

A Sparrow Falls

Willy sat on his bed, but not like any of the hundreds of times before - as a young boy of ten - but now as a tiny sparrow - a little bird small enough to fit inside a teacup. How preposterous it all seemed. It was only minutes ago that the "Guardian of the Sparrows," or so she called herself - Willy thinks it more appropriate to call her a witch - broke into his room and after lecturing him and rambling off a Bible verse, transformed him into his current state with a can of hairspray - yes, hairspray! But not before two prior transformations of crocodile and then mouse. Those must have been accidents but the form of sparrow was not; that was to be his punishment, according to her, so that he may learn a lesson.

True, Willy did shoot at those birds she was feeding at her feet with his BB gun from the vantage of his parents' apartment, but why should anyone care? They were just stupid birds, and he even missed so no harm came of it. He was just playing, imagining to be a cowboy like the ones on TV - shooting vultures circling some dead carcass. Willy's imagination always ran wild at the best of times but being pent up in his home after the flu and missing school for two days drove his imagination into a boyish frenzy. To make matters worse, he had recovered fully from his illness last night and only feigned invalidity to his mother this morning to get out of a math test he did not study for. So all that energy had to come out somewhere if not on the playground at school.

And it did, first on his family's cat, Sissy. He imagined himself a tomb raider, raiding some ancient tombs of a Mayan emperor filled with booby traps and poison-tipped arrows. After craftily thwarting all daring pitfalls, he entered the main chamber where all the gold and cursed artifacts lay in a convenient pile; the only thing between Willy and the boundless bootie was one ravenous, midnight-black panther. With a low growl and fixed red, slitted eyes the beast made a move to pounce on Willy the explorer. But Willy came prepared with a six-shooter which in one quick motion fired upon the monster and smote it after a few shots, for the panther was dexterous and dodged the first volley.

Of course in reality, the gun was of the variety that shoots water instead of lead and the murderous feline was of the variety of calico house cat instead of jet-black jungle panther. Sissy was drenched by his heroic assault and ran out of the room, hissing and howling and leaving a trail of wet floor wherever she went. Willy had a good laugh at that; Sissy and he never got along probably due to his constant tormenting of her, and he could hardly enter a room she was in without her hissing and then scampering to a secluded hideout.

Then it was the shooting at the birds, but that has already been discussed. And now he was a sparrow nesting in the towering folds of his crimson bedspread. The witch had conveniently run out of the spray that would teach him how to fly, and so she left to go get more and be back with it in a moment, or so she said. This must be part of her plan too. Without much to do, Willy takes in his old surroundings with new eyes. Sure this was the room he had lived in for years, but it seemed so alien now, like when you walk a familiar path in the night when you typically walk it

during the day - the same but uncannily different. Everything was now huge, or more accurately, he was now small. He glanced around the room and his focus chanced on things that had always been there but he had never noticed: the buttons on his duvet, the little hooks that held his curtains up, the white flip switch that turned on his lamp - it all seemed so ludicrously large and detailed. Never had these things appeared as objects to Willy but instead as parts of objects that were more useful to a human boy: curtains, duvet, lamp. But now these little things have taken on a life of their own. What a strange thing even your own bedroom can become if you just change your perspective. Unfortunately, without the ability to fly yet, Willy can not explore this new perspective very well, so he roosts in his sheets and waits patiently for the witch to return.

A sudden shiver runs up Willy's little bird spine, and he naturally ruffles his feathers and shakes just like a bird taking a bath in a puddle.

At that instant, down the hall, dozing in the kitchen lays a now dry Sissy, the calico house cat formally a black panther in a boy's imagination. She was a calico but just barely. She was almost solid white, except for a few gray patches - most notably, a large splotch over her left eye. At the moment, she was wearing Willy's Sister's red, polka-dotted handkerchief tied in a bow under her chin and draped over her head.

Dried and safe from the rambunctious Willy's antics, Sissy is about to nod off when a smell perks her straight up - a bird! it's a bird's smell; she knows it; her feline nose has never led her astray. And it's in the apartment too. A wicked grin flashes across her face. Sissy is a well-fed cat; her bowl is never empty long once she starts meowing, but a live meal can never be turned down. Whether it's rodent or avian, they are always better than room-temperature slop from a can. The best part is teasing the helpless creatures, playing with them with her paws, batting them around like her toys, then gulping them down whole, still squeaking or peeping in terror. Some cats like to chew their prey and indeed that does have its benefits, but Sissy has refined the art of one-swallowing varmints for her own sadistic pleasure.

