

Unexpected Visitor

Kathy Kress

On a warm afternoon in mid-May I found myself “nesting.” I vacuumed and dusted and piddled about. My grandmother always said if you find yourself cleaning for no good reason, you are going to have an unexpected visitor. Smiling at the memories we had shared, I was startled when I heard a tap on the door. On the porch stood my unexpected visitor; she was lovely. Petite and fit with brown eyes that seemed too big for her angelic face, she stood there with an expression of knowing. I didn’t want to ask her in right away because my cleaning was not finished and well...she was a stranger. Reluctantly opening the door, imagine my surprise when she walked right in and made herself comfortable on the sofa. Puzzled, I asked her if she would like something to drink. Pouring the water, I took a moment to grasp the situation. We sat in silence for a moment. Nervously, I began rambling on and on about nothing. As the visit progressed, I began to understand her story. She was offering her services as a personal trainer. A memory of my grandmother popped into my mind, “Be careful, strangers could be angels in disguise.” As I thought about the potential, I decided to sign up for her services. I was out on a limb. I was taking a risk, and it felt eerily exciting. Always follow your inner self; that “gut” instinct is there for a reason.

She decided that very evening to begin my training. Outside we went, and before I knew, it we had walked for thirty minutes. Considering the steep, mountainous terrain and my physical condition, this was quite a feat. Arriving back at the porch, I felt a little winded. Carefully I turned the knob and opened the door to invite her back in to make our plans for future exercise appointments, but she was gone. How? I didn’t see or hear a car engine. There was no one in sight. A single chickadee landed on the birdfeeder and sang a sweet song. It chirped a new day... a fresh start. When the solo was finished, I whispered, “Bravo, encore.”

Back in my comfort zone, I called my daughter, Lisa, and told her the whole tale. Lisa is sensible and level-headed yet a bit of a mystic spirit. She opened my eyes to the fact that I had dominated the conversation during the encounter with my guest. I did not know where my visitor was from, how she arrived at my door, her background or even her name! Yet, I felt energized at the possibility that she would return.

Before the alarm clock could awaken my fitful slumber, I heard a gentle tap on the door. There she was, dressed just as the day before. I threw on my tennis shoes and off we went. Mornings have never been my favorite time of day, and I don’t recall ever enjoying a walk that took place before noon. It seemed that the air was fresher and every new blossom had released its sweet scent. The rising sun blazed a beautiful shade of tangerine, and the morning buzzed with anticipation. This time I wasn’t about to let her get away. Before I turned the doorknob, I asked her to come inside. I made breakfast for both of us and chatted about what the possibilities were in this venture. My schedule would have to be flexible and I wondered what I could expect during the workout program. My new personal trainer, however, seemed pre-occupied. As a matter of fact, I found myself following her from room to room as she looked curiously at pictures and knick-knacks. Back in the kitchen the smell of breakfast permeated the air and seemed to lead us both back to the table. We agreed that morning and evening workouts would be a good way to start. Rigid routine would discipline me to make time to exercise and she would accept no excuses.

How much do I owe you? I winced at the thought. This is when I really thought I had made a wrong turn on the road of what was acceptable in a normal business relationship. She needed a necklace? Before I could panic or dismiss her, I had a thought. This would be a test. If I were to buy her something elaborate, would she refuse it? What exactly is she doing? Intrigued by what I now saw as a test for both of us, I agreed.

As I shopped, I looked not only for the perfect necklace, but also for answers to my questions. Is she greedy or modest? Does she think that I am greedy or modest? I trudged on for hours until finally I chose a necklace that I found a little eccentric and a little earthy. It was perfect, or was it? In the end I had only spent a total of fifteen dollars. The price included the necklace and two charms.

Too excited to wait inside, I waited on the porch for her arrival. Within minutes, as if she could sense my presence, she appeared from around the corner and strolled happily down the street. With the sun rising behind her, she appeared to have an aura. Her blonde, unmanaged hair glistened in the light. I walked out to the street and presented her with the gift. Thrilled, she wore it with a sense of pride. Charms dangling, making soft tones as they touched with her footsteps, it seemed to be exactly what she was expecting. What a relief she was not anticipating more than I could afford.

The first week of sessions, which seemed only to consist of speed walking followed by a brief cool down had gone very smoothly...except I still did not know her very well. It seemed everywhere we went, she ran into friends. Up popped my grandmother, "Children and animals can sense good and evil." Daily, as we walked wherever the wind led us, people would stop and compliment her or give a knowing smile. Often, people would stop and talk to her as if I were not even there. Children in particular seemed drawn to her, as if they were metal pulled by a strong magnetic force. Often, they would reach out to her, arms open, all giggles and smiles. I was forced to trust this instinct because I still really did not know a lot about her yet, it seemed when I was with her I opened up all of the secrets I had kept locked away, some of them for years.

