

“Our New Home Is Haunted”

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Age: 8+

Six-year-old Säde and seven-year-old Siim are in shock – their mom and dad have decided to get them a babysitter for the summer! The kids can’t wrap their heads around why they need some hundred-year-old Ms. Elga when they can get by just fine on their own. Nevertheless, the two have all kinds of tricks up their sleeve for getting rid of the woman. As luck would have it, though, none of them turns out the way the children imagined.



Reading sample

Chapter 2

The Babysitter

Our whole family's catastrophe started when Mom and Dad decided to get us a babysitter. Siim and I were playing "weather report" when she arrived. He was throwing flour at the window from outside while inside, I was reporting—just like on the TV—that we could expect a lot of snow and cold. Then, Siim splashed a bucket of water against the window while I told everybody a big storm was on the way. Everything was fine and the summer would definitely have gotten better and better had the babysitter not arrived just then.

"Säde, Siim! Come into the kitchen, please! I want to introduce you to somebody."

I knew right away that it had to be the babysitter they'd requested. Mom told us a while ago that we'd be having someone come and watch us for the summer while she and Pops were at work. Our mom works at an emergency dental clinic and has to run off at random moments. Sometimes, it even happens when she's washing my hair in the bathtub and I've just gotten shampoo in my eye; other times, it's when she's been trying to cut the toenail on Siim's little toe for half an hour but he's so ticklish that he can't help but jerk his foot back all the time. More often than not, Dad has to finish up. He pulls out huge hedge clippers and says he'll use them to cut Siim's toenails if the boy doesn't start acting normal that very instant. Siim usually does. Dad is actually pretty great at most everything. Mom says that because of her job, Dad has had to be both the mom and the dad of the family. He even does my ponytails. Dad does work a lot, of course, but unlike Mom, he has fixed hours. He leaves home early in the morning and when he comes back, he smells like raw fish. Dad packages herring at a production plant. Siim and I don't eat herring. They're so salty, and every time Mom pleads with me to give it another taste and I end up giving in, I feel like I want to cry a little. Our fridge is packed with an awful lot of herring, because Dad can buy them at a discount. Old people often top them with a hard-boiled egg and raw onions, to boot. Mom always says that Siim and I will certainly get a taste for them

someday, though I'm more than sure that will never, ever happen. First of all, we don't live in the olden days anymore and there's lots of other stuff at the grocery store. Secondly, I could never, ever imagine starting to like how they taste someday! When I saw our new babysitter, I was 100% sure she was a huge fan of herring! Dad works with ladies just like her at his factory.

Dad once told us they were having a family day at work where he could bring his loved ones so they could have a look around. We'd gone to one at Mom's job before, and it was so cool! We were able to help out a little by handing her cotton balls and the kidney dish, and I even got to take an old man's cracked wisdom tooth home! Siim tried using it to get money from the Tooth Fairy, it was still lying under his pillow in the morning. Mom reckoned that the Tooth Fairy doesn't bring anything for teeth as old and cracked as those, and reminded us to be very good about brushing our own. Anyways, Siim and I really wanted to go to family day at Dad's work. Mom wasted no time in saying she knew exactly what was there and would just stay home. I only figured out why she didn't want to come along later.

"Säde and Siim, this is Elga, your new babysitter."

My first thought was that Elga certainly wasn't new—she seemed awfully old and worn out. She looked like she was close to one hundred years old. Her hair was almost white and her face was so wrinkled that even our grandpa out in the countryside looked like a little boy compared with her.

"Säde! Siim! Say hello already, would you?!" The look on Mom's face was just like when she attended a progress meeting at my preschool, so just to be safe, I squeaked out a polite "hi" without delaying another second.

"Hello there, kiddies. My name is Elga, but you can call me auntie. Or Ms. Elga, however you please. We're going to be doing activities every day together for the next month."

I felt sick at the thought of having to spend every day of the last month of my summer doing activities with Elga instead of playing with other kids outside.

Siim didn't seem all that happy about it, either, because the first thing he asked Elga was how long she really planned to stay with us. Mom got her progress-meeting look again and smiled apologetically at Elga.

