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Sometimes, I'd send kids as young as eight years old to sit for hours on the short sloping verge opposite his house.

The instruction was simple: 'Don't take your eyes off the place. Just keep staring.'

And they did. They'd sit and stare for the whole day, their soft pulpy skin burning in the glaring heat of the white sun. Very occasionally, the tedium of the task would be broken by a car passing through the neighbourhood, or a maid out walking her employer's curly-blond child before tea. But mostly, people in those parts were too scared to leave their plots so they remained indoors.

When going out was unavoidable, they passed through a secure and highly complex underground parking facility that led straight onto the main highway. To the rest of us it seemed such a waste—all those beautiful avenues of purple jacaranda abandoned through fear.

My older observers, mostly unemployed semi-literate men from back home, spoke fondly of what I worked out must have been a wind-chime hanging from the branch of a limp old cherry tree in his front garden. It tinkled three delicate notes in the lightest breeze: a single thief creeping past could create enough movement in the air to push one of the hanging rods into a swing.

The soft greying Siamese was loved too. In the evening cool, it would step carefully through a small gap in the fence, slim its entire body into a long stretch and slither just beneath the electric wire, then stroll across the road, up the verge, to finally flop to its belly and roll in the dry yellowing grass, yearning to be rubbed by one of my sitters.

Of course, he hated that. His own cat, a loping traitor, writhing and purring with the slum Coloureds in full sight of his top window.

The strange thing was, he never tried to get us removed. Not once. He never called the police, never sent his security men out. Nothing. He let the watching continue for many months, such that I assumed it was having no reasonable effect whatsoever and started developing new strategies.

I borrowed a deformed child. Of what age, I do not know. It had the body of a baby no older than a year: chubby arms, podgy belly, and legs that curled and clung to its young mother's narrow hips. So long as you didn't look at its face, you would notice nothing strange, nothing unusual. For the face was that of an old man with a brow so wrinkled and distressed, it could only have been cultivated by a long life of misery and terrible hardship. Its eyes, also, were not clear and trusting, but drunk, bloodshot and knowing. This thing looked straight through you if you caught its glance. It would smile, recognising at once both the revulsion and pity in your voyeur eyes, and holding your gaze, lean in to suckle on the mother's empty sagging breast, tugging and pulling cruelly on a dry, exhausted nipple.

In my attempt to punish the man who made my life such misery, I summoned up all of my hatred and one night, carried this child thing in a thick canvas bag, to his house in the manicured suburb. In front of his gates, I put the bag down and, with dread and loathing, unzipped it and reached inside. Dumb and deaf, the child did not make a sound, but from the black depths of the bag, it reached up and grabbed on to my arms, clamouring its fat deformed fingers over my skin. It breathed heavily, excitedly, and produced such a deep murmur that I was sure this was a deformed man in my hands, whose only pleasure was to suck from the breast of a young woman.

Struggling with the terror festering in my imagination, I managed finally to loose myself from the small creature and abandoned it by the gates. Repeatedly I pressed the bell marked 'MAIN HOUSE', holding my finger in place for as long as I dared before running for safety across the road to hide in his neighbour's thick and thorny hedge.

Shortly, a bright yellow light came on, and with that the movement of a man walking towards the gates. I immediately recognised his stride, his weight, his heels clicking. When you work with someone for more than seventeen years, even if you loathe them, you become ensnared in familiarity.

'Hello?' he called. 'Who is that?'

The small repellent bundle sitting on the other side of the gate swung a little, aware if not through sound but through shadow and vibration that another living body was coming close.

'Hello?' came the voice from behind the gates again, 'Who is that?'

He waited a while longer, completely still, listening for an answer. When again he heard nothing, he must have pressed a button because there was a click and the gates started slowly sliding back.

A yellow light fell across the street. I pushed myself back another inch into the hedge, fearing I would be seen. But his gaze was absorbed in the vile suckling mass at his feet. His own shadow fell over the child-like form, darkening its features from view, and he responded as if it were a helpless adorable baby. He bent down, his arms reaching out, and picked the child from the ground. He pushed it immediately up over one shoulder, patting the creature gently on the curve of its spine. Holding it with one hand, he turned and walked back between the gates. As he did, they began to close behind him. I crawled out from the hedge and struggled to my feet, horrified that he had taken this thing into his home. Above the closed gates, I saw the bulbous head and dribbling mouth and red eyes looking for me. As it disappeared into darkness, bouncing slightly to the stride of the man who held him, it began smiling.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lara Pawson.*