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The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

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Par Haruki Murakami
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Par Haruki Murakami : The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurToru Okada's cat has disappeared. His wife is growing more distant every day. Then there are the increasingly explicit telephone calls he has recently been receiving. As this compelling story unfolds, the tidy suburban realities of Okada's vague and blameless life, spent cooking, reading, listening to jazz and opera and drinking beer at the kitchen table, are turned inside out, and he embarks on a bizarre journey, guided (however obscurely) by a succession of characters, each with a tale to tell.** Murakamis new novel is coming ** COLORLESS TSUKURU TAZAKI AND HIS YEARS OF PILGRIMAGE 'The reason why death had such a hold on Tsukuru Tazaki was clear. One day his four closest friends, the friends hed known for a long time, announced that they did not want to see him, or talk with him, ever

again'.comBad things come in threes for Toru Okada. He loses his job, his cat disappears, and then his wife fails to return from work. His search for his wife (and his cat) introduces him to a bizarre collection of characters, including two psychic sisters, a possibly unbalanced teenager, an old soldier who witnessed the massacres on the Chinese mainland at the beginning of the Second World War, and a very shady politician. Haruki Murakami is a master of subtly disturbing prose. Mundane events throb with menace, while the bizarre is accepted without comment. Meaning always seems to be just out of reach, for the reader as well as for the characters, yet one is drawn inexorably into a mystery that may have no solution. The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is an extended meditation on themes that appear throughout Murakami's earlier work. The tropes of popular culture, movies, music, detective stories, combine to create a work that explores both the surface and the hidden depths of Japanese society at the end of the 20th century. If it were possible to isolate one theme in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, that theme would be responsibility. The atrocities committed by the Japanese army in China keep rising to the surface like a repressed memory, and Toru Okada himself is compelled by events to take responsibility for his actions and struggle with his essentially passive nature. If Toru is supposed to be a Japanese Everyman, steeped as he is in Western popular culture and ignorant of the secret history of his own nation, this novel paints a bleak picture. Like the winding up of the titular bird, Murakami slowly twists the gossamer threads of his story into something of considerable weight. --Simon LeakeExtraitBook One: The Thieving MagpieJune and July 19841 Tuesday's Wind-Up Bird Six Fingers and Four Breasts When the phone rang I was in the kitchen, boiling a potful of spaghetti and whistling along with an FM broadcast of the overture to Rossini's The Thieving Magpie, which has to be the perfect music for cooking pasta. I wanted to ignore the phone, not only because the spaghetti was nearly done, but because Claudio Abbado was bringing the London Symphony to its musical climax. Finally, though, I had to give in. It could have been somebody with news of a job opening. I lowered the flame, went to the living room, and picked up the receiver. "Ten minutes, please," said a woman on the other end. I'm good at recognizing people's voices, but this was not one I knew. "Excuse me? To whom did you wish to speak?" "To you, of course. Ten minutes, please. That's all we need to understand each other." Her voice was low and soft but otherwise nondescript. "Understand each other?" "Each other's feelings." I leaned over and peeked through the kitchen door. The spaghetti pot was steaming nicely, and Claudio Abbado was still conducting The Thieving Magpie. "Sorry, but you caught me in the middle of making spaghetti. Can I ask you to call back later?" "Spaghetti? What are you doing cooking spaghetti at ten-thirty in the morning?" "That's none of your business," I said. "I decide what I eat and when I eat it." "True enough. I'll call back," she said, her voice now flat and expressionless. A little change in mood can do amazing things to the tone of a person's voice. "Hold on a minute," I said before she could hang up. "If this is some new sales gimmick, you can forget it. I'm out of work. I'm not in the market for anything." "Don't worry. I know." "You know? You know what?" "That you're out of work. I know about that. So go cook your precious spaghetti." "Who the hell--" She cut the connection. With no outlet for my feelings, I stared at the phone in my hand until I remembered the spaghetti. Back in the kitchen, I turned off the gas and poured the contents of the pot into a colander. Thanks to the phone call, the spaghetti was a little softer than al dente, but it had not been dealt a mortal blow. I started eating--and thinking. Understand each other? Understand