

Norwegian Wood Study Guide

Norwegian Wood by Haruki Murakami

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Norwegian Wood Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	8
Chapter 4.....	10
Chapter 5.....	12
Chapter 6, pp. 90-113.....	13
Chapter 6, pp. 113-142.....	15
Chapter 6, pp. 143-166.....	17
Chapter 7.....	19
Chapter 8.....	21
Chapter 9.....	22
Chapter 10.....	24
Chapter 11.....	26
Characters.....	28
Objects/Places.....	32
Themes.....	34
Style.....	36
Quotes.....	39
Topics for Discussion.....	41



Plot Summary

Norwegian Wood is the story of Toru Watanabe, a young man who is damaged by the suicide of his high school friend, Kizuki. Toru falls in love with Kizuki's tortured girlfriend, Naoko, who is isolated in her own mind. When she goes into a mental hospital, he promises to wait for her. Meanwhile, though, he falls in love with Midori, an open and uninhibited girl who represents life. Toru is filled with guilt when Naoko kills herself, but ultimately he calls out to Midori.

The novel begins when Toru is thirty-seven, remembering the events that happened to him twenty years ago. In high school, Toru, his best friend Kizuki, and Kizuki's girlfriend Naoko are inseparable. They are all bound together by Kizuki. However, Kizuki's suicide throws Naoko and Toru into depression. Both choose to attend colleges in Tokyo, where they can get away from their pasts.

Toru runs into Naoko one day while he is in college, and the two start to see each other every Sunday. They go on long walks through Tokyo. Though Naoko has trouble talking and expressing herself, they spend every Sunday together. On Naoko's birthday, Toru brings her a cake, and they spend the evening drinking wine and listening to music. Naoko talks continuously, but she seems to be avoiding certain subjects. Then she breaks down in tears. Toru makes love to her, but the next day she disappears. Toru writes to her and longs for her but hears nothing for a long while.

When Naoko finally writes to Toru, he learns she's had a mental breakdown and is in a sanatorium. While he waits for her, Toru goes to classes and works, remaining isolated until he meets Midori, a girl who appears and then disappears for days or weeks. He goes to visit her at her family's bookstore, and they share a kiss although each is attached to another.

Toru goes to visit Naoko at the sanatorium, and he shares a day with her walking in a meadow. It's the closest he ever is to Naoko, and she tells him about her sister, who also killed herself when Naoko was young. Naoko asks Toru to always remember her, and Toru asks her to live with him when she gets out of the sanatorium.

After the visit, though, Toru falls in love with Midori. Midori has been through the deaths of both of her parents from brain cancer, and she is exhausted with caring for others. She wants someone who will care for her. Toru does not know what to do when he realizes he is in love with Midori. He asks Midori to wait while he sorts things out with Naoko. However, Naoko takes a turn for the worse. She kills herself, and Toru is flung into a pit of grief, despair, and guilt. Toru travels around Japan, alone with his sorrow. When he finally begins to emerge, he calls Midori from a clouded pit of depression.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Norwegian Wood is the story of Toru Watanabe, a young man who is damaged by the suicide of his high school friend, Kizuki. Toru falls in love with Kizuki's tortured girlfriend, Naoko, who is isolated in her own mind. When she goes into a mental hospital, he promises to wait for her. Meanwhile, though, he falls in love with Midori, an open and uninhibited girl who represents life. Toru is filled with guilt when Naoko kills herself, but ultimately he calls out to Midori.

As the novel begins, thirty-seven-year-old Toru is on a plane landing in Germany when the Beatles song "Norwegian Wood" comes on the speakers. The song affects him so much that a stewardess comes over to make sure he's okay. He sits on the plane and thinks of the past as people leave. Eighteen years before, Toru walked in a meadow with a girl, Naoko. He remembers every detail of the meadow, but it's harder to bring up the image of Naoko. The memories and the pain have begun to fade. He feels the need to write about her so that he can think about and understand what happened.

As Naoko and Toru walk in the meadow, she tells him about a supposed "field well" that is somewhere along the rim of the meadow. The well is an unmarked, hidden hole in the ground, and the only people who have discovered it are those who have fallen in and died. No one can find the field well. Naoko says she knows Toru could never fall in the well, and that as long as she is with him, she knows that she will never fall in the well either. Toru suggests that Naoko should stay with him forever. Naoko at first loves the idea and then realizes it would be impossible. They cannot be together all the time.

Toru says that Naoko won't always need him, every moment. She needs to relax. Naoko is upset. She cannot just relax, or she'll fall apart. She tells him that her confusion is deeper than he could know. Toru apologizes and tells Naoko that he wants to understand her. He needs time, he says.

Naoko asks Toru if he loves her, and he says yes. Then she makes him promise two things: that he will know that she is grateful to him for coming to see her and that he will always remember her. Toru promises. Still, years later, Toru is beginning to forget. He has tried to write about Naoko before, but he never could. Now he is fearful that he's forgotten the important things. He realizes that Naoko knew he'd forget, with time.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The opening chapter of Norwegian Wood looks back on the story from the future, when Toru is grown. The story is one of Toru's youth and emerging manhood. He is at a period of transition, as he begins to become a man. He cannot see what is happening clearly at the time, and at the beginning of the novel, looking back, he can see more objectively. Still, he has also forgotten. The story is one of a past Toru who does not

exist anymore, and even memory cannot preserve him, just like it cannot preserve Naoko.

The story of the field well is metaphorical. The deep, dark well is the pit of depression that Naoko is fighting against, and she feels safe from it when she is with Toru. Only by joining with others, in life, can she avoid the fate of the well. It is isolation, and isolation is death. The whole story of Naoko and Toru is told in the opening chapter, in the story of the field well. The well is a danger to Naoko, and Toru can protect her. Still, Naoko knows that Toru cannot be with her always. Naoko cannot communicate and break through her isolation. Ultimately, she will be lost to a dim, inaccessible place: death, the field well, the past.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Toru Watanabe is eighteen, a freshman in college, and he lives in a private dormitory in Tokyo, since it's less expensive than an apartment. The only problem with the dorm is its right-wing political philosophy, but for the most part, that doesn't affect day-to-day life. Every morning at six o'clock, the head of the east building and a student assistant raise the Japanese flag and play the national anthem. When he first moves into the dorm, Toru watches the ceremony every morning. Every evening, the flag is lowered, and it seems odd to Toru that at night, no flag is flown to watch over Japan.

The all-male dormitory is horribly filthy, except for Toru's room. Toru's roommate is known as "Storm Trooper" because people think he's a Nazi. Really, he's just a conservative boy who likes things clean and neat and is interested in maps. He doesn't want posters of nude women on his walls and instead puts up a photo of a canal in Amsterdam. When the other boys ask about it, Toru says that Storm Trooper jerks off to it. The other students seem to believe it. Toru feels sorry for Storm Trooper and feels bad for making fun of him to the others.

Storm Trooper is studying map-making. He enjoys making maps and doesn't understand why Toru is studying something he doesn't love. Toru doesn't love anything. He just picked a major that wouldn't be too hard, drama. Storm Trooper isn't a bad roommate, as long as Toru keeps his side of the room neat, except that he does calisthenics in the morning while Toru wants to sleep. Toru asks him to go outside or take the jumping out of his routine, but Storm Trooper has reasons why he can't change anything about what he's doing. Finally Toru gives up arguing with him.

The story about Storm Trooper makes Naoko laugh, and Toru laughs, too. They are walking from the train station at Yotsuya in May, and it's a beautiful day. Naoko asks if he likes living at the dorm, and Toru says it's okay. It requires being able to not let things bother you. Toru asks if she's thinking of living in a dorm, but Naoko can't explain. Toru hasn't seen Naoko for a year, and she's lost a lot of weight. They happened to run into each other, and although they don't have much to talk about, Toru and Naoko walk around Tokyo. They finally stop and get something to eat. Naoko confesses that she can never say what she wants to say, but Toru doesn't seem to understand what she really means. They arrange to meet again the next Sunday.

Naoko and Toru first meet in high school, through Toru's best friend and Naoko's boyfriend, Kizuki. Naoko and Kizuki have known each other their entire lives. Together, the three of them obtain a kind of balance centered around Kizuki, who runs most of the conversation. Kizuki is Toru's only real friend and the only link between Naoko and Toru. When they're alone, Toru and Naoko don't really talk. After Kizuki dies, Naoko and Toru only see each other once, briefly, until they happen to meet on the train.



