

Sparrow Song
by Peter Charney

(rev. 4/9/20)

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Sparrow Song

(Two song sparrows, RED and YELLOW, sing to each other from two trees on each side of a street in the center of a park. There is a light fall of rain, and no people. The dim glow of a streetlamp illuminates the darkness between them.)

RED
Yes...

YELLOW
It's quiet.

RED
Felt what?

YELLOW
I've never felt this before.

RED
You can't *feel* quiet.

YELLOW
The quiet.

RED
It'll be better soon.

YELLOW
I do.

RED
Promise.

YELLOW
You promise?

(RED tries to fall asleep.)

RED
We can always hear the rain.

YELLOW
I can hear the rain.

RED
Not like what?

YELLOW
Not like this...

RED
Buzzing and clattering?

YELLOW
There's no buzzing in the sky
or clattering on the ground.

YELLOW
The noises they make!
That always fill the air.

RED

Those are good names.

RED

You're learning quickly.

RED

Except the rain?

RED

Well you know...in other places you can.

RED

Yes!

RED

Yes! Just like this all the time.
No battering or clanging.

RED

Right! No buzzing or clattering.
Only rain. That is...*if* it's raining.
And the sounds we make!
Nothing else.

RED

Far from here, but for miles and miles on end.
You can even hear the other animals!
Nothing like where we live....

RED

Maybe we can fly there someday.

YELLOW

I know.

YELLOW

All of those noises are gone.

YELLOW

Yes. I've never heard the rain by
itself before...

It sounds so lonely.

YELLOW

Hear only rain?

YELLOW

Really?

YELLOW

Buzzing or clattering!

YELLOW

Where?

YELLOW

Wow!

YELLOW

Maybe...

RED
What's wrong?

RED
You only say that because you don't know
what it's like without them.

RED
Have you been learning many new names?

RED
Any today?

RED
Which ones?

RED
What?

RED
I don't think so.

RED
A "heavy burden?" Mine feels normal.

RED
I think you need to breathe.

RED
Just take some deep breaths.

YELLOW
I think I'd miss all the sounds.

YELLOW
I don't like only rain...

It's empty...

YELLOW
Yes!

YELLOW
A few...but –

YELLOW
Does your branch feel heavier to
you?

YELLOW
Does you branch feel heavier?

YELLOW
My branch feels heavy. Like the
weight beneath me is a heavy
burden I must walk upon.

YELLOW
My branch definitely feels
heavier. I...I don't –

YELLOW
I'm really worried about –

RED
Come on, do it with me. In...and out...
In...and out...In –

RED
Listen to me, you need to stop this –

RED
Who?

RED
Ones who pass by?

RED
People?

RED
Maybe that's why it's so quiet...

RED
Look, the sun is hardly even up today.
If I were the people, I wouldn't pass by either.
I'm sure they are just waiting for the sun.

RED
Of course I do!

(RED looks down at a garbage can that has been knocked over. There are dirty napkins and towels, empty jugs of water, empty cartons of milk, and a bottle of hand sanitizer all spread over the street below.)

RED
What new names did you learn today?

YELLOW
All of the noises are gone!

YELLOW
(overlapping)
In...and out... Where do you
think they've all gone?

YELLOW
But I haven't seen them in a long
time!

YELLOW
The ones that always pass by!

YELLOW
I do not remember the name for
them. The sun comes up and I
see them pass by. Down below.

YELLOW
Yes! People!
They're gone.

YELLOW
I guess, but –

YELLOW
You really think so?

RED
Sign?

RED
Oh! That's a good one!
Especially where we live because –

RED
Who?

RED
Oh, here you go again...
on and on about the people...

RED
Look...The people are going to do
whatever the people want to do.

RED
It's not our responsibility to –

RED
You know the people don't come out in the rain.

RED
Yes, but maybe not today.

RED
Check on them?

YELLOW
Sign.