"Our Siim here thinks he's already a big boy and doesn't need a babysitter at all. Go and play now, kids—Elga and I are going to talk about adult things. You'll see her again first thing tomorrow."

Luckily, the babysitter soon went home. All that Siim and I could do was to hope that maybe she was so ancient that she wouldn't live through the night.

Chapter 3 At the Store

The woman apparently survived the night (and a little too well, at that). In any case, when Dad had already gone to work and we were at the table eating porridge the next morning, she showed up once again—a bona fide living and breathing old lady. Before long, Mom had to leave to fix someone's broken tooth; she waved goodbye to us from the entryway.

We finished our breakfast and left the babysitter to sit on her own in the kitchen for a while. Siim reckoned we sure didn't need to stay and keep an eye on her, because she was the one who had come to watch us. And if that was her intention, then be our guest—come and find us! We figured that if she didn't see us long enough, then maybe she'd forget we exist in the first place and would go back home. Old people can be so forgetful sometimes. For instance, they'll forget what they went into the kitchen to get or where their glasses are. Sometimes, they go around looking for their glasses even when the glasses are still on right on their head!

Siim gently closed the door to our room and we sat down on our beds. I would've liked to play something, but Siim said we shouldn't make a single peep.

"I don't think the babysitter will realize anything's wrong—she'll just leave. She's so old that I bet she'll forget," Siim said.

We'd barely managed to finish munching on a couple cookies we had stashed away in a drawer before the babysitter came in.

"Siim! Säde! Dearie me—what nice, quiet little kids you are! Just sitting and doing activities here all by yourself!"

I felt a little sick again when I heard her say the word "activities" because it was obvious that starting now, we'd have to start doing things together with Elga, just like she'd promised when she arrived. I quickly stretched out on my bed.



“Auntie, I don’t feel so good. Sorry, but I won’t be able to do any activities today. I really wanted to, but I think it’s my appendix.”

“Lordie! Show me where it hurts, Säde! Is it here? Or here? Or up here?”

I figured that if she didn’t stop her awful poking and prodding, then she’d probably land on my appendix sooner or later, anyway.

“Everywhere! Ow! I feel like my appendix wants to crawl out of my belly!”

I could tell Siim immediately realized what I had planned, but the lady clapped her hands together in shock.

“We have to call your mother this instant! And an ambulance!” the babysitter shouted and dashed out of our room. Only then did I realize Siim actually looked pretty angry.

“What are you doing, you idiot? Now, she’s going to call an ambulance and they’ll be able to tell right away that your stomach doesn’t hurt!”

“All I wanted was to not have to do activities with her!” I moaned, starting to feel really scared. I certainly didn’t want an ambulance to show up! Luckily, Siim came up with an idea.

“Get up right now and run to the kitchen! Do that baby chick dance you did at the preschool’s spring party last May! Then, she’ll see that everything’s just fine!”

Siim pulled me to my feet and we sprinted to the kitchen. The babysitter had just sat down at the kitchen table and was putting on her glasses to make the call. Without a second’s delay, I started dancing right there in front of her and singing really loud to accompany it, just in case. She pressed the glasses down on her nose in surprise and set the phone back down on the kitchen table.

“Säde, dear, are you feeling better already?”

I sang even more loudly and danced even faster, because her even asking the question meant she

obviously wasn’t totally convinced I was okay.

“Goodness gracious, Säde, what happened? Do you still have stomach cramps?”

The babysitter seemed even more shocked than she was before, but I didn’t dare to stop dancing. Luckily, Siim came to the rescue.

“Säde is feeling better, yeah—she just got it wrong before. It wasn’t stomach pains; it was a jitterbug!”

I said a mental thank you to Siim for his genius idea. The babysitter sighed in relief and started laughing, too.

“A jitterbug, huh? Well, you certainly gave me a scare, Säde!”

Luckily, she didn’t seem angry and I was finally able to stop dancing. I was already pretty sweaty and my mouth was dry.

“You know what? Let’s go to the store. I’ll buy you two ice cream—we could all use a little sugar after such a fright.”

Siim and I certainly weren’t going to argue with a proposal like that, so we pulled our scooters out of the shed and waited for the lady in front of the house. She finally emerged with a brown purse slung over her shoulder and an empty cloth tote bag in her other hand.

