

CROUCHING IN THE CORNER OF HER EYE

A SHORT STORY

ANDREW D. DOAN



Copyright © 2018 by Andrew D. Doan

All rights reserved.

This story is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a review.

✿ Created with Vellum

ONE

“I’m standing alone in a large warehouse. It’s huge, but it’s completely empty. It looks like an old airplane hangar or maybe a factory floor where all of the equipment has been moved out. There are no lights on, but there is a line of windows near the top of the outside walls. They’re the old-style windows that you sometimes see in factories or machine shops. You know what I mean?”

Anyway, I can see window after window like that along the wall stretching down in front of me for a long way. Sunlight is streaming in through these windows, but it’s murky because the whole place is so dirty and dusty.

I’m standing there at the end of this massive building, and I have some sort of package in my hand. I don’t know what’s in it exactly, but it’s a cardboard box covered in shipping labels or post office stamps or something like that. It’s not very big or heavy, but I’m holding it to my chest tightly—really tightly. It feels very important.”

“It *feels* important? What do you mean by that? How can you know it’s important if you don’t know what’s inside?”

“I mean...it just feels like it’s important, you know? When I’m standing there I have this sense that whatever’s in the box is really valuable or...important. I don’t know how else to describe it. It’s just this strong feeling.”

“Okay. Fair enough. What happens next?”

“Well, I have to take the package to the other end of the warehouse so I—”

“Why do you have to take it there?”

“I’m not sure. No one told me to. I just know that I have to take it to the other end.”

“In the same way that you ‘just know’ the contents of the package are important?”

“Yes. It’s this strong sense that I have. Somehow, I know what I’m supposed to do.”

“Okay.”

“So...I start walking toward the other end, but I only get a couple of steps in before I see something moving in the corner of my eye. It happens super fast, but I definitely see it.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. I can’t see it clearly because I’m not looking at it directly. It’s just there on the side—almost like a shadow.”

“Is it your shadow?”

“No.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I’m not scared of my own shadow.”

“You’re scared of this?”

“Yes—well—in my dream I am.”

“What’s the difference?”

“The difference?”

“You said you’re scared of the shadow *in your dream*. You’re saying it in a way that makes it sound like there’s a

distinction between being scared in your dream and being scared when you're awake. What's the difference?"

"Well, for starters, one is a dream, and the other is real life, right?"

"Yes, but what about the feeling?"

"What feeling?"

"The feeling of fear. The emotion you have in your dream. Is that real?"

"I'm not sure."

"Does it feel real?"

"I don't understand the question."

"You don't?"

"I mean...I guess it feels real. In my dream I'm scared, so if that counts as real..."

"You sound like you're getting a little frustrated."

"Maybe."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I guess we're just approaching this from different angles. That's all."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean...you're focusing on the fear, but I'm more interested in the dream."

"Aren't they connected?"

"Yes, but I would rather find out what the dream means than talk about how it makes me feel."

"What the dream means?"

"You know...the interpretation. The warehouse represents this, and the package represents that."

"Oh. I see. What makes you think the dream *means* anything?"

"Don't all dreams mean something?"

"Not necessarily."

"Oh. I figured there was some sort of Freudian thing

going on, you know? Like my subconscious is trying to tell me something.”

“If that’s true, what do you think your subconscious is trying to say?”

“I don’t know. That’s my point. I figured you could help me interpret it.”

“Dreams can have significance in the way you’re describing, but that’s not necessarily true all of the time. Even when it is true, it’s often quite difficult to draw firm conclusions from a dream. I tend to think of dreams as a de-cluttering or de-fragmenting of the mind. Our brains are trying to tidy up a bit.”

“So you’re saying this is just random? Even though I keep having the same dream over and over again?”

“It’s possible.”

“That’s depressing.”

“How many times have you had this dream?”

“I think about seven or eight times over the last few weeks.”

“It’s the same dream each time?”

“No. Some nights I don’t dream at all. Other nights it’s a similar dream, but some of the details are different.”

“Do you ever dream about anything else?”

“Not that I can remember.”

“What changes when this dream is different?”

“Sometimes it’s in a field or a parking lot instead of a warehouse. Sometimes my hands are empty instead of holding a package.”

“Is there anything that remains consistent whenever you have this dream?”

“Yes. The shadow-thing.”

“The thing in your peripheral vision?”

“Yes.”

“The thing that scares you?”

“Scares me in my dream—yes.”

“So it doesn’t scare you after you wake up the next morning?”

