

Out From the Land of Uz

by

Damien Keith

INT. BEDROOM OF A RURAL MIDWESTERN FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Soft moonlight pours through the open window of the rustic bedroom. The pale, blue light illuminates the stuffed animals and wooden rocking horse of a child's room. On the bed HARRIET, dressed in a weathered, flannel robe, coos softly into the child JONATHAN'S ear as he cries softly. Her voice is hoarse with sleep and worry as she lovingly strokes his blonde hair.

HARRIET

What's wrong child?

The boy cries softly.

JONATHAN

I dreamed about it again. It said  
it was going to take me away from  
you.

Jonathan snuffles quietly into Harriet's robe and drifts slowly back to sleep as Harriet whispers lovingly into his ear.

HARRIET

Nobody's gonna take you from us  
Jonathan. You're God's child and  
under the Lord's protection. No  
baby, you're God's child and  
ain't nobody gonna take you away.

Harriet smiles as she lays Jonathan gently back onto the bed and covers him with the thick colorful afghan.

FADE OUT:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

ROGER sits in the modest farmhouse kitchen, staring out the window at the sheep grazing calmly in the distance. He blows at the steam rising from the inky, black coffee and takes a tentative sip. He sets his cup down then stares at the steaming mug sitting in front of Harriet across the table.

ROGER

You gonna eat something Harriet?  
You really should eat something.

HARRIET

No Roger, I'm gonna fast and pray  
'til the Lord gives me a sign as  
to what to do 'bout poor, little  
Jonathan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGER

Honey, he ain't had a dream for two nights now and he seemed happy enough when he left for school this morning. Maybe that's God's sign.

Roger takes another sip then wipes at his thick, black mustache as he eyes Harriet closely. Harriet ignores him as she opens her Bible on the table, closes it then opens it again.

ROGER (CONT'D)

(slightly irritated)

Harriet, you listening to me?

Harriet doesn't answer or look up, only continues to read her Bible, periodically brushing a wispy, brown hair off her forehead. Roger sighs deeply, sips his coffee and returns to staring at the sheep in the fields.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. CHURCH - TEN YEARS AGO

Voices - speaking in low reverent whispers - echo through the church, which is empty except for two people. Roger sits on a hard, worn pew clutching his Bible. He rocks back and forth, touching the book to his forehead, as he speaks tearfully to PASTOR GREELEY beside him.

PASTOR GREELEY

Brother Roger, you must strengthen your faith.

The Pastor lays his hand on Roger's shoulder.

PASTOR GREELEY (CONT'D)

You must continue to pray for release from the demons of your past.

ROGER

(tearfully)

I try Pastor, God knows I try. But, but it's hard to, ... to give up old habits, old ways.

Roger pulls a handkerchief out of his back pocket and swipes at his nose.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PASTOR GREELEY

You and Sister Harriet have only been with us a short time but we have taken you both into our flock and into our hearts. When you both came to us you were in sin brother; drugs, alcohol and godless religions. I fear that you both have not fully renounced Satan and, until you do, you will not fully know God's love and forgiveness.

Roger breaks down into sobs.

ROGER

I know, I know. We're both trying.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - PRESENT DAY

Roger turns from the window, looks at Harriet and smiles as he watches her study the Bible.

ROGER

What you reading there Harriet?  
Looks like you found something interesting.

Harriet excitedly runs her finger along the letters of the passage in her Bible.

HARRIET

Listen to this Roger. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

Harriet looks up at Roger, her face awestruck as she searches his face for a response.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Roger, I opened this Bible three times and each time it fell open to here, this place, now that's no accident!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGER

What you saying Harriet? I don't understand what you mean.

Harriet continues reading.

HARRIET

But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

Harriet pauses and looks up at Roger again but is only met with a blank stare.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Roger! Can't you see, this thing that's happening with Jonathan is a test? A test to see how strong our faith in God is!

Roger stares thoughtfully into his cup. Finally, he takes the worn, striped railroad cap out of his back pocket and stands up.

ROGER

Honey, maybe it is a test, I don't know. If it is, I know you're strong enough to pass it.

FADE OUT.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Harriet and Roger sit in the living room watching television as Jonathan sleeps with his head in Harriet's lap on the sofa. Roger leans over, picks up the paper and turns to the sports section. Jonathan shifts uncomfortably and whimpers, as though troubled by a bad dream, while Harriet absentmindedly caresses his forehead.

