eric



some years ago we had a foreign exchange student come to live with us. We found it very difficult to pronounce his name correctly, but he didn't mind. He told us to just call him 'Eric'.

We had repainted the spare room, bought new rugs and furniture and generally made sure everything would be comfortable for him. So I can't say why it was that Eric chose to sleep and study most of the time in our kitchen pantry.



'It must be a cultural thing,' said Mum. 'As long as he is happy.' We started storing food and kitchen things in other cupboards so we wouldn't disturb him.

But sometimes I wondered if Eric *was* happy; he was so polite that I'm not sure he would have told us if something bothered him. A few times I saw him through the pantry door gap, studying with silent intensity, and imagined what it might be like for him here in our country.



Secretly I had been looking forward to having a foreign visitor — I had so many things to show him. For once I could be a local expert, a fountain of interesting facts and opinions. Fortunately, Eric was very curious and always had plenty of questions.

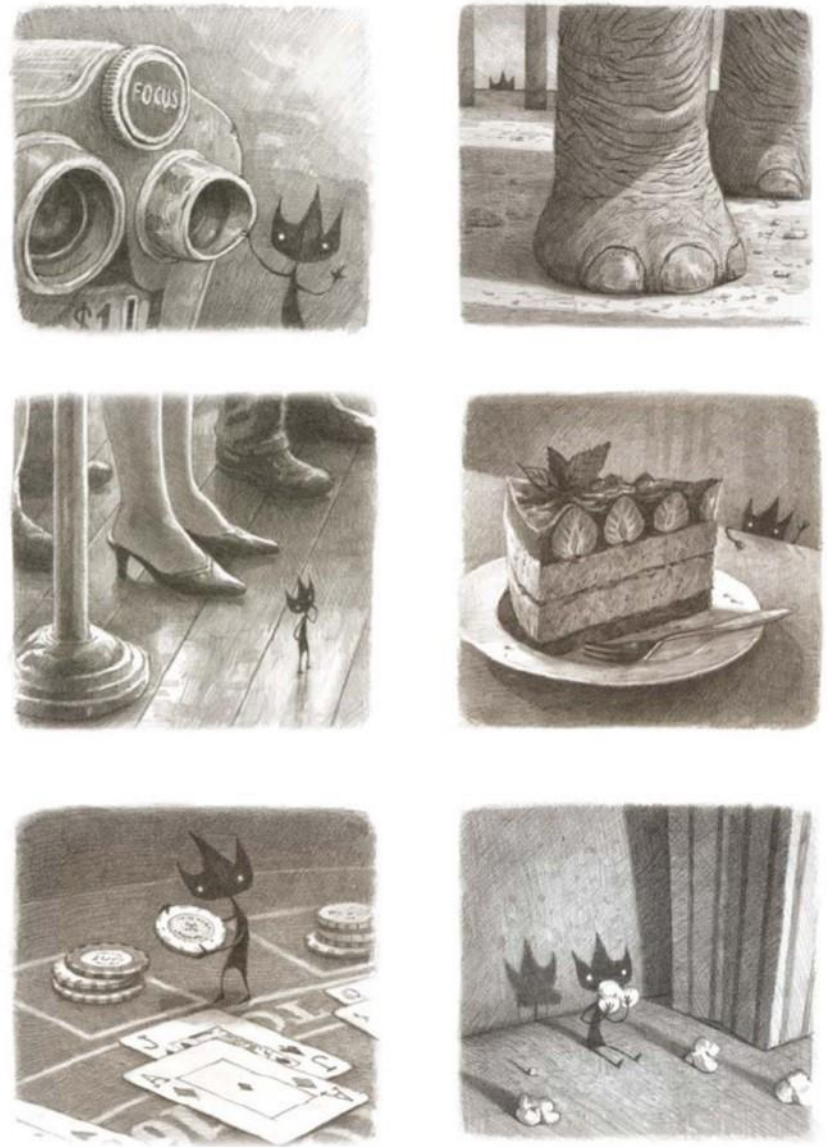
However, they weren't the kind of questions I had been expecting.



Most of the time I could only say,
'I'm not really sure,' or, 'That's just how it is.'
I didn't feel very helpful at all.



I had planned for us to go on a number of weekly
excursions together, as I was determined to show our
visitor the best places in the city and its surrounds.
I think Eric enjoyed these trips, but once again,
it was hard to really know.



Most of the time Eric seemed more interested in small things he discovered on the ground.

