intelligent, but flighty, disappointed by the fact that Columbe is not using her intelligence to make the world a better place. Paloma sees her sister as her torturer. Columbe is one of the many reasons Paloma has for wanted to commit suicide.

Pierre Arthens

Pierre Arthens is a food critic who writes about food as though he were writing great fiction. Renee admires his writing, but not the attitude he has toward her as his concierge. It is the death of Pierre Arthens that causes his widow to sell their apartment, creating an opening for Kakuro Ozu.

Jean Arthens

Jean Arthens is Pierre Arthens' son. When Jean lived in the building, Renee had little opinion of him because he was a drug addict. However, just before Renee dies, Jean comes back to the building and tells her that the image of the camellias in her front garden helped him get through the most difficult moments of rehab. This surprises



Renee, who did not understand the significance of his fascination with her camellias one spring afternoon. Later, when Renee is dying, she thinks of the people in her life as her own camellias.

Paul Nguyen

Paul Nguyen is Kakuro Ozu's personal assistant. Paul is a kind young man whom Renee instantly likes because of his respectfulness for her and her position at the building. Paloma also finds Paul fascinated, curious about his ethnic background and his charming personality.

Solange Josse

Solange Josse is Paloma's mother. Solange Josse has been in therapy for ten years and taking anti-anxiety drugs for the same amount of time. Paloma finds her mother self-absorbed and feels that her mother does not notice her much of the time. In fact, Paloma believes that her mother prefers the company of her plants and cats to that of her daughters.



Objects/Places

Plants

Solange Josse seems to take better care of her plants than she does her own children, spending a great deal of time each day watering and speaking to the plants.

Sleeping Pills

Paloma steals one of her mother's sleeping pills each night and hides them so that she might use them to commit suicide on her thirteenth birthday.

Beige Dress

Manuela borrows a beige dress from her neighbor and friend, a dressmaker, for Renee to wear to her first dinner date with Kakuro. The dress belongs to a client who died and Renee is later told she can keep it. However, Renee exchanges it with a purple one when she goes to the dry cleaner to pick it up.

Columbe's Master's Thesis

Renee reads an early draft of Columbe's Master's Thesis and finds it wanting. Renee feels that intellectuals should use their education to make the world better, but this is not what Columbe is doing with her thesis.

Journals

Paloma makes observations and writes down profound thoughts in two journals to chronicle the months up to her suicide.

Husserl

Renee attempts to read a book by Husserl about phenomenology, but finds it to be a whole lot of nonsense and puts it aside.

Anna Karenina

Anna Karenina is a novel by Leo Tolstoy. Renee considers this novel one of her favorites and it is a quote from this novel that causes Kakuro Ozu to figure out Renee's secret on their first meeting.



Ozu Movies

Renee has recently discovered movies by a Japanese filmmaker named Ozu that she feels are full of great metaphor. It turns out Kakuro Ozu is a distant relative of the filmmaker.

Elevator

Paloma meets Kakuro on the elevator when it becomes stuck after someone forgot to close the gate on an upper floor. This leads to a good friendship between these two when Kakuro learns of Paloma's interest in Japanese culture.

Dry Cleaning Truck

Renee is hit by a dry cleaning truck the day after her second dinner date with Kakuro Ozu. Renee notes the irony of being hit by the same dry cleaning employee from whom she took the wrong dress days before.

Renee's Loge

Renee lives in a loge at number 7, rue de Grenelle that comes with her job. Renee often leaves the television on in her loge to confirm the preconceptions of the tenants even though she does not watch regular television.

Number 7, rue de Grenelle

Number 7, rue de Grenelle is where the novel takes place. This is an apartment building in France that caters to wealthy tenants.



Themes

Hiding One's True Nature

This novel is about a woman who feels she must hide her true nature because she thinks that the wealthy people in the building where she lives have certain expectations about their concierge. Renee enjoys her job and does not want to lose it because the job gives her the time she desires to read and watch artistic movies. For this reason, Renee becomes quite frightened each time it seems someone has discovered her true nature.

Paloma is a young child who feels that no one in her family sees her for what she really is and instead sees only what they want to see. Paloma also worries that when she grows older, as the child of wealthy people, there will be certain expectations about her behaviors and actions. For this reason Paloma has decided to commit suicide on her thirteenth birthday.