Toru last sees Kizuki on an afternoon in May, when they cut school to play pool. That night, Kizuki kills himself by locking himself in the garage with his motor running and a hose connecting the exhaust pipe to the car. No one knows why. After Kizuki's death, Toru doesn't know what to do. He dates a girl and loses his virginity, but he can't really care about her. He wants to leave, so he goes away to college in Tokyo. After he leaves, Toru begins to see that death is part of life.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The dorm where Toru lives is a communal place, and it represents the necessity for becoming part of the human community. Toru, however, lives in isolation. He has recognized that death is part of life through Kizuki's death, but he isolates himself within his community. He is aloof, flying below the radar.

Storm Trooper represents the rigid and acceptable world. He follows rules and regulations, and he doesn't delve into the dirty and complicated realities below the surface. He gives lie to the idea that human beings are what society accepts or plans for. He is laughable because he lacks all the human elements of life. He is asexual and unsoiled.

In a sense, Storm Trooper represents the expectations of society and the outward images of life. Meanwhile, Naoko represents the inner workings of the mind and the darkest most incommunicable and inaccessible parts of the human soul. How are these two qualities to be reconciled? How can Naoko's soul live in the world of rules and expectations that Storm Trooper embodies? Naoko doesn't talk to Toru, she only walks. She is trapped inside her mind, unable to make a connection with Toru through the wall of separation between them. They are bound together by death, Kizuki's suicide.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The next Sunday, Toru and Naoko go walking around Tokyo again, talking in fragments. Then they walk together the next Sunday, and the next. It becomes a standing date. Toru often goes over to Naoko's small apartment to eat. She's attending a girl's college and has few friends or possessions. She also wanted to leave the old life behind her. As time goes on, Toru and Naoko become close friends. Toru tells her a story about Storm Trooper. The boys in the dorm replace the photo on his wall with one of the Golden Gate Bridge, to see if he'll masturbate to it. Toru tells them that he loves it, and it becomes a running joke in the dorm for the boys to replace the photo with different landmarks.

Toru tells Naoko about the girlfriend he left behind before going to college, and he confesses that he's never been in love. Toru cannot explain his relationship with Naoko, and he lets the other boys think he's got a girlfriend. Toru feels lost and drifting, and he continues to walk with Naoko and read books. His tastes are not modern books, but classics. He meets Nagasawa this way, a bright up-and-coming student going into the foreign service who also reads classics.

Nagasawa is popular and wealthy, on his way to a brilliant future, and he picks Toru as his friend because Toru is not interested in his grades, good looks, or money. Toru is only interested in Nagasawa's oddness. Once, to resolve a difference with the upper classmen, Nagasawa swallowed three slugs. He also has constant one-night stands. Sometimes, Nagasawa takes Toru with him to pick up girls, but Toru dislikes the uncomfortable morning-afters. Nagasawa can't resist picking up girls, although he has a wonderful girlfriend, Hatsumi.

Toru gets a part-time job at a record store. For Christmas, he buys Naoko a record, and she knits him gloves. Instead of going home for Christmas, Toru stays in Tokyo. During January, Storm Trooper gets sick with a terrible fever, and Toru must stay at the dorm to take care of him, missing a Brahms concert with Naoko. In February, Toru gets into a fight with an upperclassman and begins being dissatisfied living at the dorm. In March, the school year ends, but Toru doesn't have enough credits to complete his freshman year.

Naoko turns twenty in April, and Toru brings her a cake. He tells Naoko about Storm Trooper's new sweater, which looks funny on him. Naoko drink and talk and listen to records. Naoko is talking constantly, but Toru feels she is avoiding talking about herself and her past. When she's all talked out, she begins to cry. Toru tries to comfort her and then makes love to her. He discovers she is a virgin. Afterward, he asks why she never made love to Kizuki, and she begins to cry again. The next morning Toru leaves, and he doesn't hear from Naoko again. When he goes to her apartment, she's gone. Toru writes to her at her parents' home but receives no answer.



In May, students at the university begin to strike. Toru works at a trucking company, exhausting his body, and at night he drinks and reads. In June, he writes to Naoko again, and meanwhile, he goes out picking up women with Nagasawa. In July, Toru finally receives a letter from Naoko. She apologizes and says it's difficult for her to write. She's taking a year off school and tells Toru it's not his fault. She is going to a sanatorium and cannot see him right now. At the end of July, Storm Trooper gives him a firefly in a coffee jar, just before he leaves for the summer. The firefly's light is dim, and Toru lets it out of the jar. He watches it until it flies away, leaving a line of light.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Toru and Naoko come together, not only because they are bound by Kizuki's death, but also because they are bound together by isolation. Their walks through Tokyo are a kind of drifting. They travel through the city, just like they are traveling through life. They move forward, but they aren't going anywhere. Their journeys are unplanned and uncontrolled, and although they travel together, they each travel in isolation, unto themselves. Toru's relationship with his previous girlfriend shows his inability to come out of himself. He treats her selfishly because he cannot get over his grief and make a connection with her. Ultimately, being trapped in one's own mind makes one selfish or at least self-centered, causing pain to others. Toru hurts her because he cannot come out of himself.

Nagasawa, like Storm Trooper, is a representation of the outside world. Nagasawa does not live in his own mind. Instead, he lives in the outward systems of the world. He plays school and career like games. He plays other people like games as well, picking up girls in the bars at night. Nagasawa is everything that society demands and expects from him. Ultimately, though, it leads to emptiness, like the empty one-night stands he has with women.

Nagasawa is also a reflection of Kizuki. Again Toru finds himself with one close male friend, and Nagasawa, like Kizuki, has a girlfriend. Toru is part of a relationship of three, something that will repeat itself throughout the book. Something is missing in the relationship of two, and a third is needed, somehow, to complete it.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The police break up the student strikes, but in September the campus seems unchanged. The striking students are back in class, responding to roll call, and Toru decides to stop responding to the roll. He thinks college is pointless and the strikers are hypocrites. Meanwhile, Storm Trooper never returns, and all that he leaves behind in the dorm is a habit of neatness Toru has acquired.

One day, Toru goes to a restaurant for lunch after one of his classes. A girl recognizes him and sits down with him. She's in his class, History of Drama, but he doesn't recognize her at first because her hair is different. He compliments her on the haircut. The girl asks Toru why he didn't answer at roll call, and he says he didn't feel like it. The girl seems attracted by Toru's loner attitude and asks if he likes green. Her name, Midori, means green. Midori borrows Toru's notes from class and arranges to meet him again at the restaurant, but she doesn't show up.

Toru looks up Midori's name at the school. Her last name is Kobayashi, and he finds her address and phone number. He calls her, and the number is a bookstore. The man says that Midori is probably at the hospital. Toru hangs up. Then, Toru goes to dinner with Nagasawa. He's completed the Foreign Ministry exams easily. He's ambitious and sees his career as a game, and he tells Toru that his code is to be a gentleman.

Midori comes late to her next History of Drama class. She returns Toru's notebook, and shortly afterwards, student rebels take over the classroom and start talking about politics. Midori and Toru leave. They go to lunch, and Toru asks her about the hospital. She doesn't want to talk about it. After lunch, Midori takes Toru to her old high school and points out the smoke where they burn the sanitary napkins at the all-girl school.

Midori hated the private school full of rich girls but played by all the rules just to beat it. Her parents run a tiny neighborhood bookstore and are poor in comparison to all Midori's old schoolmates. Midori's now got a job writing notes that go with maps. Toru tells Midori about his dorm and Storm Trooper. They make a date to meet at the bookstore the next Sunday for lunch.

Toru brings Midori flowers at the bookstore, and she cooks him lunch. She's an excellent cook, and she explains that no one in her family cooks. She bought a cookbook from another region and taught herself to cook, so her cooking is in the style of the Kansai region, where Toru's home is. She bought all her own cookware, even going without a new bra to buy an egg fryer. Midori's mother died of brain cancer two years ago, and now she's in charge of the finances.

Midori's sister is out with her boyfriend, probably driving, and she tells Toru that her father ran off to Uruguay after her mother died. When her mother died, he told his



daughters that they should have died instead. Midori hates him for saying that but still admires his love for his wife. A fire starts down the block, and Midori and Toru go up to the roof to watch. They drink beer, and Midori plays folk songs on her guitar. She's not very good, especially the song she wrote herself. Midori says she wasn't sad when her mother died or when her father left and asks if she's cold-hearted. She feels unloved and wants someone to cater to her every whim. Eventually, the fire is put out. Midori and Toru share a gentle kiss, though they are each attached to someone else.

