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The Housekeeper and the Professor, by Yoko Ogawa, Picador,
2009

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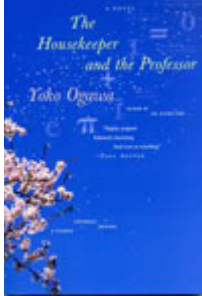
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Recommended Readings



The Housekeeper and the Professor

by Yoko Ogawa, Picador, 2009

Reviewed by Eloise Sureau-Hale

This is the story of a most unusual encounter. A young Japanese single mother who works as a housekeeper is sent by her agency to take care of an elderly man. The victim of a terrible car accident, he is unable to remember more than 80 minutes at a time. Every day starts anew for the housekeeper who must take great care not to shatter the old man's illusion of belonging to a past that is long gone.

The old professor of mathematics welcomes the housekeeper as a stranger every day, relying on pictures and pieces of scribbled information pinned on his jacket for keepsake. As the professor openly shares his passion for numbers, the housekeeper slowly learns to speak the language of mathematics, a common tongue between people living in two completely different worlds.

Little by little, a friendship develops between the housekeeper who brings balance in the old man's life, the professor whose life is governed by numbers, and the housekeeper's young son that the old man nicknames Root and loves like a grandson.

Set in the early 1990's Japan and told from the perspective of the housekeeper long after the events took place, as the story unfolds it grips the reader with its impeccable description of the agony of living life one hour at a time, both for the person entrapped in this inferno, and for those around him. Yet, it is not a sad tale.

Those who have enjoyed novels like *Still Alice* by Lisa Genova and *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry will delight in *The Housekeeper and the Professor*.

- Eloise Sureau-Hale is associate professor of French at Butler University.