And so she plans with this one if it stays in the house too long. Quickly she gets to her paws and follows her nose down the hall and to Willy's room - that little snot-nosed brat. Sissy would dislike nothing more than to be shot by that damnable water pistol after she had just dried. But the smell of prey is coming from his room, and the door is ajar. Cautiously, she peers around the corner and glances in...

What a sight! No human boy is to be seen, but up on the bed is a little sparrow wearing Willy's white scarf and sporting his straight, red locks. Sissy's instincts put two and two together at once and she concludes this little sparrow is her masters' pup turned bite-sized snack... How? She doesn't know or care; There is only one thing on her mind. She swaggers across the bedroom floor and in one graceful leap, lands at the foot of the bed.

Willy, still absorbing his environment, feels the bed ripple under a new force. Sauntering closer to him is Sissy wearing his sister's handkerchief and a devious, fanged grin. Her ivory fangs point like needles from under her curled lips.

Sensing the danger, Willy puffs up and shouts, "Sissy! Go away! It's me, Willy; Can't you tell?!" As though if she realized his identity, that would resolve the issue and not enhance his peril.

Sissy is beside herself and answers the little peeping bird in a cool taunting tone, "I can tell you're much smaller now."

As Sissy now nearly eclipses his whole view, Willy is suddenly reminded of a time when he saw Sissy with a little mouse dangling by its tail from her maw, still squeaking and squirming, and the fate that ensued for that poor rodent. A thought that he isn't much bigger than that mouse flashes through his mind. Willy peeps but already knows the answer, "What are you doing!?"

Sissy smiles from ear to ear and coos, "Giving you a taste of your own medicine. Let's see how you like being picked on by someone bigger than you."

Willy can no longer deny the danger he is in and tries to flee. But he can't fly so he hops up and ducks under his pillow, trying to bury himself in the folds of his blanket. The pillow engulfs him on all sides like warm clouds of fluff and turns his world dark-gray.

But Sissy is only amused by this act and reaches under the pillow and with one claw, snags Willy's scarf and drags him out by it. "Ohhhhh, this is going to be fun!" She laughs with joy. What a perfect revenge this will be.

Willy is mortified as he is dragged from his warm hiding place by the paw and closer to the grinning cat's muzzle. At her will, he is helpless to resist and is sure this is where she will do unto him what happened to the mouse...

But Sissy is only getting started and wants to play with her food a bit more. She gently bats Willy on the back of the head and knocks him off the bed and onto the floor.

Sissy's "gently" felt more like a solid thump to Willy's bird brain, like the time he wasn't paying attention in gym and was smacked in the back of the head with a soccer ball heartily kicked by one of the stronger kids. Willy falls to the ground, his fall softened by his flapping feathers though he can't gain altitude as he wished. He flops to the hardwood floor and tries to hop away, but used to human legs, stumbles over his talons and trips. The clumsy bird gets back up but can only make it a few more inches before spilling over once more.

Sissy lies relaxed on the edge of the bed looking down on the flustered sparrow trying to stumble to safety. "What's the matter?" She taunts. "Can't get away fast enough? Try using both feet." This is too easy; she might as well be eating a hatchling fallen from a nest or an elderly bird with an injured wing. But that only makes it better in her yellow eyes. "Here, let me help."

She teases him some more by jumping off the bed and down to his level. She lays flat and with her front paws, claps them together under him, forcing the hapless sparrow to jump or be crushed.

Willy's heart beats uncontrollably as he jump ropes the paws full of tiny knives; he can see the tips of the claws poke from their sheaths with each clap. He shouts, "Chill out, Sissy! I don't need your help!" But it did help a little and he is able to flutter away in a kind of half-flying motion and gets as high as his wastebasket. He clings to the rim and hoists himself up, hops to the opposite rim, then up to his desk looking out the window and over the town.

The window! It was left cracked from when he shot his gun. If he could only get outside and away from his crazy cat. He's sure outside is not much safer for a bird his size, but it has to be better than in here with her. So he begins that way, awkwardly hopping as he still tries to run like a human.

Sissy only giggles at the scene. She has Willy right where she wants him and no window escape can save him. She waits until Willy is climbing up to the windowsill and is almost free. Effortlessly, she jumps up to the desk, soars over Willy, and with her back to the glass and standing up, slams the exit close. She glares down at the stunned bird with a predatory stare and licks her chops slowly and deliberately for added effect.

