

# Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman: Twenty-four Stories

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From the bestselling author of *Kafka on the Shore* and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicles* comes this superb collection of twenty-four stories that generously expresses Murakami's mastery of the form. From the surreal to the mundane, these stories exhibit his ability to transform the full range of human experience in ways that are instructive, surprising, and relentlessly entertaining.

Here are animated crows, a criminal monkey, and an iceman, as well as the dreams that shape us and the things we might wish for. Whether during a chance reunion in Italy, a romantic exile in Greece, a holiday in Hawaii, or in the grip of everyday life, Murakami's characters confront grievous loss, or sexuality, or the glow of a firefly, or the impossible distances between those who ought to be closest of all.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Haruki Murakami was born in Kyoto in 1949 and now lives near Tokyo. His work has been translated into thirty-four languages, and the most recent of his many honors is the Yomiuri Literary Prize, whose previous recipients include Yukio Mishima, Kenzaburo Oe, and Kobo Abe.

From the Trade Paperback edition. *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*

When I closed my eyes, the scent of the wind wafted up toward me. A May wind, swelling up like a piece of fruit, with a rough outer skin, slimy flesh, dozens of seeds. The flesh split open in midair, spraying seeds like gentle buckshot into the bare skin of my arms, leaving behind a faint trace of pain.

"What time is it?" my cousin asked me. About eight inches shorter than me, he had to look up when he talked.

I glanced at my watch. "Ten twenty."

"Does that watch tell good time?"

"Yeah, I think so."

My cousin grabbed my wrist to look at the watch. His slim, smooth fingers were surprisingly strong. "Did it cost a lot?"

"No, it's pretty cheap," I said, glancing again at the timetable.

No response.

My cousin looked confused. The white teeth between his parted lips looked like bones that had atrophied.

"It's pretty cheap," I said, looking right at him, carefully repeating the words. "It's pretty cheap, but it keeps good time."

My cousin nodded silently.

My cousin can't hear well out of his right ear. Soon after he went into elementary school he

was hit by a baseball and it screwed up his hearing. That doesn't keep him from functioning normally most of the time. He attends a regular school, leads an entirely normal life. In his classroom, he always sits in the front row, on the right, so he can keep his left ear toward the teacher. And his grades aren't so bad. The thing is, though, he goes through periods when he can hear sounds pretty well, and periods when he can't. It's cyclical, like the tides. And sometimes, maybe twice a year, he can barely hear anything out of either ear. It's like the silence in his right ear deepens to the point where it crushes out any sound on the left side. When that happens, ordinary life goes out the window and he has to take some time off from school. The doctors are basically stumped. They've never seen a case like it, so there's nothing they can do.

"Just because a watch is expensive doesn't mean it's accurate," my cousin said, as if trying to convince himself. "I used to have a pretty expensive watch, but it was always off. I got it when I started junior high, but I lost it a year later. Since then I've gone without a watch. They won't buy me a new one."

"Must be tough to get along without one," I said.

"What?" he asked.

"Isn't it hard to get along without a watch?" I repeated, looking right at him.

"No, it isn't," he replied, shaking his head. "It's not like I'm living off in the mountains or something. If I want to know the time I just ask somebody."

"True enough," I said.

We were silent again for a while.

I knew I should say something more, try to be kind to him, try to make him relax a little until we arrived at the hospital. But it had been five years since I saw him last. In the meanwhile he'd grown from nine to fourteen, and I'd gone from twenty to twenty-five. And that span of time had created a translucent barrier between us that was hard to traverse. Even when I had to say something, the right words just wouldn't come out. And every time I hesitated, every time I swallowed back something I was about to say, my cousin looked at me with a slightly confused look on his face. His left ear tilted ever so slightly toward me.

"What time is it now?" he asked me.

"Ten twenty-nine," I replied.

It was ten thirty-two when the bus finally rolled into view.

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[www.harukimurakami.com](http://www.harukimurakami.com)

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