

## A Beautiful Accident

By Stanley V. Makower

WHAT an exquisite feeling there is about this spring afternoon. A tender grace clings to every object in the scene. On one side of the road a row of shops : milliners, grocers, florists, a little second-hand book-shop wedged in between a pastry-cook and a chemist, and so on. On the other side a block of tall, soft brown houses standing a little way back from the road, with small, narrow gardens in front of them. It is about three o'clock in the afternoon. All the people in the neighbourhood have come out—more to enjoy the air than to attend to the business on which they pretend to be bent. But the shops are well filled, and there is a ceaseless clapping of heels outside on the pavement. Ladies in twos and threes wander slowly along, talking, and stopping now and then to gaze in at a shop window, and all the time the sun shines lazily from a mild blue sky streaked here and there with thin white clouds. Blue shadows are on the pavement and in little pools of water left from the rain of yesterday ; carriages and cabs in the road, and people crossing in and out of them. From time to time some one goes into one of the houses on the other side of the road.

First, it is a straggling schoolboy, with a load of books and a lazy, reluctant air, as if he would rather stay outside. Then a tall,

tall, elegant lady, with a light feather boa that quivers all over with the soft breeze. Now an old and infirm man stands on his doorstep listening to the pleasing bustle of the scene and sniffing in the spring air. He, too, enjoys it, for it puts fresh life into him, and awakens many dim reminiscences of spring. He does not think of things that have happened: he is only conscious of having felt like this before, and in a way very intimately associated with his life. You can see it in his face as he looks in a kind of meditative, satisfied way at the people who pass before him on the pavement.

The whole scene is perfect. You could not pick a fault in it anywhere. Just now a child wanders across the road, following a little hoop which quivers and rolls in front of it. The anxious nurse runs after it to take its hand for fear of a passing carriage. Perfect. It must have happened. If it had not you would have missed something. A sense of uneasiness would have come to you from the scene. But it does happen. The nurse and child reach the other side of the road; and now you see that the line they took in crossing was also necessary to the whole picture. You cannot tell why, but you feel that it is part of a scheme. Examine everything round you: a satisfying proportion suggests itself to you, an appropriateness in the relationship of one thing to another, and this not through the cunning of an architect: for the buildings are in mixed styles, some very different from those standing next to them, but the colours, softened by age, mingle into a harmony made all the more subtle by the light haze that is over everything.

How strange the houses opposite look as soon as the pictorial view of them fades from the mind. It is so impossible to believe that they contain all the attributes of the interior of a house and that people actually live in them. They are so high, and then  
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those rows upon rows of windows—not mere pieces of glass fixed in a flat wall such as would suggest that they were to let in the light of the sun for human use—but elaborate contrivances of some fanciful builder, with cornices and ornamental frames. No, it is impossible to think of them as having anything to do with a place where people dwell, and yet there is a consistent beauty about the whole scene of which they are a part.

Look at a small window at the corner of a block right at the top. This has a beauty of its own. You can look at it by day or by night, in summer or winter, it is always beautiful. Only a narrow border of wall separates it from the air above and on one side. Look at it now.

The lower sash has been raised a little. In the middle, hanging a little below the level to which the sash has been raised, is a tassel on a fine cord belonging to a yellow blind now rolled up. This tassel is gently swinging about in the breeze while the people are walking to and fro below in the sunlit street. See how it bobs backwards and forwards with a kind of silent laziness.

Now it is swinging sideways. It almost touches the white muslin curtains that hang on each side. They are not quite still either. Occasionally they flutter as a breath of wind catches them. Standing on the sill outside is a tiny little pot with a fuzzy green plant in it. The leaves are so small that you can only just see that the wind is playing with them too, very gently.

No one comes to the window ; very likely there is no one in the room ; at all events, this tassel has nothing to do with the inmates. It is part of the outside of the house : one gem in the great beauty of the street outside. Besides, the inmates cannot have intended things to be so. Are not windows made to see out of ! Who would put pretty white curtains in front to flutter in

the wind and a tassel to swing about so gracefully? No, they have got there somehow, because the street wanted it—that is all.

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The sun has thrown a red glow on to the window pane. The tassel is almost still. It is evening now, and all the pretty ladies have gone home. Their afternoon lounge is over. The shops are putting up great shutters, and all the street is growing black and dark.

Look at the little window. The yellow blind is down and a light behind gives to it a soft, warm colour. In the centre is a black shadow which we can recognise to be the shape of the back of a small looking-glass. But we do not think of the looking-glass. We only see a bright yellow ground with a queerly shaped black shadow in the centre, and on each side of it a dark wing formed by the shape of the muslin curtains. The little fuzzy plant is gone. The rest of the street has lost the aspect that it wore this afternoon, but the little window is still beautiful.

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And now it is a hot summer night and the stars are out, and lovers are walking in couples along the dusty street, and there is stillness in the air. It has been so hot all day. The sun blazed down upon the white pavement and the people crawled lazily along the streets. The window was wide open all day, but the tassel hung straight down like a rod and never moved, and the little fuzzy plant became quite brown and shrivelled as the burning rays beat down upon it.

Now it is dark, and still there is something beautiful in the window—a white patch up in the corner of the pane—the reflection of a large brilliant star. And underneath, the lazy shuffling of  
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the lovers' feet along the pavement. Surely no living person could have lifted the sash so skilfully that the glass could catch the image of that star?

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The heat has passed away. A mild damp wind is sweeping over the street, whirling along the dry leaves from the trees in the little gardens in front of the houses; they rush and crackle as they fly along the pavement. People hurry along, struggling with the wind. They do not loiter at the shop windows. The little window is closed. Occasionally the tassel moves in a spasmodic way, and the white curtains shudder when the wind rushes in through some crevice. So far there is nothing beautiful; but in a moment the light shifts. Look, now there is a thin metallic blue reflection in the pane; and now great masses of white float swiftly across it. Watch them, one after another. How quickly they pass! Who put that window in such a position that it might catch the beauty of these fleeting clouds? Is it to make up for the little fuzzy plant? For that is gone for ever.

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A thin yellow fog is over the street, and under foot there is a thick mud from the recent snow; the air is very cold, and a drizzling rain is trickling through the fog upon the few people who are in the street. There is a cold silence about it to-day. Occasionally you may hear the sticky noise made by a cart or carriage making its way through the muddy floor of the street. It is not dark enough to light the gas inside the houses, and so the street looks dead and deserted.

As you look up at the little window, a yellow glimmer springs up behind the water-bespattered pane. The thin yellow fog round the window is scattered into single points of black and pale

pale green that tingle. The rest of the street is as before, but now it seems a mere setting to this window, exactly the right deadness of tone and feeling to set off the brilliance of this bit. And then this patch of light appeared exactly at the right moment. A second later, the lights spring up in all the windows, and the character of the scene is changed. The little window would have a fresh relation to the other things in the street, but some singular beauty in its new form would surely appear. It must: it is inevitable. And yet it was only an accident that that light appeared when it did. Some one may have wanted to read and found it necessary to light the gas, but the street has nothing to do with that, nor has the little window. All that was necessary for it to preserve its reputation was a particular light at a particular moment behind the watery pane. So it happened—by accident of course: a beautiful accident.