Midori doesn't show up to school again, and that weekend Toru goes out with Nagasawa. For once, they don't find any girls, and Nagasawa goes to his girlfriend's. Toru goes to an all-night movie. The next morning, waiting for the train, he runs into two girls. One of them caught her boyfriend cheating on her and wants a drink. Toru goes with them to get sake, and he ends up sleeping with the girl. He calls Midori afterward and gets no answer. Then he goes home and finds a letter from Naoko.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The student strikes that are going on in the background throughout the book and the Marxist movement among students is an outward representation of the turbulence within Toru and the turbulence of adolescence in general. However, the student strikes are also hollow. Like Storm Trooper's neatness, and like Nagasawa's one-night stands, the strikes are superficial. Everything in society seems to take on a superficiality in the same way. The striking students don't really rebel against the system. They only present a facade of rebellions. Toru, in his quiet way, is the real rebel. He does not read Marx or rouse the rabble. Instead, he quietly stops responding to roll calls, leading to extra absences that will meaninglessly affect his grade. Toru sees no substance in society, because there is too much superficiality.

Midori seeks out Toru because she notices that he is different. She picks up on the fact that he does not respond to roll, and she sees that he is solitary. He even talks differently from other people. Toru has been marked by Kizuki's death. He has seen through the meaningless aspects of society into the truth of death and life. Midori also has a connection with death. Her mother has died of brain cancer. Midori has lived through a long, difficult illness. She and Toru, much like Toru and Naoko, are bound by death.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Naoko thanks Toru for his letters and tells him she's thinking about him. She feels she hasn't been fair to him, but she is wounded and flawed. She is undergoing therapy and feels she's improving with the simple, structured life at the sanatorium. She at least is well enough to write, something she hasn't been able to do. About seventy people live in the sanatorium, quietly and close to nature. Naoko plays sports, and the staff plays along with the patients. She feels that everyone is warped, doctors and patients alike.

The patients also raise vegetables and serve them at meals, and Naoko says the food is delicious. Her doctor wants her to interact with outsiders, and Naoko asks Toru to come visit her. Toru reads the letter over and over. He calls Ami Hostel, the sanatorium where Naoko is staying, and makes an appointment to see her the next day.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 is shorter than the other chapters, giving it importance. It contains little more than Naoko's letter to Toru. The letters that Toru and Naoko write to each other are another example of communication in the story. They communicate by letter, from a long distance, emphasizing their separation. Toru writes to Naoko constantly, trying to open up to her and bring them together, breaking the barrier that exists between them. However, Naoko cannot break out of her own mind and find communion with someone else. She is isolated in her self. That is why Naoko finds it so difficult to write letters. Naoko's experience at the sanatorium is communal, and it is teaching her to reach out. She reaches out, not only in the letter, but also in her invitation to Toru to visit her.



Chapter 6, pp. 90-113

Chapter 6, pp. 90-113 Summary

Toru takes a train and a bus into the mountains toward Ami Hostel. When he gets to the bus stop, no buildings are visible. The sanatorium is deep in the woods. He walks in until he gets to the gate, and he has to wait for the guard. The guard tells him to go to the main building and ask for Doctor Ishida. He follows the directions, and finally meets a wrinkled, wiry-haired, friendly woman, Reiko Ishida. She notes from his hands that Toru hasn't played an instrument lately, and Toru confesses that he doesn't play anything. Reiko takes him to the cafeteria to eat. The vegetables are as good as Naoko said.

Reiko is not Naoko's doctor. She is a patient of many years who also teaches music, and they call her the music doctor. Reiko is Naoko's roommate. She is recovered but afraid to leave the safety of the sanatorium. She explains the communal living at the sanatorium. The patients try to help each other. She advises Toru to be open to helping and to be totally honest. Naoko and Toru aren't allowed to be alone, so Reiko will chaperone. Toru will stay in Naoko and Reiko's cabin for a few days.

Reiko brings Toru to the cabin, which is a small, simply furnished apartment. Everyone is away working, and Reiko returns to her scheduled activities, leaving Toru alone. He stretches out on the couch and suddenly remembers going on a motorcycle trip with Kizuki four years ago. Naoko enters so quietly that at first Toru doesn't hear her. She's only come briefly to say hello and to make sure that it's no burden on Toru to be there. Toru promises to be honest, and he holds her briefly before she leaves. Then Toru goes to sleep on the sofa.

Around five o'clock, people start coming back to the apartments. Naoko and Reiko come in at five-thirty. Naoko is sad to hear that Storm Trooper is gone, and Toru tells Reiko some Storm Trooper stories. After dinner, the three drink wine by candlelight. Reiko brings out her guitar and plays Naoko's favorite songs, including "Norwegian Wood." The song makes Naoko think of wandering alone in a cold, dark wood.

Toru tells Naoko about his life at the university and about Nagasawa. Naoko asks how many girls Toru has slept with, and Toru admits to picking up girls with Nagasawa. He's slept with eight or nine girls altogether. His pain over Naoko drove him to seek out meaningless flings. Then Naoko explains why she never slept with Kizuki. She loved him, but her body would not respond to him. She never got wet, and lubricants did not help. It always hurt. The night she slept with Toru was the only time she felt desire, and she doesn't know why. She didn't love Toru, not like her love for Kizuki. Naoko spills her wine and then begins to cry. Reiko goes to comfort her, and Toru goes for a walk to leave them alone.



Chapter 6, pp. 90-113 Analysis

The shortest chapter in the novel is followed by its longest, and in a way Chapter 5 is merely a prelude to Chapter 6. Chapter 6 brings the reader back to the beginning of the book, back to the meadow and the field well. Chapter 6 is so long because it is the heart of the book, the essence of his relationship with Naoko. When Toru travels to the sanatorium, he takes a long journey deep into the mountains. This is emphasized by the train and bus ride, followed by Toru's trek through the woods.

Metaphorically as well as literally, he is traveling a vast distance. He must travel into a kind of underworld, a place away from the normal workings of society. The world of Storm Trooper and Nagasawa, the world of superficiality is left far behind. The sanatorium is separate from the rest of the world, a place of the mind and a place where Toru can finally be close to Naoko. Even when Toru reaches the sanatorium, he must pass a gatekeeper, trek through the grounds, and then pass another kind of gatekeeper to get to Naoko.

Reiko Ishida acts as a guardian and gatekeeper to Naoko. She is a protector, and her conversation with Toru seems like a test of him and his intentions as well as an introduction to the sanatorium. The sanatorium is a different world, one of pure communion of minds without all the trappings of society. It requires honesty and openness that cannot be achieved anywhere else.

When Toru arrives in the sanatorium, he begins accessing dreams and memories, because the sanatorium is a place of the mind. Kizuki comes back to Toru there, in his mind, just as Naoko physically comes back to him. She is able to talk to him about Kizuki and about sex in a way that she could not on the outside. Naoko's inability to have sex with Kizuki is another representation of her inability to connect with another. She is close with Kizuki, but she cannot give herself to him. She cannot find a way to join together with him completely.



Chapter 6, pp. 113-142

Chapter 6, pp. 113-142 Summary

When Toru returns to the apartment, Reiko suggests that they take a walk to let Naoko rest. Reiko asks what he likes to do, and when Toru mentions hiking, swimming, and reading, she realizes that all his activities are solitary. Reiko reassures Toru that Naoko is okay and that he hasn't done anything wrong. Still, Reiko is not sure whether Naoko will recover or not. She cautions Toru not to be impatient, and she also thinks it's unhealthy for Toru to have one-night stands.

Reiko begins telling Toru her story. She was a talented pianist and went to a conservatory, on her way to becoming a famous concert pianist. Then one of her fingers became paralyzed from stress. She never got back on track. She had a psychological breakdown and spend two months in a hospital. She went back home, but when she was twenty-four she broke down again and was hospitalized for seven months. After she got out one of her piano students asked her to marry him. At first she was reluctant and explained about being in the mental hospital, but he persisted. Finally, she agreed to marry him. She trusted him to keep her safe and healthy.

Reiko had another breakdown, though, at thirty-one. After her daughter was born, she began playing piano again, and one of her neighbors asked Reiko to give her daughter lessons. Reluctantly, Reiko agreed. The girl was appealing and attractive, and Reiko could not refuse her. She had a spark at the piano. Reiko learned, though, that the girl was a pathological liar and manipulator. Reiko cuts short her story, saying that they should get back. She promises to finish another time.

Naoko is sitting on the sofa and says she's better. She talks with Toru about her life at the sanatorium, caring for the birds and growing vegetables, taking classes and going to therapy. Toru reminds her of the time he and Kizuki came to visit her in the hospital and brought her chocolates; it's the motorcycle trip he was remembering earlier. Naoko says that Kizuki hid his weaknesses when Toru was around. Still, Naoko loved his weak side as well as his strong side. The two of them belonged together and began kissing at twelve. They could not be apart. Their happiness could not have lasted.

The three talk and laugh until bedtime. Toru lies awake on his make-shift bed on the couch, until Naoko appears silently in the night. She slips off her nightgown and shows him her perfect body, much more perfect than he remembers. Then she slips on her nightgown again and leaves, never uttering a word. Afterward, Toru cannot sleep.