Willy is in disbelief at the cat looming large over him as his last hope is sealed off. He looks at Sissy's smug snout and licking chops then follows her natural body line down through her throat, then her chest, and finally coming to her soft, furry gut. Willy gulps a hard, dry lump; that's a long way from her mouth to her stomach, he thinks... he wonders if that mouse ever thought the same thing. So wrapped up is Willy staring at his cat's midsection, he is completely unaware of the calico's tail swiftly switching over his head.

With one solid whipping motion, Sissy wacks Willy with the end of her tail with such force it flings him back onto his desk. He lands on his back next to his teacup splayed out flat like a specimen's example in a museum of natural history.

Sissy dismounts her windowsill perch and sashays coyly towards her former tormentor; how much better it is when it is the other way around. She says, "Isn't this fun? Now you know what it's like to be picked on." She stands over the stunned sparrow showing off her teeth as she leans in - his eyes growing ever wider with each inch closer to her mouth. "Come on, Willy. Let's play some more..."

Sissy opens her maw wide. Time almost freezes for Willy: Her mouth drips with drool - strands of spit dangle and cling to various surfaces. Her tongue, bristling with tiny barbs and glistening saliva, leads like a red carpet to her gaping throat. Every concentric throat ring leads deeper, **deeper**, impossibly deeper into the seemingly endless tunnel until the void grows reddish-black. Willy could even number the ridges on the roof of her mouth. And her teeth, her *teeth*! He could, in that moment, count every last one and describe them in great detail. Every tooth, like

every curtain hook, takes on a life of its own. What a strange thing even your own cat can become if you just change your perspective.

Willy should do something; he has to, even if it is in vain. He could try to flutter away, try to prolong his life in some miserable way. But he can't. He's frozen, fixed, mesmerized by the incoming maw and can not twitch even a feather to his defense. The only thing that could save him now would be some type of divine intervention... but it doesn't look like he'll be so lucky.

The horrific maw envelops his whole vision; hot cat breath smelling of stale, faux tuna washes over his body. The top row of teeth goes over his head while the bottom row goes under his tail feathers. Willy wonders if she'll bite down hard and end it here, but if that mouse is anything to go by, it'll be much longer and an all-consuming fate that awaits him. Willy isn't sure that would be much better than a quick bite. As he predicted, the jaw doesn't clamp down hard but lightly pinches his form and brings him up to Sissy's natural head level. Willy flops face first, laying belly down on her tongue and staring down the reddish void. A strand of drool leaks from the roof and drizzles onto his beak. The teeth around him close like bars in a prison cell and his world is plunged into a red-black. Only his tail feathers and talons poke outside her lips.

Elated with her new prey toy, Sissy is almost too wrapped up in the moment and hastens to swallow; Her head tilts up and presses the flabbergasted Willy to the roof of her mouth and prepares to gulp.

Willy sees down the inclining throat and peers into pure blackness. *N-no, this can't be*, he thinks to himself. Finally, he snaps out of his trance; He thrashes and squirms trying to prevent his demise but only expedites it by sliding down another inch.

Sissy, too, snaps out of her own trance and realizes she is about to spoil a perfectly good meal by scarfing it down too rapidly. No need to rush this. Sissy lowers her head and opens her mouth. Willy can't believe he is seeing daylight again and doubles his efforts to free himself. He rolls around to flap his way out but his wings have developed a glaze of spit and have lost most of their ability to create flight even if he was skilled enough to do that. Even so, Willy is able to sort of row his way to the edge of the front of the maw.

Sissy rolls the little sparrow around in her mouth, enjoying his taste as well as his pointless struggles. Every time Willy gets close to her front teeth, she makes a half-gulping motion and Willy falls backward deeper in the maw. Sometimes, she closes her mouth, plunging the unfortunate bird in darkness and pressing his face beak-first onto her tongue.

Willy fights in vain in the cat's maw. Her tongue is like a stormy sea, tossing him about like a small pontoon about to be sunk and lost forever in its unknown depths. Every time Sissy closes her mouth and is pressed between her ridged mouth's roof and the sandpaper-like tongue, Willy is convinced this will be when she eats, but she opens her mouth and lets him see daylight once more. Willy shouts periodically something to the effect of, "S-Sissy! Put me down!!" but his cat, being a cat, doesn't obey his command.

This wrestling between the two lasts three minutes; Willy can feel himself tiring against the endless assault. Every half gulp drags him closer to the gullet and each time Willy can not drag himself closer to her front fangs; he's losing ground fast. Finally, one half gulp brings him tottering dangerously on the back of the tongue and her gullet. Willy is too exhausted to inch himself away from this pivotal point.

