

MY NEW FEATHERED FRIEND

by
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I got an unexpected visit yesterday; not a visit from friends or family, but another type of visit. This visit was a from a little sparrow to be exact.

She had managed to somehow get herself trapped in the housing unit. So there she was, out and about, flying here and there. I could hear her singing her tune, chirping happily along as I went about the task of shaving. I never looked out of the window, and didn't pay much attention to the melodious, wing-beaked creature. At least not at first. My cell had the light on, to see my task better, which must have aroused her curiosity. Things went quiet for a short while and I figured that she must have escaped and went on about her sweet business. The next thing I knew, she was staring inquisitively at me through the honey-combed holes in the cell door. I ignored her, thinking she would just fly away the moment I looked over at her. She lingered on the eight-inch food port tray; her harmonious chirps grew more fervent – as if she insisted on my attention.

She then paced the edge of the food-port tray, head bobbing and kind of jerking, as sparrows do. My own curiosity aroused by then, I turned over to her and asked "What's up little birdie, you all right?" She continued to pace back and forth on the ledge, but her chirping grew more purposeful, as if complaining about something.

It was the oddest scene, so I stopped shaving and stooped down to look at her. She stopped pacing and looked back, still chirping; ever so feminine with her neck movements. Her body language expressed an attitude. She seemed to be trying to tell me about it. No, she was bobbing her head as if trying to figure it out; trying to figure what *I* was all about.

I stuck my pointer finger through a perforation in the cell door, as if to greet her. Certainly, I expected her to fly away at that point, but she didn't. Instead, she softly, curiously pecked at my finger, very friendly. As I began to talk to her, mindlessly abandoning my half-shaven face, she seemed to listen, her tiny little head looking up at me and then bobbing it up and down as if to take in every syllable that parsed my lips. She just stood there, listening, no more pacing.

I kept thinking she would fly away any minute, but she didn't. She chirped back a few times, never interrupting, but as if in genuine dialogue. I told her it seemed funny to me that I was in cage, and she was free – looking at me from the outside in. At this, her chirps got more intense, as if she was thinking the same thing. It was a real "umph," moment, and I actually uttered this non-word to myself.

I asked her to wait a minute while I fetched her a piece of graham cracker from my locker. I figured she'd definitely fly way at this point, thinking I had forsaken the conversation. Yet when I returned, there she was quietly waiting. She eagerly accepted the small crumbs I broke for her and pushed through the door. We were both quiet, having exhausted our moment of converse.

Though I never really focused on the time, I'll guess we kicked it for a good twenty minutes before she decided to let me go. I was so surprised and enraptured, I let her lead the entire adventure. The cue for letting me go was a stark silence; a mutual look that said, "well....." And then her departure.

She sort of jumped into flight very slowly – though the entire event was surreal to me – and was off smoothly, sailing into the air. I hoped that she'd departed feeling as warm and comforted as I did. That little nameless birdie had left me in a huge bubble of wonderment, sitting seemingly weightless, on my bunk – still half shaven. I wondered, *were we really communicating?* I wondered still, *what was it about my cell, as opposed to the ninety-nine other cells, that would cause her to stop and linger as she did?* Finally, I wondered, *what was that visit was all about?*