The next morning, Naoko acts like nothing happened, and Toru almost thinks it was a dream. He goes with Naoko and Reiko to feed the birds and clean their cages. Then the women go to the farm, and Toru stays behind to read and study. After lunch, the three go for a walk outside in the woods. Reiko and Naoko are in better shape for walking, and Toru gets out of breath. They go through an empty, abandoned village and a



pasture guarded by an old dog, until they come to a small coffeehouse. They listen to music, and Reiko plays the guitar. Then Reiko stays behind while Naoko and Toru go for a walk.

Naoko and Toru walk to the meadow. Naoko says that Toru always likes twisted people: her and Kizuki and Reiko. He doesn't see them as twisted, though. Naoko describes being frightened that she'll never recover. Sometimes she asks Reiko to hold her to make her feel better. Now she asks Toru to hold her. She asks him to wait for her to make love to him, and in the meantime, she relieves his erection with her hands.

Chapter 6, pp. 113-142 Analysis

Reiko's story of her life is a tale within a tale. Reiko is a mental patient, and her story may be unreliable. Could Reiko be the chronic liar, instead of the piano student? It's possible, but Reiko is otherwise shown as a comforter and protector. Naoko depends on her, and Toru deeply likes her.

One of the themes of the novel is the relationship of the mind and the body. Naoko's mind and body are disconnected. She cannot have sex with the man she loves, only with Toru, whom she doesn't truly love. Reiko's mind and body also are at odds. She is on her way to becoming a concert pianist, but her mind interrupts her body, through a psychosomatic injury to her hands. Her internal being rebels against the expectations of society, causing a break.

When Naoko visits Toru in the night, she is still distant from him. She shows him her body, but he cannot touch her. Naoko, it seems, is always just out of Toru's reach. He marvels at her perfection, but the one time he made love to her, her body seemed imperfect. Perfection is unattainable. It is only in imperfection that two people can be joined together. Naoko, however, has trouble accepting her own imperfections. She cannot open her imperfections up to others and expose herself. She only exposes her untouchable perfection.

The meadow is the place where Naoko and Toru are closest. They are alone together, in the middle of nature, with no pressures and no society forcing them one way or another. The meadow is the centerpiece of the story, symbolizing paradise, an idyllic condition of communion.



Chapter 6, pp. 143-166

Chapter 6, pp. 143-166 Summary

Naoko tells Toru about her older sister. She was perfect, self-reliant, and popular, but one day she hung herself in her room. Toru found her body. Toru's sister had episodes where she shut herself up in her room before her suicide, but she seemed to snap out of them and be fine. Naoko's uncle also killed himself, and her father thinks it runs in his family. Naoko says she's deeply flawed and asks Toru to promise to remember her. Toru asks her to live with him, if she gets out of the sanatorium.

After dinner in the sanatorium dining hall, Naoko and Toru play cards while Reiko plays the guitar. Then Reiko takes Toru with her to get some grapes. She finishes her story. Reiko's lessons with her student went well, and they would talk for awhile after the weekly lessons. The girl seemed to admire Reiko. Then one day, she said she felt sick. Reiko took her upstairs to lie down. The girl asked Reiko to rub her back, but then soon, the girl started making a pass at Reiko. Reiko feels like she's not in control of her own body. It responds to the girl's touch against her will. Reiko tells the girl to stop, and finally she slaps her student. The girl finally leaves, but she tells Reiko she knows Reiko is a lesbian. Reiko still is not sure if it's true.

After the episode, Reiko began to relapse. Then she found out the girl told her parents that Reiko attacked her, sexually. The rumor went around the neighborhood, and everyone found out Reiko had been in a mental hospital. Reiko realized that she had to leave right away to avoid a breakdown. Her husband, though, had just started a new job. He asked her to wait. Finally she agreed to wait a month, but she couldn't. She had a breakdown, and after that, she couldn't trust her husband anymore. He'd let her down by asking her to wait. She went to a mental hospital and then to the sanatorium. She divorced her husband, and he remarried. Toru believes Reiko can make it outside again, but Reiko doesn't think so.

That night, it rains. Toru is leaving the next day. He promises Naoko to come visit again and to write every week. During the night, Naoko crawls into bed with Toru, and they hold each other. The next morning, after helping feed the birds, Toru leaves. He has a sad feeling, being back in the outside world again. Toru gets home in time to change and go to work. He watches the people at the record store and the sex toy store next door. His boss brags about sleeping with a girl who works in another shop. All the loud, noisy people seem meaningless to Toru. He longs for Naoko.

Chapter 6, pp. 143-166 Analysis

Throughout the novel, Murakami uses motifs, repetitions of important elements and ideas. The trio of friends is a motif. First, Kizuki, Naoko, and Toru form a trio, a romantic partnership plus one. Then, Nagasawa, his girlfriend, and Toru form a trio. Now, Reiko,



Toru, and Naoko form a trio. The partnerships are all flawed. Kizuki, Nagasawa's girlfriend, and Naoko will all die; their loved ones cannot prevent their suicides or join in complete communion. They all have chaperones that keep them, on one level, at arms length, that complete them and make them comfortable.

Another motif is unexplained suicide. This motif emphasizes the disconnect between society and individuals, and the disconnect between appearances and reality. Naoko's sister seems perfect on the outside. She does everything well, and everyone thinks she is wonderful. However, they don't see the real woman inside. She cannot express her real self within the confines of society. Like Kizuki, she kills herself.

Reiko finishes her story to Toru, and again her story exemplifies the disconnect between mind and body, especially sexually. Reiko does not want to have an affair with her student, but she cannot control her body's excitement. She must strike out to fight against, not just the student, but her own body.

When Toru leaves the sanatorium, the real world outside seems sordid, noisy, uncomfortable, and meaningless. He has entered into a peaceful world of the soul. The world of Nagasawa and Storm Trooper cannot live up to the world of Naoko, however troubled.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The next day, Toru runs into Midori, and they go get something to eat. Midori says he looks "spaced out" and invites him to go drinking with her after his classes. While they're drinking, Midori wishes their kiss had been her first kiss. She fantasizes about running off to Uruguay, dropping everything, and having lots of babies. She says being with Toru is a relief, and he doesn't force things on her. She makes a date with him for Sunday, and then starts fantasizing about being drunk and in bed with him. In her fantasy she tells him to stop and that he's too big and hard for her. After she pays for the drinks, and they're about to part, she tells him another sex fantasy: they're captured by pirates, stripped, and tied up with an hour to revel before they're thrown in the ocean.

On Sunday, Midori picks him up wearing a really short skirt. She asks what boys think of when they masturbate and if he thinks of her, and Toru tells her he doesn't. He has his girlfriend to think about. She instructs him to think about her next time he does it. Midori takes Toru on the train but doesn't tell him their destination. She tells him about going to meetings of the student protestors and trying to read *Das Kapital*. The students, she says, were hypocrites and weren't interested in helping her understand Marx, or even understand it themselves.

Midori lied about her father going to Uruguay. He's at the hospital, and Midori brings Toru with her to take care of him that day. Like her mother, he's dying of a brain tumor. Her father has had a brain operation, and he's suffering from headaches. Midori gives him water, fresh clothes, and food. Her sister has accidentally included cucumbers, and Midori wonders what an invalid would want with cucumbers. She talks to her father, who can barely speak, and tries to feed him. When they take a break, Midori makes up sex fantasies about Toru's girlfriend, and Toru promises to take her to a porno theater.

Midori takes care of her father four days a week, feeding and washing him. She watched her mother die the same way, slowly and painfully for everyone. Toru says she needs a break and offers to watch her father while she takes a walk. He talks to Midori's father about his literature classes, and then he gets hungry and eats two of the cucumbers. Her father sees him and asks for a cucumber, too, so Toru feeds it to him. Then Midori's father asks him to do something to do with Midori, a ticket, and Ueno Station. Toru doesn't understand but agrees to take care of Midori.

When Midori comes back, she is amazed that Toru got her father to eat. She doesn't know what her father was asking him, but tells him that when she was young and ran away, her father took her back on the train to Ueno Station, twice. Those were the only times they really talked. Toru promises to come back to the hospital the next Sunday, but Midori's father dies on Friday. She tells Toru not to come to the funeral. For the next week, Toru doesn't hear from her. He tries to think of her while masturbating, but can't masturbate. He writes to Naoko and tells her about Midori's father.



Chapter 7 Analysis

While Naoko is isolated at the sanatorium, inaccessible from the everyday world, Midori takes her place in the world. Her isolation means that she loses something, her connection with Toru. She exists more in Toru's mind than in his physical life, while Midori is live, flesh and blood, in the world with him. Naoko is outside of the world.

