

Week-end Book Review: *The Greedy Sparrow* retold by Lucine Kasbarian, illustrated by Maria Zaikina

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The Greedy Sparrow

Marshall Cavendish Children, 2010

Ages 4-8

Too rarely do we see a book where text and illustration prance along in perfectly matching high step as well as they do in this Armenian folk tale. Imbued with an impish humor and attention to authentic detail in both illustrations and storytelling, [The Greedy Sparrow](#) is an Armenian folktale, passed down in author [Lucine Kasbarian](#)'s family from generation to generation, continuing ancient traditions of Armenian oral storytelling. A wandering sparrow with a devious bent flies through the Armenian countryside, tempting people he meets in order to benefit himself. In a surprising twist, he discovers that deceptive behavior and greed may leave one empty-handed in the end.

From first glance, *The Greedy Sparrow* bursts with life, its minimal narration placed above oversized, overly round figures, objects, and text bubbles that fill the page from corner to corner with color. "Once there was and was not a sparrow who caught a thorn in his foot." Armenian folk tales, we read in the author's note, always begin, "Once there was and was not", a questioning of the reality of the fantastical story that will follow. The motifs of animals, magic and morals will make elements of this otherwise little-known Armenian folktale familiar to readers across the world, just as [Maria Zaikina](#)'s layered oil and wax illustrations echo centuries old woodblock images, which pull readers into the world of the familiar unfamiliar. This is the land of folk tales, where sparrows can carry sheep in the sky, and brides will interrupt their weddings to care for the sheep when it lands (until their new husbands decide to make shish kebabs, of course, which leads to the forfeit of one new bride to the sneaky sparrow.)

Sara Hudson

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