

The Storyteller by Lynn Tieu

"Where did Mason go? I should look for him." Amidst all of the family chatter and laughter, Megan found her little brother, sitting with his legs crossed on the carpet, alone. Megan felt a pang in her heart as she took a second to take in the image in front of her. Mason quietly fiddled with a beat up doll as the sunset filtered in from a window and naturally highlighted the ten-year olds black hair. Cousins squealed and scrambled around the room loudly, but they kept a wide range around her brother.

Megan just couldn't understand how he ended up as the lone wolf in the family. Mason was intelligent, a good listener for the most part, and not a disagreeable child either. He and Megan shared many of the same characteristics, except for speaking. Whereas Megan could engage in conversations as easily as breathing, Mason was incredibly shy around people, especially those his age. Because he barely spoke up, attention was often hard to come by for him. It was a personal achievement for Megan if she got Mason to engage in conversation.

Although older children for centuries have kept the tradition of not acknowledging their younger sibling, Megan decided that this rule could be ignored today as she sat next to Mason.

"Hey, what are you up to?"

"Playing."

"With who?"

"Myself" Mason's reply had a touch of melancholy.

"Why don't you play with our cousins?"

"They don't want to play with me."

"Play with me then. What do you want to play?" Mason shrugged.

"Hey, you're not trying to avoid me, are you?" Megan teased, tickling her brother. Giggles emanated from his throat and she saw him grin for the first time all day. Mason looked straight into Megan's eyes, redirected his gaze thoughtfully at the doll, and scuttled over to the bookshelves, thumbing each spine until he found a worn, blue, hardback book. He shuffled back next to Megan, plopped right in the sun's rays, and opened the book as he whispered, "I want to tell a story."

And so he read, of mythical creatures and extraordinary people living in faraway lands. With each page, Megan could hear his voice grow more animated as he took up these characters.

"I challenge you to a duel!" Mason's tiny fist was raised, with a gleaming sword in mind. Mason was the ogre under the bridge, but he was also the king of the country. The doll was his helper, so she became the princess, and sometimes the wizard. The older sister was slightly shocked at Mason's buried talent. How could she have discovered this just now? Her family had to see this. But Megan didn't have to do much; Mason's voice drew their relatives in like fireflies to a lamp.

"And they lived happily, ever after." As Megan's brother finally sent off his characters, his eyes rose from the book to meet his family, who began applauding and praising him for his skill. Mason's cheeks turned a light shade of pink from the attention and his hands tried to cover his smile.