HARRIET

What honey?

Roger looks over his paper and watches them both closely. Harriet looks down at Jonathan, who mumbles in his sleep but doesn't answer, turns over and sighs.

ROGER

Boy's just having a dream is all.

Roger returns to his paper as Jonathan whispers something unintelligible but loud enough for Harriet to hear.

HARRIET

What did you say Johnny?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Harriet rolls the child over and pats his stomach. He doesn't wake only continues to speak in the unintelligible language. Harriet's brow knots in concern as she shakes him gently but gets no response.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Roger, I think something's wrong  
with Johnny.

Roger puts down the paper, walks over and kneels down to look into Jonathan's face.

ROGER

What's he saying Harriet?

HARRIET

I don't know; it don't sound like  
English.

Harriet shakes the boy again, slightly harder this time. Getting no response, she says Roger's name in a small, frightened whisper.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Roger.

ROGER

Can you make out what he's  
saying?

Harriet sits Jonathan up, her eyes watering as he continues, what sounds like, a conversation with someone unseen.

HARRIET

The Devil walks the earth! The  
Devil walks the earth!

Harriet repeats the phrase like a mantra, clutching Jonathan and crying as Roger caresses the boy's arm helplessly.

ROGER

(in a authoritative tone)  
Johnny! Johnny wake up! This is  
your father talking and I want  
you to wake up!

The boy continues in his conversational stupor. Roger picks up Jonathan, stands and turns to go toward the stairs when suddenly all the electrical appliances go haywire. Stations on the television begin switching themselves, the stereo BLARES as it scrolls down the dial and the lights flicker crazily, creating an eerie strobe affect.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARRIET

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall  
not want!

Harriet runs sobbing to Roger and buries her face in his shoulder as she repeats the Lord's Prayer. Jonathan is oblivious, continuing his foreign dialogue.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Roger and Harriet stumble into the bedroom. Roger places the boy on the bed as he and Harriet fall to their knees crying, screaming prayers to heaven over the roar of the living room noise.

FADE OUT.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Roger and Harriet sit at the kitchen table, still shaken as they discuss the events of the previous evening.

HARRIET

(pleading)  
He was speaking in tongues Roger,  
couldn't you see that?

ROGER

I don't know what I saw.

Roger raises the quivering cup to his lips as Harriet thumbs through the pages of her Bible feverishly.

HARRIET

Look here, read what it says  
right there!

Harriet thrusts the Bible toward Roger. Roger silently reads the passage twice, then sighs and rubs his forehead.

ROGER

Harriet, I see where it talks  
about speaking in tongues, but it  
also says that if nobody can  
understand you, it doesn't do any  
good.

Roger starts to hand the book back but Harriet pushes it back toward him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRIET

Roger, if you read right there Paul says he wished that we all spoke with tongues; are you blind?

ROGER

No Harriet, I see where you're reading, but I also see where Paul puts more store in prophesying because, unless there's somebody to translate, speaking in tongues don't do no good. He says that himself.

Harriet folds her arms defiantly.

HARRIET

You gonna argue with God? Roger, nobody can argue with the word of God!

ROGER

(softly)

Why is this happening Harriet?  
Why is this happening to us?

Harriet responds loudly, her voice cracking in frustration.

HARRIET

A test! God is testing our faith, same as he tested Job's. Satan walks the earth Roger, and he is jealous. Jealous of our faith in God, jealous of Johnny's innocence and jealous of the gift God gave us seven years ago.

Roger pensively strokes his mustache.

ROGER

The gift God gave us.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - SEVEN YEARS AGO

EAR-SPLITTING MUSIC permeates every room of the ranch-style house. Roger and Harriet lie together on a quilt against the wall in the north end of the room. Roger sits up, takes a long draw off an ornate glass bong and passes it to Harriet. She takes it and Roger turns his attention back to the checkbook he holds in his hand. His eyes follow the anemic balances as they dwindle to zero toward the bottom of the register.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He smiles as he reads the memo notation that bears his father's name and the amount of the deposit that rejuvenated the ailing total. He then glances over at Harriet with heavy lids.

ROGER  
(slurring)  
What you doing baby?

