

These are my notes, summarizing Norwegian Wood. I first took the summary on Wiki, converted that summary to blue font, then began building my own. I've preserved the Wiki in full, and kept it in blue font.

Chapter One: remembering Naoko

A 37-year-old Toru Watanabe arrives ~~just arrived in~~ Hamburg, Germany (1987). When he hears an orchestral cover of the Beatles' song "Norwegian Wood," he is suddenly overwhelmed by feelings of loss and nostalgia for an event 18 years earlier in October (1970): Naoko (直子 no real meaning to the name but, if pushed, along the lines of "proper girl" or "fixes it girl") and he were walking, and she was talking about an unmarked "field well" in the meadow and, in that connection Naoko talks about how it is impossible for one person to look after another totally. She also asks two favors of Toru, that he realizes she is very grateful that he has come to visit her and that he never forget her. Yet he is forgetting her and that is sad because "Naoko never even loved me". ~~He thinks back to the 1960s, when so much happened that touched his life.~~

Chapter Two: Toru's dormitory life and the earlier death of his best friend Kizuki

Now the story turns to 20 years ago (1968) when Toru (18) is new to Tokyo, a freshman living in a private dormitory with a right-wing political bent to it. His roommate is "Storm Trooper" (突撃隊、とつげきたい) who does radio calisthenics early in the morning. Naoko, with whom he is taking a walk, having not seen her in nearly a year but having run into her by accident in Tokyo, is amused by his stories of his roommate.

Flashback to his second year in high school (1966). Toru (16), his classmate Kizuki (キズキ), and Kizuki's girlfriend Naoko are the best of friends. Kizuki and Naoko are particularly close and feel as if they are soulmates (they have known each other since the age of three we later learn, 112), and Toru seems more than happy to be their enforcer. This idyllic existence is interrupted by the unexpected suicide of Kizuki on his 17th birthday (1967, near beginning of senior year high school). The day of his death in May (school begins in Japan in April), Kizuki had invited Toru to play pool with him; Toru is the last to see him before he dies. Toru sees Naoko two weeks after the funeral and then not again until they bump into each other in Tokyo.

Kizuki's death deeply touches both surviving friends; Toru feels the influence of death everywhere ("Death exists, not as the opposite but as a part of life" 25; in bold and large in the original: 死は生の対極としてではなく、その一部として存在している), while Naoko feels as if some integral part of her has been permanently lost.

Chapter Three: Toru becomes involved with Nagasawa, his relationship with Naoko first deepens then is cutoff when he sleeps with her on her 20th birthday. She disappears. It is a time of student strikes.

~~The two of them spend more and more time together, trying to console one another, and they eventually fall in love.~~ Toru turns 18 and is reading F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, John Updike's *The Centaur*, and not reading the popular writers of his day: Kazumi Takahashi, Kenzaburo Oe, or Yukio Mishima, or French novelists. He becomes involved with Nagasawa, two years his elder, a brilliant student with a bright career and a penchant for women. "There were sides to Nagasawa's personality that conflicted in the extreme. Even I could be moved by his kindness at times, but he could, just as easily, be malicious and cruel." (32) Toru and Nagasawa sometimes cruise for women even though he has a steady girlfriend Hatsumi.

Toru begins to work part-time at a record store. He buys Naoko Henry Mancini's album that has "Dear Heart" on it, her favorite track (a fairly saccharine song). January / February 1969 Storm Trooper gets very sick but recovers, Toru hits an upper classmen but Nagasawa smooths out the trouble. March 1969 Toru is getting Cs and Ds and doesn't quite end the school year with enough credits.

Halfway through April 1969. [On the night of Naoko's 20th birthday](#), they are listening to Beatles' *St. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Bill Evan's *Waltz for Debbie* and a few other albums and [she feels especially vulnerable](#), breaks into a torrent of tears, [and they consummate their love](#). Toru more or less ruins the night by asking afterwards if she had slept with Kizuki. [Afterwards, Naoko leaves Toru a letter saying that she needs some time apart and that she is quitting college to go to a sanatorium.](#)

Student strike starts at the end of May 1969.

June 1969 he write Naoko a long letter and is again, somewhat uncomfortably, chasing girls with Nagasawa. In July 1969 he gets a short letter from Naoko: she is taking leave from her school and is not ready to see him. At the end of July Storm Trooper gives him a firefly.