Midori says everything that comes into her mind, with no inhibitions and no blocks controlling her. Neither society nor her own personal demons stop the flow of thoughts from her mind through her mouth. In this way, she is the opposite of Naoko, who is locked inside her mind and cannot let herself out. Naoko is sexually blocked as well as psychically blocked, but Midori is neither. She is completely free, constrained only by the necessity of caring for her dying father.

Both Midori and Toru have someone depending on them. Naoko is ill in mind, depending on Toru mentally for support and sustenance. Midori's father is ill in body, depending on her physically for support and sustenance. Midori's father's illness is another exploration of the interdependence of mind and body. His problem is physical, a tumor in his mind, but it affects his mind and damages his mind, just as Naoko's mental problem will damage her body. Midori's father's illness traps and isolates him away from the world, taking away his ability to communicate and to be a person. His words are mere whispers, expressed in brackets to show how far away he has withdrawn.

The cucumber is a symbol of the world outside the hospital, a normal world of everyday things. Midori comments how ridiculous it is to buy a cucumber for a man who's just had a brain operation and is in the hospital. It does not belong to the world of sickness. Perhaps that is why ultimately Midori's father craves it. The cucumber belongs to the world of health. It symbolizes a normalcy that he cannot achieve anymore and longs for. The cucumber brings him back for a moment from the world of long, drawn-out death that he lives in. When he eats his hospital food, he says it is awful, but he says that the cucumber tastes good. Toru sees good food as a kind of proof that you're alive. The cucumber is reminiscent of the vegetables grown at the sanatorium. They are fresh, close to the Earth and close to nature, and they ground the patients in reality, bringing them away from death and close to life.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Toru cuts open his hand on a piece of glass, and emotionally strung out, he goes to talk with Nagasawa. He's passed the Foreign Ministry exam. After a year of training, he'll go overseas. He invites Toru to a celebration dinner with him and Hatsumi. Toru asks about Hatsumi, and Nagasawa says he's not planning to marry. She'll be on her own once he leaves.

The celebration dinner is at a fancy French restaurant. Hatsumi tries to set Toru up with a girl from her school and then quizzes him about his mysterious girlfriend. With Nagasawa's okay, Toru tells Hatsumi about some of their one-night stands, and Hatsumi thinks it's bad for Toru. Nagasawa and Hatsumi end up in a fight, and Hatsumi leaves. Toru goes with Hatsumi to a bar, and they shoot a game of pool. They talk about Nagasawa, and Toru's advice is to leave him, but she loves him. Two years after Nagasawa leaves the country, Hatsumi will remarry, and two years after that, she will kill herself.

On Sunday, Toru writes to Naoko. He tells her about his cut hand, and he talks about the pool game with Hatsumi. It's the first time he's played pool since the day Kizuki died. He remembers Kizuki making a beautiful shot that day, and he wonders why he didn't think of Kizuki when he went to the pool hall, not until he got a Pepsi from the machine. He is overcome with guilt for not thinking of his friend right away. Time has separated him and Kizuki, who will always stay seventeen.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The pool game that Toru plays with Hatsumi shows how far he's traveled from the memory of Kizuki. It's healthy for Toru to forget and to begin to live again, with new people and new events. However, Toru is also reliving the past. His last visit with Hatsumi is a pool game, where she soundly beats him. Like Kizuki, she will kill herself (although years later instead of that day). Still, the past is repeating itself. As Midori will say about the porn movies in the next chapter, people cannot do anything but repeat themselves, always doing the same things. Toru is part of another triangle of three, and one of them will commit suicide. Hatsumi cannot be satisfied, because Nagasawa can never give her what she needs. The two are misaligned, another lack of true communion.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Midori doesn't show up for the next day's class, but at 6:15 on Friday evening, while Toru is sound asleep, Midori calls him. She's just returned to Tokyo. After the funeral, she took off on a trip with her boyfriend. He got angry at her, though, because her period started early, and she took off on her own. Midori's boyfriend doesn't like Midori's openness about sex. He doesn't like blow jobs, and he got angry at her for telling a joke about a tampon. He doesn't even like her to wear colored underwear. Toru tells her that he was too embarrassed to masturbate while thinking about her, and she makes him promise to try again.

Toru fulfills his promise to take Midori to an S&M porno film. Toru is bored by the movie but enjoys watching Midori watch it. Midori makes him promise to take her to another one sometime. She's drunk, and she falls asleep in a pay toilet. She's not feeling good but doesn't want to go home, and she convinces Toru to stay with her through the night. As soon as he promises not to leave, she feels better, and they go to a disco and then get pizza.

Afterward, instead of going to a hotel, Toru goes back to Midori's house with her. She and her sister are planning to sell the bookstore. They burn a stick of incense for her father, and Midori tells Toru how she sat naked in front of his photo, to show him herself. Toru holds Midori until she falls asleep, and then he goes into the kitchen. He goes downstairs and finds a book, leaving the money for it, and he reads all night. Early in the morning, he writes a note and slips out, back to his dorm. Toru writes to Naoko every week, and she writes short letters to him, describing the deepening autumn turning to winter. She thinks Midori might be in love with him. Naoko and Reiko knit him a sweater for his twentieth birthday.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Midori's boyfriend is also misaligned with her. She is sexually free and open, while he is sexually constrained. The difference is that Midori does not love her boyfriend. He is only a dim character somewhere in the background. Midori's love of the porno movies shows her openness and her attraction to life. Sex is an enactment of life, and she cannot get enough of it, in all its iterations.

Midori finds comfort with Toru, and Toru finds comfort with her. He is beginning to drift away from Naoko and toward Midori. For his character, this is a drift away from death and toward life. In the novel, life and death exist on a continuum. They are intermixed with each other. Midori's father lives in a dark place near death, and so does Naoko. Midori is drawn toward death by her father, but ultimately she lives far from death, in a lighter place, a sexually open place, and a free place. In her letter, Naoko says that it

sounds like Midori is falling in love with Toru, and she is right. This knowledge may be drawing Naoko closer to death.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Toru avoids going out trolling for women with Nagasawa, instead writing to Naoko and spending some time with Midori. He writes to Naoko in December to ask to visit her, and Reiko writes back. Naoko cannot write, but they want him to visit. In the winter, the mountains are covered with snow. Toru spends three days and two nights with Naoko and Reiko, much as before. Naoko has retreated into quietness, speaking little. Toru tells Naoko that he hasn't slept with anyone else. She helps him come, with her mouth and hands, but she will not let him touch her vagina. Toru asks her to come live with him, to leave the sanatorium. Naoko cannot give him an answer. She is worried that she'll never be able to enjoy sex. Aside from the experience on her twentieth birthday, she has never before or since gotten wet. Before Toru leaves, he says he can probably come back to visit in March.

After final exams, Toru starts looking for an apartment. He finds a small cottage in the suburbs, and Nagasawa helps him move. Nagasawa himself is moving on to his future career. Toru writes to Naoko about his new place, again asking her to come join him, and asking when he can come visit in March. He fixes up his apartment and adopts one of the feral cats that live in the area, a white cat he names Seagull. He does not hear from Naoko.

One day, Toru realizes that he's moved and hasn't even told Midori or talked to her. He calls her, but she won't come to the phone. She's too angry. Toru realizes how terribly he's treated Midori. He writes her a letter, apologizing and telling her that he misses her. She never answers. All spring Toru waits for a letter from Midori or from Naoko, but he gets none. He lives a solitary life at his new home. He fixes up an old bike and a guitar that his landlord has, and he also works in the garden.

In April, Toru gets a letter from Reiko. Naoko has been unable to write. She is relapsing, overcome with voices in her head. She may need to be transferred to a regular mental hospital. Reiko asks Toru to keep writing to her and to be patient and wait. Toru falls into depression, drinking and staying secluded. When Midori finally writes to him days later, Toru can barely process the words. He pulls himself out of his depression, shaves and bathes, and chooses to live.

Toru and Midori have lunch. She has sold the bookstore and is living in an apartment with her sister. As they part, Midori gives him a note she's written. She's written him a letter because he's lost in some other world, and she can't communicate with him. She tells him that she was planning to spend the night with him, but now she won't. He hasn't even noticed her new hairstyle, and she's mad and sad. She doesn't want to talk to him anymore. True to her word, she won't let him talk to her when they meet at school. Toru is isolated again.



Toru gets a job at a restaurant and meets Itoh, a painter whose girlfriend is starting to bug him about getting a job when he graduates. They get drunk together one night, and Toru calls Midori. She still is not ready to talk with him. In May, Toru receives another letter from Reiko. Naoko is worsening and has been transferred to the mental hospital. Toru spends his time writing letters, to Naoko, Midori, and Reiko.