Harriet blows out a thick cloud of smoke and brushes back a curly brown lock of hair. She smiles as she points toward the ceiling.

HARRIET  
Reaching out man, reaching out  
to, ... there. I can hear them  
Rog. I can hear them, umm and  
they said they're coming.

Harriet holds her head and moans as Roger sits up and leans back against the wall, listening to strains of the KLAATU song, CALLING OCCUPANTS.

ROGER  
Baby, you been trying to make  
contact for years and every time  
you say you do, nothing happens.  
C'mon, have a drink and forget  
about it.

Roger picks up a bottle of wine that sits next to the bong and takes a long, deep drink. Harriet continues to hold her head and groan.

HARRIET  
No, not this time Roger. They say  
they're in trouble an' they're  
coming. They say they're in  
trouble and want to, ... give me  
something.

Roger laughs as he reaches over and strokes her long brown hair.

ROGER  
Baby, you're stoned.

The light from the dozens of candles scattered around the room suddenly brightens, far beyond the capacity of mere flames. The sound of the music filling the room SWELLS AND CONTRACTS as the air thickens into a light fog. Roger's confused eyes blink rapidly against the brightness.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Jesus, I'm pretty stoned too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

A loud groan from Harriet draws Roger's attention and, as he turns to her, a brilliant ball of light explodes in the center of the room. The light slowly coalesces into two large glowing figures that hover hypnotically above the floor. Roger shields his eyes with his hands and tries to peek through his fingers.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Harriet, are you seeing this?  
Harriet?

Roger looks toward Harriet out of the corner of his eye but she does not answer, only lies on her back staring blankly at the ceiling. One of the light figures glides toward Harriet as Roger's body suddenly goes limp. Roger's wide frightened eyes follow the entity as it reaches Harriet, stops and produces a small brighter ball of light from its chest.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
(frightened whisper)  
Harriet, wake up!

The creature pauses and looks directly at Roger who can only make out the large eyes and a smiling slit of a mouth amid the brilliant light. The being lays the pulsing ball of light on Harriet's stomach. It seems to sink into Harriet's flesh as Roger's eyes close and he falls unconscious.

FADE OUT.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

Roger shakes his head, rubs wearily at his eyes then stands without looking at Harriet.

ROGER  
I got to go tend the sheep. It's  
getting late and they have to be  
looked after.

He puts on his cap and slips out the door, avoiding Harriet's steely gaze and breathing the cool morning air.

CUT TO:

INT. SHED - LATER

He enters the shed and absentmindedly loads feed onto the quad runner. He finishes, climbs into the vehicle and heads toward the exit.

CUT TO:

EXT. PASTURE - LATER

He reaches the gate of the pasture, climbs out and opens it.

ROGER  
Harriet must be right. What else  
could it be?

Climbing back into the vehicle, he cocks his head, listening for the BLEATING of the sheep in the pasture. Continuing on, he BEEPS the horn, but no sheep come running as he stops and surveys the pasture for any sign of them.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Maybe they're down in the valley.  
Where the hell could over 200  
sheep go?

Roger crests the hill, stops and looks down into the valley. Spotting clusters of sheep at the far end of the pasture, he steers the vehicle down the incline.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Crazy animals.

He turns in the direction of the largest group then stops as he sees the bodies of more than two dozen sheep and lambs lying in the grass, their lifeless eyes staring blankly toward the sky.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Roger and FRANK THORNTON, the local veterinarian, sit at the kitchen table deep in conversation.

ROGER  
(irritably)  
I don't know what happened to  
them Frank; you tell me, you're  
the vet. I just drove out there  
and found 'em lying dead.

FRANK  
Well, I examined the feed and the  
self-watering tanks and be damned  
if I can find anything wrong.

Frank rubs at the back of his neck and looks thoughtfully at Roger.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Still feeding them the same food  
Rog?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGER

Yeah Frank, same as I always do.

Roger places his hands on his hips.

FRANK

What about the tanks, all working right; haven't added anything to the water?

ROGER

Look, you saw them Frank, all the other sheep were fine. If it was something in the feed or water, don't you think they'd all be affected? Now I don't know what you're playing at but I want some answers not finger pointing at me to get you off the hook!

