

Story for performance #994  
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Tags: [countryside](#), [child/parent](#), [storytelling](#), [home](#)  
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'You can't stay outdoors all night!' she shouted from the back door. Beyond the circle of light that fell from doorway to dirt it was completely dark. The farmhouse was in the middle of a paddock surrounded by more paddocks and nothing to see until the horizon blended into stars and a silvery moon. In daylight all was flat and brown.

We were running through the dusty yard as far away from the light of the house as possible. In the dark it was scary, and that was good. But it was also hot and dry and not so good. It made you thirsty. The air smelt of the heat of the day past: that type of heat that singes your nostril hairs when you breathe it in.

We were a group of five. A collection of sisters and cousins, and Billy, a visitor from nearby, some kind of place without paddocks.

The littlest of our gang moved back towards the light so his protest could be heard, 'Mu-umm, it's not a school night! Just a bit longer?'

The flywire door snapped shut as Mum called back over her shoulder 'Okay, ten more minutes and that's it.'

One by one we jumped the hosepipe snaking over a patch of grass and made another break into the dark. The four-wire fence was supposed to keep any wandering sheep out of the house yard, and it was the boundary for us at night. We weren't to go any further than the fence line.

When we got to the fence we did scissors-paper-rock to decide which way to head. Off to the east we went exploring territory familiar in the daytime, anticipating something new in the night. At the corner fencepost the littlest (again), said 'Let's do our stars. C'mon! Here's a good place.' We tumbled onto the dirt bumping against each other, reorganising our familiar tangle of legs into position for our star gazing. We had worked out a way of leaning against each other's knees to make a line, up against the boundary fence.

Billy knows a lot about the sky at night, says the stars are made of gas and sometimes he tells us they are made of people's spirits. And then next time he might tell us a story from his grandmother about the stars. This is our favourite thing: to sit in the dark, outdoors and away from everyone, looking into the other worlds and listening to his stories. Billy is what Dad calls an 'odd boy' because he knows lots of stuff and can't kick a football.

We make a competition: who can be the first to see a falling star, or a satellite. Far away from town lights the sky is blacker than blue-black and the stars capture all our attention, 100 per cent.

You can follow one star to another through a maze of little sparkling soft lights you barely see. To spot a satellite you have to choose one star and stare at it, stick to it until you see a small light moving quickly by. Sometimes it might be a plane. Once you see one then others appear, like they are magnets for each other.

'Tell us a story about the stars Billy', demands the littlest (again). 'Like you did last time, tell us.'

We turn our ears to Billy, wanting it too.

'Okay.' And Billy begins.

'Ages ago, a long way away, a girl was given a quest by a good spirit. She had to carry a special sack to the Olders who were a day's journey away. She was told not to open the sack under any circumstances, not ever.

'After walking for a while she got tired and sat down, and looked at the sack. She tipped it upside down. It was tied very tightly, like there was a secret in there. The little girl just had to know what was in there, so she undid the knot. But just as quickly as it was undone another knot appeared. She was determined and with lightning fingers undid and opened the top of the sack to peek in. A puff of white light flew out of the sack, like "puuff". She was so surprised she dropped the sack and more puuffs of light came out, a blue one, a yellow one, a white one. She tried to grab them but they slipped away and moved up, up out of reach. The little girl was worried. She grabbed the sack by the neck to stop any more coming out and tried to catch and push what she could back into the sack. She knotted the top and quickly set off again on her journey to the Olders.

'When she finally met the Olders and gave them the sack one of them held it high and said "Hmm this feels quite light, did you open the sack on the way here?"

"Well," she said, "I did take a peek."

"Just a peek?"

"Well, no. Some things got out."

'The Older pointed to the sky "Look up" said the Older.

'The deep black sky was covered with stars. The Older reached into the sack, pulled out the puffs of light and put them, carefully, into place in the sky. "We make patterns with the stars", he said, "to help us find our way home. When the stars are in place they keep us in our place. Your stars are there."

Billy stopped. We looked up into the sky for the patterns he'd shown us, to find our own place in the stars. Billy told us which were the stars that we should keep hold of and remember all our lives. They could get us home.

The littlest (again), called out, his pointing arm cutting angles in space 'Emu! Southern Cross! Billy? That's what I need, isn't it?'

Just then it was Mum's voice that reached us from the house, 'Hey, you kids, time to come in. You can't say out there all night.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Helen Idle.