

## The Visitor

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He was four-something. Maybe a little older. He seemed smart enough but speech delayed and spoke in an elaborate gibberish. On a first-time visit to a great aunt and uncle he wandered through the big house, renaming objects with such rapidity that the adults could barely catch one sound before it effervesced into another.

It took them some effort to figure out what he wanted. On one occasion he simply gave up on the adults and tried to make due himself, making a beeline for the refrigerator. Stopped just in the nick of time, he was given fruit for his effort. They plopped him down at the kitchen table and in short order his cheeks were smeared with fresh cherry juice and his teeth bled from the dark nectar. He watched with fascination as the liquid ran down the underside of his forearm and dripped onto the table from the point of his elbow. Remarkably, he didn't swallow a seed. He was that good.

Then it was up from the table to resume reconnoitering the rooms, filled to the brim with old furniture, meaningful nick knacks, and books long ago read and mostly forgotten. He managed to drag an artist's tripod down the carpeted stairs from somewhere in the upper floors; and he was so thrilled to discover the cat that he waxed near-operatic into a libretto that might have been worth translating.

He was, as they say, a mess, so worthy of contemplation. They speculated his school years would be challenging. A wry smile suggested he wasn't quite the innocent adults always hope for.

Several times during the visit he was caught in the act of reaching for a forbidden object, at which he would freeze, stare at the intruder, and wait—see who would blink first. He would, of course, then move on, unperturbed.

To be honest, they were relieved to see him go, although it was agreed he had lifted the place from its slumber. His great aunt gave him a small bag of cherries and one of the less meaningful nick knacks he had taken a fancy to. After the front door had remained closed for a safe interval, the cat ventured forth, and the great uncle took the tripod back upstairs. The table was then set for dinner and the TV turned to the news. Outside, lamplight began to stencil window patterns onto the lawn.