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The Fly in the Window

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The amethystine sky bore little resemblance to the sky in regatta paintings and yet the black-bottomed, white-crowned puffs of cumulus were like sailing ships in tight formation, and the brisk wind shot them along at a rapid clip. The wind was more than a sailing wind, it was storm wind. It embraced all of the potentials of a sailor’s dread, a force nine gale. The trees rocked gently in the subtle ground breeze while aloft the clouds grew darker and the background lost its purplish tint and turned dead grey as if to shroud another onslaught of nature.

As the sky darkened and the surface wind increased, the inhabitants began the preparations to close out and ignore nature’s tirade. From the streets, the wind twirled gutter refuse up into the yards and slapped spright poplars with last Sunday’s newspaper, and cats withdrew from alley can-stench to seek shelter in their kind master’s home. Six bright yellow leaves went scuttling down the street like some advance guard announcing the imminent, and a screen door slammed resonantly against its jam and then slammed again. A big striped bus charged down the street with passengers grimly holding onto children in an effort to beat its own schedule. Commuters leaped deftly from the last step and made for shiny cars and becoming wives, while the second section of today’s paper skittered off down the tracks toward the next station. Headlights, now forced on by the increasing solemnity of the sky, swung about resolutely seeking out tiny garages which were their homes.

Apartment dwellers watched disinterestedly as leaves and bits of gum wrappers blew into the foyer alongside their tired feet, then turned to silver mail boxes tastefully off-set by gold-edged name plates. Climbing worn stairs to a number-emblazoned door, and from there into the grey, dreary sanctum, they dropped grey-wrapped packages and turned to the mighty switch which could throw grey nothingness into bright yellow home.

In one of these homes there were sets of jalousie windows which cranked open and shut by a small handle on the inside. It was the type which has the screen on the inside of the window when it is closed. In this particular home, the windows had been left open in the single-minded early morning dash and now the wind was whistling freely in and out fondly lifting up the draperies and then dropping them to whirl away and then lift again. Inside, a woman kicked off sale shoes and wriggled from a low-overhead dress and plunked into a wrought chair. A man pummeled a deck of cigarettes and pulled a can of beer from the refrigerator. He peered aggrieved at the invading wind and the wide open windows. On one of the leeward window moldings sat a fly comfortably admiring his reflection in the window pane and watching the springing storm. His friends had all gone on to safe storm niches and had left him alone, brooding on the window.
The little fly contemplated many monumental questions regarding his existence and that of his fellows, and the one which bothered him the most seemed to be why he should exist at all. His fly-brain tried to conceive some rational explanation of life, some meaning to which he could attach significance, but after meditating for long moments, he failed to arrive at a single reason or reward for existing. He simply existed until that time when he wouldn't. With this totally unsatisfying philosophy he turned his acute gaze upon the blowy nature, only occasionally reaching his shielded sanctuary on the window frame. The wind would swish past his fragile wings and then rush at the draperies on the other side of the screen and into the warm yellow room.

The fly, still calmly admiring nature and himself, was suddenly startled to feel himself swinging in toward the screen as the window was cranked vigorously by a woman. The window snapped shut. The fly was trapped. He regarded the sullen woman as she paced back to her chair. His situation seemed hopeless, but he did not panic. He began to think of his friends who had flown off and left him, and of what he might do to escape, and then he thought of not escaping and that brought back his earlier conclusion. But then, he reasoned, why contemplate discouraging things when I could be planning a way out. Then again, he paused, why should I try to escape? Well, it'll pass the time, he rationalized. He began to walk along the molding in search of some tiny exit. With growing concern when success was not immediate, he began to run, up one molding and down another looking for a hole in the glass or in the screen, for although reason dictated calmness, he became agitated by this forced security. Soon he began flying back and down and over and up covering every bit of glass, buzzing furiously against the impermeable pane. Then with growing bitterness, he turned to the screen which, he reasoned, probably offered a better chance, since it already was full of holes and all he had to do was find one large enough. But, as he buzzed along, he became more and more discouraged because of the efficient organization of the holes into one small size. He paused. Gazing into the room beyond the screen, he watched the man boredly toss off the last of the beer. Ignoring the conclusion he had carefully reached that his existence was pointless, the fly surrendered to a powerful instinct which compelled him to seek an immediate escape. With all calmness now replaced by a single purpose, he became maniacal in his desire. In an effort to arouse the attention of a savior, he began to buzz violently about the confining frame of the window, crying out in agony for release. He kept this up until, nearly senseless with exhaustion, he fluttered to the sill between the two confining walls.

With the grey skies threatening and the wind howling, the fly wondered vaguely where his friends were and how long he might hold out in this prison. With saddened eyes of one forsaken, he looked above him at the sheer, immuring planes and sighed dejectedly like some crinkled balloon making a last gasp, for here, between the window and screen, was the end of the world for the little fly.

As he turned his head slowly about, looking out at the storm-
ravaged trees and then in at the yellow glow of security, he felt pangs of remorse and vexation. With the sullen look of one cheat-ed, he turned his eyes about him for a single last look, and, as though some greater power were trying to tease him, there suddenly appeared to his misted eyes a small yet promising hole which had been missed in his urgency. With a leap of elation and a stirring of his sensitive heart he roared up to the Godsend in the form of an irregularity in the seemingly faultless screen. With agile wrigglings and considerable contraction he worked silently at escaping into the promised land of yellow light where the wind and bleak weather couldn’t reach him and where he could enjoy the comforts of home like any civilized fly. With a surprising determination, he managed to struggle through the opening and into the lighted sanctity of the home. Pausing momentarily, he sighed with tremendous relief and tears welled up in his big fly-eyes. His temporary imprisonment had given him a new outlook. It had forced him to realize that the ability to act and think freely, even if not toward a specific end, was reward in itself for existing. He could now appreciate the compelling instinct for freedom.

Revelling in the bright light of freedom, he surveyed the room and noted the two humans and the open loaf of bread on the table in the center. Beside it sat the huge man with desolate, unhappy, grey eyes staring forward at a large white sheet of paper as if the answer to intense miseries would be found there. The tiny fly, still clinging to the inside of the screen, sympathetically regarded this person who was apparently imprisoned by his ignorance of the freedom which he owned. And, reasoned the fly, if he is ignorant of his freedom, then he can’t possibly realize his own captivity. His sorrow for this seemingly miserable soul sitting at the table was genuine and the fly wished there were some way in which he might enlighten this trapped person. With his newfound understanding of life, he felt it was his duty to become a missionary and pass on this intense feeling for the freedom of life to someone who needed it, and his first subject was right at hand. With heart swollen and eyes shining with the excitement of his mission, the little fly pushed off from the screen, and leaving his former prison behind, flew in a great exhilarating circle down to the table with the bread. Ignoring the inviting bread, the little fly cleared his throat and with well-chosen words began an oration on his meaning of existence, accompanying his dramatic expression with eloquent, attention-commanding gestures. With mounting verve, and almost carried away with his message, he continued, then abruptly stopped when he realized the large white sheet seemed to interest his audience more than his important message. Yelling a little louder than he had intended, he commanded his audience to attention and with a satisfied grin watched as the human turned his full attention to the fly and began to fold the distracting white sheet. He began his speech again, remembering all the time his narrow escape and the lesson it had taught him. With hand dramatically extended in a poignant pause, he looked up in time to note that his message apparently wasn’t reaching his listener. With an ironic smile, he wondered if perhaps he might communicate by speaking on a lower level of intelligence as the folded white sheet came crashing down on his fragile, sensitive body.