Willy looks outside over the pink sea and pearly fangs at his room. How could this have happened? The witch told him he needed to learn a lesson, but what could it be? Willy's pride prevents him from drawing a proper conclusion - if only he had more time to learn. Then, like that pontoon on the angry sea, a large wave appears on the horizon foreboding doom - Sissy's tip of her tongue curls up and up while the back begins to drop out from under Willy. Still obstinate, Willy shouts, "S-Sissy, stop! This isn't funny! I'm not cat food!!"

Sissy almost laughs. *We'll see about that*, Sissy thinks to herself.

The pink wave rolls towards Willy and pushes him into the throat. He begins to slip tail feathers first into the gullet and sinks slowly. He struggles but that only helps as he is now up to the neck, constricted by the slimy, snug vice. The mouth of his house cat begins to close as she inclines her nose to point to the ceiling...

"Wait!" Willy shouts in desperation; He is starting to understand what the witch meant by not picking on those smaller than you. "Hold on! I've learned..." but it's too late. Willy was going to say, I've learned my lesson in hopes of either Sissy spitting him out or the witch swooping in and saving him... But Sissy's jaws have snapped shut, plunging the bird boy into darkness. The wave has reached the back of her tongue and...

GLK!

Willy is gulped down the cat's throat: the back of her tongue tightens up into a ball and forces Willy down deeper in the greedy gullet. From there, the concentric muscles squeeze and drag him deeper and deeper, his wings tucked tight to his chest. Willy can't even bring himself to speak; it all seems like a fever dream and he would soon wake. That was it! He was sick yesterday. This was just that kinda dream, and he would soon wake at the start of the day; this time, he wouldn't skip school; He'd beg his mom to let him go back... but as he slips farther down Sissy's throat, he loses hope that this is just a nightmare.

Sissy, with a smug look adorning her upturned snout and drool still dripping from her chops, enjoys feeling her bird brunch sliding slowly down her throat. She tries to relish every second of feeling his little lump slipping towards her waiting stomach.

Every inch down grows hotter, tighter, and smellier from Willy's perspective. He passes through her chest cavity and can distinctly hear each one of her calm heartbeats and feel the pulses on

the other side of the walls. But as he is dragged deeper, the beating fades and is replaced by a much more ominous sound from below: a growling stomach preparing itself for a new guest.

Willy slides down and plops into the stomach, landing with a sticky splat and sinking into a shallow pool of acid and some sort of muck. Willy can't see in the black void, but he can feel a half-digested mush, and judging by the smell he can conclude it's the store-brand canned cat gruel his mother buys from the shop down the street - the kind that retains the shape of its container when served. The happy stomach groans and gurgles around Willy. The confines are roomier than the throat but not by much; he can flutter and struggle and does so as though he could escape other than through Sissy's upper intestines after being melted down into nutritious chyme.

Willy shouts as he fights, "S-Sissy! I've learned my lesson! I shouldn't pick on those smaller than me..." but Willy's voice is drowned out by a new, more insidious sound: Sissy's purring. Sissy has never once purred around Willy. This is the first time she has ever purred due to him... and what a horrible way to make your cat happy for the first time. Inside the stomach, the purring is so loud it vibrates him to the core like when a distant yet powerful thunderbolt rolls low and long through the entire house, shaking the building and rattling the cutlery. The dreadful sound makes Willy's blood turn cold.

Sissy, however, is the happiest she has ever been. This was the best meal she has had - not because it was the biggest or even the tastiest - at least objectively. But it was the best because the meal was seasoned with the greatest spice of them all: revenge. Sissy feels poor little Willy struggle in his fleshy tomb and massage those spots only a prey can. Naturally, she starts purring and purring loudly. If he was saying something, she would never hear him through her flesh, fur, and paws. Not that if she could, she would let him go anyways.

The victorious cat sits down and begins licking her front paw, cleaning it and savoring the flavor of her latest victim and using the wet paw to slick back her whiskers. Once finished, she gets up and slowly sashays her way back to the windowsill. Her hips sway so much it almost looks like she is trying to seduce a potential suitor.

Sissy can't help but tease Willy some more: "Not cat food? You sure looked and tasted like it to me, Willy. And now you're where cat food ends up..." She chuckles and hops up to the windowsill. She falls over and rolls on her back - the warm sun filters through the glass and across her belly. With her front paws, she kneads her soft, furry stomach like she would do a nice human's lap if she were feeling particularly sociable.