[The blossoming of their love is set against a backdrop of civil unrest. The students at Toru's college go on strike and call for a revolution.](#)

Chapter Four: Nagasawa and Toru still cavort a little; Toru becomes involved with Midori

September 1969. [Inexplicably, the students end their strike and act as if nothing had happened, which enrages Toru as a sign of hypocrisy.](#) Storm Trooper is missing.

Toru befriends a fellow drama classmate, Midori (緑, "Green" but a common name) Kobayashi. She is everything that Naoko is not — outgoing, vivacious, supremely self-confident. Despite his love for Naoko, Toru finds himself attracted to Midori as well. Midori is attracted to him also, and their friendship grows during [Naoko's absence](#) although she is mysteriously gone, at the hospital, one day, cancelling a date with him and although he is still sending letters to Naoko. Midori goes to a "rich girls" school and hates it. Her family is typical "ordinary working people" who own a small bookstore. He visits her at her bookstore, where she makes lunch for him. She is an excellent cook. She talks about her family, including that her father left her to go to Uruguay. They watch, at length, a fire in the neighborhood. He kisses her.

A letter arrives from Naoko.

Chapter Five: Toru reads Naoko's letter and determines to go see her

Toru reads Naoko's letter. She says she was not fair to him, she explains where she is and she invites him to visit. Most of the letter is a description of her healthy and regulated lifestyle at "Ami Hostel".

Toru is reading Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (again).

Chapter Six: At Ami Hostel, Toru meets Reiko and learns her sad story, Toru hears more about Naoko's incomplete sex life with Kizuki, and the relationship between Toru and Naoko becomes more physical

This chapter is significantly longer than all others and occupies about 25% of the entire novel.

[Toru visits Naoko at her very secluded mountain sanatorium near Kyoto](#), called "Ami Hostel". He will be there for two nights: Monday through Wednesday.

Monday. [There He meets Reiko Ishida](#) (レイコ、石田先生 "Ishida sensei"—the English, "Dr. Ishida" is meant to enhance the confusion of whether Reiko is a patient or doctor but, still, it gives something of a wrong impression; by the way, Reiko calls Toru "Watanabe kun" which is more formal than Naoko's "Toru" but the "kun" adds two things: a friendly feeling but a indication that he is Reiko's junior), [another patient there who](#)

has become Naoko's roommate and *confidante*. In her lengthy introduction Reiko says, among other things: the hostel is a place where everyone is supposed to be honest; Naoko might have shown improvement since arriving; she thinks the three of them can help each other.

Monday mid-afternoon, then 5:30PM. Naoko slips away from her daily duties to tell Toru she is so grateful he came. Then, at the end of the day, they greet each other more officially. Naoko notices Toru is reading *The Magic Mountain*. Reiko says, "How can you bring a book like that to a place like this?" and Toru thinks she is entirely correct in that.

Monday, 6PM. They dine in the common hall where everyone talks at the same quiet level of speech. Monday, post-dinner. Reiko and Naoko leave to take a bath, Toru waits in the apartment listening to Bill Evans and looking at the beautiful moonlight. When the women return, they light candles, drink wine, talk and Reiko plays the guitar. Naoko makes a special request that she play "Norwegian Wood", her favorite song. Naoko: "That song can make me feel so sad. I don't know, I guess I imagine myself wandering [lost] in a deep wood. I'm all alone and it's cold and dark, and nobody comes to save me." (109) Toru talks about Nagasawa and his own escapades with women. Neither Reiko nor Naoko seem to like this. Toru says he has slept with 8 or 9 girls; Naoko says she was unable to have intercourse with Kizuki and that this was clearly a profound problem for her. And, in addition, she *did* feel very sexually aroused with Toru even though, by implication, she did not love him at the time she slept with him (her 20th birthday evening) (112) Naoko becomes so upset Reiko asks Toru to leave for a while.

Monday, later that night, after his walk alone. Naoko is alone in her room recovering; Reiko and Toru take a walk, and talk. It seems Toru is rather ordinary as a person and doesn't have a particular passion for anything. Reiko is not sure Naoko will ever get better; she asks Toru if he can wait for her, whether he loves her that much. "I'm not sure. (わからないですね) Like Naoko, I'm not really sure what it means to love another person." (115) Reiko says she has a daughter now in the 4th grade. She tells the story of how she was a promising pianist but lost the use of one of her fingers and later was hospitalized for mental instability. "Some jewel or energy or something had disappeared." (117) (でもね、もう何かが消えちゃったのよ。何かこう、エネルギーの玉のようなものが、) But she recovered, married a good man, and things were wonderful until she began teaching a beautiful 13-year-old girl who was a bad person, a liar.