Both of the main characters in this novel feel as though they cannot be who they really are for one reason or another. Renee is content to hide her true nature, while Paloma wants the world to see hers. However, when Renee is drawn out into the open, Paloma is impressed with her disguise, comparing her to a hedgehog who is tough on the outside but soft on the inside. These two women learn from one another, discovering there is no reason to hide their true selves due to the expectations of others and just because others might have certain expectations of them this does not mean that this is who they truly are. It is a good lesson to learn.

Hope in the World

When the novel begins, Paloma feels there is no hope in the world. Paloma feels that each person has a role to play from the moment they are born and there is no way to change this. However, as Paloma fixates on her decision to commit suicide, she begins to closely observe certain aspects of the world and soon finds herself finding multiple examples of hope.

At the same time, Renee is a student of philosophy and as such she finds herself questioning the meaning of life every day. This causes Renee to question things as simple as an itch that wants to be scratch or the physical reality of her cat, Leo. With this, Renee finds it difficult to see beyond the intangible and find delight in the small things in life.

As Renee and Paloma befriend Kakuko as well as one another, they begin to find hope in one another. Renee sees Paloma as an intelligent girl with her future ahead of her, a girl full of potential who can make a difference in the world. Paloma sees Renee as a spark of hope because by consoling Renee, Paloma feels hope in her own life. Hope



becomes an important theme of the book as the plot reaches its conclusion, finally giving Paloma, a twelve year old child, a reason to live.

Friendship

Renee is a lonely woman who lives alone and takes pleasure in her own company. However, like anyone else, Renee values the people whom she calls friends. At the beginning of the novel, Renee has only one friend. Manuela is a maid who works in the building and often comes to have tea with Renee. Although Manuela is not as intelligent as Renee and does not read the same types of books, Renee sees Manuela as an aristocrat, a woman who is much too refined for her station in life, someone she admires. Renee admires Manuela and cannot imagine how empty her life would be without her.

As the novel progresses, Renee finds herself becoming friends with a new tenant. Kakuro Ozu is a business man who has many of the same interests as Renee. They begin to spend time with one another and for the first time in her life Renee finds herself completely at ease with a man. In fact, Renee finds that she can speak with Kakuro about things she has never spoken about before. At the same time, Renee meets Paloma Josse and immediately discovers a soul mate. As Renee lies dying in the street at the end of the novel, it is these three people she thinks about, making friendship an important theme of the novel.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is the first person. There are two narrators in this novel. The first narrator is Renee Michel, the concierge at number 7, rue de Grenelle. Renee is a highly intelligent woman who masks her intelligence from her tenants out of fear of losing her job if she does not fit the stereotype she thinks her tenants expect. The other narrator of this novel is Paloma Josse, a twelve-year-old girl who lives in Renee's building. Paloma is contemplating suicide because she feels ignored and as though there is little purpose to life.

The points of view of this novel work well with the novel because the story is written in diary form as though both the main characters are writing their story down on paper for a reader to find one day. The point of view offers an intimate connection between reader and main characters and gives the reader insight into the plot that they might not get with another point of view. Hence, the point of view of this novel works well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is mainly set at number 7, rue de Grenelle, an apartment building catering to rich people in France. The novel's scenes take place mainly in the concierge's loge and the apartment of the Josse family. The story revolves around the concierge at this building and one of her young tenants, giving the reader insight into both the wealthy and the poor characters that populate the novel.

The setting plays an important part in the plot of the novel because without the role of concierge, Renee Michel would have no reason to hide her intelligence. In the same vein, Paloma Josse would not want to commit suicide if she did not feel that wealth dictates how her life will evolve as she grows older. Hence, the setting of this novel works well with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel was originally written in French. Hence, some of the language of this novel tends to be more formal than simple English and include some phrases that remain in French due to a lack of suitable translation. The language of this novel is also filled with large words that reflect the intelligence of the two main characters.

The language of this novel is both complicated and simple. When Renee is the narrator of the novel, she often speaks in a language that is overly simplistic in order to maintain the illusion that she is an unintelligent, common woman. However, when Renee is by herself and allowing her mind to wonder over philosophy or art, her language can grow



quite complicated. In this way, the author has used the language of the novel to create fully rounded characters whose language fits their level of education and intelligence.

Structure

The novel is divided into a preamble and four parts. Each part contains multiple chapters in which Renee Michel tells her story. Each part also contains journal excerpts from Paloma Josse's writings, including entries from her *Journal of the Movement of the World* and her journal chronicling her *Profound Thoughts*. Each of these chapters and journal excerpts build on one another even though these two characters do not actually meet until the end of the novel.

