

a short story

**The Book
From the
Basement**

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Note from the author:

Hey there, I'm Jordan! You may or may not know me, but I am an aspiring author trying to get my book, with working title *Project Fire*, published! I've created short stories like these in the meantime for people like you to enjoy. I'm so glad that you've taken valuable time from your day to read my work, and I'd like to personally thank you for doing so. It means so much to me. I sincerely hope that this story will transport your imagination to Oroktiv's world.

With love,

Jordan T. Hariel

THE BOOK FROM THE BASEMENT

Eight year-old Jonathan gazed out his foggy window one starry evening. He cleared away some of the haze with his hand to give him a better view of the brilliant night sky. There were not a good many streetlights and headlights and other such things in the small town of Terryton, South Dakota, that would detract from the awesome luminance of the stars, so it was always relatively easy to see them. He watched as the shadowy trees flailed wildly in the wind before the celestial backdrop--almost as if the dance of the starry sky had entranced them. Jonathan, too, was entranced by the stars, and he always had been. Miriam, the kindly old lady who ran the orphanage where Jonathan dwelt, had told him that stars were guardian angels, continually watching over us; and he believed her. For as long as he could remember, he felt as if they were sentient beings, and that they were actually looking out for him; although, it was more of a deeply held conviction, the kind that we know not from where it comes, than a mere feeling.

He shifted his gaze to the twinkling of city lights down below him and far in the distance. Terryton was situated a good fifty miles from the larger city of Marsborough. Indeed, Marsborough offered much if one fancied city life; but Terryton was just large and rural enough to satisfy its inhabitants. Now, I said that it was small, and undoubtedly it was; but it was not undeveloped. In fact, it had all the necessities: a grocery, a hardware store, a bakery, a gas station, a quaint little inn, and an orphanage, which, as I said, Jonathan called home. He hated calling it that, but since he slept there, he supposed it was the only suitable name for it. It was not that it was not a pleasant little orphanage, for all the kids were kind, and Miriam Madison, the director, was the sweetest lady you should ever meet. Further, and queerer, was that he did not want to be adopted. He wanted his real mother and father. The only predicament was that he nor anyone else had the slightest idea who they were.

Yes, Jonathan was one of those children. His parents left him at the doorstep and slipped away without a word, leaving their child without any memory of them whatsoever. At some point a few minutes afterward, Miriam discerned the poor baby's wailing, and took him in. Eight years had passed, but his parents never reached out to him. Miriam told Jonathan on several occasions that a couple was endeavoring to adopt him, but at the last minute, they always seemed to change their minds. He did not care. If they were not his real mother and father, then he did not want them. Sure, his biological parents had abandoned him, but there was a small part of him that hoped they still wanted him.

He was pondering on all this when Miriam gave a soft knock on the door. She called out in her sweet voice, "Jonathan?"

"Yes, Miss Madison, do come in."

The seventy seven year old lady opened the door silently. Miriam was a quiet woman, and everything she did was quiet; and she seemed to have the uncanny ability to do everything without making a sound. As she had tonight, she usually opted to dress in a flowery skirt, a blouse, and some modest loafers. Her hair was thin, gray, and curly, an accurate depiction of her wisdom she had gained throughout her life. "All your friends are out playing. You do not wish to join them?"

"No, ma'am."

She strode noiselessly over and seated herself on the bed across from Jonathan's, which had been vacant for some time. "Come, Jonathan, what's on your mind?"

“Nothing different than usual.” He pulled his orange vest closer together and curled up in a ball on his bed.

Miriam smiled. “Sweetie, I know you miss your parents. Everyone else here does also. But you will hurt for the rest of your life if you don’t let someone take you in.”

“I’m afraid, Miss Madison. I’m afraid that they’ll come back for me and I’ll be with someone else.”

“And then what?”

“Well, then I won’t be with them!”

Miriam clapped her hands together. “Jonathan, you know that night that they left you, and I picked you up? When I looked into your eyes, I thought to myself, ‘Golly! What sparkly blue eyes! And what a beautiful blond-headed baby that sees with ‘em!’ You’re still a very handsome little boy, and I know you will do incredible things one day. Now do you just imagine that such an amazing kid like you could ever be abandoned forever by his parents? I doubt it!”