Monday, after Reiko and Toru return from their walk. Naoko is sitting properly, feeling better. Naoko and Toru remember Kizuki; Naoko talks about their relationship. How they began kissing at 12 and petting at 13. Naoko thinks that if he had lived they would have slowly become unhappy because they had too much happiness when young. "We would have had to pay the world back for what we owed it." (129)

Monday deep at night, or early hours of Tuesday. After everyone has gone to bed, Naoko comes secretly to Toru, undresses, lets him look at her for about 5 minutes, then silently dresses and leaves. Toru ruminates on how perfect Naoko's body has become.

Tuesday morning into mid-afternoon. At breakfast Naoko gives no indication about what she did last night. The three do morning chores. They return to the apartment and leave Toru behind to study his German while they go out again. They return at 11:30AM and the three lunch at the hall then they leave for a long walk. They go to a building where there is a girl and dog, Reiko suggests Naoko and Toru take a walk alone for an hour. They do. Naoko talks about how Reiko comforts her. Toru says he wants to hold her, too. They hug and Naoko brings him to a climax with her hands. Afterwards, Naoko talks about her dead sister, six years older than her. She killed herself at 17, like Kizuki, and, like Kizuki, no one understands why she did it. (It is Naoko,

then in the 6th grade, who discovered her hanging in her room.) Naoko also learned at that time about an uncle, younger brother of her father, who had stayed inside for four years from age 17-21 then threw himself in front of a train. After sharing these things, Naoko warns Toru not to try to take care of her, but Toru insists he wants to do so and insists that someday Naoko will feel better, leave Ami Hostel, and can live with him.

Tuesday night dinner at the hall is fairly uneventful. They talk about how the patients and staff seem pretty much like each other. (Side note: In English Reiko at one point says “Right on” when agreeing to a comment. This “60s style” way of talking is almost entirely absent from the original. Here it is just まったくそのとおり. However earlier when Naoko said “Peace.” as a greeting that did match the original: ピース. Still, for the most part, what sets this story in the 1960s is the music selections and the constant reference to the riots, not speech patterns which seem quite neutral.)

Tuesday night. Naoko and Toru play cards, Reiko plays the guitar. Then she invites Toru to go with her to buy some grapes. This becomes an opportunity for Toru to ask her to complete her story about the beautiful young lying piano student of hers. She describes how she was seduced by her, how wonderful sex with her was, and how, afterwards, the young girl ruined her life by spreading rumors that she was a lesbian. At the time, Reiko was 31. She divorced her husband and return to hospitalization. After this story, the two return to the apartment.

Late Tuesday night or the early hours of Wednesday morning with heavy rain and some thunder. After going to bed around 11PM, Naoko secretly comes to Toru. They caress each other, then she slips away: “Good-bye,” she called in a tiny voice.” (163) The original has “sayonara” which is a more final way of saying good-bye, one that suggests a last time or that it will be a long time until meeting again.

Wednesday morning, fine rain. They breakfast and Toru leaves.

Wednesday 4:30PM. Toru arrives back at Tokyo and goes directly to his record store. He seems to have culture shock being back in the city. “What the hell was this all about?” (165)

For all of the above Wiki just has (and “subsequent visits” is inaccurate): [During this and subsequent visits, Reiko and Naoko reveal more about their past: Reiko talks about her search for sexual identity, and Naoko talks about the unexpected suicide of her older sister several years ago.](#)

Chapter Seven: Toru reengages Midori, cares for her father who then dies, and writes a letter to Naoko

Thursday. Toru runs into Midori, who takes him drinking, talks about how people force things on each other and shares her sexual fantasies about him. Toru is disengaged at the beginning but warms to her.

Sunday. Midori, in an exceptionally short skirt, picks up Toru at his dormitory and takes him to the hospital where her father was, admitting that she had lied about Uruguay. On the way to the train station she asks Toru to think about her when he is masturbating. On the train she talks about a left-wing group that was selfish and arrogant in behavior. At the hospital she is kind to her father but he is mostly uncommunicative. She leaves for a while, asking Toru to stay with him. Once she is gone the wife of the man in the hospital bed gives Toru his evaluation of Midori: “She’s a really wonderful girl. She takes wonderful care of her father; she’s kind and gentle and sensitive and solid, and on top of all that, she’s pretty. You’d better treat her right. Don’t ever let her go. You won’t find another one like her.” (188) Toru, oddly, is very successful at taking care of Midori’s father, including getting him to eat a fresh cucumber. He decides he likes the man. When Midori returns, she gives Toru more details about him, including how he didn’t notice the Great Earthquake of 1923.