One day, Midori decides to start talking to Toru again. After class, she makes him take her to a department store restaurant, and then up to the roof. Toru apologizes for how he's treated her, and Midori says she's been hurt by being separated. She broke up with her boyfriend, and she has feelings for Toru. They embrace; Toru is in love with her, too. He says that he needs time, though, and asks Midori to wait for him. They spend the night holding each other, but Toru does not want to have sex yet, while he hasn't resolved things with Naoko. He writes to Reiko, confessing what's happened. Reiko advises him to live life and find love, but say nothing to Naoko, for now.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Naoko's quietness and her inability to write are symptoms of her retreating into her own mind, losing touch with the world, and moving closer to death. Toru wants to push Naoko to get better. His impatience is probably harmful to her. He doesn't want to pressure her, but he wants to move forward. Death is a kind of stillness in time. Kizuki is always seventeen. He doesn't move forward, and the world moves forward without him. Naoko's illness works in the same way. She is stuck where she is, lost in her mind, while the world (and Toru) are moving forward. Toru's desire for her to move forward shows Naoko that he cannot wait forever. They are separated, and those who are separated drift apart.

Toru loses his ability to communicate. He isolates himself in his new cottage, and he waits for Naoko. He is retreating from life, and he is retreating from Midori. Toru falls into his own mind. The disconnect and lack of communication makes Toru self-centered, and he ends up hurting Midori because of it. When Toru retreats into himself, she cannot communicate with him. She cannot talk to him. As Toru has communicated to Naoko with letters while she is away in a dark place, retreated into her mind, Midori does the same thing. The only way she can get through to him is with a letter, a type of communication that implies separation. They are sitting next to each other, but they are separated by a vast distance.

When Toru expresses his love for Midori, he chooses life over death. He chooses living over waiting. He chooses to move forward instead of being stuck in one place. Still, his choice is not complete. He is still in love with Naoko, and she ties him to the darkness, to death, and to waiting. Toru does not know how to extricate himself from the past.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Naoko dies in August. Toru asks Midori to continue waiting for him. He packs some things and hops on a train, traveling to nowhere. He travels all across Japan, sleeping anywhere he can and taking odd jobs when he runs out of money. He calls Midori only once. He's been gone three weeks and missed the start of school. He can't get the vision of Naoko out of his head. He sees her, with him, in death.

One day, Toru meets a young fisherman and tells him he's grieving for his mother. The fisherman sympathizes with him and gives him food, sake, and money. Toru is impatient with the fisherman's memories of his dead mother, unable to get outside of his own grief. After the fisherman leaves, Toru thinks of his high school girlfriend and how badly he treated her. He is sick. He finally returns to Tokyo.

Toru hears from Reiko. She has left the sanatorium and comes to visit him at his house, pretending to be his aunt for the sake of the landlord. Reiko has been offered a job in Asahikawa, with a friend of hers at a music school, and she's finally pulled herself out of the sanatorium. Naoko seemed to improve when she was at the mental hospital, Reiko tells Toru. She returned to the sanatorium briefly to pick up some things before going back to the hospital for more therapy, and she stayed overnight with Reiko. Naoko seemed happy, and Reiko was not worried. Naoko asked Reiko to get an apartment with her, saying that Toru would understand.

Naoko went through her things, burning old letters and her diary. After dinner, Reiko played the guitar for her. Naoko told Reiko the story of the night they had sex, in detail. She felt it was wonderful but something that would never happen again, something she's never wanted again. Reiko held her until Naoko fell asleep. During the night, Naoko snuck out and hung herself.

Toru and Reiko make sukiyaki to eat, and they have their own private funeral for Naoko, leaving a glass of wine on the veranda railing for her. They get drunk, and Reiko plays fifty-one songs on her guitar. Afterward, Toru and Reiko make love. They have sex four times that night. When it's time for Reiko to leave, Toru sees Reiko off on the train. They promise to write and visit each other. Then Toru calls Midori. He needs to see her and talk to her, and he wants to begin over from the start. Midori asks him where he is, and he looks outside the telephone booth. He sees people, but he cannot discern where he is. He is lost, and calling for Midori.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Naoko's death at once frees and traps Toru. He is thrown into death with her. When he is traveling Japan, he is completely outside of life, much as Naoko has been at the sanatorium. He becomes totally self-absorbed, and he leaves Midori waiting for him, just



as Naoko left Toru waiting for her. His self-absorption shows in his meeting with the fisherman.

When the fisherman tries to sympathize with Toru, telling him about his own mother's death, Toru has no patience with him. The fisherman's mother is unimportant to him. The only important thing is Naoko and her death and his own pain. Toru realizes suddenly that he is wound up in himself to the exclusion of all others, and that hurts those around him. He is doing the same thing to Midori as he is doing to the fisherman, the same thing he did to his girlfriend. By shutting out the world and choosing death and isolation, he is hurting those around him.

Reiko helps bring Toru out of his mind, where he is trapped. By having their own funeral for Naoko, they begin to let go of her and to move on in life. Reiko and Toru are now bound together by death, and they must help each other to get past it. Once Reiko leaves, Toru is ready to get out of his own mind, but at the end of the novel, he is still trapped. He does not know where he is. He only knows that he needs to find a way out, and he needs Midori to help bring him into life.



Characters

Toru Watanabe

Toru is a young man just starting college. His best friend from high school, Kizuki, killed himself without explanation, and Toru is haunted by the death of his friend. He realizes, through Kizuki's death, that death is a part of life. His closeness with death separates him from others. He is a solitary person who doesn't form close friendships with those around him. Although he is an outsider, he superficially fits in to college life.

Toru falls in love with Naoko, but he cannot have a relationship with her. Naoko cannot share herself with him. After one sexual encounter, she leaves and ultimately has a breakdown. The closest Toru ever is to Naoko is when he visits her in the sanatorium, and their time together there haunts him even to adulthood. Toru wants to understand Naoko and what his experiences with her mean.

Toru also falls in love with Midori, a girl he meets in one of his college classes. Midori is, in many ways, the opposite of Naoko. While Naoko represents isolation and the absorption in the self, Midori represents openness and interdependence with others. Toru has promised to wait for Naoko, but he finds himself in love with Midori. When Naoko dies, he is overcome with sadness and also with guilt. Naoko represents death, not only in her suicide, but also in her isolation from the world around her. Toru falls into a death of isolation when she kills herself, following her into the grave, metaphorically. He finally pulls himself out and calls to Midori to bring him back into life.

Naoko

Naoko is a friend of Toru's from high school. She was the girlfriend of his best friend, Kizuki. Kizuki, who Naoko knew since she was small, was the only bond between Naoko and Toru. After Kizuki died by suicide, Naoko lost touch with Toru. She wanted to get away from her home and her past, so she went to Tokyo. Toru also went to Tokyo for similar reasons. They meet again by chance and fall into a friendship that might be love.

Naoko is a confused and damaged girl. Just like Kizuki, Naoko's sister killed herself without leaving a note or any explanation. Naoko is full of complicated, confused feelings, and she cannot communicate them. She cannot come to terms with her own emotions or find her way out of her own head. Toru wants to understand Naoko, but Naoko cannot open herself up to communicate with others.

Naoko and Kizuki, though they were bound closely together and deeply in love, never had sex. Naoko could never get wet when they were together, and the act of sex always hurt. She could not bind herself to another person; she lacked the capacity to join together completely. Physically as well as intellectually, Naoko cannot get outside of herself and find communion with others. She finds some peace at the sanatorium



because it is a place of peaceful communion without pressure; but ultimately Naoko cannot trust, open herself up, and deal with her own imperfections. She kills herself.

Midori Kobayashi

Midori Kobayashi is a girl attending Toru's university. She is in his history of drama class. When they first meet, Midori is attracted to Toru's strange and solitary attitude. She has a boyfriend, and Toru is involved with Naoko. However, the two of them start hanging out. Midori is obsessed with sex, and she craves sexual openness. She also feels unloved and wants someone to cater to her whims and to do what she needs for a change.

Midori's mother died of a brain tumor, and now her father is in the hospital dying of the same ailment. Midori spends four days a week going to the hospital to look after her father, washing him and feeding him. She is tired of the hard work of living through a long illness, the second one she's had to deal with. When Midori's father dies, she is relieved.

Eventually, Midori breaks up with her incompatible boyfriend. She falls in love with Toru, and he falls in love with her. Midori is in many ways the opposite of Naoko. While Naoko has difficulty communicating, Midori says whatever comes into her head whenever she thinks of it, without filtering or inhibiting her thoughts or fantasies. While Naoko needs constant looking after because she is fragile, Midori has spent her life looking after others in dire straights. While Naoko is sexually inhibited, Midori is sexually free. While Naoko needs Toru to wait for her, Midori needs to wait for Toru. After wandering in a deep fog after Naoko's death, Midori is the one Toru calls out for.

