The Window

Ralph T. Schneider*
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Abstract

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IT WAS several minutes before two when the old man unfolded his hands and rested them lightly on the wheels of his chair. He pushed, and the chair carried him forward to the tall window at the end of the room. Advancing slowly, he stopped, still two feet from the pane. The chair creaked a quiet protest as he leaned slowly forward to look down on a deserted street. Somewhere out of his sight, a screen door slammed. The old man's frame relaxed and he half smiled. His hands moved the chair a little closer to the window. Around the corner of a house below came a solitary little boy, dressed in faded and ragged blue jeans and a candy-striped shirt. The boy wandered to the middle of the brown-patched yard and stood looking uncertainly about. When his hopeful gaze neared the house with the tall window, the old man's chair creaked again as he drew back from his vantage point. After a last look up the street, the disconsolate child sat down abruptly and began smoothing a patch of dust with a small hand. Finally satisfied, he moved back and viewed his handiwork. The man above squinted a little when
the boy leaned forward and decorated the smooth spot, making designs with a grimy finger of a stylus.

The boy hesitated for a moment as his eyes wandered and the movement of his finger became erratic and undirected. Suddenly he lifted his head and looked up at the tall window. A vague glimpse of motion, perhaps a patch of gray in the darkness behind the window, nothing more. Once he had seen someone up there, watching him. Always since then he had tried to surprise the watcher. He screwed up his small face, trying to see into the room he knew must be behind the window. He could see nothing. Maybe later, if he looked up fast enough. He returned his eyes to the design in his patch of dust.

Once more the old man pushed his chair up to the window, still tensed for sudden movement, but the boy seemed to be absorbed in the dust again. He was looking down on small hands patting the dust smooth when another movement caught his eye. Behind the boy, a black and white cat appeared between two houses. The old man's eyes alternated anxiously between the cat and the boy.

"The cat, boy," he whispered. "See the cat." He watched the boy nervously for any sign of his realizing the cat's presence. His hands clenched the wheels more tightly and the chair inched its way closer to the window. The cat pawed curiously at a battered toy car and the boy's head turned, searching for the sound. He saw the cat.

"Here, kitty," he said. "C'mere, kitty, nice kitty. Bobby won't hurtcha. Kitty-kitty-kitty." The boy got to his feet and cautiously approached the cat. The animal ignored the child but allowed itself to be picked up and cuddled in small arms. From the window the old man smiled and watched the scene below. The boy stroked the cat and bent his head, listening to the satisfied purr. Closing his eyes and smiling, he hugged the furry body to his chest. Watching, the old man started nervously.

"Watch it, boy," he whispered. "Don't hold 'im too tight." The cat writhed to escape, striking out with one paw and leaving four tiny red scratches. The boy opened his arms quickly, and watched the black and white form drop to the ground and disappear between two buildings.
His eyes were bright with tears as he looked up and down the deserted street once more.

"Darn ol' cat."

The screen door creaked open and a voice called out. The shoulders beneath the candy-striped shirt were slumped as he walked to the house.

Behind the tall window the old man sank back into his chair. His cheeks were wet.

**Discovery**

*by John Gordon*

JIMMY followed cautiously as Buddy scrambled over the stacks of old magazines inside the stairway door, and then climbed the steep, narrow stairs.

"Wait for me."

He knew Buddy wouldn't wait; Buddy never did. Ever since Jimmy could remember, no matter where they went, Buddy always got there first. "He's older though," Jimmy explained to himself. "After all, he'll be nine this winter."

The stairway was dim and quiet. Completely cut off from the gleaming world of kitchen smells and busy grown-ups, it seemed strange and inviting. But Jimmy suddenly felt a little sad. He didn't know why. He traced an aimless pattern in the dust on the magazines.

"Hey! C'mon! Look what I found!" Buddy's shrill voice shattered the attic quiet.

Jimmy hurried up the stairs into the pale sunlight that filtered through the window, caked with dirt, at the far end of the narrow room. Buddy was vigorously cranking an old Victrola that squatted under the sloping rafters.

"It's got records and everything. It runs just like the one we got at home, only you got to crank it," Buddy explained seriously.

He placed a record on the turntable and lowered the needle. The scratchy voice of Sir Harry Lauder filled the attic. Buddy laughed at the strange sound.

"Boy, this thing's no good."