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Gorilla

Anthony Browne
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Children should never go off with a stranger in the middle of the night, unless, of course, the stranger is a large, pleasant gorilla that has just appeared at the foot of the bed.

Hannah's father, who is too busy to pay much attention to her, has given her a small stuffed gorilla for an early birthday present. The illustrations show his posture clearly saying, "Don't bother me." As he reads the morning paper, his gray face with its distant expression and the dull, orderly kitchen are in stark contrast to Hannah's lively imagination. The girl loves gorillas, and sees them everywhere, including in a painting of "Whistler's Mother."

While Hannah sleeps, the toy comes to life and grows. Gorilla offers the lonely child all that she has been longing for in a relationship with her father. He proposes that they go to the zoo in the middle of the night. They creep downstairs, and Gorilla puts on her father's hat and coat. "'A perfect fit,' he whispers."

With Hannah tucked under his arm, they swing through the trees in the moonlight, then climb a wall to get into the zoo. There, Gorilla takes Hannah directly to the primates. She is thrilled to see so many gorillas. They visit the orangutan and a chimpanzee-"beautiful but sad." The face of the chimp looking through the bars of the cage begs to be felt. Browne masterfully used watercolor to create each whisker, the chimp's chamois-type skin and penetrating gaze.

The pair ends up at home on the lawn where they dance (Daddy-and-daughter-style), while verdant gorillas emerge from the hedge and waltz behind them.

When Hannah awakes, she takes her toy gorilla to breakfast. Before she can tell her father (who has a banana in his back pocket) what has happened, he wishes her a happy birthday and asks if she wants to visit the zoo. Off they go, hand in hand.

First published in 1983, this delightful book won the Kate Greenaway Medal and was named the New York Times Book Review Best Illustrated Book of the Year. Author-illustrator Browne has received numerous awards for his other books.

Without being overly serious, the book invites parent and child to talk about the time they are spending together-which is usually not enough-and to enjoy their own gorilla adventures.
LINDA SALISBURY (March / April 2003)

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