



Source: Michael Moss and Souad Mekhennet, [‘The guidebook for taking a life’](#), *New York Times online*, 10/06/07.

Tags: [animals](#), [discomfort](#), [diplomacy](#), [home](#), [retribution](#)
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He came in through the bedroom window. I don’t know how—it’s a steep climb up the umbrella tree and the gap to the verandah is really very wide. I tried it once, going down that is, but Poppy heard and came rushing out in his slippers and scolded me quite badly. Stuff and nonsense about egg-shaped bumps and broken bones. Anyway, he came in through the bedroom window. I was startled at first, as was he with his back hunched towards me, the tail erect and quivering, his canny pointed face. I hunched up too, against the bedhead. He, IT, quickly recovered his composure and began to speak: ‘what is that is not that not that is it?’ He shook his head as if to straighten his muddled brain. And then almost in a moment of clearheadedness I realised the whole situation was bearing down on me impossibly—like all the improbable things that made me wonder, were all of a sudden, part of this moment.

Another world existed after all.

IT sprung up, pirouetting on one hind leg, and bowed as if to say ‘at your service’. My night light suddenly went dim, and the shadows spread inwards from the corners of the room. A shiver ran down my spine but more than that, a pleasure at the thought of what fun I might have with my new companion. IT seemed to read my thoughts: ‘Let’s burn the house down’, he said, quite clearly, with a smile so sweet, with a voice so charming that even the dullest of listeners, had there been any, would have been tempted to go down this path of fun and adventure. ‘Or do something even more adventurous,’ he half purred, half growled with a far more worrying glint in his beady eye.

I decided to take the situation in hand—after all he’s my guest and Poppy and Ma are pretty strict about how people—ah, guests—behave round here; helping out with the chores, sitting up at table, keeping quiet if Aunt Gladys is having a headache that afternoon. That sort of thing. Even though I was not yet 12, I knew that IT might be hard to contain in the company of grown ups. I reasoned that he was nocturnal and that if I could keep him occupied here talking till dawn, he might sleep tomorrow and give me time to make a plan.

‘Tell me about yourself,’ I started politely. ‘Where are your parents?’

IT sniffed the night air and gave me a withering look: ‘Can’t you come up with anything better than that? Come on, let’s run amok downstairs. Who don’t you like and we’ll get ‘em? I can kneecap them and you can finish them off—I’m quite handy with a weapon you know’. And he made a military flourish that looked pretty convincing to me.

I snuggled down in bed hoping to calm him, but it only had the effect of exciting him more. He pulled back in a hunch, then shot towards me, scurrying over my knees like determined infantry; up my tightened chest, and sticking his pointy little face in mine, he hissed: ‘Listen buster, if I’ve landed here it’s because I’ve got something to sort out. You’ve got one night, I’ve got one night and let’s make the most of it. I can do most jobs—just let me know now if I’m going to need extra help, there’s a limit to what even I can handle. Come on’, he wheedled, ‘you must have a grudge, a vendetta, inconvenient in-laws—that line of thing. Huh?’ His earthy breath misted my face, while he still managed to hiss and growl beneath a thin smile of encouragement. He fixed me with his eye, all the force of his animal magnetism beaming in on me. ‘Well?’

I hesitated a moment more, but he knew he had me as soon as he felt my chest constrict under his claws. ‘Come on, out with it. I know you’re thiiiiinnnnkkking,’ IT coyly pushed his advantage. Still I hesitated—I somehow knew I was at a cross roads, like a rider in the outback who comes to a fork and looks one way then the other. I peered over IT’s shoulder as if for guidance. The possibilities began to open up to my fervent imagination, bloody dismembered images of everyone who had slighted or humiliated me, a chasm into a dark world. I shivered again, for what seemed the hundredth time that night. I looked back into IT’s face—I could hardly avoid it, he was pressed so closely to me, his nose would poke in and out of my ear when he emphasised his words.

I took a deep breath—as well as I could with this fidgeting creature glued to my chest: somehow I decided, even to this day I wonder how, why? I saw the line between good and bad, saw it clearly and understood it, and again I wonder how? It was never so clear or so simple again. And I turned my heart inside out and I took in the pointy face and the glistening snout. ‘IT, how do you go on the other sort of job? One that’s small or silly or fun?’ I moved my hands from under the covers and I placed them on either side of his restless squirming body. To my surprise he fell instantly calm. ‘Hmm, well, if there’s a bit of nice supper and a warm spot on the hearth, well in that case I could be persuaded to do a deal,’ and IT began to purr and growl at once, relaxing into the crannies of the bed with a contented sigh.

When I awoke in the morning, only the crumbs of our midnight feast and an animal impression remained. But I was changed forever and though I wished for him, IT never came and visited again.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Kate Richards.