



“Under the Sign of the Rose”

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 16+

A young man named Johan disappears on the island of Hiiumaa. His girlfriend Ingel is understandably distraught. The police can't locate a body, nor even any clues to pursue. Ingel and her friend Saara decide to investigate the case themselves. As they do, they meet Miikael from the mainland (who is tormented by nightmares) and a mysterious girl trying to help him named Vika (who claims to be a psychic). At first, it appears the girls might be able to help their new acquaintances, but then they notice the boy wears a ring with a rose symbol identical to one Johan had. Even so, Miikael claims to have never met their missing friend. Things turn even more bizarre when the girls notice the local pastor wearing a rose ring as well. Who could be behind Johan's disappearance and what's the story behind these rings? The clues lead to an ancient curse...

Award:

2019 Good Young Adult Book



Reading sample

1.

Anton Sarapuu, the long-time electrician in what used to be the town of Pühalepa, had only just gone into the cellar of Suuremõisa manor to inspect what was probably a faulty circuit breaker when all at once he heard an awful sound.

Anton stood still. There was a roaring somewhere. This was rather odd because the cellar walls were so thick that the noises of the outside world normally didn't penetrate this far. Anton assumed it was a passing car, put his toolbox on a table and took out a screwdriver.

However, even though Anton knew that a car should have moved on, the noise had not faded. In fact the exact opposite was true – the roaring had not softened or ceased at all, but was growing stronger with every second.

A moment later Anton heard the thunder of hooves, like a horse galloping toward him in the semi-darkness of the cellar. He clasped the screwdriver more tightly in his hand. His mind must be playing tricks on him. Had to be. But he could hear the crash of horseshoes no more than twenty metres away on the stone cellar floor. The sound swelled louder and louder, and the elderly man's ears began throbbing painfully.

Anton took a step back, the screwdriver slipped from his fingers and his hands pawed helplessly at the wall. Later he could not for the life of him remember what he had been thinking at that moment. Instead he stood transfixed against the stone wall, as if embedded in it, and stared in the direction of the sound.

Then one of the cellar walls was suddenly green and out galloped a horse and rider. A cold draft blasted across Anton's face as the rider passed him, so close that if he had stretched out his hand he would have been able to touch either horse or rider. Just to prove to himself that he hadn't lost his mind. To prove that this was actually happening.

But no more than a moment later both horse and

rider had vanished – swallowed up by the cellar wall. Anton scabbled around for the screwdriver he'd dropped, abandoned his toolbox and everything in it, and stumbled out of the cellar as fast as he was able. However, even when he was standing on the steps in front of Suuremõisa Manor, his shaking hands fumbling in his pocket for a packet of cigarettes, the crashing of hooves on the stone floor was still ringing in his ears. In any other circumstances he'd have been convinced that he was beginning to lose his marbles, that he'd been hallucinating or imagining things, but not now.

Because now he'd remembered that long ago, when still a young boy, his Grandad had once told him about it.

"They think the rider is Captain Malm," the old man had said. "His soul still has not found rest."

2.

Miikael stared at the girl's body jerking and twitching. He could feel his heart-rate and breathing quickening as he watched. Inside he was strangely cold, yet at the same time his palms were sweating. He didn't know what to do, but he couldn't just stand there. He paced nervously back and forth. He felt like he was dreaming yet not dreaming all at the same time.

In fact Miikael didn't want to see what he was witnessing, yet at the same time he was unable to turn his gaze away from Vika. It was as if watching her would be just enough to control what was happening. It wasn't, of course. Besides, her unconscious body made him feel uneasy. Vika looked helpless. And ugly.

This wasn't the Vika he knew. She had become something else. A giant doll perhaps, that looked like the real thing. But hollow inside. An unconscious husk. A biomass.

At last he turned his head away. He didn't like the thoughts that were pushing their way into his mind. Yet at the same time he didn't like finally losing control of the situation and for that very reason he returned his gaze to the girl a moment later.

Vika was now jerking even more violently than before. Miikael wondered whether he should call for an ambulance and if so, what he would tell them. Would they believe him? And even if they did, how likely was it that they would be able to help her?

Miikael didn't explore this line of thought very far because a couple of minutes later it looked as if it was all over. Gradually the jerking was dying down. Now it looked like she was just having a restless sleep. He hoped she would soon open her eyes, but her head suddenly started jerking from side to side again.

Miikael clenched his fists. He didn't even know why. Well, that wasn't true – of course he knew why. It was all his fault. But now he suspected something. Suspected or feared. Vika had never done this before. Miikael didn't dare to think about what would happen if something went wrong. Or whether something already had. Like if Vika could not or could no longer come back. Vika herself had told him stories about it. It had happened to a girl once while she was still a child and still didn't know that that kind of thing was even possible.

Miikael glanced at his phone and realised that too much time had passed since the beginning of Vika's trance. "I won't be gone long," she'd said. And she'd told him not to worry. Not worrying was something he found easier to promise than to do. With each second Miikael was more and more on edge.

But then something happened. Miikael almost jumped when Vika's body twitched and she sat bolt upright. For a split second he thought it was finally over.

But it wasn't. Vika was in a trance again and when she looked at Miikael he could see only the whites of her eyes.

"Blood debt!" she announced. "You are bound by a blood debt!"

3.

Pastor Olaf Saar was walking along the aisle to the church door in time with the organ, summoning his most neutral expression to his face. This was phenomenally difficult to do. Right now he had only one desire: to be able to throw down his books and dash outside. The boy could not be too far away. And Olaf was absolutely certain it was him. There was no possibility of error. He'd seen him just a moment ago standing at the church door.

All the same, Olaf could not break into a run – that would be outrageous. Therefore he fixed his gaze on the door and walked slowly onward, gritting his teeth. Yet his thoughts would not give him rest. And the aisle seemed with each step to become longer and to mould itself into an interminable narrow tunnel even though he knew that ultimately, escape awaited him at the end. At least that's how it looked because he still had duties to perform.

Olaf grasped the books more tightly and walked on, while somewhere in the back of his mind he heard the strains of the organ and the steady strike of the church bells that were now ringing.

"Lord, give me strength to do my duty," prayed Olaf silently as he walked.



The church floor creaked now and then as he trod, although he felt rather than heard it. The bells rang louder the closer he got to the open door. The sun dazzled him as he finally stepped out of the vaulted church, but he realised that there was no longer any point looking round. The boy had gone.

What happened next had a dreamlike quality. It was as if he'd switched to autopilot – handshakes, congratulations, asking after the health of the elderly. He forced himself to smile, but all the while his inner being was aflame. He knew he'd seen him. Just for a moment, only for the boy to vanish into thin air never to be seen again. Just like all the previous times.

And finally, when the very last person had left, he stood alone at the church door in the deceptively warm autumn sunshine and could sense with every cell in his body that he had failed once again.

He was not a good shepherd. He had not forsaken his flock to search for the errant sheep. But he should have done!

Perhaps that had been his last chance...

Unless in spite of everything, he had not erred. Unless the demons of guilt had not painted false pictures in his mind.

Spectres.

Spirits that could appear to people and use them.

Translated by Susan Wilson