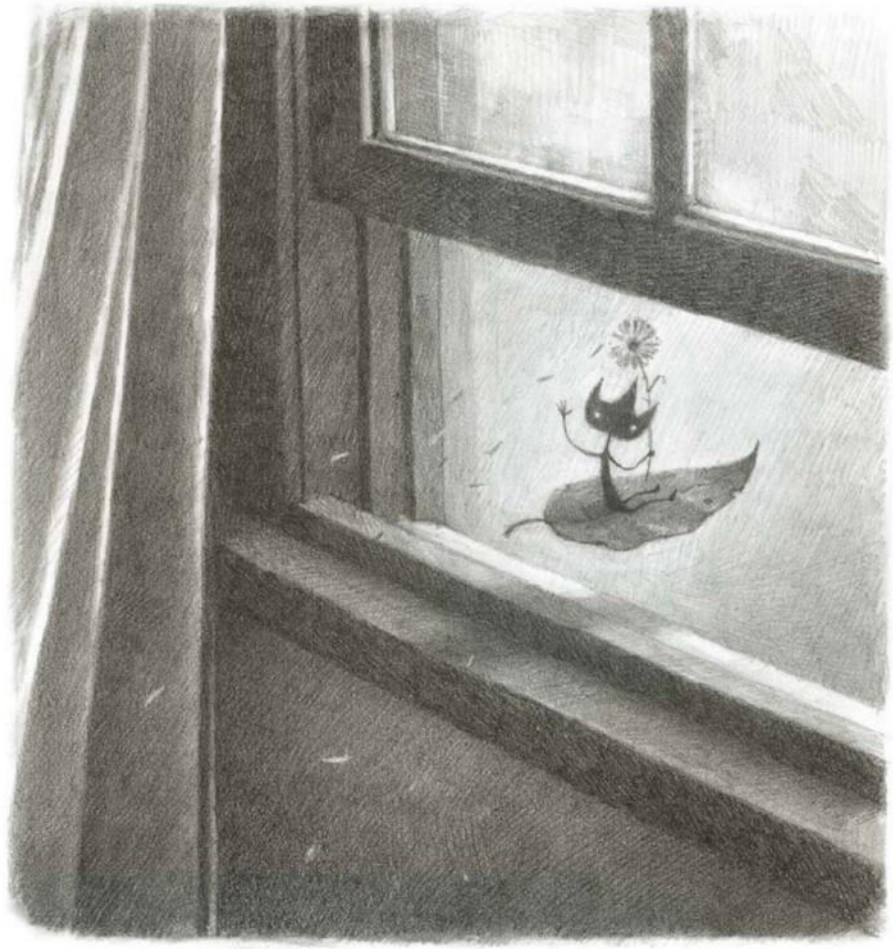




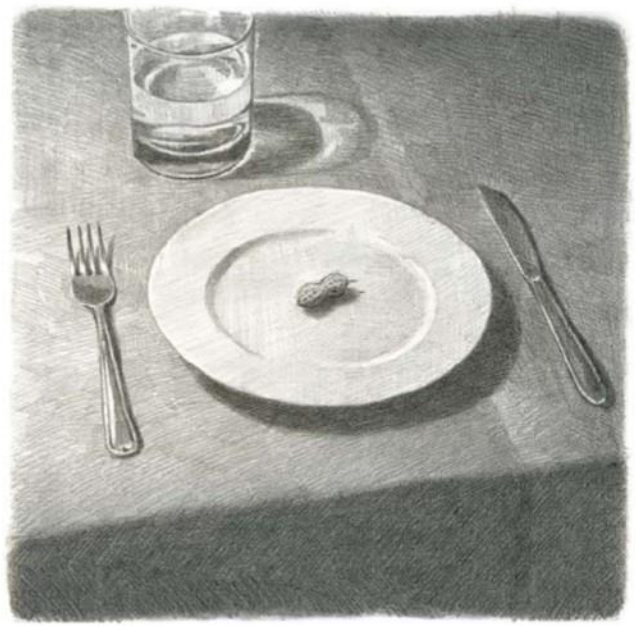
I might have found this a little exasperating, but I kept thinking about what Mum had said, about the cultural thing. Then I didn't mind so much.

Nevertheless, none of us could help but be bewildered by the way Eric left our home: a sudden departure early one morning, with little more than a wave and a polite goodbye.





It actually took us a while to realise he wasn't coming back.



There was much speculation over dinner later that evening. Did Eric seem upset? Did he enjoy his stay? Would we ever hear from him again? An uncomfortable feeling hung in the air, like something unfinished, unresolved. It bothered us for hours, or at least until one of us discovered what was in the pantry.

Go and see for yourself: it's still there after all these years, thriving in the darkness. It's the first thing we show any new visitors to our house. 'Look what our foreign exchange student left for us,' we tell them.

'It must be a cultural thing,' says Mum.


THANK YOU FOR
WONDERFUL
TIME