each other's feelings in ten minutes? What was she talking about? Maybe it was just a prank call. Or some new sales pitch. In any case, it had nothing to do with me. After lunch, I went back to my library novel on the living room sofa, glancing every now and then at the telephone. What were we supposed to understand about each other in ten minutes? What can two people understand about each other in ten minutes? Come to think of it, she seemed awfully sure about those ten minutes: it was the first thing out of her mouth. As if nine minutes would be too short or eleven minutes too long. Like cooking spaghetti al dente. I couldn't read anymore. I decided to iron shirts instead. Which is what I always do when I'm upset. It's an old habit. I divide the job into twelve precise stages, beginning with the collar (outer surface) and ending with the left-hand cuff. The order is always the same, and I count off each stage to myself. Otherwise, it won't come out right. I ironed three shirts, checking them over for wrinkles and putting them on hangers. Once I had switched off the iron and put it away with the ironing board in the hall closet, my mind felt a good deal clearer. I was on my way to the kitchen for a glass of water when the phone rang again. I hesitated for a second but decided to answer it. If it was the same woman, I'd tell her I was ironing and hang up. This time it was Kumiko. The wall clock said eleven-thirty. "How are you?" she asked. "Fine," I said, relieved to hear my wife's voice. "What are you doing?" "Just finished ironing." "What's wrong?" There was a note of tension in her voice. She knew what it meant for me to be ironing. "Nothing. I was just ironing some shirts." I sat down and shifted the receiver from my left hand to

my right. "What's up?" "Can you write poetry?" she asked. "Poetry!?" Poetry? Did she mean . . . poetry? "I know the publisher of a story magazine for girls. They're looking for somebody to pick and revise poems submitted by readers. And they want the person to write a short poem every month for the frontispiece. Pay's not bad for an easy job. Of course, it's part-time. But they might add some editorial work if the person--" "Easy work"? I broke in. "Hey, wait a minute. I'm looking for something in law, not poetry." "I thought you did some writing in high school." "Yeah, sure, for the school newspaper: which team won the soccer championship or how the physics teacher fell down the stairs and ended up in the hospital--that kind of stuff. Not poetry. I can't write poetry." "Sure, but I'm not talking about great poetry, just something for high school girls. It doesn't have to find a place in literary history. You could do it with your eyes closed. Don't you see?" "Look, I just can't write poetry--eyes open or closed. I've never done it, and I'm not going to start now." "All right," said Kumiko, with a hint of regret. "But it's hard to find legal work." "I know. That's why I've got so many feelers out. I should be hearing something this week. If it's no go, I'll think about doing something else." "Well, I supposed that's that. By the way, what's today? What day of the week?" I thought a moment and said, "Tuesday." "Then will you go to the bank and pay the gas and telephone?" "Sure. I was just about to go shopping for dinner anyway." "What are you planning to make?" "I don't know yet. I'll decide when I'm shopping." She paused. "Come to think of it," she said, with a new seriousness, "there's no great hurry about your finding a job." This took me off guard. "Why's that?" I asked. Had the women of the world chosen today to surprise me on the telephone? "My unemployment's going to run out sooner or later. I can't keep hanging around forever." "True, but with my raise and occasional side jobs and our savings, we can get by OK if we're careful. There's no real emergency. Do you hate staying at home like this and doing housework? I mean, is this life so wrong for you?" "I don't know," I answered honestly. I really didn't know. "Well, take your time and give it some thought," she said. "Anyhow, has the cat come back?" The cat. I hadn't thought about the cat all morning. "No," I said. "Not yet." "Can you please have a look around the neighborhood? It's been gone over a week now." I gave a noncommittal grunt and shifted the receiver back to my left hand. She went on: "I'm almost certain it's hanging around the empty house at the other end of the alley. The one with the bird statue in the yard. I've seen it in there several times." "The alley?" Since when have you been going to the alley? You've never said anything--" "Oops! Got to run. Lots of work to do. Don't forget about the cat." She hung up. I found myself staring at the receiver again. Then I set it down in its cradle. I wondered what had brought Kumiko to the alley. To get there from our house, you had to climb over a cinder-block wall. And once you'd made the effort, there was no point in being there. I went to the kitchen for a glass of water, then out to the veranda to look at the cat's dish. The mound of sardines was untouched from last night. No, the cat had not come back. I stood there