



## “Under the Sign of the Rose”

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Night has come, and it's time to snuggle into bed. Nevertheless, sleep just won't come to little Susie. Her father tells her to start counting sheep. When that doesn't help either, her mother and her brother Simon propose other ways to better fall asleep. Can the Sandman and his magical sand assist? Or should they frighten the little girl with monsters, the Bogeyman, the Devil, or the police, instead?

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## Reading sample

"I can't sleep," said Susie, as she stepped into the living room. She had spent the past hour trying to fall asleep, but for some reason she just couldn't fall asleep.

Maybe this was because she was the only one in the family who had to go to sleep this early – but then again, no one else in the family was four years old or went to daycare.

When Susie came into the living room, her father was sitting on the sofa with his computer. Her mother was right beside him reading a magazine and her brother Simon was laying on the floor doing his math homework. And it wasn't even dark out yet.

"Count SHEEP!" answered her father.

"But we don't have sheep, Dad, we have cats," Susie reminded him.

"Then count cats," said Simon. He was five years older than Susie, and he already went to school – so he was able to stay up much later.

"Am I really supposed to count cats?" asked Susie.

Counting the family's two cats wouldn't take long, and it was hard to see how this would make her sleepy. And, besides, their two cats Berta and Matra were way too energetic. After counting those two, Susie was probably going to be even more awake than before.

"Of course not," said Mom. "Simon was only joking"

"And you don't have to count real sheep," added her father. "Try counting imaginary sheep."

"How is that going to help?" asked Susie.

"Honestly it's never helped me," her father shrugged. "I always loose count around fifty and then I get grumpy and lose all my sleepiness."

"But why sheep?" Susie wanted to know.

"Well you can count cows if you like," replied Simon, "or foxes or hippos or even snakes."

Susie shivered. The thought of counting snakes in a dark room was something she never wanted to think about again.



"If you count something then you get sleepier and sleepier and eventually you fall asleep," her mother explained.

"But maybe the animals need to be as calm as the sheep," added Simon, "because if you counted fighting dragons then you might never fall asleep."

"I don't want to count dragons," declared Susie. Dragons seemed even worse than snakes.

"Don't scare Susie with dragons this late," Dad told Simon.

"I'm not scaring her," said Simon. "Besides, some sheep can be scary as well. Last summer at grandma's, I tried to feed a sheep some bread, and he almost bit me!"

"Susie, I think you should go back to bed and wait until you fall asleep," suggested her mother.

"Or the SANDMAN could put you to sleep," added Simon.

"And who is the Sandman?" asked Susie. She couldn't remember whether anyone had mentioned anything about a sand guy.

"He's this little man who puts sand into children's eyes," her father explained.

"I don't want sand in my eyes!" Susie protested.

Last week when she was playing in the sandbox at preschool, she had gotten some sand in her eye and it had hurt a lot. Despite the fact that the teacher had immediately rinsed Susie's eyes in the sink, her eyes had still been painful and red for a while afterward.

"The Sandman has good sand," explained her mother.

"Doesn't it sting?" asked Susie, just in case.

"No, it doesn't," said Mom.

"Oh yes it does!" said Simon, and nodded at his words, even after their father gave him a dark look.

"Don't listen to Simon," said their father. "He's just teasing you."

"No, I'm not!" insisted Simon. "It does sting a bit when you're very sleepy. But in a good way," he added quickly.

"Well, maybe it stings a little bit," confessed Mom. "But it's not that bad."

"But what if I don't want the Sandman to come into my room?" asked Susie.

"He doesn't come, if you don't want him to," said her mother. "But he's good – he wants you to fall asleep."

"The Sandman is like a pixie," Dad explained, "Except that pixies only go to good children, whereas the Sandman goes to all children."

"It would be pretty horrible if bad children couldn't sleep just because they were bad," thought Simon.

"Children aren't bad," said their mother, "but sometimes they can act badly."

"I think I still don't want the Sandman to come," said Susie. The thought of a stranger coming into her room in the dark and throwing sand around didn't sound very nice.

"The Sandman isn't very bad," said Simon.

"There's much worse. Once when I was sleeping at grandma's house and I couldn't fall asleep, grandma said that if I didn't fall asleep, then the MONSTERS would come."

"I don't think we should be talking about monsters this late in the evening," said their mother.

"Don't worry, the monsters won't eat you," said Simon. "I stayed up all night with my phone beside my bed and waited for them to come, so I could take a picture of them. But none came."