Roger immediately lowers his voice and glances into the dining room where Harriet sits reading a Bible story to Jonathan and throwing nervous glances into the kitchen. Frank stands up and puts on his hat as he tucks the jars with the samples of feed and water into his overcoat pocket.

FRANK

(pensively)

I'll examine these and the sheep out in the truck.

Frank points his thumb in the direction of the front door.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Let you know in a couple of days what I find out. Hopefully they'll tell me something because, right now, I'm stumped.

Roger stands and extends his hand.

ROGER

Alright. Just let me know what you find.

Roger leads Frank toward the door, opens it and lays a hand on Frank's shoulder.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I really do appreciate you coming out on short notice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

They shake hands once again and Frank leaves. Roger blows out a frustrated sigh, runs his fingers through his thinning, brown hair and walks over to the dining room table.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Just have to wait and see what  
the doc comes up with.

Roger smiles at Jonathan and rustles his hair as the boy smiles back.

JONATHAN

Daddy, what happened to the  
sheep?

Roger and Harriet look at each other nervously. Roger pulls out a chair, slowly sits down and gives Jonathan a sad, nervous smile.

ROGER

Well, some of the sheep died and  
went to heaven. That sometimes  
happens with animals and people.

JONATHAN

What made the sheep die daddy?

Jonathan's smile suddenly fades as Roger reaches for his hand.

ROGER

I'm not sure son, that's why I  
called Doctor Frank. I think some  
of them may have been sick.

Harriet clears her throat with a disapproving little cough, which Roger ignores. Jonathan continues hesitantly as his eyes begin to water.

JONATHAN

Did, ... umm any of the lambs die?

ROGER

Yes, yes they did.

Roger caresses Jonathan's tiny fingers and looks down at the floor.

ROGER (CONT'D)

(softly)

Yes Jonathan, some of the lambs  
did die.

JONATHAN

Did, did Sno'ball ... die?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ROGER  
(quietly)  
Yes, yes he did.

Roger kisses Jonathan's head gently as the boy begins to cry. He places him on his lap and brushes at his tears.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
You know Jonathan sometimes God gets lonely and sees some interesting people or animals and decides to have them come and live with him.

Roger avoids looking at Harriet who stares sternly at him.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Now we don't always know when that's going happen, but when it does we don't feel bad because we know they went to heaven.

Jonathan wipes at his face with the back of his hand and looks at his father with innocent, bright-blue eyes.

JONATHAN  
(smiling)  
I'm sorry Sno'ball died daddy,  
but I'm glad he went to heaven.

FADE OUT.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The miniature grandfather clock in the living room downstairs CHIMES ten. Harriet carries the sleeping Jonathan over to his bed and tucks him in. She is quietly moving toward the door when he calls to her so she walks back and sits on the bed.

HARRIET  
(softly)  
Yes sweetheart, what is it? Don't you think it's time little boys were asleep?

JONATHAN  
Okay mommy.

Jonathan gives her a hug and clings to her tightly.

HARRIET  
What is it honey?

Harriet strokes his hair and kisses his forehead.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JONATHAN

I know God gets lonely, but I wish he hadn't took Sno'ball.

HARRIET

I know darling.

Harriet throws a glance toward the door and, seeing Roger is not there continues. As she does, she gazes out the window at the bright half moon hovering in the black velvet sky.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

You remember what your daddy said about dying this morning?

Jonathan nods and gives a tiny um hmm as a response.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Well, I think your daddy's partly right. I think God does take the people and things we love sometimes because he gets lonely, but I think the devil takes loved ones too.

JONATHAN

(mournfully)

Why? Why would the devil want to take Sno'ball?

Harriet cups his chin in her fingers.

HARRIET

Because you loved him. The devil is very jealous of the things we love.

JONATHAN

But why would God let the devil take Sno'ball, couldn't he stop him?

HARRIET

He could, but sometimes he doesn't because he wants to test our faith, our love for him. Sometimes what we love has to die to bring us closer to God.

Slowly Jonathan's grip on her sleeve loosens and his small hand falls into her lap. She looks lovingly at his sleeping form and gently lays him back onto the bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
Poor little thing. Truly a gift  
from God.

FADE OUT.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Harriet is in the living room putting the finishing touches on a sweater for Jonathan as the local news plays on the television. In the background, Roger sits at the kitchen table working on the inventory of his feeder lambs.