Another week had flown by and I was intrigued by what my payment for a full week, two sessions per day would be. A what? A massage? A fleeting moment of fear and disgust came over me as I tried to rely on some reason of... somehow to justify... what is this relationship exactly? Breaking through all of the societal barriers of right and wrong and acceptable and unacceptable, I went against my better judgment and agreed. I did lay three ground rules: no nakedness, if I feel uncomfortable you must leave immediately, I will only massage your back and neck... period. She flopped to the floor and to my surprise it wasn't that weird. In fact, within minutes she was asleep.

Three weeks had vanished from the calendar, and I was ashamed to say I could not remember if she had ever told me her name. Skipping about the park where we found ourselves that breezy spring day was a little fellow, who was mastering the art of "swing and jump." You remember, swing as high as you can, then launch yourself into the air keeping track of your previous landing like an Olympic shot-put competition. Brown curls bounced with a thud as he landed successfully just beyond the impression created by the previous attempt. His mother clutched her heart with one hand and used the other to cover her eyes. He was a cutie, and he saved me the embarrassment I dreaded. "Lady Solis," he squealed with glee as he embraced her.

Now I had a name, and no matter what, I had to find out the truth about this Lady Solis. I made a few calls to local authorities and learned that she was indeed homeless, a rambler, perhaps a con artist. This information destroyed and devastated me. After thinking about the potential for harm and utter weirdness, I wondered how I had allowed myself to be caught up in this mess. Was I a crazy lunatic? This lady knew everything about me. Everything. But she needs me; she is a victim of a culture that failed her. I don't care what she has or hasn't done in the past I will cherish her. Unconditional love was all she had ever shown me. All of the secrets, past accounts of despicable deeds, sorrows and fears I shared with her and yet her compassion was undaunted. I would love her the same way. In fact, I would allow her to move in with me if that is what it took to protect her from any further abuse and disgrace.

It was an easy move since the only thing she had was the necklace I had given her. She always wore the same exact thing, but it was always clean. Just this morning as I grabbed her by the ears and babbled baby talk to her, I wondered what my life would be like without her. Healthier and happier than I have ever been, I owe it all to Lady. Take it from me, go out on a limb, open your heart and maybe your home. It is my expert opinion that everyone should have a dog.



Flash
Kathy Kress

In my eyes, I am young—maybe twenty-five.

Smooth ivory skin, flowing hair, and full eyelashes.

The mirror sees me differently.

Chunky rolls and stretch marks give it away.

I am old.

An almanac of time well spent is spelled out on my thighs,

Etched like hieroglyphics on an ancient wall.

Veins unveiled, ribbed lines mercilessly weave patterns of days well lived

Freckles, furrows, divots and circles

Paint my face

A shade of history



What's My Line

Kathy Kress

(prompt: using famous movie lines)

Mr. Watson interviewed a prospective teacher. He asked her what field she was certified to teach. The candidate nervously said, "Elementary, my dear Watson." They both laughed and she was hired on the spot. Mr. Watson walked Ms. Teacher to her classroom, which was already filled with students. As she wrote her name on the chalkboard, a spitwad flew through the room. Ms. Teacher turned and eyeballed the student, "You'll shoot your eye out," she threatened. "Alrighty-then," mocked the student. She shouted at Eric Thomas, "E.T. phone home!" Mr. Thomas answered the phone, and Ms. Teacher explained the situation and suggested he be grounded. "I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse," spewed Mr. Thomas.

Houston, who sat in the back row, had handed in an assignment that was supposed to be an apology for pulling Sally Hoke's hair. It read, "Never apologize and never explain, it's a sign of weakness." "Houston, we have a problem. What we have here is a failure to communicate," explained Ms. Teacher. Houston tried to defend himself pointing out that he was just playing, "Hoke, you're my friend," he begged. Sally was distracted having just received her first love letter from Louis. In a starry gaze she mumbled, "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful relationship."

"Here's looking at you kid," Louis whispered.

Billy, who was the class bully, teased Louis about the budding romance. Ms. Teacher reminded Billy that teasing was against the rules. Billy shouted, "I wouldn't give you two cents for all your fancy rules if behind them they didn't have a little bit of plain ordinary everyday kindness and a little looking out for the other fella, too." The whole room turned into an uproar. Paper flying, students romping about, Mr. Math opened the door and offered some encouragement. "May the force be with you," he said.

Dragging her weary bones to her car, she answered a call on her cell phone. "Who is it?"

"I am your father," the voice answered. He asked about her day and she replied, "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. After all, tomorrow is another day."