“Not really. Mostly it’s just irritating when I think back on it.”

“So you brought it up in our session today because it irritates you—not because it scares you?”

“Yes. I guess so.”

“And it bothers you enough to talk with me about it, right?”

“I just want it to go away.”

“I can understand that.”

“It’s affecting my sleep. I don’t usually get enough rest as it is, and this isn’t making the situation any better.”

“How many hours of sleep do you get per night on average?”

“Six or seven.”

“How many since the dreams began?”

“It’s still about the same, but I think the quality of my sleep is being affected. I wake up feeling tired and grumpy. I’m more restless during the night—tossing and turning a lot more than usual. At least, that’s what Curtis tells me.”

“Does Curtis think there’s a specific interpretation of the dream?”

“No. He only knows that I’m not sleeping well. I haven’t told him about the dream and the shadow.”

“So you’ve determined that it’s a shadow.”

“No. I have no idea what it is. I’m just calling it that for lack of a better way to describe it.”

“Ok. That makes sense. Why haven’t you told Curtis about it?”

“I don’t know. It seems kind of silly to bring it up. It’s just a dream.”

“Yes, but it’s a recurring dream that is affecting you emotionally and physically.”

“I never said anything about it affecting me physically. I feel great. I’m a pretty healthy person overall.”

“I was referring to your lack of quality sleep. If that continues, you may start to see more physical symptoms. My point is that this is something that is troubling you right now, and I think your husband deserves to know about that. Don’t you think he would want to know about it?”

“I guess. It’s just so embarrassing.”

“Why does it embarrass you?”

“Because it doesn’t seem like something an adult woman in her thirties should have to deal with. I run my own business for crying out loud! But here I am like a toddler having night terrors.”

“I don’t think your age has anything to do with it. Like it or not, it’s happening...to you. Do you believe that berating yourself like that will help?”

“No.”

“I don’t either. Do you remember marking the box labeled ‘Insecurity/Self Doubt’ on your paperwork when you first came to see me?”

“Yes.”

“Old habits die hard.”

“You’re right.”

“Neither of us knows why this is happening or what it means—if it means anything at all. I believe our energy will be best spent on figuring out how you can handle this in a healthy way. Do you agree?”

“Yes. I just don’t like weird things like this. I shouldn’t—
“

“Didn’t we just agree that this kind of talk isn’t helpful?”

“Yes. I’m sorry.”

“I really want to encourage you to stifle that kind of negative thinking, okay? Focus instead on working through it in a healthy way.”

“Okay. Any suggestions on how to do that?”

“To start, I think you need to tell Curtis about it—even though you don’t want to.”

“Okay.”

“Secondly, if the dream happens again—with the shadow—I want you to focus on being curious about it rather than afraid of it.”

“Do you mean when the dream is happening or later when I wake up?”

“During the dream. When you start to feel afraid about whatever it is in the corner of your eye, I want you to try to be curious about it instead. I think this might help you rest better.”

“Really?”

“Of course I don’t know for sure, but it’s a start. I think the anxiety is affecting you, and we need to try to get past that.”

“Okay, but how do I make myself curious rather than afraid?”

“Well, you’re still you in the dream, right?”

“Uh...yes?”

“Okay. Then just tell yourself to be curious instead of afraid.”

“That will work?”

“I don’t know, but I don’t think it hurts to try. Can you do that and let me know about it next time?”

“Yes. Thank you. It feels good to have something to do

about it rather than just sit there as it keeps happening over and over again.”

“Well, I hope it’s helpful to you. One more thing before you go...”

“Yes?”

“Tell Curtis about it.”

“I will.”

TWO

“**T**his time, it was in my kitchen. All alone as always. I’m just standing there. I’m not doing anything. No box in my hands. No sense of urgency. Just standing...and staring at the kitchen sink.

Everything is fine until I hear this odd noise. Like a chewing sound or a gnawing sound.”

“Is it a person chewing or an animal?”

“I don’t know for sure because it—whatever it is—is just out of sight. Like before.”

“In the corner of your vision?”

“Yes.”

“So you couldn’t see—Oops! Let me grab your mug over there. I don’t want the tea to get too strong. You couldn’t see this thing at all?”

“It’s weird because I can see something—like movement or a reflection in my peripheral vision—but if I turn my head to look at it, I can’t see it. It moves when I move. It’s always there just out of my direct line of sight.”

“You tried to look at it this time? Here you go. I hope I didn’t let it steep too long.”