Friday, 6:30AM. Midori calls to say that her father just died “a few minutes ago”. A week and a few days pass.

Sunday. Toru writes a letter to Naoko and includes details about the man and the cucumber. He says he misses Naoko, and he misses Reiko, too. After writing the letter, he muses about the father’s death and how his own Sundays might repeat endlessly “quiet, peaceful and lonely”.

Chapter Eight: Nagasawa’s selfishness, Hatsumi’s troubles and her later suicide

Halfway into the next week. Toru cuts the palm of his hand, an accident at work.

Saturday. Nagasawa takes his girlfriend Hatsumi and Toru to a nice French restaurant to celebrate his passing of the Foreign Service exam. Nagasawa and Hatsumi fight, mostly about Nagasawa apparently not caring enough for Hatsumi. The talk circles, more or less, around Nagasawa’s habit of sleeping with random girls and sometimes taking Toru along. Hatsumi thinks this is not in keeping with Toru’s true nature; Nagasawa thinks it is. “Neither of us is interested, essentially, in anything but ourselves. ... neither of us is able to feel any interest in anything other than what we ourselves think or feel or do.” (208) During the conversation, Toru feels nostalgia for Naoko’s room at Ami Hostel. Hatsumi asks Toru, not Nagasawa, to see her home. In the taxi Toru feels an “emotional reverberation” about her. (彼女が僕の心の中に引き起こすこの感情の震え)

Flashback to around 1982 (“some dozen or so years later”). Toru is in Sate Fe and realizes how special Hatsumi was. He recounts how, two years after Nagasawa left for Germany, she married and two years later cut her wrists and died. Nagasawa expressed regret in a letter that Toru tears up, never to write him again.

Saturday, early night. Hatsumi and Toru play pool. Toru recalls how he played pool with Kizuki just before he died. From there they go to her place, to redress Toru’s cut which has gotten sore from pool. At her place he recommends, when asked, that she stop seeing him but she says she can’t. This is the last time he ever sees her.

Saturday, 11:30PM. Toru dreads Sunday and also thinks how he will be 20 in two weeks, on a Sunday.

Sunday morning. Toru writes Naoko about recent events with Hatsumi and his fading memory of Kizuki.

Chapter Nine: Toru gets more involved with Midori, letter exchange with Naoko

Monday, drama lecture. Midori is missing. Thursday. Nagasawa apologizes for the previous dinner’s behavior and admits that Hatsumi is too nice for him.

Friday, 6:30PM. Midori calls Toru and they go out, again, to the bar DUG. Midori tells how she went with her boyfriend to Nara but, because of her period, they could not have sex and they ended up having a huge fight and so she took a second trip, alone, to Aomori. Midori does not want to be alone and convinces Toru to stay out late dancing with him. They return to her place (Kobayashi bookstore). She tells how “the other day” she had gotten naked in front of her father’s altar and showed him all of her body. Toru talks Midori to sleep. He can’t sleep himself. He gets up, finds a copy of Herman Hesse’s *Beneath the Wheel* in the book store and reads it in full, until dawn.

November. Toru is writing weekly letters to Naoko. At last she responds with a relatively simple letter: how she misses him, how she rereads his letters, how it is difficult for her to write.

Wednesday, three days after Toru’s 20th birthday. A present, a sweater, arrives from Naoko. It has been knitted half by Naoko, half by Reiko.

Chapter Ten: A difficult spring for Toru who angers Midori by his drifting into thoughts of Naoko, while Naoko, for her part, is growing more ill. Toru is caught between his love for both women.

1969, in retrospect, Toru tells us, was like a swamp.

Winter, after Toru turns 20. Attends classes, works, rereads *The Great Gatsby*, write letters to Naoko on Sundays, occasionally date Midori. Midori sells Kobayashi Bookstore and moves in with her sister in a nicer part of the city. Nagasawa invites Toru out now and then but he makes excuses.

Winter break. Toru goes to Ami Hostel. Naoko is less talkative than before. She performs oral sex for Toru. He says he plans on moving out of the dorm and into a nicely place of his own and he want Naoko to join him. She is non-committal. Although they caress each other, she cannot become sexually aroused.

