Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

The Brothers Lionheart

written by

Astrid Lindgren

published by

Oxford University Press

All text is copyright of the author and / or the illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Chapter 1

Now I'm going to tell you about my brother. My brother, Jonathan Lionheart, is the person I want to tell you about. I think it's almost like a saga, and just a very little like a ghost story, and yet every word is true; though Jonathan and I are probably the only people who know that.

Jonathan's name wasn't Lionheart from the start. His surname was Lion, just like Mother's and mine. Jonathan Lion was his name. My name is Karl Lion and Mother's is Sigrid Lion. Father was called Axel Lion, but he went to sea and we have never heard from him since.

But what I was going to tell you was how it came about that my brother Jonathan became Jonathan Lionheart, and all the strange things that happened after that.

Jonathan knew that I was soon going to die. I think everyone knew except for me. They knew at school, too, because I was away most of the time, coughing and always being ill. For the last six months, I haven't been able to go to school at all. All the ladies Mother sews dresses for knew it, too, and it was one of them who was talking to Mother about it when I happened to hear, although I wasn't meant to. They thought I was asleep. But I was just lying there with my eyes closed. And I went on lying there like that, because I didn't want them to see that I had heard that terrible thing—that I was soon going to die.

I was sad, of course, and terribly afraid, and I didn't want Mother to see that. But I talked to Jonathan about it, when he came home.

'Did you know that I'm going to die?' I said, and I wept.

Jonathan thought for a moment. Perhaps he didn't really want to answer, but in the end he said:

'Yes, I know.'

Then I cried even more.

'How can things be so terrible,' I asked. 'How can things be so terrible that some people have to die, when they're not even ten years old?'

'You know, Rusky, I don't think it's that terrible,' said Jonathan. 'I think you'll have a marvellous time.'

'Marvellous,' I said. 'Is it marvellous to lie under the ground and be dead?'

'Oh,' said Jonathan. 'It's only your shell that lies there, you know? You yourself fly away somewhere quite different.'

'Where?' I asked, because I could hardly believe him.

'To Nangiyala,' he said.

To Nangiyala—he just threw out the word as if it were something everyone in the world knew. But at the time, I had never heard it mentioned before.

'Nangiyala?' I said. 'Where's that?'

Then Jonathan said that he wasn't quite certain about that, but it was somewhere on the other side of the stars. And he began to tell me about Nangiyala, so that one almost felt like flying there at once.

'It's still in the days of camp fires and sagas there,' he said, 'and you'll like that.'

All the sagas came from Nangiyala, he said, for it was there that everything like that happened, and if you went there, then you could take part in adventures from morning till evening, and at night too, Jonathan said.

'You know, Rusky,' he said. 'That'll be different from lying here and coughing and being ill and never able to play, won't it?'

Jonathan always called me Rusky. He'd done that ever since I was small, and when I asked him why once, he said it was

because he liked rusks so much, especially rusks like me. Yes, he liked me, Jonathan, and that was strange, for I've never been anything else but a rather ugly, stupid, and cowardly boy, with crooked legs and all. I asked Jonathan how he could like such an ugly, stupid, boy like me, with crooked legs and all, and then he said:

'If you weren't such a nice, ugly little paleface with crooked legs, then you wouldn't be my Rusky, the one I like.'

But that evening, when I was so afraid of dying, he said that as long as I got to Nangiyala, then I would at once be well and strong and even beautiful, too.

'As beautiful as you?' I asked.

'Much more beautiful,' said Jonathan.

But he shouldn't try that one on me, because there's never been anything so beautiful as Jonathan and there never will be.

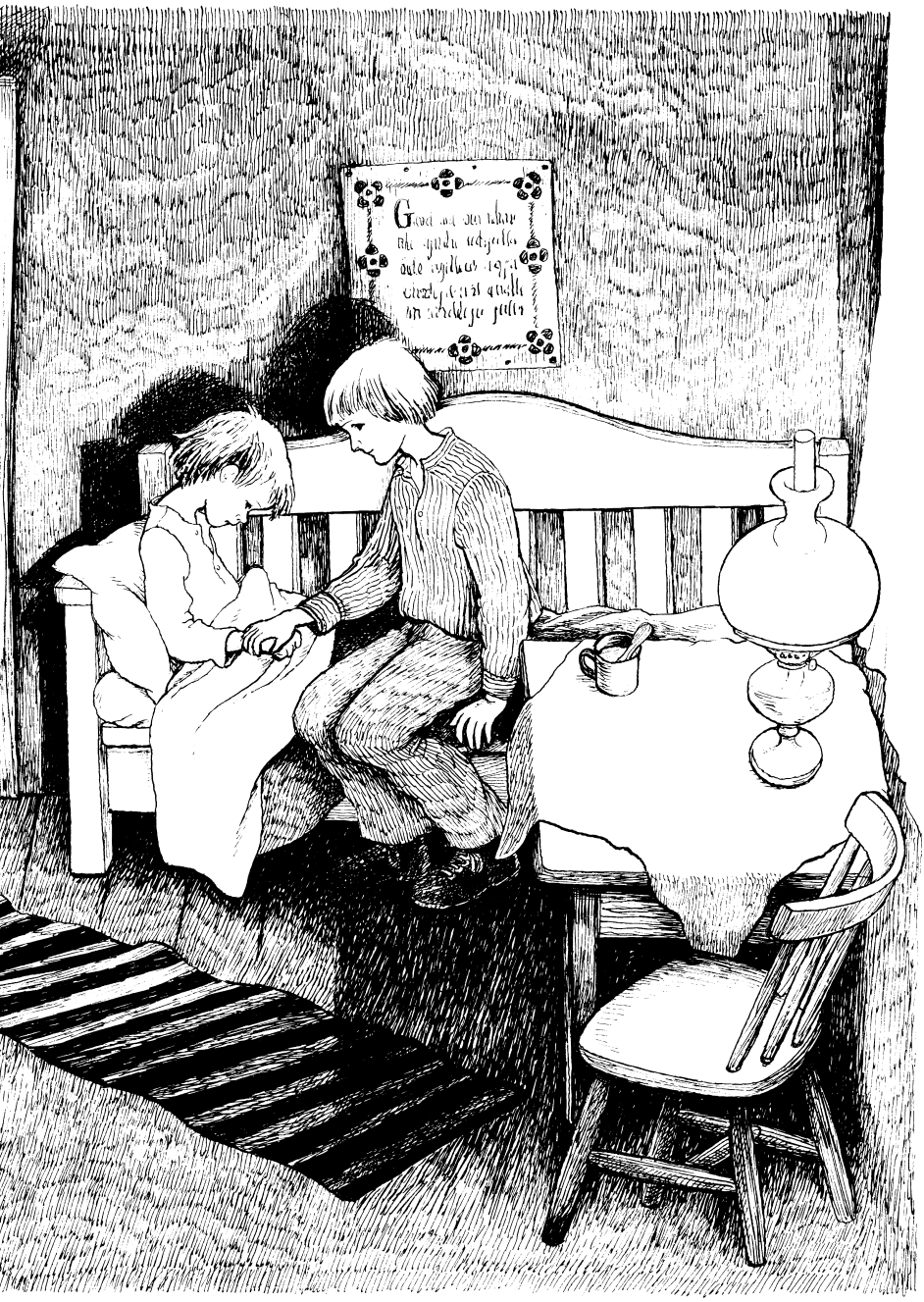
Once, one of those ladies Mother sews for said:

'My dear Mrs Lion, you've got a son who looks like a prince in a saga.'

And she wasn't talking about me, you can be quite certain!

Jonathan really did look like a prince in a saga. His hair shone like gold and he had beautiful, dark blue eyes which really shone, and beautiful white teeth and perfectly straight legs.

And not only that. He was kind, too, and strong, and he knew everything and understood everything and was top in school, and all the children in the yard hung around him wherever he went, wanting to be with him, and he found amusing things for them and took them on adventures, and I could never go with them, because I was lying on my old kitchen sofa-bed day in and day out. But Jonathan told me everything when he came home, everything he'd been doing and everything he'd seen and heard and read. He would sit for ages and ages on the edge of my bed



and tell me. Jonathan slept in the kitchen, too, in a bed which he had to get out of the wardrobe in the evenings. And when he had gone to bed, he went on telling me stories and sagas, until Mother called in from the other room:

'No, you two must be quiet now. Kalle must sleep.'

But it is difficult to sleep when you do nothing but cough. Sometimes, Jonathan got up in the middle of the night and boiled honey-water for me, to soothe my cough. He was kind, Jonathan was.

That evening, when I was so afraid of dying, he sat with me for several hours and we talked about Nangiyala, but very quietly so that Mother shouldn't hear. She was sitting sewing as usual, but she has her sewing-machine in her room, the room where she sleeps—we only have one room and the kitchen, you see. The door into her room was open, and we could hear her singing, that same old song about a seaman far away at sea; it was Father she was thinking about, I suppose. I don't remember very well how it goes. I only remember a few lines which go like this:

If I die at sea, dear,
perhaps there'll be a day
when a snow-white pigeon comes
from far, far away;
then hasten to the sill, dear,
it's my soul that's there;
wanting to rest awhile, here
in your arms so dear . . .

A beautiful, sad song, I think it is, but Jonathan laughed when he heard it and said:

'You know, Rusky, perhaps you'll come flying to me one evening. From Nangiyala. And please don't forget to sit there like a snow-white pigeon on the window-sill, will you?'

I began to cough then, and he lifted me up and held his arms round me as he usually did when it was worst, and he sang:

My little Rusky, I know, dear
that your soul is here
wanting to rest awhile here
in my arms so dear . . .

Not until then did I begin to think about what it would be like in Nangiyala without Jonathan. How lonely I would be without him. What use would it be to be where there were lots and lots of sagas and adventures, if Jonathan were not there, too. I would just be afraid and not know what to do.

'I don't want to go there,' I said, and I wept. 'I want to be where you are, Jonathan.'

'But I'm coming to Nangiyala, too, don't you see?' said Jonathan. 'After a while.'

'After a while, yes,' I said. 'But perhaps you'll live until you're ninety years old, and in the meantime I'll have to be there alone.'

Then Jonathan said that there was no *time* in Nangiyala in the same way as we have on earth. Even if he did live until he was ninety, then I wouldn't think that more than two days at the most had gone by before he came. That's what it's like, when there isn't any real time.

'You could manage two days on your own, couldn't you?' he said. 'You could climb the trees and make a camp fire in the forest and sit by a small stream and fish, all those things you've longed to do so much. And just as you're sitting there, catching a perch, then I'll come flying in and you'll say: "Good heavens, Jonathan, are you here already?"'

I tried to stop crying, because I thought I might be able to last out those two days.

'Though just think how good it would be if you'd gone there first,' I said, 'so that it was you who was sitting there fishing.'

Jonathan agreed with me on that. He looked at me for a long time, kindly as usual, and I noticed he was sad, because he said very quietly and rather sorrowfully:

'But instead I'll have to live on earth without my Rusky. For ninety years, perhaps!'

That's what we thought!

