



Review

BLIND WILLOW, SLEEPING WOMAN: 24 Stories

Haruki Murakami

Knopf

Fiction/Short Stories

ISBN-10: 1400044618

ISBN-13: 9781400044610



**Books by
Haruki Murakami**

[BLIND WILLOW,
SLEEPING WOMAN: 24
Stories](#)

[KAFKA ON THE SHORE](#)

[AFTER THE QUAKE:
Stories](#)

[NORWEGIAN WOOD](#)

Reading Group Guides

[NORWEGIAN WOOD](#)

According to the bestselling Japanese author who is celebrated for both his short fiction and his longer novels, writing short stories is a purely joyful experience and a welcome respite from the challenges that accompany writing a full-length book. "If writing novels is like planting a forest, then writing short stories is more like planting a garden. The two processes compliment each other, creating a complete landscape that I treasure." BLIND WILLOW, SLEEPING WOMAN is Murakami's latest collection of short stories, compiled over the last 25 years of his career.

If many of the 24 offerings presented here seem familiar, they are --- 19 have been previously published in prominent literary and cultural magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *McSweeney's*, *Granta*, *The Yale Review* and *Storie Magazine*, and one ("Firefly") appeared in his highly acclaimed novel, *NORWEGIAN WOOD*. When included together in the same volume seemingly in no particular order, these stories represent a comprehensive portrait of Murakami's wide-ranging talent and broad scope.

As many fans of his are aware, the magic of Murakami's work lies mainly in his ability to manipulate structure when balancing what is with what might be. His multi-layered stories consist of a number of atmospheric and allegoric vignettes that, when fused together, form a narrative that takes place somewhere between fantasy and reality. Contemplative and often very intense, these dreamlike sequences add depth to the plot and meaning that can take days to digest and comprehend. In most, if not all of these stories, this emphasis on what lies in-between is what makes them so compulsively readable.

While not all of the stories in this collection are up to Murakami's far above-average par, there are a few of them that stand out. "The Rise and Fall of Sharpie Cakes" is quite possibly the collection's most entertaining piece, for it parodies the Japanese literary "scene" at the time of Murakami's debut. In the form of a fable, he describes a man who attends a "major informational seminar" on Sharpie Cakes --- a type of confection. The purveyors of the conference are sponsoring a contest to see who can create the preeminent Sharpie Cake for the next generation. High-minded readers will love the somewhat predictable but nonetheless ingenious ending (featuring a gaggle of Sharpie Crow judges pecking each other to death upon picking a possible winner) and might even smugly agree with its sentiment.

"Birthday Girl" was composed when Murakami was working on an anthology containing other writers' birthday-themed stories. Thankfully, his editor requested that he also write a story for that collection, and the result of that request is also included here --- a perfect illustration of a somewhat real, somewhat fantastical and slightly ungraspable allegory of a person on the edge of a seemingly ordinary yet life-changing experience. What transpires on the protagonist's 20th birthday is simple, yet the consequences are unalterable and far-reaching. Looking back on that day many years later, the girl shares a bittersweet conversation with a friend about what happened, and the impression left is both perceptive and slightly unnerving.

"Nausea 1979," "The Year of Spaghetti," "Firefly" and "Crabs" are all variations on the same intertwined theme: loneliness begets haphazard behavior in the attempt to find communion begets even more loneliness. In each of these stories, characters fumble around carelessly trying to connect with each other while also trying to maintain their independence. They love wholeheartedly. Some latch on too tightly while others push defiantly away. No matter what the circumstances are, all of them take advantage of each other, thereby forgetting their inherent mortality (in its most basic sense) and end up alone despite their intentions.

While most readers will not like all of the selections in Murakami's latest collection equally, they will find certain pleasure rifling through the pages to pick out what to read. His introduction provides a useful menu of background information surrounding the stories, as well as a few notes about their translation. BLIND WILLOW, SLEEPING WOMAN is a worthwhile foray into this esteemed author's shorter works while waiting for his next sure-to-be marvelous full-length literary masterpiece.

--- Reviewed by Alexis Burling

► [Click here now to buy this book from Amazon.com.](#)

© Copyright 1996-2006, Bookreporter.com. All rights reserved.

[Back to top.](#)

[Home](#) - [Reviews](#) - [Features](#) - [Authors](#) - [Daily Quote](#) - [Books to Movies](#) - [Book Clubs](#) - [Awards](#)
- [Coming Soon](#)
[Search](#) - [Contests](#) - [Word of Mouth](#) - [Bestsellers](#) - [New in Paperback](#) - [Newsletter](#) - [Author](#)
[Bibliographies](#) - [Blog](#)
[For Librarians](#) - [Submitting a Book](#) - [Become a Reviewer](#) - [FAQ](#) - [Contact Us](#) - [About Us](#) - [Privacy](#)
[Policy](#)

© Copyright 1996-2006, Bookreporter.com. All rights reserved.
The Book Report, Inc. • 250 West 57th Street • Suite 1228 • New York, NY • 10107

[Bookreporter.com](#) • [ReadingGroupGuides.com](#) • [AuthorsOnTheWeb.com](#) • [AuthorYellowPages.com](#)
[Teenreads.com](#) • [Kidsreads.com](#) • [FaithfulReader.com](#)