Storm Trooper

Storm Trooper is Toru's roommate at the dorm. Storm Trooper doesn't fit in with the other boys. He's a neat freak, and he doesn't like pictures of naked women, so instead, they have a photo of a landmark on their wall. Storm Trooper gets up early in the morning to do calisthenics, and he seems unable to change himself or his schedule in any way to get along with Toru or to fit in with the other boys at the dorm.

Kizuki

Kizuki is Toru's only friend from high school. He was also Naoko's next door neighbor and friend from childhood. Kizuki and Naoko became boyfriend and girlfriend at a young age and were together always. Somehow, Toru completed their relationship. One day after playing a game of pool with Toru, Kuzuki killed himself by locking himself in the garage with his car running and a hose connecting the exhaust pipe to the inside of the car.



Nagasawa

Nagasawa becomes Toru's only friend in his private college dorm. Nagasawa is a brilliant, successful, self-confident, good-looking and popular man. He's on track to have a brilliant career in the civil service. He befriends Toru because Toru is not in awe of him, and also because Toru likes classic literature. Toru is interested in Nagasawa, not because of his success, wealth, or popularity, but because of his oddities. Nagasawa is a womanizer, and although he has an amazing girlfriend, he goes out trolling for one-night stands. Nagasawa brings Toru along on his expeditions, and Toru has empty sex with girls to satisfy his physical needs.

Hatsumi

Hatsumi is Nagasawa's girlfriend. She is intelligent and wonderful, and Toru and Nagasawa agree that Hatsumi is too good for Nagasawa. Hatsumi, though, is deeply in love with the womanizing Nagasawa. He makes it clear that he's not interested in marriage, and Toru advises Hatsumi to leave him. Hatsumi, though, stays with Nagasawa until he leaves for duty in the foreign service. Hatsumi marries another man two years later, and two years after that, she kills herself.

Momoko

Momoko is Midori's sister. Her name means "Peach Girl," and she looks good in pink and likes cars.

Reiko Ishida

Reiko is a musician who has been a patient at the Ami Hostel for seven years. When she was young, she was on track to become a concert pianist, until she had her first mental breakdown. After two breakdowns, Reiko married one of her piano students, but because of a traumatic experience with another student, she had a third and final breakdown. Now, though Reiko feels recovered, she is afraid to leave the sanatorium. She is known as the "music doctor," and teaches music to both staff and patients.

Reiko is Naoko's roommate, and she tries to help Naoko recover. She plays Naoko's favorite songs on the guitar, including "Norwegian Wood." The two become close friends, and Reiko becomes friends with Toru when he visits. After Naoko's death, Reiko finds the strength to leave the mental hospital. She comes to visit Toru, and they have a private funeral for Naoko, of drinking, eating, and music. Reiko and Toru have sex before Reiko goes off to try to start a new life as a music instructor.



Reiko's Piano Student

Reiko attributes her final breakdown to a piano student she took on, a neighbor's daughter. The piano student is a pathological liar, and she tried to seduce Reiko and then lied about the incident.

Midori's Father

At first, Midori tells Toru that her father has run away to Uruguay, but actually he is in the hospital dying of brain cancer. Toru goes with Midori to visit her frail and dying father, who can hardly speak and is suffering great pain, less than a week before he dies.

Itoh

Itoh is an oil painter who strikes up a friendship with Toru.

The Fisherman

While Toru is grieving for Naoko, a fisherman takes pity on him and gives him food and money.



Objects/Places

The Meadow

When Toru goes to visit Naoko in the sanatorium, they go walking together in a meadow. This walk is important to Toru, and it's one of the times when he's closest to Naoko.

The Field Well

When Naoko and Toru are walking in the meadow, Naoko tells Toru of the "field well," a deep well hidden in the grass of the meadow. No one knows where the field well is, and no one finds it without falling in and dying.

The Private Dormitory

Toru lives in an inexpensive private dormitory while he attends college.

The Streets of Tokyo

Toru and Naoko endlessly walk the streets of Tokyo on their Sundays together during the first year after they meet again while they are in college. Both have come to Tokyo to get away from their old life.

The Firefly

Storm Trooper gives Toru a firefly in a jar right before leaving for the summer. The firefly's light is dim, and Toru lets it out of the jar. It takes some time to accustom itself to its new surroundings, and then it takes off, leaving a glowing trail of light.

Kobayashi Bookstore

Kobayashi Bookstore is Midori's family's bookstore. Midori and her sister care for the small neighborhood store while her father is in the hospital, and after he dies, they sell it.

Ami Hostel

Ami Hostel is the sanatorium where Naoko goes. The patients live communally and grow vegetables. The hostel is peaceful and protected from the world.



Yotsuya Station

Yotsuya Station is where Toru runs into Naoko and renews their acquaintance.

The University Hospital

Midori's father is dying at the University Hospital.

Cucumbers

When Midori and Toru go to visit Midori's father in the hospital, Midori brings him food that her sister picked up. Her sister accidentally included three cucumbers. While Midori is out, Toru gets hungry and eats two of the raw cucumbers. Midori's father, who has not been eating much, sees Toru eating the cucumber and asks for one himself.

Ueno Station

When Midori is young, she runs away twice, and her father goes after her to bring her home. They travel on the train to Ueno Station, and those are the only times she really remembers talking with her father. When he is dying in the hospital of a brain tumor, he tries to tell Toru something about Midori and Ueno Station and a ticket. Later, after her father's death, Midori calls Toru from Ueno Station.

Toru's House

Toru rents a small cottage in the suburbs, where he hopes Naoko will come live with him.

Seagull

When Toru moves to his own cottage in the suburbs, he adopts a white cat he names Seagull.

Takashimaya Department Store Restaurant

When Midori decides to talk to Toru again, she makes him take her to a department store restaurant, which reminds her of her childhood.



Themes

Communication and the Isolation of the Mind

Naoko's mental illness is bound up in an inability to communicate. She cannot express what she means, and she cannot talk about the things that are important to her. When Naoko is ill, she loses the ability to write. She becomes embroiled in her own mind, centered only on herself and her own problems and troubles. The isolation of the mind makes her withdrawn and self-centered, and it hurts both her and those around her. She is thrown into the "field well," where she is isolated and alone. Ultimately, it leads to death.

Kizuki never hints that he's about to kill himself, and he leaves no reason or explanation. Naoko's sister also leaves no reason, and she talks to no one about her problems, relying only on herself. Isolation and lack of communication are symptoms of their deep illnesses. Toru also becomes isolated in his grief for Kizuki, and then in his grief for Toru. He retreats away from Midori, and he cannot communicate with her nor she with him. Midori needs Toru to let her in and to come out of his own mind, so that they can be together.

Of all the characters, Midori is the one with the healthiest communication. She is burdened with the problem of caring for her father, but mentally, she lets herself flow into life. She says whatever is on her mind. She only cuts off communication when she is hurt, and what has hurt her is Toru's lack of communication. Toru's isolation makes him selfish and self-centered, and Midori cannot deal with it. She counters his mental isolation with physical isolation.

Death

Murakami's novel is centered around death, and it presents death as on a continuum with life. When Kizuki dies, Toru comes to realize that death is part of life, and that in life, people move toward death. In the novel, characters choose to move closer to life or closer to death; they choose communion or isolation. Naoko symbolizes death for Toru, while Midori symbolizes life. Naoko is closed, isolated, and uncommunicative, while Midori is open and overflowing with words and communications.

Death is not always a choice, as with Midori's father, whose brain tumor is forcing him into the realm of death. His living death in the hospital brings only pain and suffering. Naoko also does not truly choose death. She just cannot make herself change and come out of her own mind. Of all the characters, Toru himself has the most choice in moving toward death or toward life. Reiko tells him to live his life, and in her advice, she is also telling him to move away from death.

The sanatorium is a metaphorical afterlife, where Naoko's spirit is free and where she is lifted from the cares of the world. In this role, it is a peaceful place that the inmates don't



want to leave; but ultimately, it is also a place of death. There is no conflict, no torment, but no life. Reiko is trapped in this afterlife because she is afraid to face life. Ultimately, she too chooses life.

Sex

Naoko and Reiko both have issues with sex. In Norwegian Wood, sex exemplifies the disconnect between the mind and the body. When Naoko is in love, she cannot get sexually excited. Her body cannot follow her mind. It is symptomatic of her inability to give herself fully to another person and to experience communion. Similarly, Reiko's body responds to her piano student, defying her mind and intellect. Reiko's body and mind are not in unison.

Midori is obsessed with sex, and she loves porno movies. She's curious about masturbation and talks about her sexual fantasies. She even sits naked, legs spread, in front of the memorial photo of her father after his death. Her sexuality is open and free, the opposite of Naoko's. Midori seems to have the trick of following her body wherever it leads her, of not obsessing or worrying about her own sexuality. Her openness and sexuality is a kind of life-force that counters the world of death. She is in tune with her body; while Naoko, driven into her own mind, is out of tune with her body.