“It’s perfect. Thanks. Yes. As soon as I heard it and saw it on the side, I tried to look at it.”

“Why?”

“I was trying to be curious. Just like you said.”

“That’s good to hear. It means that our discussions are filtering through to your dreams to some extent. Last time, I encouraged you to focus on being curious, and that’s exactly what happened. That’s a good sign.”

“Okay. Cool. I like good signs.”

“I suppose the real question is—did your curiosity overpower your fear?”

“Um...no. It didn’t.”

“Can you be more specific?”

“The dream seemed to last for a long time. I was standing there in the kitchen hearing noises and looking around. The longer it lasted, the more anxious I felt.”

“Were you anxious or were you afraid?”

“I guess a little of both.”

“Just like before—in the earlier versions of the dream?”

“Worse.”

“Worse? How much worse?”

“This time it felt almost like a panic attack. The noise just wouldn’t stop. Chewing and gnawing. It really made me anxious...or afraid. Whatever I felt, it was weird.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, in real life, I would be frustrated in that situation. I don’t think I would be afraid.”

“What situation?”

“Standing in my kitchen trying to figure out where a weird noise is coming from.”

“Has that ever happened to you?”

“Probably. That’s my point. I’ve had to deal with something like that before. Maybe a mouse or a cockroach in the

kitchen. Those things don't scare me. They're just annoying."

"But in the dream it scares you rather than annoys you."

"Yes, and I find that fact...annoying."

"Do you think it's a mouse or a cockroach? In your dream?"

"It could be, I guess. Do mice and cockroaches make loud chewing sounds?"

"So the sound is loud."

"Relatively speaking. Loud enough to be noticeable."

"Ok...the dream is basically the same except for the fact that there's some sort of sound coming from the shadow..."

"Yes."

"...and the fact that the shadow is scaring you more than it was before."

"I guess so."

"I'm not trying to put words in your mouth. You said the anxiety was worse this time. Didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. I just—"

"Just what?"

"I just—I know I'm not supposed to think like this, but I can't get over how stupid this is. It's been going on for weeks now. I'm not getting enough sleep, my performance at work is suffering, I'm irritable and edgy, and it's all because of some silly nightmare that won't go away. It's really annoying!"

"I can see that it bothers you. I'm sorry you're going through this. What does Curtis think about it?"

"He...uh...doesn't really have much of an opinion."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Hasn't said a word to me about it."

"Why do you think he's so closed off?"

“Um...well, it’s...probably because I haven’t told him about the dream.”

“Oh. I see. I thought you agreed last time that it was best to tell him.”

“I did. I know. I should have mentioned it to him.”

“Is there any particular reason you didn’t?”

“No—other than embarrassment.”

“I appreciate your honesty. It seems that you’re really hung up on the idea that this whole thing is silly, stupid, and embarrassing.”

“Yeah.”

“Do you have any theories about why you’re getting so hung up?”

“You know me pretty well, right?”

“Yes. I would say so. We’ve been meeting for almost three months.”

“Exactly. You know that I—for the most part—am a no-frills, ‘what-you-see-is-what-you-get’ kind of person, right?”

“That seems like a pretty good description.”

“So you can probably understand why I’m finding this so frustrating. I’m a doer. A problem-solver. If something goes wrong with my business, I fix it. Period. End of story. If I need a new pair of shoes, I buy some. The same day. I don’t screw around or waste time debating the pros and cons of shoes. I just do what I need to do.”

“Okay.”

“So this shadow nightmare is driving me up a wall! It doesn’t seem like the type of thing someone like me should experience. I know that sounds arrogant, but it’s how I feel.”

“Thank you for telling me exactly what you think and feel. I mean that. Not all of my patients are as forthcoming as you are. I understand exactly what you’re saying, but I notice one major fallacy in your logic.”

“You do? What is it?”

“We are more than just the product of our own self-estimation.”

“What do you mean?”

“You and I—in our being—are more than just the sum of our own thoughts about ourselves. There’s more to us than simply what we perceive ourselves to be. Often, there’s a *great deal* more to us than that. Do you know what the term ‘blind spot’ means?”

“Of course. You think that’s what this is all about?”

“Pardon me?”

“A blind spot. The thing in my dream—the shadow thing with the chewing noises—you think it could represent a blind spot in my life?”

“Remember what I told you before about interpreting dreams. It’s usually pretty hard to do with any degree of certainty.”

“Yeah, but this makes sense, right? You’re saying that there’s more to me than just my own self-perception. There are some character flaws that I can’t see—just like there’s something in my dream that I can’t see. Something scary.”

