Sandman

The fall of night beckons to me. I emerge from my shadowy domain and am swept up into the darkness. It is the same story every night; I creep in to the rows and rows of houses, slipping in through cracks in the windows. I slither in, my cloak of darkness around me, and I crawl up to the beds of the humans who beg to be swept away into dreamland.

I reach into my leather pouch and feel the sugary sand against my fingertips. I take a small pinch and then slowly cast it over the eyes of the slumbering humans, watching as sleep breathes into their bodies. Slowly I reach deep down into their inner aura so that I grasp their steadfast soul and loosen it. It slips away from them and I carefully tie it to my silver string of conscious souls. They do not perish, but they are dissolved into a subconscious realm for the night where they are free to meander until the morning dawns.

When daybreak begins to peak over the horizon, I set the souls free. They flee like butterflies back into the bodies of those they have left behind.

Tonight is a particularly cold winter night. A fresh new snow lies like a blanket over the city as it is lulled to sleep. A frost bitten wind whispers over tall buildings and through silent streets. Christmas lights illuminate the neighborhoods in kaleidoscopic constellations. It is time. I creep out from my cave and leap into the night sky.

I weave through the houses, my string of souls growing longer with every street I pass. They are all unique. Some are shiny and untainted, some are delicate and wounded, and others are maleficent.

I turn towards the last house I am due to visit for the night.  *145 Shepard Avenue.* It is a small house, with a front porch that is woven with a necklace of pearly white lights. I slip through the crack under the door and find myself in the front hall. I creep up the stairs and steal into the first bedroom I set eyes on. Upon entering, I glance over to the bed. Within the white downy fortress there lies a girl who must be about twenty. She is the most beautiful creature I have ever laid eyes on. Her ivory skin is soft, and her lips are drawn into a perfect pink bow. Her hair is draped delicately over her white pillows in shiny brown curls.

She lies in a state of dreamy wonder, with the promise of sleep lingering nearby – closer than she thinks. She captivates me, and I hesitate for a moment before I cast my sandy spell over her bashful blue eyes. As slumber creeps into her thin frame I reach deep down into her internal depths until my fingers find her soul. It is silky to my touch, and I loosen it from its place. As it emerges, it catches the moonlight that streams through the window and glimmers with a golden grandeur. I am in complete awe of the jewel I have just stolen from this beautiful girl’s treasure trove, and I make sure to tie it extra carefully to my string. I glance over at the girl again, and without thinking I lean over and place a soft kiss on the shadow of her cheekbone, though I know she cannot feel it. Finally with one last look I dash away into the night sky back to my cave.

Once I return I release the souls into my cage, and they float around each other in a sea of essences. But one still draws my attention. It is the gleaming soul of the girl that holds my fascination. It sparkles with radiance like no other soul, and the way it floats around the others with such a grace sparks a desire within me, a hunger. *This soul is mine*.

Soon the night begins to fade and I make my way over to the cage of restless souls. My fingers slide the latch over with a click, and I watch as they all disperse into the air, aching to reenter the bodies in which they had once resided. However before I turn away, the sparkle of the one wavering soul catches my eye. Before my intuitions can speak for my actions, I reach out and snatch it in my hand. It wriggles about in surprise, but I clutch it with the intent to never let go. This soul is special.

Hours pass by, and I keep the glittering thread locked away in my cage. It glows with a shimmering sense of allure that the spaces of my dark sunken cave have been deprived of for far too long.

 As I sit watching it, I am suddenly overwhelmed by a strange compulsion to open the cage and grasp the soul within my cold, clammy clutch. I gaze into it, studying its shimmering hues and soft configurations. Figures begin to emerge in the soul’s mellifluous façade. I see a small child, with her brown curls pulled up into pigtails. She is sitting on a small red bike, and I can almost hear her squeals of delight as a man, who I assume to be her father, pushes her down the sidewalk. She looks so carefree and happy, and I begin smiling in spite of myself.

Soon the memory fades and a new scene emerges. It is the same girl, but older. She is sitting in her room on her bed. I look closer and notice her melancholic expression, which is accompanied by silent tears that roll down her cheeks, reflecting the moonlight streaming in through her window. She looks so sad and broken, and I do not know why she is crying but I am overcome with the urge to reach into the memory and wipe away her tears.

As the image dies away, a third one appears. It is the same girl, but much older. She looks just as I had seen her only mere hours ago. In this memory she is in a classroom, surrounded by children whose admiration towards her is evident in their dumbfounded expressions as she smiles at them, and shows them how to add and subtract. She must be a teacher. It is then that I realize that I am in love. I know I can never have her though; I exist only in the margins of her subconscious. All I have to tie myself to her existence is this soul.

As the clock strikes eight o’clock, the sun falls from the clouds and the stars spill out across an inky indigo sky, signifying that it is time for me to get to work.

“I’ll be back soon.” I whisper to the single soul, which hangs sadly in its confinement, before I leap into the night.

Once again I make my rounds, slipping from house to house as I do every night. Finally I reach a familiar street. *Shepard Avenue*, the sign reads.

I turn towards the small house I remember visiting the night before, and a sudden guilt washes over me.  *If I still hold the soul, what has happened to the girl?*

A sudden siren shatters the silence, which had hung in the air over the street like a glass chandelier only moments ago. The noise echoes around the quiet neighborhood, and red-flashing lights whirl through the night sky. I watch as an ambulance pulls up outside the house I have been watching.

I creep precariously towards the ambulance so that I can see what is going on. Some men rush out of the vehicle and make their way towards the door at a hurried pace. A middle-aged woman greets them on the porch. Her face is creased with worried lines and her eyes are wide with fear.

I lean in to try to make out what she is saying to the men. She is talking very quickly and her words are drowned by broken sobs.

“I thought she was asleep! But I went to wake her up and she wouldn’t budge so I tried calling her name and she wouldn’t respond and-“

“Ma’am, do you mind if we go in and take a look?” one of the men interrupts.

“Oh yes, of course, yes go right on in. It’s the first room on the left.”

The men enter the house and tear up the stairs, with me following close behind, to the room I had visited a mere twelve hours ago.

They all gather around the girl and begin to examine her body, which lies cold and lifeless in the same position as I had left it, tangled in the sheets of her feathery fortress.

“We have a pulse,” I hear one of the men mutter.

Some other men enter the room carrying a large stretcher, and I watch as they load her pale, limp body onto it and haul her into the ambulance before stealing away into the night with the siren blaring. I know I have to get back to my cave, but I also know that this is my doing, and guilt orders me to follow the ambulance, with my string of souls trailing behind.

The word *coma* echoes through the halls of the hospital.

“We are unable to determine what induced this coma, and there is no way of knowing how long it could last.” A man in a white coat informs the woman who had been at the house. The woman looks stricken with grief, and she has to sit down in one of the hospital chairs.

I can’t watch anymore. I am overcome with guilt and sorrow, and I know what has to be done.

I notice a hint of sunrise peaking over the horizon through the hospital window, so I dive in to what is left of the night sky and unleash the souls I have been carrying back into the winter air.

I finally trudge back into my lowly cave, and head straight for the cage. The thin thread of that girl’s soul lies there flickering like an old light bulb. It looks lost and empty, no longer gleaming with the initial vivacity I had fallen in love with. I reach into the cage and grasp it in my cold clutch. It lies slack in my palm. I search it for any sign of the memories it had reflected before, but all I see is emptiness. I rub it against my cheek and feel its sleek silky texture against my leathery skin.

Finally I release it from my grasp and watch as it flutters away into the winter air.

**Word Count: 1781**