Jonathan giggled. “Thanks, Miss Madison.” He embraced her tightly.

She laughed. “You’re very welcome.” Pausing for a moment, she furled her eyebrows and sighed. “Jonathan?”

“Yes, ma’am?”

“There is something which your parents left with you. I put it away and have long forgotten about it; but now for whatever reason, I seem to have remembered it. Follow me.”

She rose and motioned for Jonathan to walk behind her. “Where are we going, Miss Madison?” Jonathan asked.

“The basement, dear.”

The basement. Jonathan shivered at the mention of its name. Some nights he could hear the furnace in there producing terrifying noises as he endeavored to sleep. He personally had never been down there, but some children said that it was dreadfully dark and quiet, and that a hideous creature that typically fancied children for dinner dwelt down there in the shadow. His anxiety, and simultaneously his intrigue of what could be down there, grew as they traversed the halls of the orphanage.

At last, they reached the dingy stair which dwindled down into the unknown. Miriam tugged on a string, causing a solitary lightbulb to flicker to life. It struggled to illuminate the staircase, but Miriam, taking Jonathan’s hands, uttered soft words of reassurance as they walked downward. Eventually, they reached the pitch blackness that pervaded the musty basement.

“Stay right here, Jonathan,” said Miriam. Giving him a gentle pat on the back, she traversed a little way into the dark. Suddenly, the furnace roared to life, flames leaping forward from its grate like prisoners in a desperate attempt to escape from their cell. Jonathan screamed, but Miriam’s comforting voice came quickly after, “There, there, Jonathan, I’m still here.” He discerned a click in the murkiness, followed by another light blinking on. Most of the darkness immediately melted away; however, it was still rather dim. Though Jonathan at first could not fathom what might have lurked down there, of the basement there was actually little to be told. The floor and walls were wood planks, as essentially was the rest of the orphanage. To the left there was a large, glowing furnace, and everywhere else were random trinkets, worthless antiques, and suchlike. It was not tidy, to be sure, but it was not as frightening as Jonathan had imagined it.

Presently Miriam began to push away some of the mountains of junk in the far right hand corner of the room, and soon she uncovered a chest. It was overlaid with leather, with gilded plates on the corners; and upon its lid was inscribed a strange word in gold thread: LIBONETH. It was locked tightly; but after a moment of searching, Miriam recovered the key, and soon the chest creaked open. Within was an large book, whose peeling leather binding appeared as if it had been subjected to every harsh environment accessible to man. It was not labeled or titled or decorated in any way. Elatedly, Jonathan removed it from the chest. "Do you think this will tell me about my parents?" he asked.

"Well, dear, I'm not sure. When I read that book, it made very little sense to me. I thought it was merely some kind of a book of fairytales, so I stored it down here."

"And you didn't tell me?" inquired Jonathan with a twinge of offense in his tone.

"Ah, well, I am very old: I forget things, mind you. Nonetheless, I should have left it with you. I'm very sorry, dear. But now that you are grown, you may understand it, though I could not."

Hesitantly, Jonathan opened the book. He might be happy to find therein letters from his parents or clues to their whereabouts; but on the other hand, he might be disappointed to find a simple book of nursery rhymes. He held his breath for either outcome. He turned to the first page. It was a small paragraph written in a foreign language. He squinted at it. He had seen something like it before--but what? Oh, that was it: German! It was German, no doubt. Perhaps he had come from Germany. "I don't really talk like they do," thought he to himself, "but I've heard that many of them have blond hair and blue eyes like I do."

On each subsequent page there was a title at the top in that language, and below it was a large drawing of some beautiful place. Some of the pictures depicted mountains, some rivers, some towns, and so on. "Artists!" Jonathan thought. "My parents are artists." For a moment, he thought that their being artists (and German ones at that) would be rather good clues for finding them; but immediately afterward, the thought occurred to him that Germany was a fairly large country, and likely full of artists. Who could tell, further, that they even lived in Germany anymore? To this question he found no answer in that book, nor to any other question: for the book ended rather abruptly, the last page being like all the others. Closing the book and inspecting the cover did not reveal anything either. His countenance fell.