“I didn’t use the term ‘character flaw.’”

“I know, but I think that’s what you were moving toward. Maybe this whole series of nightmares is designed to get me to see my blind spot. To discover some character flaws that need to be addressed.”

“I suppose it’s possible.”

“Maybe if I figure out what my blind spot is and take care of it, the dream will go away!”

“Again—it’s possible, but—”

“So how does a person go about discovering their blind spots?”

“Well, one of the best ways to see a blind spot is to have

it pointed out to you by someone else. Someone who knows you intimately. Someone whose opinion will carry a lot of weight for you.”

“That sounds like you.”

“I appreciate the thought, but that’s not really what I had in mind. I was thinking of someone else.”

“Who?”

“I think you know the answer to that question.”

“I do?”

“Yes.”

“Oh...you mean Curtis, right?”

“Yes. *If* this dream is a subconscious way for you to become more self-aware and see some of your blind spots, then I can’t think of a better person to walk you through that than your husband.”

“You’re probably right.”

“Probably?”

“You’re right. I know you are, I just...”

“...You just, what?”

“If I’m honest—”

“—you usually are. At least with me.”

“Thanks. If I’m honest, I don’t want to tell him.”

“I know you don’t.”

“But you think I should anyway.”

“I do.”

“Wonderful.”

“Can I ask you a pointed question?”

“I guess so.”

“I want you to know that I’m not trying to be mean or unkind by asking it.”

“I know that. I trust you.”

“Good. Here’s the question. Whenever we talk about this dream, you’re insistent that you—the awake version of

you—aren't afraid of the shadow, yet it appears that you *are* afraid to tell Curtis about it. That seems inconsistent to me. You want me to believe that it's no big deal, but it feels like you're making it a 'big deal' by refusing to tell your husband."

"Is there a question in there?"

"What's holding you back? Why won't you just tell him?"

"Honestly? I don't know. I can't put it into words. I just think this dream business is so silly and stupid. The thought of telling Curtis makes me feel...well...silly and stupid."

"You told me a moment ago that you're a 'no-frills,' get-to-the-point kind of person, right?"

"Yeah."

"All right then. I think you should go home, sit down with Curtis, and...get to the point. Tell him what's going on. Okay?"

"Okay."

THREE

“Well...?”

“Well, what?”

“Did you tell Curtis about your recurring nightmare?”

“Um...no.”

“Oh.”

“I mean...I didn’t tell him the way you wanted me to.”

“What does that mean?”

“I told him but not because I wanted to. I basically had to tell him.”

“Why is that?”

“It’s been getting worse—a lot worse.”

“The dream?”

“Yes...and the shadow. The last few times, I could actually feel it.”

“In what way?”

“I could feel it touching me. On the back and shoulders.”

“But you still can’t see it or figure out what it is?”

“Correct.”

“Does its touch give you any ideas about what it is? Does it feel like a hand or a claw or something recognizable?”

“Not really. It’s a very light touch. Like a light tap here or a quick brush there. I can still hear the chewing noises and breathing.”

“Breathing? That’s new?”

“I think so.”

“So, it sounds to me like it’s some sort of living creature. Touching. Chewing. Breathing.”

“I guess.”

“Ok. So you told Curtis...”

“Well, like I said, it’s been getting worse. It’s happening more often. Every other night or so. Sometimes it happens several nights in a row. The fear and anxiety are getting a lot worse too.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. I can tell it’s weighing you down.”

“Yeah, I know I look like crap.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You don’t have to. I know it already. This thing is really stringing me out. People at work are noticing. Always asking me if I’m feeling okay. ‘You look really worn out.’ or ‘You’re working too hard.’ ‘Be sure to take care of yourself.’ Stuff like that.”

“And what about Curtis? Has he been noticing?”

“He hasn’t said anything specific.”

“What did he say when you told him what’s going on?”

“Oh yeah. Sorry I got sidetracked with the story. That’s another thing—I’m having a really hard time focusing on... on anything.”

“That’s to be expected when you’re getting so few hours of quality sleep each night.”

“Yeah. Right. Anyway, it’s been getting really bad, but last Thursday was the worst so far. I was walking on a dirt road. All by myself. No one around. No buildings in sight. I heard the noises, and I felt the touching. I knew ‘it’ was right behind me. My surroundings weren’t dark or spooky at all, but I just got really freaked out. I can remember the dream quite clearly. This wave of panic shot through me, and I started screaming at it.”