HARRIET  
(loudly)  
Roger, why don't you quit for  
tonight?

Receiving no answer, Harriet puts down the sweater and looks toward the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Harriet stands behind Roger at the kitchen table and massages his broad shoulders.

HARRIET  
Roger honey, put that away for  
tonight. You look beat to me.

Roger pats her hand.

ROGER  
In a little while. I only have a  
little bit left to go. You know,  
doc still don't know what  
happened to my sheep. If it's  
some kind of disease I could be  
in real trouble.

She walks over to the sink and is filling a glass of water when the television in the living room sounds as though it is switching channels.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
What the devil is wrong with that  
thing?

Harriet shuts off the water and exits the kitchen. The lights flicker momentarily, but Roger ignores it, trying to concentrate on finishing the inventory.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Harriet SCREAMING his name from the living room jolts Roger to attention and he springs from his chair.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Roger enters the room and stops short when he sees the ghostly face in the static of the television. The face on the screen, fades in and out as the hard slit of a mouth moves slowly, uttering silent words. Harriet tries to scream but it sticks in her throat as the huge, dark eyes in the thing's elliptical head fix their gaze on her. Harriet finally finds her voice and clutches the silver crucifix around her neck.

HARRIET

Yea tho I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death, I will  
fear no evil.

The mouth of the thing on the screen moves rapidly now, as though it is shouting and at once the electronics in the room go crazy. Harriet grabs Roger's arm and gazes at him in terror.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

(shouting)  
Jonathan! It's going to try to  
take Jonathan!

CUT TO:

INT. JONATHON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Harriet and Roger fling open the door to Jonathan's room and are suddenly frozen with fear. Floating beside the bed and surrounded by a blinding white light is a thin, glowing apparition with long, skeletal fingers. Roger rushes toward the thing as it turns and appears to snarl.

ROGER

(shouting)  
No! Get away from him!

Roger strikes the thing, making contact. The air CRACKLES as the creature swings its taloned fingers, slashing at the air. Roger throws wild punches, never seeming to connect, while through it all Jonathan sleeps soundly. Electricity shoots through Roger as he grabs the thing's slender, glowing wrist. He spins it around and pins it against the wall while turning his head to avoid the blinding light. The creature slides down the wall as though weakening.

Suddenly, another creature appears in a bright, electrical burst.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It grabs Roger, easily tossing him across the room as he hits the west wall and slides to the floor. Roger is shaken but tries to focus on the blurry sight of the two creatures bending over Jonathan. The smaller of the two lifts the boy and turns to the other as a look of recognition flashes across Roger's face. He is slowly slipping into unconsciousness when Harriet appears in the doorway holding his hunting rifle.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
(hoarse whisper)  
Harriet don't.

Roger slumps to the floor and the last thing he hears is the CRACK of the rifle and a loud pitiful WAIL.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. SPACECRAFT - SOMETIME LATER

Through the window of the craft the bright, blue globe of the earth falls away and, with it, the tiny Midwestern town. Inside the craft, one creature sits beside another who lies prostrate on a soft slab that protrudes from the smooth wall. Waves pass between the two as the smaller one is enveloped in the pale, blue field.

MALE ALIEN (V.O.)  
We did all that we could. In his human form he was vulnerable and we had no time to revert him.

The smaller creature opens its eyes and looks at her companion.

MALE ALIEN (V.O.)  
You did all that you could. We took every care to make sure our child could survive until we returned. We wrapped him in a human shell and placed him in a environment that we thought would be safe. That was all we could do in so short a time.

The male looks at the small hole in the other's chest that is nearly closed.

MALE ALIEN (V.O.)  
We can't undo the mistakes of the past. You must try to get well and look to the future.

FEMALE ALIEN (V.O.)  
(quietly, painfully)  
I, ...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEMALE ALIEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I know there is logic in your  
words. I know we gave our son  
seven years of life that he would  
not have had.

The male smiles and nods.

FEMALE ALIEN (V.O.)  
I know that, then, he would not  
have survived the trip home, no  
child could have.

The male closes his eyes and continues to nod.

MALE ALIEN (V.O.)  
It nearly killed us.

FEMALE ALIEN (V.O.)  
All these things I know but,  
knowing them is futile - our  
child is dead.

FADE TO BLACK.