"Well, did you find anything, dear?" asked Miriam with a glimmer of hope in her eye.

Jonathan shook his head. "No, ma'am. If it's all right with you, though, I'd like to bring the chest to my room."

Miriam nodded. "All right, but you'll have to help this old woman carry it up!" She laughed.

Jonathan promptly agreed. Though it only had a book inside, the chest itself was rather weighty, and thus it was no simple task for a seventy-seven year old and an eight year old, each grasping a handle on each end, to bear the chest all the way to Jonathan's room. Nonetheless, eventually they got it to the foot of his bed (though not without giving poor old Miss Madison back pain for a few days afterward). After Miriam, reminding him to have his lights out in thirty minutes, departed from his room, Jonathan again opened the chest and pulled out the book.

He slowly flipped through the pages once more. At length, he found a picture which he particularly liked: a canyon, in which white and red rock were mingled ravishingly together upon the walls, with a murky river rushing at the bottom of it. He ran his fingers over it and smiled. Perhaps if his parents came back, he might visit this place which they had drawn. He closed the book and tossed it on his bed; but instead of hearing the old mattress springs creak, he heard a loud *thud*. All of the sudden, his bedroom had vanished, and he was now at the bottom of a canyon. It was precisely like the illustration he had just admired in his book, but it was far more real. He looked down at the wide muddy river, which, giving a constant shush, charged onward to its unknown destination. Jonathan guessed, based on what he had learned in school, that over a long time it had worked to carve that gorgeous canyon--what was it called? He picked up the book, and found the picture. *Lübaläd*. It sounded pretty, but he wished he could understand its meaning. At any rate, it seemed to fit the beautiful appearance of the gorge rather well.

Setting the book aside, he knelt by the water's edge and stuck his hand into the raging current. It was so strong that he nearly fell over, even by only putting his hand in it, but the feel of it was cool and refreshing. He was rather enjoying himself when the thought suddenly occurred to him: how did he get there? Certainly it could not be a dream, for he was not tired in the slightest bit when he found himself at the bottom of the canyon. Maybe it was a hallucination, but Jonathan felt that he was a rather sane boy. As he wondered at this, it all disappeared, and he was in his room once more.

Immediately, he grabbed the book and opened it to another drawing he liked. Placing his hand on it, he again found himself in the place which the book depicted: a sizable city, filled with houses large and small, brick and wood. Some were two stories, and some were only one; but, mind, there were no three story homes to spoken of. People bustled to and fro, usually not speaking to each other, but every so often giving a cold "good morning" to a passerby, as if they all held disdain for one another. In the distance, huge trees in a vast forest cracked and snapped and slammed into the earth, having been defeated by the ax of the lumberjacks. Jonathan laughed, bounding through the streets of the strange city and greeting the people as he went by them; but not one paid him heed (which he thought considerably rude). Nonetheless, no one's sour mood could spoil the joy he had at being suddenly transported away from the orphanage.

As he ran, he was abruptly halted; for a man stood in the road, completely still, with his eyes locked on Jonathan. At first Jonathan was taken aback, for no one had thus far acknowledged his presence; but the man was not intimidating by any means. As a matter of fact, he was rather short. He seemed relatively young, yet his eyes were full of understanding, experience, and tears. Jonathan wondered why he seemed so depressed, and he came closer to him. "What's the matter, sir? Are you all right?" he asked. In reply, the man smiled weakly. "Kind Liboneth," he whispered, reaching his hand out and touching Jonathan on the face. Instantly, the man and everything around him was gone, and Jonathan was once more in the old Terryton Orphanage. All the sudden, a great longing arose within the boy; and he wept fiercely for a good ten minutes, though he was unsure why. There was something about that man's face that made him yearn for something--something he could not quite put his finger on. He felt as if he were missing someone. Obviously, he missed his parents, but who was this man? And why did he say that strange word *Liboneth*? What were these visions he had when he touched the pictures in the book? It seemed now that this book, which he hoped would provide answers, gave

him more questions than he even had before. He might have continued to go through the entire book and visit these peculiar places, but his bedtime was drawing near; and Miss Madison, kind as she was, did not take well to children staying up later than they ought. He therefore put the book away, turned out his light, and slipped into bed, but not into sleep: he was awake a few hours longer, pondering on this odd book from the basement.