When Toru first falls in love with Midori, he takes on Naoko's role. He is in love, but he cannot have sex with Midori. He stops himself, albeit more purposefully than Naoko stops herself from having sex. Toru goes through a period of sexual disconnect, when he is in love with Naoko but finds sex with random strangers. When he falls in love with Midori, he waits to have sex, trying to put his body and mind back in tune.



Style

Point of View

Norwegian Wood is written in the first-person perspective, and punctuated with letters from Naoko, Reiko, and Midori. The story is one of the mind and of personal experience, and the first-person perspective gives it not only a biographical feel, but also an intimate, experiential perspective from inside Toru's mind. The reader experiences his isolation and his grief, as well as his surprise when he realizes how he is pushing away others and hurting them. The reader also experiences a sense of distance from Naoko, who remains a mystery, inaccessible within her own mind.

Other points of view are only seen from afar, in letters and in stories others tell. Reiko's story is an example, one person removed. Toru hears the story, but he cannot experience it. He only knows what Reiko communicates with him, and his impression of Reiko's student is even further removed. He only knows Reiko's impressions and speculations, as she is able to communicate them to Toru. He cannot see the story from an outside perspective, where it is perhaps quite different.

The novel is also written from the perspective of the future. Toru, twenty years from the story's timeline, is looking back on events. He is at the whim of his own memory, and he is a different person now, separated from his younger self by the distance of time. Toru could not write about the events when he was too close to them. The perspective of the future gives him some objectivity with which to write.

Setting

Norwegian Wood is set in the late 1960s in Japan, against a backdrop of Marxist student rebels who profess to want to tear down the institutions of education. Toru finds them hypocritical and unthinking, without a real understanding of Marxist ideas or a real desire to dissolve the system they are part of. The backdrop of rebellion supplies a feeling of turmoil to the world, a turmoil that is reflected in Toru's emotions and experiences.

The setting of the sanatorium is an important one. The sanatorium is an ideal place, so ideal that it seems unreal. It is a metaphoric afterlife, a place of the spirit instead of a place of the world. The patients can be at peace because the sanatorium is outside of the world. Yet, the sanatorium is close to nature. It is a place of life, but it is also a place of death. It removes all the messiness and noise and hypocrisy of the world, all the things represented by the shallow Marxist students.

Toru's cottage is similar to the sanatorium, separated from the world, and it isolates him. However, while the sanatorium is communal and encourages communication within its safe walls, the cottage is a place where Toru is alone. He falls into depression there and



loses touch with Midori. He only finds respite when Reiko joins him there, to help bring him out of his darkest times.

Another aspect of setting is traveling. Naoko and Toru walk through Tokyo endlessly, and when Toru is in the depths of his depression he travels aimlessly through Japan. In these traveling settings, the characters do not know where they are going. They have no destination, only movement, a reflection of how they are moving aimlessly through life.

Language and Meaning

Language is a difficulty for Naoko. In Murakami's novel, language symbolizes communication, life, and being part of humanity. Naoko can never find the words to say what she means, and she cannot find the words to write letters. Language escapes her. It is a link between the world of her mind and the physical world around her, and that link goes missing for her. The lack of language is symptomatic and symbolic of her isolation. Without it, she is lost.

When Naoko talks about the "field well," Toru is unsure whether she is making up something in her head or telling him something real. In reality, the field well is a metaphor. It is a place of isolation and death, where someone can be trapped, alone. The field well is the darkness in her mind that Naoko is afraid of. She only feels safe from it when she is with Toru.

Language seems far away when characters are close to death. Midori's father can only talk in whispers, barely audible, and the author encloses his unheard words in brackets, placing him far from the readers and closer to death. Midori, however, is full of life. She has no problems expressing herself and letting her spirit out in words. She talks about her fantasies without pausing, and she has no inhibitions. However, when she is hurt, she punishes herself and Toru by cutting off communication.

Structure

The novel is written from a point twenty years in the future. It begins with a memory. Toru is on an airplane, remembering Naoko and the meadow near the sanatorium. He tells the story of the field well, an encapsulated metaphor of his relationship with Naoko, in which he tries to save her from isolation. The narrative then travels backward in time, to when Toru is first starting college.

The story proceeds chronologically, following Toru through the beginning of his college career until the centerpiece of the story when he visits Naoko at the sanatorium. His visit to the sanatorium is the longest chapter in the novel, Chapter 6, its central chapter both thematically and literally. Toru's visit to the sanatorium is also the height of Naoko's mental health. Afterward, she relapses, and her health goes downhill for the rest of the story.



After Toru leaves the sanatorium, and while Naoko is worsening, a new path opens up to him. He begins to fall in love with Midori. The two paths are distinct: Naoko symbolizes death while Midori symbolizes life. Toru at first focuses only on Naoko, falling into isolation and retreating away from Midori and life. However, when he is rejoined with Midori, he chooses life. This leads to the height of conflict in the novel. Toru has chosen Midori, but he cannot abandon Naoko. The conflict is not resolved at Naoko's death. Toru still cannot let go, and he begins losing himself in his own mind. Only at the end of the book does Toru try to pull himself up out of his despair.



Quotes

"I know, too, why she asked me not to forget her. Naoko herself knew, of course. She knew that my memories of her would fade. Which is precisely why she begged me never to forget her, to remember that she had existed." —Chapter 1, page 10

"Death exists, not as the opposite but as a part of life." —Chapter 2, page 25

"More than once I stretched my hand out in that darkness. My fingers touched nothing. The faint glow remained, just beyond their grasp." —Chapter 3, page 46

"'No, I just wanted to see how you'd react,' Midori said. 'But dying itself, I'm not afraid of. Really. Like here, I'd just be overcome with smoke and lose consciousness and die before I knew it. That doesn't frighten me at all, compared with the way I saw my mother and a few relatives die. All my relatives die after suffering with some terrible illness. It's in the blood, I guess. It's always a long, long process, and at the end you almost can't tell whether the person is alive or dead. All that's left is pain and suffering.'" —Chapter 4, page 77

"After putting the letter away in my desk drawer, I changed clothes and went out. I was afraid that if I stayed near the letter I would end up reading it ten, twenty, who knows how many times? I walked the streets of Tokyo on Sunday without a destination, as I had always done with Naoko. I wandered from one street to the next, recalling her letter line by line and mulling each sentence over as best I could." —Chapter 5, page 89

"'That song can make me feel so sad,' said Naoko. 'I don't know, I guess I imagine myself wandering in a deep wood. I'm all alone and it's cold and dark, and nobody comes to save me. That's why Reiko never plays it unless I request it.'" —Chapter 6, page 109

"Holding Naoko in my arms, I wanted to explain to her, 'I am having intercourse with you now. I am inside you. But really this is nothing. It doesn't matter. It is nothing but the joining of two bodies. All we are doing is telling each other things that can only be told by the rubbing together of two imperfect lumps of flesh. By doing this, we are sharing our imperfection.'" —Chapter 6, page 131

"What was Naoko doing now? I wondered. Of course, she must be sleeping, sleeping deeply, wrapped in the darkness of that strange little world of hers. Let her be spared from anguished dreams, I found myself hoping." —Chapter 6, page 166

"'It's good when food tastes good,' I said. 'It's kind of like proof you're alive.'" —Chapter 7, page 191

"How many Sundays—how many hundreds of Sundays like this—lay ahead of me? 'Quiet, peaceful, and lonely,' I said aloud to myself. On Sundays, I didn't wind my spring." —Chapter 7, page 199



"It was Nagasawa, of course, who told me what had happened. His letter from Bonn said this: 'Hatsumi's death has extinguished something. This is unbearably sad and painful, even to me.' I ripped his letter to shreds and threw it away. I never wrote to him again." —Chapter 8, page 212

"Well, what else can they do? We all just keep doing the same things." —Midori, Chapter 9, page 225

"And besides, I still loved Naoko. Bent and twisted as that love might be, I did love her. Somewhere inside me, there was still preserved a broad, open space, untouched, for Naoko and no one else." —Chapter 10, page 267

"Again and again, I called out for Midori from the dead center of this place that was no place." —Chapter 11, page 293



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast Naoko and Midori.

Is Toru attracted to strange or broken people? Why?

What do you think happens to Toru and Midori after the end of the novel?

Is Toru in any way responsible for Naoko's suicide?

Why does Toru go on one-night stands with Nagasawa?

What does the "field well" symbolize? How does it relate to the relationship between Toru and Naoko?

Why was Naoko unable to have sex with Kizuki?

Is Toru in love with Naoko? Is he in love with Midori?

What is the relationship between love and sex in the novel?

What does it say about Toru that he ultimately chooses Midori?