Back on the inside, Willy is sloshed around the hellish container with every one of Sissy's movements. The slop inside now coats every inch of him and he feels like he is becoming less bird and more like the stuff on the inside of Sissy's tin cans. The warmth of the sunbeam increases the inside temperature to stifling levels and seems to quicken the digestive process - the growling and gurgling grow louder and the cavity fills with a fresh batch of acids. Willy can feel the kneading of Sissy's midsection. The soft, slimy walls press against Willy's face with

each stroke of Sissy's kneading. The whole thing is degrading although, in a weird way, kind of soothing - between the warmth, the purring, and the kneading. It's almost a kin to being tucked into a warm blanket and sung a humming lullaby - just like that... except for the burning acids, the rotting smell, and the ending of his life.

Sissy enjoys her complete domination over her former abusive owner but soon grows tired from her meal; Bird meat always makes her grow sleepy. She rolls over, yawns, and lays out flat - basking in the sunbeam with her chin resting on her front paws and the end of her tail switching casually.

Sissy is about to give Willy some parting words before drifting off to sleep when Willy's younger sister barges into the room. "Willy!?" She looks under the bed and in the closet but doesn't find her brother. The young girl turns to the cat lounging near the window and asks, "Sissy? You haven't seen Willy, have you? He's going to be in big trouble!"

Sissy only lets out one passive meow to answer the rhetorical question. Willy's sister seems to stew with both a false sense of angry pride and raw revengeful mischief - the kind of feeling only siblings can have when they have dirt on the other and are about to tell their parents of their wrong deeds. She can barely contain a grin, but her cheeks flush red in simulated wrath. She didn't care that Willy was missing, at least not yet; she was only looking to get her annoying brother in trouble.

"Mom!" She shouts in a high-strung trill, then storms out of the room. Sissy only smiles as she leaves - she never thought to look inside a cat's stomach for her lost brother.

Sissy chuckles and looks down at her midsection. "Did you hear that, Willy?"

Willy, in fact, did not hear anything except some muffled sounds through his prison's walls. But he can hear the words of the calico booming through her body.

"You're in big trouble! But I guess you already knew that... Looks like your sister is going to tattle on you going missing. They'll probably think you snuck out then ran away or got kidnapped. But we both know that's not what happened. I bet they never think to look in my litter box for you." She laughs out loud and sets her chin back on her paws. "No... while they're mourning, they'll scoop out your remains and dump you in the trash... That's the funeral you'll get. Then I'll be there to comfort them: rubbing against their legs, jumping on their laps, and purring. They'll never suspect a thing. Only you and I will know - and you not for much longer.

"And you know what will be my favorite part? When they pour me a little bowl of milk and it's your face on the carton - that'll be the sweetest milk I've ever tasted."

Willy's eyes begin to grow heavy. It's so hot and stuffy that he grows faint; He won't be able to hold on for much longer. But hearing Sissy's taunts, he regains some energy and flutters in her gut and tries to plead one last time: "Please let me out, Sissy. I swear I won't shoot you with a

water pistol ever again. I'll be a good owner and never bully you. I-I'll give you treats and comb your fur... Just... please... Don't eat me."

But Sissy couldn't hear the desperate promises over her pervasive purring. Even if she could, she wouldn't free him. It's not out of spite she ate him; oh, that made it all the better, but it's not the reason. She ate him simply because she could. If it had been a human Sissy was actually fond of that was transformed - or even just shrunken - the results would have been the same. Willy said to her before being swallowed, "I'm not cat food." When the fact of the matter is that anything living and breathing is cat food if it is small enough and to bigger felines, like the black panther, everything already is. It's just the nature of the Family Felidae.

Sissy does feel the last struggling flutters of the little bird and says, "Still fighting in there? Why don't you just relax and let your eyes close? It's all over now." Sissy lets out a wide-mouth yawn, complacently smacks her lips, and slowly closes her eyes. She wiggles into a comfortable position and whispers softly to Willy one last time, "Sweet dreams, little sparrow..." And with that, the warm sun, full belly, and her own loud purrs lull the satisfied calico into a deep sleep.

Willy, too, can't fight the wave of drowsiness any longer; His eyes flutter, droop, and close alongside his devourer's. As he drifts off to that permanent slumber listening to the deep pulsing tones of purring and the satisfied groanings of a full stomach, he can't help but remember what the witch said to him just before she turned him into this sparrow: "Why, did you know that the Good Book says that not even one sparrow will fall to the ground unnoticed?" And he wonders if eaten-by-cat doesn't go unnoticed as well.