1970. After he has completed most of his finals, Nagasawa helps him move out.

March, three days after Toru moves. He writes Naoko and invites her to join him suggesting that April is a good time to start things anew. He finds a part-time job as an assistant to a painter. He suddenly remembers that he did not tell Midori he was moving. He tries to contact her but she is so angry. He spends his spring waiting for letters from Midori, Naoko and Reiko.

April 4. Letter from Reiko: Naoko is not doing well and might have to see a specialist, moving out of the hostel. Toru closes himself off from the world for three days.

April 6. A letter from Midori. She wants to meet on the 10th, feeling she has punished him sufficiently for his thoughtlessness.

April 10. When they meet, Midori tells Toru that he looks terrible. They are interrupted by two girls. Toru drifts into thoughts of Naoko. Afterwards they go for a walk but his is only half-listening. When he leaves her for a short time to buy drinks for them, she writes an angry letter of how uninterested he seems to be in her and slips it into his pocket. He reads it when they part, when he is still on a train home. He tries calling her but her sister says she has not come home. He tries writing her, gives up, and write Naoko instead.

April 11. He tries numerous times to reach Midori but her sister, sounding worried, says that she has still not come home.

Wednesday. Midori comes to class but says she doesn't want to talk with him.

May. An even more depressing month for Toru than April. Midori continues to refuse conversation with him; he continues to write Naoko. He meets a new friend: a quiet, gentle person named Itoh, from Nagasaki who has drifted out of love with his regular girlfriend still in his hometown.

Mid-May. A letter from Reiko. She tells him that Naoko will have already moved to a new hospital by the time he receives this letter. Toru is writing a lot of letters: weekly to Naoko, several to Reiko and several to Midori.

Mid-June. Midori begins to talk to Toru again. They have a serious discussion. He tries to explain why he was distant. In the course of this discussion, it is clear Toru has been thinking not of Midori but of himself and has not imagined her feelings at all. Midori has broken up with her boyfriend and admitted her seriously feelings about Toru. Toru says that he loves her from the bottom of his heart but is being held back by the complicated situation with his girlfriend (Naoko). He does say, however, that he loves her from the bottom of his heart.

(262)(君のこと、大好きだよ。心から好きだよ。)

Now back in Tokyo, Toru unintentionally alienates Midori through both his lack of consideration of her wants and needs, and his continuing thoughts about Naoko. He writes a letter to Reiko, asking for her advice about his conflicted affections for both Naoko and Midori (who has an “irresistible power” 268). He doesn’t want to hurt Naoko, but he doesn’t want to lose Midori either. Reiko counsels him to seize this chance for happiness and see how his relationship with Midori turns out.

Chapter Eleven: Naoko dies, Toru and Reiko talk and sleep together, Toru is trying to repair his relationship with Midori when the book ends.

September 1 or shortly after that date. A later letter informs Toru that Naoko has killed herself.

Toru, grieving and in a daze, wanders aimlessly around Japan grieving and thinking, while Midori — whom he hasn't kept in touch with — wonders what has happened to him. He says that from Kizuki he learned that death is an innate part of life and from Naoko he learned that no truth can cure the sorrow of losing a loved one. (273) After about a month of wandering, he returns to the Tokyo area on October 2, 1970. (He has missed the first month of classes, that began Sept 1.)

Four days later he gets a letter from Reiko asking him to call her. Immediately he gets in contact with Reiko, who leaves the sanatorium to come visit and will move to far away Asahikawa, a city in northern Japan, Hokkaido. The middle-aged Reiko (39) stays with Toru, they have a private funeral for Naoko with Reiko playing 50 songs and a 51st played together with Toru. Twice she plays Norwegian Wood and she also plays “Dear Heart” (Naoko’s favorite song by Mancini that was the cause of a Christmas present the year before last from Toru to her) and they have sexual intercourse. ~~It is through this experience, and the intimate conversation that Toru and Reiko share that night, that he comes to realise that Midori is the most important person in his life.~~ Once Reiko leaves, Toru calls Midori out of the blue to declare his love for her saying they must talk, that he has a million things to say. Midori asks, “Where are you now?” He does not know. “Again and again I called out from Midori from the dead center of this place that was no place.” (293) What happens following this is never revealed — ~~Midori's response is characteristically (by this point) cold, yet the fact that she does not explicitly cut Toru off at that point (as she did before) leaves things open.~~