“Your mother asked me to pick up a few groceries as well, so we’ll get them at the same time.”

It wasn’t a long way to the store, but the babysitter was so awfully slow that every little while, we managed to get to the end of the street and then make it back to the lady and then back to the end of the street again. When we came to the big intersection where the babysitter had told us to wait by the traffic light, Siim came up with another idea for getting rid of her.

“We’ll secretly slip things into her pocket and the bag so that when we leave, they’ll start beeping and she’ll be thrown in jail!”

I actually felt a little bad for wanting the lady to be sent to jail, especially since she'd said she would buy us ice cream. My throat kind of squeezed up like I was about to cry, but there was nothing I could do. Siim said that the ends justify the means. I don't know what that means, exactly, but Siim told me that you can get away with all kinds of things if you just use it as an excuse. What's more, he said, Mom and Dad won't get angry, either.

Because there was a sale on fish that day, the store was packed with shoppers. We pushed our way through the crowd and grabbed a basket. The babysitter took a list Mom had given her out of her pocket.

"Let's see, my darlings—first of all, bathroom soap. Stay close and don't get lost!"

Siim and I trailed the woman. While she was busy picking out soap, Siim scanned the shelves.

"Look for something little but expensive!" he whispered.

We both started checking price tags, but most of the things were way too big. Bottles of shampoo and soap and laundry detergent ... they definitely wouldn't fit into her pocket. Suddenly, I noticed those little razors Dad uses to shave. I pointed to the small packet hanging on a peg and Siim quickly grabbed one. Then, we walked close behind the babysitter—right on her heels—so we could slip it into her pocket when the right moment came. Siim suddenly nudged me and pointed—there was a snap on her jacket pocket!

"Get that snap open!" Siim whispered.

I didn't know how to do it without being noticed. We'd already gotten to the bread section when I remembered a news clip Dad and I watched together once. It talked about pickpockets and how they could get things out of people's pockets unnoticed. Sometimes, the thieves will pretend to stumble into a person and when they do, they're able to stick a hand into their pocket without getting noticed. I gave Siim a thumbs-up to show I knew what to do. I'd seen it on TV and nothing could go wrong!

The babysitter was nestling a loaf of bread into the shopping basket when I ran and bumped straight into her. Surprised, she dropped the bread, which fell in front of another lady who accidentally smashed it as flat as a pancake.

"Säde, did your stomach start hurting again?"

"No, it's fine! I just tripped!"

I blushed and looked over at Siim, because I remembered I'd been concentrating so hard on tripping that I forgot to pull open the snap on the lady's pocket.

So, I sprinted again and knocked into the lady with a little more momentum this time, pulling open her pocket as I did.

"What's this all about, Säde? Did you catch a jitterbug again?" she asked. I'd almost made the babysitter lose her balance and this time she seemed a little angry.

Luckily, I had pulled off unsnapping her pocket, so I winked at Siim to give him the signal. By "winked", I mean I just blinked both eyes, because I didn't know how to wink with one eye yet.

The babysitter noticed and gave me a worried look. She asked Siim in a low voice: "Does your sister have fits like these often? I can see her eyes twitch sometimes, too!?"

Siim shrugged. "Sometimes, yeah. Mom says she was born with a caul ... That's probably why."

The babysitter gave Siim a strange look when she heard this, but luckily just kept walking down the aisle without asking any questions. And it's a good thing she did—being born with a caul is no crime, you know, and it certainly doesn't make anybody a fool. Mom and I have talked about it before and she says some people call it being born under a lucky star. So there!

I noticed Siim slip the razors into the lady's jacket pocket right when she was busy putting macaroni in the shopping basket. Now, we needed to find more things to put in there. I was afraid she wouldn't be

sent to jail for stealing just one packet of razors—maybe they'd just give her a fine and she'd be back the very next day. Fortunately, I spotted a package of little AAA batteries on another shelf. They cost quite a lot and were just the right size. Siim and I managed to slip them into the pocket, too. He added a tube of lip balm to the mix and when the lady was busy inspecting the salmon on sale at the fish counter, I topped it all off with a little can of tuna.