“At the shadow?”

“Yes. Once I started screaming, I just wanted to get louder and louder.”

“Do you remember why?”

“Not really. I suppose I was trying to scare it away, but it didn’t work. By the time I woke up, I was in a full-volume, blood-curdling shriek. That’s how Curtis described it.”

“So Curtis heard you screaming?”

“Oh, yes. He said he woke up and saw me sitting up straight as a board and screaming my fool head off.”

“And that’s when you told him?”

“Yes. Obviously, he was pretty curious.”

“Did you tell him everything?”

“Sort of.”

“What does ‘sort of’ mean?”

“I told him I’ve had this weird nightmare a couple of times—”

“—a *couple* of times?”

“That’s what I told him, yes. I told him there was some weird monster thing in my dream that keeps freaking me out.”

“So, you’ve concluded that it’s a monster?”

“Not exactly, but that was the easiest way to describe it to him. Sounds a heck of a lot better than saying I keep

dreaming about a big nothing that scares the crap out of me.”

“How did he respond?”

“He tried to be comforting and helpful, but there’s not a whole lot he can do. Unless you’re there in the moment to hear it and feel it, you can’t really understand the situation.”

“Have you talked to him about it since then?”

“No. He asked me about it again the next morning, but I just shrugged it off. I gave him some silly comment about eating too much junk food before bed.”

“So...he doesn’t really know how much this is affecting you.”

“No. He doesn’t.”

“And as far as we can tell, it isn’t going away anytime soon.”

“Wow! That’s a depressing way to put it.”

“I’m just trying to be honest with you. This has been going on for quite a while, and it’s getting progressively worse. You shrugged it off with your husband, you’re trying to compensate for it at work, but we both know this is a serious issue for you right now.”

“Yeah. I guess.”

“Did you give any more thought to the ‘blind spot’ idea we discussed last time?”

“Yeah, I thought it over, but I couldn’t really come up with anything.”

“Did you ask Curtis about it?”

“No. I...”

“You...what?”

“I’m just sick of this! It’s so frustrating. I’ve never dealt with anything like it before. I think about the problems other people around me are facing right now. I know people who are dealing with divorce, cancer, bankruptcy—heavy

stuff! My biggest issue is some ridiculous dream that won't go away. It's just so stupid, but it's ripping me up. I—I want it to go away! Great! My makeup is probably an awful mess now."

"There's a box of tissues on the shelf behind you."

"Thanks. Sorry to get so weepy."

"You never need to apologize to me for being open with your emotions. Let's go to something you mentioned a while back."

"What's that?"

"The idea that the shadow represents something. That it has some specific interpretation."

"You didn't seem to like that idea when I mentioned it."

"It's not that I didn't like it. I was just trying to caution you about it. Dream interpretation is—can be—a tricky thing to do with any degree of certainty."

"I know."

"But I don't want to throw out that option completely. Let's explore the possibility a little."

"Okay. How do we do that?"

"I want to try a little exercise with you. I'm going to list off a series of different items one by one. As you hear each one, I want you to answer 'yes' if you think it's the correct interpretation of the shadow and 'no' if you think it's not correct. I want you to answer immediately without giving it too much thought or analysis. Just answer from your gut. Does that make sense?"

"It does, but what if I say 'yes' to more than one item on the list?"

"Don't worry about that right now. Remember, this isn't an exact science. Just give me your answer like a reflex. I'll keep track of all your answers in my notes, and then we can go back through and rehash it afterward. Sound good?"

“At this point, I’m up for anything.”

“Okay. Do you want to close your eyes?”

“Should I?”

“It might help you concentrate.”

“Okay. I’m ready.”

“Okay. Here we go. Remember, just give me your initial answer. The first one that comes to your mind.”

“Got it.”

“Failure.”

“No.”

“Loneliness.”

“No.”

“Embarrassment.”

“No.”

“Divorce.”

“No.”

“Death.”

“No.”

“Losing your business.”

“No.”

“Rape.”

“What?”

“Do you have an answer?”

“My answer is no!”

“Finding out your husband is having an affair.”

“Definitely no!”

“Cancer.”

“No.”

“Bankruptcy.”

“No.”

“Losing all of your friends.”

“No!”

“Being alone.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

“What’s your answer?”

“No.”

“Crowds.”

“Crowds?”

“Yes. Are you afraid of crowds?”

“No. Who’s afraid of crowds?”

“A lot of people.”

“I thought we were trying to figure out the interpretation of the shadow from my dream.”

