

THE GIVER



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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Boston | New York

Five

USUALLY, AT THE morning ritual when the family members told their dreams,
Jonas didn't contribute
much. He rarely dreamed. Sometimes he awoke with a feeling of fragments
afloat in his sleep, but he
couldn't seem to grasp them and put them together into something worthy of
telling at the ritual.

But this morning was different. He had dreamed very vividly the night
before.

His mind wandered while Lily, as usual, recounted a lengthy dream, this one
a frightening one in
which she had, against the rules, been riding her mother's bicycle and been
caught by the Security
Guards.

They all listened carefully and discussed with Lily the warning that the dream
had given.

"Thank you for your dream, Lily." Jonas said the standard phrase
automatically, and tried to pay
better attention while his mother told of a dream fragment, a disquieting
scene where she had been
chastised for a rule infraction she didn't understand. Together they agreed
that it probably resulted
from her feelings when she had reluctantly dealt punishment to the citizen
who had broken the major
rules a second time.

Father said that he had had no dreams.

"Gabe?" Father asked, looking down at the basket where the newchild lay
gurgling after his
feeding, ready to be taken back to the Nurturing Center for the day.
They all laughed. Dream-telling began with Threes. If newchildren dreamed,
no one knew.

"Jonas?" Mother asked. They always asked, though they knew how rarely
Jonas had a dream to
tell.

"I *did* dream last night," Jonas told them. He shifted in his chair, frowning.
"Good," Father said. "Tell us."

“The details aren’t clear, really,” Jonas explained, trying to recreate the odd dream in his mind. “I

think I was in the bathing room at the House of the Old.”

“That’s where you were yesterday,” Father pointed out.

Jonas nodded. “But it wasn’t really the same. There was a tub, in the dream.

But only one. And the

real bathing room has rows and rows of them. But the room in the dream was warm and damp. And I

had taken off my tunic, but hadn’t put on the smock, so my chest was bare. I was perspiring, because it

was so warm. And Fiona was there, the way she was yesterday.”

“Asher, too?” Mother asked.

Jonas shook his head. “No. It was only me and Fiona, alone in the room, standing beside the tub.

She was laughing. But I wasn’t. I was almost a little angry at her, in the dream, because she wasn’t

taking me seriously.”

“Seriously about what?” Lily asked.

Jonas looked at his plate. For some reason that he didn’t understand, he felt slightly embarrassed.

“I think I was trying to convince her that she should get into the tub of water.”

He paused. He knew he had to tell it all, that it was not only all right but necessary to tell *all* of a

dream. So he forced himself to relate the part that made him uneasy.

“I wanted her to take off her clothes and get into the tub,” he explained quickly. “I wanted to bathe

her. I had the sponge in my hand. But she wouldn’t. She kept laughing and saying no.”

He looked up at his parents. “That’s all,” he said.

“Can you describe the strongest feeling in your dream, son?” Father asked. Jonas thought about it. The details were murky and vague. But the feelings were clear, and flooded

him again now as he thought. “The *wanting*,” he said. “I knew that she wouldn’t. And I think I knew

that she *shouldn’t*. But I wanted it so terribly. I could feel the wanting all through me.”

“Thank you for your dream, Jonas,” Mother said after a moment. She glanced at Father.

“Lily,” Father said, “it’s time to leave for school. Would you walk beside me this morning and keep an eye on the newchild’s basket? We want to be certain he doesn’t wiggle himself loose.”

Jonas began to rise to collect his schoolbooks. He thought it surprising that they hadn’t talked about his dream at length before the thank you. Perhaps they found it as confusing as he had.

“Wait, Jonas,” Mother said gently. “I’ll write an apology to your instructor so that you won’t have to speak one for being late.”

He sank back down into his chair, puzzled. He waved to Father and Lily as they left the dwelling, carrying Gabe in his basket. He watched while Mother tidied the remains of the morning meal and placed the tray by the front door for the Collection Crew.

Finally she sat down beside him at the table. “Jonas,” she said with a smile, “the feeling you

described as the wanting? It was your first Stirrings. Father and I have been expecting it to happen to

you. It happens to everyone. It happened to Father when he was your age.

And it happened to me. It will happen someday to Lily.

“And very often,” Mother added, “it begins with a dream.”

Stirrings. He had heard the word before. He remembered that there was a reference to the Stirrings in the Book of Rules, though he didn’t remember what it said. And now and then the Speaker

mentioned it. ATTENTION. A REMINDER THAT STIRRINGS MUST BE REPORTED IN ORDER FOR TREATMENT TO TAKE PLACE.

He had always ignored that announcement because he didn’t understand it and it had never seemed

to apply to him in any way. He ignored, as most citizens did, many of the commands and reminders read by the Speaker.

“Do I have to report it?” he asked his mother.
She laughed. “You did, in the dream-telling. That’s enough.”
“But what about the treatment? The Speaker says that treatment must take place.” Jonas felt miserable. Just when the Ceremony was about to happen, his Ceremony of Twelve, would he have to go away someplace for treatment? Just because of a stupid dream? But his mother laughed again in a reassuring, affectionate way. “No, no,” she said. “It’s just the pills. You’re ready for the pills, that’s all. That’s the treatment for Stirrings.” Jonas brightened. He knew about the pills. His parents both took them each morning. And some of his friends did, he knew. Once he had been heading off to school with Asher, both of them on their bikes, when Asher’s father had called from their dwelling doorway, “You forgot your pill, Asher!” Asher had groaned good-naturedly, turned his bike, and ridden back while Jonas waited. It was the sort of thing one didn’t ask a friend about because it might have fallen into that uncomfortable category of “being different.” Asher took a pill each morning; Jonas did not. Always better, less rude, to talk about things that were the same. Now he swallowed the small pill that his mother handed him. “That’s all?” he asked. “That’s all,” she replied, returning the bottle to the cupboard. “But you mustn’t forget. I’ll remind you for the first weeks, but then you must do it on your own. If you forget, the Stirrings will come back. The dreams of Stirrings will come back. Sometimes the dosage must be adjusted.” “Asher takes them,” Jonas confided. His mother nodded, unsurprised. “Many of your groupmates probably do. The males, at least. And they all will, soon. Females too.” “How long will I have to take them?” “Until you enter the House of the Old,” she explained. “All of your adult life. But it becomes

routine; after a while you won't even pay much attention to it.”
She looked at her watch. “If you leave right now, you won't even be late for
school. Hurry along.

“And thank you again, Jonas,” she added, as he went to the door, “for your
dream.”

Pedaling rapidly down the path, Jonas felt oddly proud to have joined those
who took the pills. For

a moment, though, he remembered the dream again. The dream had felt
pleasurable. Though the

feelings were confused, he thought that he had liked the feelings that his
mother had called Stirrings.

He remembered that upon waking, he had wanted to feel the Stirrings again.
Then, in the same way that his own dwelling slipped away behind him as he
rounded a corner on

his bicycle, the dream slipped away from his thoughts. Very briefly, a little
guiltily, he tried to grasp it

back. But the feelings had disappeared. The Stirrings were gone.