"That's enough—otherwise, the pocket will get too heavy!" Siim whispered. As luck had it, the babysitter was already heading towards the checkout.

However, right before the cash registers came the ice cream freezers. The babysitter stopped there and smiled. "Alright, kids—both of you may pick out one ice cream for yourself, whatever kind you like!"

I started feeling just terrible and my eyes even got watery. I could already imagine her being led away in handcuffs and having to move into a cold, dark jail cell with murderers and other criminals, her legs locked in heavy metal shackles.

Siim apparently spotted my pangs of doubt, because he sidled up next to me as he was picking out his ice cream. "If you ruin everything, then you'll have to spend time with that babysitter every day until the end of summer. Do you understand?"

I did, indeed. It was good that Siim reminded me at just the right moment. Sometimes, I really am too good. I've got no idea whom I got that from.

So, we picked out our chocolate ice cream cones and were finally able to head to the checkout. I could feel my heart start to pound as we stood in line. It made me a little queasy to think that the police would show up at any second and there'd be an awful chase. The babysitter was old, alright, but I hardly believed she'd give up without a fight! By that time, the cashier was already beeping our groceries through. The babysitter was standing in front of her, pulling money out of her wallet. Siim and I stood at a slight distance so that no one would blame us for the theft. I knew that in just a few steps, it'd all turn to chaos—the beeping, the security guards, the babysitter being pressed against the floor with her arm pulled behind her back, the police arriving, and

finally, jail. Even Siim seemed to be a little nervous. He tried to put on a brave face, of course, but I could tell. Before I knew it, though, the babysitter was already at the other end of the conveyor belt and was packing the groceries into the tote bag. No beeping and no police?! The cashier was smiling and telling us to have a nice day. I grabbed Siim's hand with an awful feeling in the pit of my stomach because something was very wrong.

"Maybe it'll start beeping once we walk through the doors?" I whispered to him. He didn't seem to know what had gone wrong, either.

"Säde, Siim! Throw your wrappers away here," the babysitter said, pointing to a trash can near the register. We did as we were told, unwrapping our ice cream. For some reason, though, my appetite was totally gone.

"Come, now! What are you waiting for? Let's head home. I think it's going to rain soon," the lady said, beckoning to us and leaving the store.

I held my breath in terror, but even now, nothing started to beep anywhere. Something was very wrong with the grocery store's security system.

When we got home, Siim and I were both fretful and terrified that the lady would discover all the stuff in her jacket pocket. Looking back on it, I also felt ashamed that we'd taken things from the store without asking permission. Even Siim finally felt embarrassed, so he secretly took the things out of her pocket and returned them to the store.

That night, when Dad had read us a fairy tale and turned out the light, I softly talked things over with my brother. He sighed, saying the babysitter's a tougher nut to crack than he'd thought and that we'd sure need to try a lot harder tomorrow.



Chapter 6 Grandpa

Our hopes that the babysitter would stop coming after the disappearing trick we'd pulled off yesterday didn't come true. She showed up that morning just like always. Siim and I were watching cartoons while she chatted with Mom in the kitchen. After a while, Mom and the lady came into the living room.

"You know, I've got a little surprise for you two. Grandpa is coming to town to visit for a couple days!"

Siim and I were already bursting with joy thinking it'd mean we'd be free of the babysitter, but far from it.

"Ms. Elga will still be here—she'll cook healthy, hot food for you and Grandpa and will make sure things are tidied up. Grandpa can't care for you as well as she can, you know. He's just not used to it. And I don't want to burden him with any work, anyway. His birthday is coming up!

We were thrilled about Grandpa coming, of course. Siim and I don't have any grandparents left apart from him. All the others are dead or disappeared years ago. Actually, only one of them—our Dad's mom—disappeared for real a very long time ago. Mom says she probably isn't gone gone, though—she likely just up and went somewhere or maybe moved abroad. If you ask me, I'd say a grandma who just decides to go away for good and doesn't even wait to see her grandkids born isn't a real grandma at all. Luckily, we've still got Grandpa Aadu—we call him Papa. As Siim always says, it's spooky-great having him around. Papa is short and thin, but very strong. He lives alone in a country house by the sea and we go to visit him every summer. Grandpa is a fisherman and tells us fascinating tales about going out to sea. Sometimes, he even takes us along on his little boat and spins yarns about the awful sea monsters lurking just below the surface that could attack at any moment. He's joking, of course, but sometimes you do get a little scared out of your wits!