The years after passed quickly for Jonathan, but the memory of this spectacular book lingered in his mind. Often, when he had spare time, he removed it from the chest and visited those fascinating places, every time just as awed as he had been at first. Indeed, though his childish imagination was slow to fade away, Jonathan continued to grow in height, eventually stopping around five feet, eleven inches: a height Miss Madison called “just right.” But in his third year of high school, unfortunately, Miriam passed away at the age of eighty-six. Jonathan was devastated, and the director that assumed control after her was far less kind than Miss Madison had been. Nonetheless, Jonathan excelled in his schooling, achieving the highest grades in his class. After his graduation, he left the orphanage to attend the University of Marsborough and attained a degree in architecture. He moved into an apartment downtown, and was soon employed by a small architecture firm. But the ease with which these things came was quick to come to an end, as the firm abruptly closed its doors a few months afterward.

Jonathan returned to his apartment that night utterly dejected, wondering how he was to now provide for himself. He threw his keys to the side and plopped down at his desk. He rubbed his face and exhaled sharply. If he were not a grown man, he might have collapsed on the floor and sobbed. He wished he had a mother and a father that he could depend on, especially in times such as this. Immediately, he remembered the book. He had not touched it in years--not since Miss Madison had passed away. It had served then as a distraction for his grieving mind and soul; he hoped it would do so again.

He brushed the dust off that ancient chest and opened it. There it was: the only memory he had of his parents. By that point, he had given up hope that they would find him. He was not even sure if they were still looking for him, if they ever had been at all. It did not take away the pain, though. He still missed them. He still wished they *would* find him, and that they *were* looking for him. But if there was one thing that living outside of the orphanage had taught him, it was that the world does not operate on wishes. One must be *realistic*.

He carefully opened the book, for years of excited page turning in his childhood had caused it to become much more fragile than it already had been when he first got it. He turned to a place which he remembered he had always loved: that strange town where he always met that strange man. He touched the picture of it, and instantly, he was taken there. Instead of sprinting gleefully around as he had in his childhood, he walked somberly through those unwelcoming streets, where the citizens acted as if he were invisible. The trees still fell in the distance, the tan grass shivered in the wind, and the houses were all the same. Normally, these sights cheered Jonathan, but this time he felt that it only served to deepen his depression; because they reminded him of brighter times. In that moment, he wished to be a child once more.

Finally, he came upon that same man, who never appeared to age. He stood in the exact same place as he always had, and looked at Jonathan with that same--

No, this time his eyes looked different. They were not tearful or downcast; instead, they almost looked joyous and expectant, as if all of the sudden, something had given

him the will to live again. Nonetheless, he remained motionless. Jonathan approached him. Usually, he asked the man what the matter was, for it seemed that he could not bring himself to pose another question; but Jonathan felt compelled to ask him something else. “Why so glad, sir?”

“Because it is time, kind Liboneth.” The man smiled, and touched Jonathan’s face. All at once, Jonathan felt a deep drowsiness overwhelm him. He fought to remain standing, but the sleepiness rapidly subdued him. His legs lost all their strength, and he fell to the gravelly road. Slowly, his eyelids grew heavier, heavier, heavier...

And he forced his eyes open one last time to find himself afloat on a sparkling blue ocean.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hey everyone! I'm Jordan Hariel. I am sixteen years old. I (obviously) love to write fantasy/sci-fi stories. The biggest inspirations for my writing would probably be C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Lewis Carroll. In the time that I'm not writing, I do robotics, watch TV, and occasionally edit a video. I also play the piano, but I'd really love to learn the cello. My dream is to one day be a published author!