

## Vogelsang

By James L Hill

The man awoke with the sunrise and the joyful song of his bird in his cage. Every morning began the same way, whether it was sunny or rainy, in the summer's heat or the cold of winter, the man bounced from his bed to prepare his bird's breakfast. He diced apples, pears, and strawberries. Then sprinkled blueberries, nuts, and seeds of various types into the bowl. He drew fresh water from the tap, and with a smile upon his face opened the cage door and presented his bird with the daily feast.

The bird happily jumped down from his perch. Chirped and sang as he pecked and accepted the loving strokes of his feathers from the man. This was the best part of the man's day. After cleaning the cage and closing the door, the man left for his daily business with the bird's song in his heart. This was his life for years. For more than a decade, he fed and cared for his bird. And his bird rewarded him with song.

One morning, during his daily routine, there was a knock at his door. The man went and answered it; it was nothing of importance and he returned to finish caring for his bird. Dismay struck him in the gut when he saw the cage open and empty. Had he forgotten to lock the door? He could not recall closing it. Surely, his bird was in the house looking for him. He went from room to room looking on top of the furniture and underneath too. His bird was not in the house. Then he noticed the open window across from the cage.

Frantically, the man ran to his yard and stood beneath the apple tree that provided the bird's breakfast. There was a flock of birds singing joyfully but his bird was not among them. He knew his bird's song, every note and tone, it was not part of this symphony. He moved to the pear tree, then to the berry bushes, none of the birds were his bird.

The man left his yard and searched the neighborhood, carefully listening for his bird's song. Surely his bird had lost its way and would be overjoyed to see him. He walked the area, then canvassed the town, returning home well after dark. He expected to find his bird had long since returned to his cage.

His heart sank lower when the house was quiet and empty. Anxiety turned to anger. How could his bird leave him after the care he gave him? After all, he fed him well, kept him safe. He was happy. As he lay in bed playing the sounds of the birds in his head, hoping he missed his bird calling out to him, he noticed a difference in the songs. It was subtle; the tunes were the same, but the tone was different. His bird's song was more melancholic. The birds in the trees sang more carefree, his bird had a hint of despair. How had he not noticed? Was the joy in the song only his own?

As he lay in bed playing the song over and over his answer became sorrow. The song of his bird was a cry. His bird was not fully a bird, and it was his fault. Exhausted from the day's walk and the night's contemplations he passed out.

Sunlight burned its way into his dreams. Nightmares vanished, leaving no trace of the tortures with which he punished himself. They were replaced by the sounds of joy emanating from the next room. The man immediately recognized it to be his bird's song. He knew his bird's song had changed. He leaped from his bed.

His bird sat on the perch in his cage singing loudly, jubilantly, calling to the man. His wings flapped frantically at the sight of him. The man hurriedly stroked his features then rushed to prepare his bird's food. He gave him extra helpings of fruits, nuts, and seeds. He stroked his bird's head as it bobbed while he ate. Finally, before he left for his daily business, he removed the door from his cage.