Siim and I decided to make Grandpa a birthday card. Ms. Elga went into the kitchen to clean while we got to work on our craft project. At first, I thought I'd

draw Grandpa when he was a kid, but that felt boring because I always imagine him in black and white and this time, I wanted to make him a pretty card with lots of colors. So, instead, I drew a robot who lives with a little dog in a house made of cheese. Right in the yard next to the house, Siim drew a sea filled with colorful fish. He reckoned a fisherman's birthday card ought to have fish on it, even if that means the sea is in the back yard.

"You know, I've been thinking, and I think you're right. Ms. Elga isn't suspicious at all. I don't think Mom or Pop would ever send her away," Siim said with a thoughtful look. "And that's exactly why we've got to be the ones to tell her something that makes her never want to come back here ever again."

I didn't really understand, but Siim had already started to explain. "Look—whenever adults don't like something, they can always leave. No one forces them to stay. If they don't like someone or something, then they simply go away."

Now, I got his point. It was like Mom with our Great Aunt Juta and Great Uncle Tarvo. Mom has told Dad on more than one occasion that she just can't stand those two, so our visits always end up being short. Mom doesn't like Great Aunt Juta always talking badly about other women or Great Uncle Tarvo watching violent action movies that Siim and I aren't allowed to see. It was a great idea. The only problem was that our mom and dad weren't like that at all.

"There's nothing wrong with Mom and Dad, though; you know what I'm saying?" I told Siim I didn't believe the babysitter would leave just because Dad occasionally leaves his socks lying around or Mom chats on the phone for too long. Still, Siim didn't see that as a problem.

"No worries—we'll just make things up! The babysitter won't know what's true and what's not, now will she?!" It seemed like a great plan and, even better, Siim promised to carry it out himself.

"You've got no good ideas. You're still so little and stupid. But don't worry, you'll grow up," Siim reassured me, not that I was really arguing. All I did was mention to him that thing about Great Uncle Tarmo

and the movies, and miraculously, Siim even seemed to like the idea.

The only problem was that the babysitter was busy in the kitchen and wasn't checking in on us at all—so, Siim and I started playing elephants to get her attention. We ran around the room, stomping and blowing on toy horns. It didn't take long at all for her to come and stand in the living room doorway. She announced that in her opinion, it was awfully selfish to play elephants in an apartment and told us to stop it at once. The babysitter was just about to go back into the kitchen when Siim whipped up a troubled look on his face.

"Auntie, you know, at night, when everybody else has gone to bed, our daddy secretly watches blood movies. Sometimes, I can't fall asleep because I can hear the sounds of that blood movie through the wall."

"Oh, dearie!" The babysitter sat down with us on the couch, looking worried. "But—what are blood movies?"

"You know, the usual ones where there's blood and guns ..."

"A-ha ... Siim, darling, you know what—sometimes, they show movies like that on TV. They're not meant for children. That's why he watches them so late, once you've gone to bed. There's nothing so wrong about that."

Siim drifted off in thought, so this time, I came to the rescue.

"No, Auntie—he watches them in the morning before work, too! Secretly, in the bathroom! One time, I went to go pee early in the morning, and I saw it with my own eyes!"

"So, you're saying your father was sitting in the bathroom before work and secretly watching these ... blood movies?"

"Yeah, on his phone."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing. He didn't see me."

I accidentally blushed as I was telling the lie. The babysitter probably thought I was red in the face because I'd been spying, but Siim knew all too well that it was because of the lying. Sometimes, Daddy doesn't even have time for breakfast in the morning, much less sitting in the bathroom watching blood movies. I figured the story should make the lady reconsider what kind of suspicious people she was spending time around. Suddenly, I remembered another thing and quickly turned on the computer. I opened Google and waved to the babysitter to come closer.

"Look, Daddy searches online for big guns, too!" I pointed to the words in the search history as I pulled the lady down to sit in front of the computer. "And look what else he's searched for," I said, hitting L on the keyboard. As soon as I did, the words that Siim had typed in earlier popped up on the screen: lady butt poop.

