

I made my way through the living room and den to reach the kitchen. Doc was brilliant, but he was also a creature of habit. And it made him easy to track. He always left his book bag in the kitchen beside the mudroom door, right next to the refrigerator. Unfortunately, I too was a creature of habit; my bag always sat right next to Doc's. Today hadn't been the first time that I'd grabbed the wrong bag or set of books in the morning. I had planned for this tonight though, and my book bag was sitting safely up- stairs, in my room. Doc's bag was here, all alone. And what I sought was still inside. I'd checked on that earlier, when I came to get my bag.

I took a knee on the floor beside the book bag and glanced over my shoulder to make sure that I was alone. I knew that what I was doing was wrong. Trust was a virtue that Doc valued above all others, but this was important. I absolutely had to know what was inside the journal.

I took a deep breath and reached into the bag. There was the journal – right where it had been earlier. I let my breath out again, with both relief and fear, and pulled out the leather-bound volume. Reading this journal may or may not answer my questions about Doc's sanity. The bigger question, though, was whether I actually wanted to know those answers. Either way, something told me that I needed to read the book. Something was going on, and Doc knew at least part of it. I eased down to sit against the wall and stilled, listening. Just the groaning and creaking of our old home, though there was a deep thrumming coming from somewhere ... a thumping in the ground, almost as though someone was playing heavy drums a few houses down. I paused, listening, and felt the beat enter my bones, and then my heart. Something was there, I could feel it, though I shook the feeling off. I thought I heard footsteps from upstairs, then, but decided that it was my overactive, guilt-ridden imagination playing tricks on me. I wasn't used to sneaking around like this, and my nerves weren't taking to it like I'd hoped they would.

For a second I thought about returning the journal and walking back upstairs. But only for a second. I was in too deep to back out now, and my curiosity would never let me sleep. Besides, now that I was here, there was no reason to let the opportunity go to waste. Nowhere to go but forward. I opened the journal to the beginning, resolute on reading it cover-to-cover instead of skipping around like I had earlier, and tilted it toward the light from the street lamp. Bending down, I began to read. Slowly at first, and then more quickly as the story caught me and held.

For over an hour and a half, time stood still. I read every word of the journal as it unfolded. I read many of the entries two and even three times, to make sure that I had it right. My heart raced the entire time. Not from fear of being caught, but from the story itself. I knew without a doubt that the journal was real, at least in my grandfather's mind. These were not the words or emotions of some creative writing assignment. Whether that meant he was losing his mind was a different question altogether. I still had my doubts about his sanity, but as I read, I began to believe, despite myself. What if he had found a way to do it? What if these happenings were real? But if it was actually going on ... if the journal entries were recorded as fact, and not as the incomprehensible raving of an old man, then everything I thought I knew – everything I thought important in my life – had been turned upside down and inside out. This would rip apart the fabric of reality as we knew it, and the basic bindings of my everyday existence. I leaned my head back against the wall and closed my eyes. What in the world was Doc hiding? And did the break-in mean that other people knew about it too?

I felt rather than saw the presence of someone walking into the kitchen, directly across from where I sat in the mudroom. I gulped and opened my eyes, my thoughts frozen. My sixth sense hadn't lied to me. He was standing in the kitchen doorway, staring back at me.