

Janie and Jerome

Janie tells Jerome that she's just hidden something in the living room. This happens regularly, and as he never finds any of these objects he accuses her of lying. Janie insists that she's **not**, that she really has hidden something - something that wasn't there previously - now, and all those times before. And it's not her fault if he's no good at finding things. This is an opportunity for him to get better at it. Practice.

This has been going on for so long now that the feelings of frustration and challenge run deep, and Jerome can't just let it pass. Even though he's always in a position of inferiority when they enter into this exchange, he can't help taking the bait, just as Janie can't resist dangling it in front of him.

Around the age of ten she introduced a new variable: the time limit. After twenty-four hours she'd no longer be able to comment on whether it was *newly hidden* as by then it would have transformed into *usually there*. This ratcheted up the sense of urgency and soon after segued into Janie's new policy of never directly announcing she'd hidden something. He had to ask, and she had to reply honestly. But once the object had passed its twenty-four hour residency she was no longer able to say whether anything had been added recently or not. So Jerome asks most mornings, and Janie replies with either a no or an end time.

In order to accommodate all these objects - if that's what's really happening - then others must have been removed, or the room would just fill and fill, but he's not aware of things disappearing either. He can't understand why he wouldn't notice this as he functions normally in the world, can always find his keys, where he's parked, books on shelves. Janie suggests that he has a blind spot: that he knows the room so well that he never really looks at it. Or that it could be a mental aberration, that maybe a bit of his brain hadn't developed properly. Or maybe she is lying, but has a pathological disorder that makes her believe otherwise.

Janie offers to remove all the things from the room that she's ever added (she's kept a list) - and then that would be it, game over. She

concedes that although she's stayed true to the usually-there-after-twenty-four-hours rule, she still thinks of the new objects as interlopers and finds sitting in the living room distracting as she's overwhelmed by their glaring obviousness and inappropriateness. He might find it frustrating not to be able to detect them, but she has her own related vexations.

Jerome asks if he couldn't just see the list but she says obviously not. When he flares up she quickly adds that she didn't mean she wouldn't be willing to show him, but that it was in the room with them already, in plain view. It's such an audacious claim that it stops him dead.

Jerome could call an end to this by taking up his sister's offer, and can see that she wants to move on. But to where? If the room is bare afterwards - or there's no change - then the only thing he can be certain about is that the list is no longer in the room. But if there are no hidden objects in the first place, then the one thing he can be certain about - again - is that the list is not in the room. So all she's really offering is the opportunity to remove, or give the appearance of removing, the one thing that would prove whether she's telling the truth. Alternatively, if they carry on as they are then the list and the objects maybe remain, or continue not to be there. So maybe there is no end.

About a month later Janie casually re-mentions her offer, over breakfast. Jerome thanks her, but declines. He points out an article in the newspaper he thinks she'll be interested in: about the sudden population explosion in hedgehogs, and how they've been swarming around the countryside in packs. An accompanying photo shows a mass of them carpeting a school playground with a group of children watching on warily through a classroom window.

'I don't know how I feel about that', she says. 'It's good that they've stopped dying out - but swarming's not good'.

He felt similar, as did the reporter. It was one of those mixed message things.