The babysitter clapped her hand over her mouth in shock, but at that very moment, we heard shuffling and a gruff voice calling out "Hello!" from the entryway. It was Grandpa! Siim and I ran to meet him, but he was already standing in the living room doorway. He hugged us and politely greeted Ms. Elga, who was still sitting in the computer chair with a look of horror on her face. Siim and I were convinced that starting tomorrow, the babysitter would never show up at our seemingly out-of-control household again.

That evening, we celebrated Grandpa's birthday. The babysitter made potato salad and roast beef, and Mom asked her to stay for dinner. We all sat down around the table and ate. Siim and I were busy digging caves in our potato salad when all of a sudden, Ms. Elga started to cry. Mom and Dad stared at her in astonishment.

"I just have to get something off of my chest," the lady sobbed. "I'm very worried about your family. Your children can't get any sleep at night! Yes, I'm talking about the blood-movies—the big guns and the ..." The lady blushed before continuing, "the lady butt poop, too." She glared at Dad as she said the last part.

Mom narrowed her eyes at Dad, too, awaiting his response. “Yes, Kuldar. Would you care to share an explanation with us?”

I suddenly started to feel very, very hot. Siim was fidgeting in his chair, too.

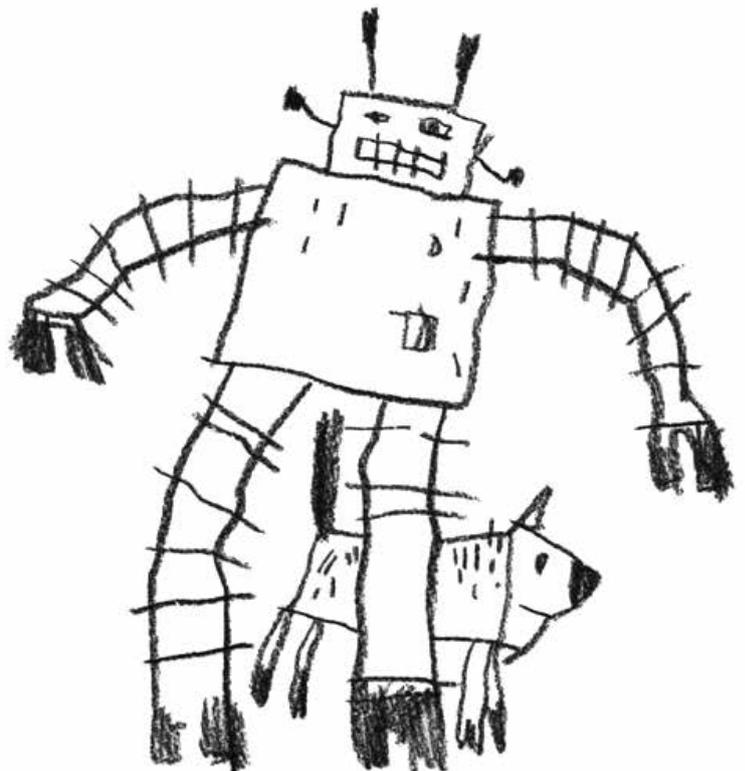
Grandpa set down his fork and asked in quite a temper: “Could someone please explain what’s going on here?!”

Mom was happy to fill him in on the details. Papa’s eyes grew wider and wider until he finally shouted at Dad: “Boy, what the devil are you looking up things like that on the internet for?!”

Dad took a big bite of potato salad and shook his head vigorously. “How many times do I have to tell you—I haven’t searched for those things! What’s that even supposed to mean!?”

Grandpa said firmly that a proper family can’t allow behavior like this and that Dad had to put an end to all the foolishness at once. He added that he and Dad were going to sit down for a progress meeting of their own, after which they went into the other room for several hours. By the end of the evening, Dad was so worn out that he laid down on the couch with a blanket, a mug of tea, and a wet rag over his forehead. He complained that he felt downright sick, to which Grandpa retorted that he, too, reckoned Dad wasn’t quite right in the head.

Translated by Adam Cullen



“Our New Home Is Haunted” by Kristi Piiper