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Flash Nonfiction by Don Lyman

Animal Warmth on a Winter Night



I haven't seen them in months, but I know they're there. They sit on the air conditioner in my bedroom window, up on the second floor. I hear them chirping and fighting and scratching and flapping. I hear them in the morning, when I sit at my computer and check my email. I peck at my keyboard, and they peck at the windowsill.

I hear them at night, too, when I'm back at my computer or watching television as I'm falling asleep. I can hear them scratching around, ruffling their feathers, sometimes letting out soft peeps. They must be sleeping. I often wonder if they can hear me typing or if they hear the TV. What do the noises from my side of the curtain sound like to them?

The Birds Behind the Curtain

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Strange, exotic, or as familiar as the highway traffic in the distance and the wind in the trees?

I think they're house sparrows, but I don't dare open the curtain. I'm afraid I'll scare them away. A few times back in the spring, I peeked at them—small brown birds—through a crack at the side of the curtain, but that startled them, and they flew away.

I've been delaying removing the air conditioner. I haven't turned it on in months. It's November now, and I can feel the cold draft from the air-conditioner grill at night, but I keep putting it off. Every day I think, *I need to take the air conditioner out of that window*, but I still haven't done it.

I don't want to take away their roost. What would they do if they came back at night and it was gone?

I can't leave the air conditioner there through the winter, but it's comforting to hear the soft chirping and scratching, to know there are other living creatures just a couple of feet away, huddling against the window on a cold night.

Maybe they feel the same way about me.

Art Information

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