

The Paper Windmill

Amy Lowell

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THE little boy pressed his face against the window-pane and looked out at the bright sun-shiny morning. The cobble-stones of the square glistened like mica; in the trees a breeze danced and pranced, and shook drops of sunlight, like falling golden coins, into the brown water of the canal. Down-stream slowly drifted a long string of galiots piled with crimson cheeses. The little boy thought they looked as if they were roc's eggs, blocks of big ruby eggs. He said, "Oh!" with delight, and pressed against the window with all his might.

THE golden cock on the top of the stadhuis gleamed; his beak was open like a pair of scissors, and a narrow piece of blue sky was wedged in it. "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" cried the little boy. "Can't you hear me through the window, gold cocky? Cock-a-doodle-doo! You should crow when you see the eggs of your cousin, the great roc." But the golden cock stood stock-still, with his fine tail blowing in the wind. He could not understand the little boy, for he said "Coquerico!" when he said anything. But he was hung in the air to swing, not to sing. His eyes glittered to the west wind, and the crimson cheeses drifted away down the canal.

IT was very dull there in the big room. Outside in the square the wind was playing tag with some fallen leaves. A man passed, with a dog-cart beside him full of smart, new milk-cans. They rattled out a gay tune: "Tiddity-tum-ti-ti. Have some milk for your tea. Cream for your coffee to drink to-night, thick and smooth and sweet and white," and the man's sabots beat an accompaniment: "Plop! trop! milk for your tea. Plop! trop! drink it to-night." It was very pleasant out there, but it was lonely here in the big room. The little boy gulped at a tear.

IT was queer how dull all his toys were. They were so still. Nothing was still in the square. If he took his eyes away a moment it had changed. The milkman had disappeared round the corner; there was only an old woman, with a basket of green stuff on her head, picking her way over the shiny stones. But the wind pulled the leaves in the basket this way and that, and displayed them to beautiful advantage. The sun patted them condescendingly on their flat surfaces, and they seemed sprinkled with silver. The little boy sighed as he looked at his disordered toys on the floor. They were motionless, and their colors were dull. The dark wainscoting absorbed the sun. There was none left for toys.

THE square was quite empty now. Only the wind ran round and round it, spinning. Away over in the corner where a street opened into the square the wind had stopped — stopped running, that is, for it never stopped spinning. It whirred and whirled and gyrated and turned. It burned like a great colored sun. It hummed and buzzed and sparked and darted. There were flashes of blue and long smearing lines of saffron and quick jabs of green. And over it all was a sheen like a myriad cut diamonds. Round and round it went, the huge wind-wheel, and the little boy's head reeled with watching it. The whole square was filled with its rays, blazing and leaping round after one another faster and faster. The little boy could not speak; he could only gaze, staring in amaze.

THE wind-wheel was coming down the square. Nearer and nearer it came, a great disk of spinning flame. It was opposite the window now, and the little boy could see it plainly; but it was something more than the wind which he saw. A man was carrying a huge fan-shaped frame on his shoulder, and stuck in it were many little painted paper windmills, each one scurrying round in the breeze. They were bright and beautiful, and the sight was one to please anybody, and how much more a little boy who had only stupid, motionless toys to enjoy!

THE little boy clapped his hands, and his eyes danced and whizzed, for the circling windmills made him dizzy. Closer and closer came the windmill-man, and held up his big fan to the little boy in the window of the ambassador's house. Only a pane of glass between the boy and the windmills. They slid round before his eyes in rapidly revolving splendor. There were wheels and wheels of colors, big, little, thick, thin, all one clear, perfect spin. The windmill-vender dipped and raised them again, and the little boy's face was glued to the window-pane. Oh, what a glorious, wonderful plaything — rings and rings of windy color always moving! How had any one ever preferred those other toys which never stirred! "Nursie, come quickly! Look! I want a windmill. See! It is never still. You will buy me one, won't you? I want that silver one, with the big ring of blue."

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SO a servant was sent to buy that one, — silver, ringed with blue, — and smartly it twirled about in the servant's hands as he stood a moment to pay the vender. Then he entered the house, and in another minute he was standing in the nursery door, with some crumpled paper on the end of a stick, which he held out to the little boy. "But I wanted a windmill which went round," cried the little boy. "That is the one you asked for, Master Charles." Nursie was a bit impatient; she had mending to do. "See, it is silver, and here is the blue." "But it is only a blue streak," sobbed the little boy; "I wanted a blue ring, and this silver doesn't sparkle." "Well, Master Charles, that is what you wanted; now run away and play with it, for I am very busy."

THE little boy hid his tears against the friendly window-pane. On the floor lay the motionless, crumpled bit of paper on the end of its stick; but far away across the square was the windmill-vender, with his big wheel of whirring splendor. It spun round in a blaze like a whirling rainbow, and the sun gleamed upon it, and the wind whipped it, until it seemed a maze of spattering diamonds. "Coquerico!" crowed the golden cock on the top of the stadhuis. "That is something worth crowing for." But the little boy did not hear him; he was sobbing over the crumpled bit of paper on the floor.