

Story for performance #935  
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Source: Martin Chulov, 'Window-dressing and hope rise in Ramallah for Bush', *The Australian online*, 11/01/08.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [home](#), [ghosts](#)  
Writer/s: [Jane Goodall](#)

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Don't call me paranoid, alright. Give me a break. It's just I don't like to be in the dark. Not in any sense. I mean, who does? Actually, there are some people who like it, but I wouldn't trust them. Seriously. They're a breed apart, those types. And to tell you the truth I think they run in families. To tell you the truth I think they run in my family, which is why I tend to take a few extra precautions when it comes to the lighting arrangements.

When I was a little kid I had this cousin who used to come and stay with us. She was five years older than me. Melissa. A tall girl with curly blonde hair and glasses. Looking back on it, I suspect there was something wrong with her eyes. You know—she had this way of pushing her head forward as if she had to shorten the distance between where she was and what she was trying to see. Sometimes she'd put a hand out in front of her to check where the edge of a door was, or the back of a chair. But in the evening, she'd never think to put the lights on. I'd find her sitting on the bed in the near darkness, talking to the dolls. So I'd flick the light switch immediately, but she wouldn't react. It was as if it didn't make any difference to her at all.

But then, one day she did react. I was behind her. I swear I remember this right. She was sitting on the bed with her back to me, holding up the Japanese doll and whispering to it, and when I put out my hand to flick the switch, she snapped, 'Don't!' And for some reason, I knew immediately that this was directed to me, not the doll.

I ran away. Even though it was my bedroom. I mean, when you're six years old and a kid of eleven gives you orders, you generally obey them, don't you? I went back to watch television till my Dad told me to go to bed, by which time she was already asleep, so I had to creep past her and put on my pyjamas in the dark. I couldn't go to sleep myself, not for ages. I just lay there staring at the line of dolls sitting up against the window, where she'd put them. She hadn't drawn the curtains, so some light was coming in from the moon outside. Her spectacles were on the table and each of the lenses showed a tiny moon, glinting in the middle of the glass disc. It made me think someone was looking at me, so I daredn't close my eyes.

The next time she came to stay I was prepared. When we were in Targets I persuaded my mum to buy me a bright yellow Bart Simpson telephone that had flashing lights all over it when it rang, and the Simpson's theme for a dial tone. You got a matching yellow watch for free. That started giving me a few ideas, so after we got home I ferreted around in the wardrobes upstairs and found the Christmas tree

lights. It took a while to untangle them, sitting on the floor of my room, and a bit longer to get them fixed up how I wanted, so each of the dolls had a little halo of lights around its head, and when I switched them on, they glowed out from every part of the room. But I left the Japanese doll on the bed, seeing it was Melissa's favourite. I ran the tail end of the wire from the tree lights out through the door of the bedroom and plugged it in the socket in the hallway. Then I fixed the batteries in the Bart Simpson phone and put it on the table by the window in my room.

When Melissa arrived with my aunty and uncle, all three of them stood on the doorstep looking at me with their spectacles flashing in the sunlight. I gave them a big smile.

I couldn't wait for it to get dark, and that happened quite late because it was the middle of summer. After dinner we were all watching television and I saw Melissa sloping off to the bedroom. I waited for ten minutes, watching them go by on my yellow watch, before I sloped off after her, collecting the portable phone from Dad's study on the way. The door of my bedroom was open, and I could see she was sitting with her back to it, just like before, talking to the Japanese doll.

I stopped at the edge of the door-frame and pressed my back against the wall, trying to hear what she was saying, but I couldn't understand a word of it. Maybe she was speaking Japanese. Or talking in code. I crouched down in the hallway and gave myself a count-down of thirty seconds on my watch before dialling the number for the yellow phone, then flicking the switch for the Christmas lights as the Simpson's theme tune started up.

I jumped to my feet and turned to look into the room. Melissa was also on her feet, and she towered over me in the doorway, the shimmering glass of her spectacles reflecting all the multicoloured chaos going on behind her. She grabbed hold of my wrist and pulled me inside, shut the door, picked up the telephone receiver and held it to my ear. I was petrified, caught there with the Japanese doll in my line of sight and all her friends and companions staring down from the shelves like saints in a chapel. I thought I heard whispering. Melissa's mouth wasn't moving, but definitely someone was whispering. It was coming through the telephone. The same thing, over and over again.

'Darkness is your friend, darkness is your friend, darkness is your friend.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jane Goodall.*