The novel contains two main plots. The main plots revolve around Renee and Paloma separately. As these plots develop, they also create subplots. One of the subplots deals with Renee's need to remain behind a façade when it comes to dealing with her tenants. Another subplot deals with Renee's growing relationship with Kakuro Ozu. Yet another subplot follows Paloma's growing friendship with both Kakuro and Renee. All the plots of this novel come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Marx has completely changed the way I view the world,' declared the Pallieres boy this morning, although ordinarily he says nary a word to me." (Chapter 1, p. 7).

"Because I am rarely friendly—though always polite—I am not liked, but tolerated nonetheless; I correspond so very well to what social prejudice has collectively construed to be a typical French concierge that I am one of the multiple cogs that make the great universal illusion turn, the illusion according to which life has a meaning that can be easily deciphered." (Chapter 2, p. 9).

"With no more apartment and no more daughter, maybe they'll give some thought to all those dead Africans, don't you suppose?" (Profound Thought No. 1, p. 18).

"In the moment where I had at last come to life, I was merely pitied." (Chapter 2, p. 33).

"If you want to understand my family, all you have to do is look at the cats." (Profound Thought No. 2, p. 40).

"Anna Arthens is selling her place!" (Chapter 17, p. 109).

"Life becomes a quiet stroll—whereas our life, in the homes we have, seems like nothing so much as a long series of intrusions." (Chapter 4, p. 139).

"On the way home I thought: pity the poor in spirit who know neither the enchantment nor the beauty of language." (Profound Thought No. 10, p. 147).

"He thinks her cat is named Leo for Leo Tolstoy and we agreed that a concierge who reads Tolstoy and books published by Vrin may not be your ordinary concierge." (Profound Thought No. 11, p. 156).

"It is always reassuring to be disabused of one's own paranoia." (Chapter 1, p. 159).

"Maybe I am the symptom of the family contradiction, and so I'm the one who has to disappear, if the family is to prosper." (Profound Thought No.14, p. 244).

"I had met another, and was prepared to love." (Chapter 23, p. 305).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Renee? What does Renee believe a concierge should be like? Where does she get this idea? To what length does Renee go to to create this façade? Why does Renee not want her tenants to know how intelligent she is? Why should a concierge not study philosophy? Why is it unusual for a concierge to be familiar with Tolstoy's Anna Karenina?

Who is Paloma? Why does she want to commit suicide? How does she plan to do it? Why does she want to burn down her family's apartment first? Why does she want to die on her thirteenth birthday? Why is Paloma fascinated with Japanese culture? How has this influenced her to commit suicide?

Who is Manuela? How have she and Renee become friends? What is this friendship like? Why does Manuela continuously think of going home to Portugal? What is Renee's biggest fear about Manuela's desire to return to her home country? At the end of the book, what does Renee say about her friendship with Manuela? What has this friendship meant to Renee? Why?

Who was Renee married to? What kind of a man was he like? To whom does Renee compare her marriage? Who does Renee feel had the better marriage? Did Renee love her husband? What reason did Renee's husband give for wanting to marry her? How did Renee feel about these words? What movie did Renee and her husband go see just before his death? What does Renee's affection for this movie say about her and their relationship?

What is Anna Karenina? Why does Renee like the novel so much? Can Renee relate to this novel? What line from the novel does Renee quote when she first meets Kakuro Ozu? How does this tip Kakuro off to Renee's secret? What does Renee do when she realizes that Kakuro can see through her façade? What is it about Kakuro that Renee likes so much? What do you think might have happened with this relationship had Renee survived her accident?

What is the Journal of the Movement of the World? What is Paloma trying to do with this journal? What do you make of Paloma's observations in this journal? How do these observations help Paloma decide whether or not to commit suicide? Why does Paloma also record her Profound Thoughts? What are these thoughts? What do these thoughts reveal about Paloma as the novel progresses? How do these thoughts represent Paloma's frame of mind?

What happened to Renee's sister? Why did this happen? Why was Renee's parents not upset by her sister's passing? What does this say about Renee's family? How has the death of her sister changed Renee? Why does Kakuro tell Renee that she is not her sister? How does this simple statement impact Renee? What might have happened after this revelation if Renee had not died?