

The Window

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THE late morning sun drifted brightly through the large and not so clean window of the hotel lobby, but the sun's refractions on the window made the outdoors appear as a soft, dreamy shade of blue. On this particular early fall morning, the sun was a welcome companion, for its presence gave me the warm, pleasant feeling that the hotel had failed to supply during the night.

I glanced at the old grandfather clock standing in the corner next to the check-in desk, and realized I still had forty minutes left before I had to catch my bus. With nothing else to do (my bag was packed and at my side) I scooted farther down into the oversized and overstuffed leather chair and enjoyed the security of the sun's warmth.

What a sleepy little town, I thought, with its old and quietly aristocratic buildings facing an almost a quiet main street—in fact, the town's only street. I suppose it was like all, or at least many, of the towns in southern Virginia, surrounded by an atmosphere of time past, when Jackson, Beauregard, and Lee made their impressions on the people and the country side. But, on this morning, I seemed to sense a strong closeness to them and their history.

As I sat there, breathing in the mustiness of this ancient and historic inn, I gazed sleepily through the blue-hued window and observed a small Negro boy with large dark eyes as he shifted aimlessly back and forth in front of the hotel doorway. He was carrying a small shoe-shine box which was strapped over one shoulder. When anyone would approach the area near the door, the young Negro would look up at him with great anticipation and expectancy, but when the person passed on, his eyes would half close and he would continue his designless movements.

Off to my right, near the door, I could hear the hotel clerk talking to a rather decrepit but kindly looking old gentleman. The old man was slightly stooped and leaned heavily on a large cane. Presently the two men stopped talking. The old man turned and started slowly limping toward the door. Even though he was stooped and his clothes were old and rather shabby, he seemed to have an air of great pride and somber respectability about him. As he walked past me, I could not help wondering and speculating about the legends and tales that this peaceful-looking old gentleman could probably tell. Finally the old man reached the door. Just as he stepped out onto the walk, the small Negro boy looked up at him smilingly and said, "Shine mista, only a nickel?" The old man stopped abruptly and replied, "Get out of my way, nigger boy." With this said, the old man turned and shuffled off down the street. The little colored boy slouched off in the opposite direction. I squirmed uncomfortably on the loose springs of my chair and continued watching the street through the dirty window of the hotel.