

A VERY SHORT STORY COMPETITION – SEPTEMBER WINNER 2011

A SPARROW'S FATE BY GAYLE BEVERIDGE

Sparrows came to our verandah the year Dad went away. They made their nest above the light; we could just see it over the edges. Sometimes dried blades of grass would fall away and be trampled under our feet or carried off on the breeze.

After school, my brother and I sat cross-legged against the wall of the house and watched the sparrows come and go. We couldn't see the eggs but we knew they were there. We talked in whispers and imagined we would know the precise moment the chicks hatched. We watched when we should have been doing homework or helping Mum set the table and our watching made Mum angry. It seemed Mum was angry all the time that year.

After the chicks hatched we could hear them chirping, competing, demanding; an endless cacophony of needs. The day the chirping stopped we looked up at the nest for the longest of times, puzzled by the silence and the absence of the parent birds, until at last we cast our eyes down. The featherless bodies of two baby sparrows lay dead at our feet; the finality so shocking we dared not speak of it.

Dad went away before that spring was over. Mum said it was only for a while, but we knew better; he had been cast from the nest.