“We are.”

“But you’re wording the question the wrong way.”

“I am?”

“Yes. You just said, ‘Are you afraid of crowds?’ You should have said, ‘Does the shadow represent a crowd?’”

“I’m afraid I don’t see the point you’re making.”

“My point is that I’m not *really* afraid of this thing—whatever it is. The fear and panic only come in my dream—never in real life. Even thinking about it now doesn’t scare me. I’ve been telling you that since the first time I brought it up. The whole point of this exercise was to figure out the interpretation of the shadow—not to dissect all of my fears.”

“So you’re still drawing a distinction between your fear of the shadow in the dream and your feelings when you’re awake?”

“Yes.”

“Why is that distinction so important to you?”

“I don’t freaking know, okay? I don’t know! I don’t know why this is happening. I don’t know what it means. I don’t know why it’s so important for me to keep this stupid distinction. It just is! All I know is that the dream isn’t me. This is not who I am!”

"I'm...I'm sorry you're getting so frustrated. It wasn't my intention to upset you."

"It's not your fault. You're trying to help."

"Yes, but there's a healthy way to help and an unhealthy way. Maybe my idea wasn't a very good one. I pushed a little too hard. What do you think would be a healthy way to continue talking about this?"

"I don't know. It seems like we're coming at this thing from two very different perspectives. I appreciate what you've done to try to help me, but I think we're barking up the wrong tree. It's nothing against you, but I don't want to talk about the dream anymore. Hopefully it will just run its course and go away soon."

"Ok. I'll respect your wishes. Do you have anything else on your mind you'd like to discuss in the time we have left?"

"Actually, I think I'm going to stop the session early this time."

"Oh. I see. May I ask why?"

"I'm...just so tired. I've got a ton of stuff to get done for work in the next few days. I feel a migraine coming on, and I think the best thing for me right now is to just head home, enjoy a hot shower, and curl up with a cup of tea."

"Self-care is incredibly important. I'm glad to hear you're planning to take it easy tonight. The next time you come in, we can talk—or not talk—about anything you want. No pressure, I promise."

"I appreciate that. You're very kind. I guess I'll be going..."

"Have a nice afternoon."

"Thanks."

FOUR

“**H**ello, Grace, this is Rita. Sorry to bother you on your voicemail, but I need to let you know that I’m not going to make it to my appointment later today. Something came up at work, and I just won’t have the time.

I do want to mention something that happened a few nights ago. I guess you might call it a “breakthrough”—sort of.

I’ve had the dream nearly every night since we last met. Haven’t woken up screaming, but everything else has been pretty much the same—until two nights ago.

I was standing alone in a forest. I had a basket of some sort in my hands. It might have been more of a bucket. I can’t really remember. It was snowing. No one else was around. It wasn’t windy or anything. Not a blizzard—just a calm, quiet snowfall.

I’m walking along with the bucket in my hands, and then it—the shadow—comes up right behind me just like before. The noises and the touches are all the same. I feel the panic start to set in like it always does.

I remember thinking, 'I'm so freaking sick of this!' In my dream, I got really angry and I whipped around to look behind me as fast as I could. This time it worked! The shadow didn't move when I moved like other times. It wasn't in the corner of my eye anymore. I was looking right at the spot where it had been just a second before.

There was nothing there. No monster. No big, blood-sucking creature. I looked around, and the woods were empty. It was like the shadow was there one moment and gone the next. Poof! It vanished.

The only trace I could find was some footprints. They looked like human prints—snow boots probably. The weird thing is that there was only one set. There was a line of prints leading up to where I was standing, but none leading away. I don't know what to make of that.

It's been two nights. The shadow hasn't come back yet, but I'm still not sleeping well. Before, I would fall asleep worrying that the shadow would show up again. Now, I'm worried because it hasn't.

I just don't know. It's all so bizarre.

Anyway, I want to thank you for your patience with me. You're a good therapist—not that I have anyone else to compare to you! I can't imagine having to sit there and listen to people's crap for 8 hours a day! I think you do a pretty good job of it.

I wanted to make sure you know that I feel that way so you don't take it personally if I stop our regular appointments for the time being. Our times have been helpful, but it's pretty expensive. Things are tight for Curtis and me right now, and I—we—think the therapy sessions cut too much into the budget.

I promise I'll get back in touch with you sometime down the road. Thanks for understanding.

In the meantime, let's just hope the dream is gone for good, right? Two nights shadow free...it's a start!

Thanks so much!

Bye!