

The Sparrow Tree

by [Susan McLean](#) in the [October 2022](#) issue

Sparrows deck the leafless tree
like plump brown figs that bob and flit,
hopping in random synergy
from twig to twig. They fluff and sit,

alert and restless in cold air,
till in a flash the troupe takes flight
into the Chinese holly, where
they chirp like ghost birds. Out of sight,

whatever caused their harsh surprise
departs, and they resume their poses
coolly. Inside, my mother lies
waning beside the hothouse roses.

No one suspects the feathered crew
is less abundant than before.
The world is full of birds. How few
would note one sparrow less or more.