

A Tale of Two Sparrows

Jacques Van Heerden

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This tale of the search for happiness is told with a delightful cadence and clever bridges between human and animal.

A fanciful story of a community of anthropomorphized birds, *A Tale of Two Sparrows* depicts main characters Billy and Sally living, loving, and learning their way through life, just as humans do. Author Jacques van Heerden muses that birds experience joys and sorrows similar to those of humans, and that they seek, with a wonderful child-like innocence, to derive meaning from those experiences. Life lessons abound in this clever tale.

Infused with poetic “sparrow song,” the cadence of the story is delightful. Capturing the essence of the devotion of the two birds to each other, Billy proclaims, “I’m just a little sparrow / and this a simple song / I’m calling for a mate / to whom I can belong.” This, paired with the simple, yet life-like illustrations interspersed throughout the book and on the front cover, transforms the ideas into works of art.

Character names are inspired. Gregory Peck (a tall, dark, and handsome fellow), Charles Dickens (Billy and Sally’s songwriter son), and Long John Slither (a predatory snake) are just a few of the characters that take on human likenesses. Similarly, word choice continues to maintain the bridge between bird and human. Snobby birds are described as “hoity-toity beak in the air” types and Billy as “Father and crumb-winner.”

The story is charming from beginning to end, despite the disjointed stumble in the transition from Chapter 3 to Chapter 4, where Gwendolyn Gracious (an as-yet-unintroduced character) flies onto the scene. This confusion is resolved much later in the story in the second-to-last chapter. It is a distraction, but not a significant detriment, as the story scuttles along at a rapid pace and is otherwise clever and well crafted.

A Tale of Two Sparrows has appeal for young adults who may still be trying to define happiness in their own lives, or for anyone interested in a pleasant and meaningful story. Gentle reminders that good manners start at home, that quality of life matters much more than quantity, and that there’s safety in numbers are just a few of the things these feathered friends share with their children. Bridging the gap between bird and human, and imparting life lessons that also make sense for people, Van Heerden makes it easy to forget that Billy and Sally are merely birds.

LAURA MAHON (May 8, 2014)

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