YELLOW
With markings. To tell the people
things.

YELLOW
Do you think we'll ever see them
again?

YELLOW
The people.

YELLOW
I'm just...I'm worried for them.

YELLOW
I know but –

YELLOW
But I really think something is
wrong.

YELLOW
Some do. I still see them, they
just pass even faster.

YELLOW
Can we just check on them?

YELLOW
Yes!

RED
Where?

RED
You mean the buildings?

RED
Yes I'm sure they are, but I don't see what
that has to do with us!

RED
You've never wanted to see them before!

RED
I've told you it's no use
getting upset over!

RED
There's no reason to –
and besides...it's too windy to leave.

RED
I'm not leaving this tree.

RED
Listen to me!

RED
You have to breathe...
You're forgetting to breathe.

RED
You need to calm down.

YELLOW
Surely they're in the hard places.

YELLOW
Yes, the buildings!

YELLOW
(overlapping)
I just want to fly by and see the
people in the buildings.

YELLOW
I've never been worried before!

YELLOW
I'm not upset! I just want to
check on them!

YELLOW
(overlapping)
If you don't care then I'll –
We can still fly perfectly fine!

YELLOW
Then I'll go without you!

YELLOW
I AM LISTENING!

YELLOW
(overlapping)
I AM breathing. SEE?
IN AND OUT AND IN AND –

YELLOW
How can you not care?

RED
I do! I do care –

YELLOW
You don't.

RED
I –

YELLOW
No! You sit there like everything's normal, like nothing's happened. But the sun comes up and NOTHING. No buzzing in the sky, no clattering on the ground. Nothing. Every time the sun comes up, it's the same. You know it's the same! Every time! But this time? Nothing is passing by. No PEOPLE are passing by....

I may know less than you and I may not remember the name for this and the name for this and the name for this, but I know when something doesn't feel right and I know this doesn't feel right.

(Silence. Almost.)

RED
Ok.

I can only hear the rain.

YELLOW
Ok?

RED
We can go.

YELLOW
Thank you.

(RED and YELLOW fly through the sky in perfect unison; a pas de deux. They land on each side of a windowsill of an old apartment building. They look inside. The dim glow of a television illuminates the darkness between them.)

RED
There. You see?

YELLOW
What? I can't see anything.

RED

They are sitting down and watching television.
Just like they normally do.

RED

I'm flying home.

(The television is set to a news station. The screen shows many scenes of people running in panic. It is catastrophic.)

RED

It's all...
gone.

RED

They have nowhere else to go...

(The television turns off and two people inside embrace. They continue to hold each other.)

RED

About what?

RED

What will you miss most about the people?

RED

I don't think they ever paid us any mind.

YELLOW

I still think something isn't right.

YELLOW

Look!

YELLOW

See? That's what I felt.

YELLOW

Yes. The people don't pass by us
anymore because they can't.

YELLOW

You know what I will miss the
most?

YELLOW

The people.

YELLOW

I'll miss the way they sit with us.
Or...sit by us.
By our homes.

But now we can sit by them for a
little while.

RED
You mean a “person.”

YELLOW
Maybe most of them don’t...but
some do. Some would stay...
Some would stay for what
seemed like a very long time.
And every so often, I would look
down and see one looking up at
me; a people and I would–

YELLOW
Yes, a “person.” I would look
down and I would see that
person looking back up at me...
And I would know, for a brief
moment...that I am not alone
here.

That we are both not alone here.
We all share a home.

(Silence. Almost)

RED
I’m going to fly back.

YELLOW
You go ahead.

RED
You’re not coming?

YELLOW
I’d like to sit here a little longer.
By their homes.
If that’s ok.

RED
Ok.

YELLOW
Thank you for believing me.

RED
Yes.
I’ll see you when the sun rises.

*(RED quickly flies away leaving YELLOW alone on the windowsill, looking inside
for what may be a very long time. Until we can no longer hear only the rain.)*