looking at our small garden, with the early-summer sunshine streaming into it. Not that ours was the kind of garden that gives you spiritual solace to look at. The sun managed to find its way in there for the smallest fraction of each day, so the earth was always black and moist, and all we had by way of garden plants were a few drab hydrangeas in one corner--and I don't like hydrangeas. There was a small strand of trees nearby, and from it you could hear the mechanical cry of a bird that sounded as if it were winding a spring. We called it the wind-up bird. Kumiko gave it the name. We didn't know what it was really called or what it looked like, but that didn't bother the wind-up bird. Every day it would come to the stand of trees in our neighborhood and wind the spring of our quiet little world. So now I had to go cat hunting. I had always liked cats. And I liked this particular cat. But cats have their own way of living. They're not stupid. If a cat stopped living where you happened to be, that meant it had decided to go somewhere else. If it got tired and hungry, it would come back. Finally, though, to keep Kumiko happy, I would have to go looking for our cat. I had nothing better to do. I had quit my job at the beginning of April--the law job I had had since graduation. Not that I had quit for any special reason. I didn't dislike the work. It wasn't thrilling, but the pay was all right and the office atmosphere was friendly. My role at the firm was--not to put too fine a point on it--that of professional gofer. And I was good at it. I might say I have a real talent for the execution of such practical duties. I'm a quick study, efficient, I never complain, and I'm realistic. Which is why, when I said I wanted to quit, the senior partner (the father in this father-and-son law firm) went so far as to offer me a small raise. But I quit just the same. Not that quitting would help me realize any particular hopes or prospects. The last thing I wanted to do, for example, was shut myself up in the house and study for the bar exam. I was surer than ever that I didn't want to become a lawyer. I knew, too, that I didn't want to stay where I was and continue with the job I had. If I was going to quit, now was the time to do it. If I stayed with the firm any longer, I'd be there for the rest of my life. I was thirty years old, after all. I had told Kumiko at the dinner table that I was thinking of quitting my job. Her

only response had been, "I see." I didn't know what she meant by that, but for a while she said nothing more. I kept silent too, until she added, "If you want to quit, you should quit. It's your life, and you should live it the way you want to." Having said this much, she then became involved in picking out fish bones with her chopsticks and moving them to the edge of her plate. Kumiko earned pretty good pay as editor of a health food magazine, and she would occasionally take on illustration assignments from editor friends at other magazines to earn substantial additional income. (She had studied design in college and had hoped to be a freelance illustrator.) In addition, if I quit I would have my own income for a while from unemployment insurance. Which meant that even if I stayed home and took care of the house, we would still have enough extras such as eating out and paying the cleaning bill, and our lifestyle would hardly change. And so I had quit my job. I was loading groceries into the refrigerator when the phone rang. The ringing seemed to have an impatient edge to it this time. I had just ripped open a plastic pack of tofu, which I set down carefully on the kitchen table to keep the water from spilling out. I went to the living room and picked up the phone. "You must have finished your spaghetti by now," said the woman. "You're right. But now I have to go look for the cat." "That can wait for ten minutes, I'm sure. It's not like cooking spaghetti." For some reason, I couldn't just hang up on her. There was something about her voice that commanded my attention. "OK, but no more than ten minutes." "Now we'll be able to understand each other," she said with quiet certainty. I sensed her settling comfortable into a chair and crossing her legs. "I wonder," I said. "What can you understand in ten minutes?" "Ten minutes may be longer than you think," she said. "Are you sure you know me?" "Of course I do. We've met hundreds of times." "Where? When?" "Somewhere, sometime," she said. "But if I went into that, ten minutes would never be enough. What's important is the time we have now. The present. Don't you agree?" "Maybe. But I'd like some proof that you know me." "What kind of proof?" "My age, say?" "Thirty," she answered instantaneously."Thirty and two months. Good enough?" That shut me up. She obviously did know me, but I had absolutely no memory of her voice. "Now it's your turn," she said, her voice seductive. "Try picturing me. From my voice. Imagine what I'm like. My age. Where I am. How I'm dressed. Go ahead." "I have no idea," I said. "Oh, come on," she said. "Try." I looked at my watch. Only a minute and five seconds had gone by. "I have no idea," I said again.