“And then what happened?” asked Susie.

Simon shrugged. “Nothing happened! In the morning, grandma said that she just told me that to scare me. But she didn’t know that I wouldn’t be afraid and that I would try to catch them instead.”

“So monsters aren’t real?” asked Susie.

“Of course they aren’t real,” said their mother.

“Of course they are real,” said Simon, but they only come when they want to, not when someone tells them to.”

“Could they come here?” asked Susie.

Simon looked thoughtful, but their father shook his head quickly and said, “No, they won’t come here.”

“How can you be sure of that?” asked Simon.

“Monsters prefer old, abandoned houses,” said their father, “but we have an ordinary new apartment.”

“Besides, we aren’t afraid of monsters,” said their mother, “Right?”

Simon shook his head, “Of course not!”

“When I was little, people in those days scared their children with tales of the BAG MAN,” their father said thoughtfully.

“Now don’t you start...” began their mother.

“Whoops, sorry – I just recalling what was said in my childhood,” said Dad.

“Who is the Bag Man?” asked Simon.



“Even I don’t know exactly,” said their father. “We never met. But I probably wouldn’t want to meet him anyway, because it was thought that he would catch bad children and put them into his big bag.”

“What does he do then?” asked Simon.

Dad shrugged.

“Does he take the children somewhere?” asked Simon.

“Where would he bring them anyway?” asked Dad.

“Why would he put them in a bag if he wasn’t going to bring them anywhere?” asked Simon.

“I really can’t say,” said their father. “It was just a story.”

“Are Bag Men still around?” asked Susie.

She didn’t actually believe that some guy with a bag would come inside this late, but it’s good to be safe.

“No, not anymore,” said their parents immediately.

“But the Sandman is a little like the Bag Man,” said Simon.

“If you keep saying stuff like that, then you’ll have to go to bed soon,” said their mother.

“They are too similar,” said Simon – “They both carry a bag!”

“But the Sandman is good,” said their mother.

“My dad told me that, back in his day, they frightened him with stories of the SECURITY OFFICERS,” continued their father.

“What are Security Officers?” asked Susie.

“These days we have the police,” explained Dad, “but we used to have Security Officers. People said that if you weren’t a good child and you didn’t follow directions, then the security officers would come and take you away.”

“What if the police came in right now and asked why Susie wasn’t asleep,” giggled Simon.

The thought of a policeman who came to their house at night and investigated why she wasn’t asleep seemed so funny to Susie, that she started laughing.

“And then the police man would have to start reading you a bedtime story or singing a song, so that you would fall asleep,” continued Simon.

“I don’t think I’d want that,” said Susie.

“Well then he’d make sure that Mom would do that,” offered their father, “And he’d check to see whether Mom is telling the story properly, without skipping anything.”

“He’d be like some sleep police,” offering their mother.

“Exactly, sleep police,” confirmed Simon.

“But back in my grandfather’s day there were DEMONS, that children feared and tried to escape,” said their father.

“Did demons also love order like the security officers and the police?” asked Simon.

“No, demons were more like the bag man,” said their father.

“Did demons also have bags?” asked Simon.

“I don’t know,” answered their father, grinning. “Maybe they did!”

“Who were these demons anyway?” asked Susie.

“Demons were...,” their father began, looking over for help, but their mother just shrugged.

“Demons lived a long time ago and they were big and stupid,” said Simon. “They said so at school.”

“And they obviously don’t exist anymore,” added their father.

“Did they even exist back then?” asked their mother suspiciously.

“But then why are there so many stories about them if they never existed?” asked Simon.

Susie felt a yawn suddenly coming upon her. She had tried to imagine all those weird guys and to remember what was being told about them, but it was pretty hard. Weird men who didn't actually exist all merged into one that had a big bag and a big flock of sheep. Susie tried to start counting the sheep, but then she remembered that she had to go to bed instead.

“I'm sleepy,” said Susie.

She was worried that no one would notice her, because Simon and her parents were arguing about how stupid demons were and whether or not they carried bags.

“I'm so sleepy that I'm going to sleep right here,” said Susie.

She curled up in her armchair.

“Don't you fall asleep here,” said her mother. “Get yourself to bed.”

“Want me to bring you upstairs?” asked her father.

Susie nodded and whispered “Good night!” to the others and she put her hands around his neck.

She dreamed that the Sandman was chasing a flock of sheep in a police outfit and throwing sand at them from a very big bag.

It was a very good dream.

*Translated by Epp Annus*

