

Sparrow

Brian Kindall

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Sparrow is a dreamy fairy tale riff on the adage to be careful what you wish for.

In Brian Kindall's fantasy novel *Sparrow*, a boy in a village that suffers from inertia wishes on a falling star.

In this work of magical realism, Timothy is a boy with bright eyes; his mother nicknamed him "Sparrow." He lives with his shut-in uncle in an abandoned factory that once housed a successful business. His uncle is a pariah in their village, though Timothy does not know why.

Timothy spends his days running errands, doing chores, and playing with birds. He has no human friends. He wants to see snow, but such weather is rare in the village. When the stars grant his wish for winter weather, the snow drifts keep increasing at an exponential rate. The boy becomes wary: perhaps his wish had implications he did not consider. With people's lives under threat, he sets out to discover why his uncle is melancholy, why his family fell from grace, and what his affinity for birds is based on.

Lonely Timothy is a sympathetic lead. Living in his cold attic room, he gets by on moxie and thanks to his unlikely animal friends. He makes use of a beautiful singing voice to call and soothe the birds. Meanwhile, the cavernous factory is a setting of portent; it houses frights. Beyond its bounds, Timothy receives help from a clergyman and a mysterious girl; their place in the broader tapestry of the town is uncovered late in the narrative, and is a source of delight (though the girl's whole story is somewhat under explored).

The story does an able job of articulating how momentous events can go from seeming fantastic to terrible, depending on their length and one's perspective. The snow, which at first leaves children spinning and catching snowflakes on their tongues, lasts so long that the same children end up questioning their own mortality. Extreme possibilities are a highlight: the townspeople are capable of great kindness and great menace; birds are simultaneously mythical and symbols of stark reality, collecting buttons and pecking at crumbs.

Throughout the book, surreal elements are braided into everyday details in a deft way. Even Timothy's family story is both whimsical and bizarre, introducing notes from ornithology and featuring field experts who went on great adventures to seek out and record new species. Though the book's language is contemporary, the evocation of a fairy tale time and space dominates: here, wishes come true, and animals have life-saving powers.

Sparrow is a dreamy fairy tale riff on the adage to be careful what you ask for, in which a boy who is attended to by a flock of birds makes a big wish—with enchanting results.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (January 31, 2022)

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