

They Crawl

By Reaper

I used to have a happy and comfortable life. I had and still have a family who loves me, plenty of friends, and an adorable pet cat named Tigger. I did well in school, I played soccer and enjoyed swimming. More than anything else I looked forward to getting my license and being able to drive a car. Sure I had problems which at the time seemed big, but looking back, I'd have to say my life was wonderful. All of that changed after I met my friend Amanda.

I don't want you to give the impression that Amanda was some horrible person who tore my life apart because that isn't true at all. Although in the end Amanda did in fact destroy every aspect of my life, I don't blame her in the least because I know she wasn't trying to.

I met Amanda on my first day back to high school after summer vacation. I remember her being rather shy and quiet at first. No surprise I suppose since she moved to our town over the summer from out of state and didn't know anybody in my school. I invited her to sit with me and my friends during lunch and our friendship started from there. Amanda was a genuinely nice person who liked soccer and animals. She had a quirky interest in science fiction and horror stories which I didn't quite share, but she was fun to hang out with anyway.

For many months Amanda and I remained friends and then one day I thought Amanda was growing a bit distant. I worried at first that as Amanda adjusted to her new school she was moving away from me into a different circle of friends. This bothered me quite a bit because I honestly liked Amanda and didn't want to lose her friendship. I realized soon though that Amanda was withdrawing from all of her friends at school and not just me. She was becoming something of a loner. She had also lost her healthy and happy demeanor and started to look sickly, like she hadn't been sleeping well.

I remember trying to talk to her and ask what was wrong but she would simply shut down and refuse to talk. It reached a point where I had no choice but to let her deal with her issues on her own until she was ready to talk to me. This only resulted in Amanda becoming more withdrawn and sitting alone at lunch. She seemed to become even more harassed looking and nervous too and had developed some odd habits such as rabidly rubbing her hands up and down her arms as though trying to get warm or continually running her hands through her hair.

Then one day, Amanda came to me and told me she needed to talk. That was the day I did my best to be a good friend to a girl who I knew must have been going through a lot. I was prepared to listen, to be a shoulder to cry on, and to do my best to help my friend with whatever had been bothering her. It was also the day that marked the end of the happy existence I knew and began my slow descent into dark madness.

"It all started with a story I read," Amanda began.

I listened to Amanda's story of what happened. Whatever I had been expecting to hear, it hadn't been what she told me. She told me of a science fiction horror story that talked about hideous otherworldly insects or spiders that crawled over everything and everybody. That after the story had ended she could feel these creatures crawling on her.

"Well, I'm not surprised. That's a common reaction to reading about bugs," I had reasoned. "I don't think that you should be so upset that you felt that way."

"I know. That's what I thought was happening, at least at first" Amanda had said.

She went on to explain that the creepy crawly sensation had not gone away but if anything had become even more noticeable to her as time went on. Then she explained how she had started seeing

things. That had begun with continually seeing unidentifiable movement out of the corners of her eyes. When she had turned to look, nothing had been there. But as time went on she had begun to catch glimpses of *them*.

"They were just like the story described, at first I only saw them here and there. That was bad enough. But I've been seeing them more and more often. Now I see them all the time. They crawl all over everything! They're even crawling on me and you right now!" Amanda had exclaimed, tears now pouring down her cheeks.

I remembered looking down and, of course, nothing was crawling on me. This was the first time I wondered if Amanda might be having some kind of nervous breakdown or something. I remember trying to reason with her and telling her that nothing was crawling on me.

"No, they are! You just can't see them. They crawl all over everything and everybody but I'm the only one who can see them!" Amanda said, now crying harder than ever. "I should have known you wouldn't believe me. I wouldn't even believe me. I'm sorry I came, I won't bother you anymore."

Amanda then left with her head hung down and still crying. I called out to her and told her I still wanted to be friends, that I didn't want her to go, but she ignored me and walked away. Her story had gotten to me. I had even begun to feel the creepy crawly sensations she described. She seemed to believe it so much that I couldn't help in at least half-believing that what she was saying was true. I resolved to talk to Amanda about this again and to try to keep an open mind, only I never got the chance to talk to her further about it.

I never saw Amanda again after that day. Later that night, Amanda had committed suicide by hanging herself in her home. In her suicide note she had put only two words: "they crawl." Amanda's parents and the police weren't able to make sense of the note. I believed I knew what it meant, but I kept my mouth shut. The last thing I wanted to do was upset Amanda's family even more by telling them what Amanda had confided in me. I also felt more than a little guilty that I hadn't believed her. I had probably been her last hope of reaching out to someone for help and I had let her down.

Later that night I thought long and hard about the story Amanda had confided in me. She had believed it so completely that I couldn't help but wonder if it might have been true. That familiar crawling sensation came up my arms at the thought of the story she had told me. I turned on the television to try and take my mind off of Amanda and her story. But this time the creepy crawling feeling didn't go away.

"You're being stupid," I told myself. I reasoned that I was just upset over Amanda's death and that's why I felt invisible bugs crawling over my arms. It's the same feeling she had described.

Despite my efforts at denial the feeling persisted and was becoming very annoying. I kept trying to brush the invisible bugs off my arms but nothing I did made any difference. That night I had a hard time falling asleep because of the annoying sensation.

I awoke the next day to the same crawling sensations on my arms, legs, and even my hair. I rubbed my arms and legs trying to get rid of the feeling and spent more time than usual brushing my hair that morning. Nothing helped. My mom noticed how tired I looked and offered to let me stay home from school that day.

I think she must have heard me tossing and turning the night before and guessed I was having nightmares about Amanda. She wasn't wrong of course. I was very sad that Amanda was gone and I had even had nightmares, but what was really wrong was the persistent crawling sensations I had all over my body. As tempting as her offer was to stay home from school, what I wanted more than anything else was a distraction from whatever was happening to me. I told my mom that I'd rather go to school anyway and spend time with my other friends. I didn't mention anything about the story Amanda told me or the crawling sensations I had been experiencing myself.

School provided no help for distracting me. It was the sensations of things crawling on me that were distracting me from school. I found it difficult to discuss anything with my friends so I mostly just shut up and tried to listen to what they were saying. The schools lessons were even harder to focus on and I left math class, which is usually a class I do fairly well in, with no understanding of what the teacher had said during the lesson.

Days went by with no improvement. I canceled the plans I'd made to hang out with some of my friends that weekend because I no longer felt up to going out and doing things. Each night I found it increasingly hard to fall asleep. Finally whole nights would go by where I wouldn't sleep. I think it was around that time they I started seeing *them*.

It started much as Amanda had described. A sudden movement out of the corner of my eye that disappeared when I looked at it. The first time it had happened I'd blinked my eyes a few times and chalked it up to some optical illusion or maybe even a mild hallucination brought on by my tired mind. But later it happened again, and then again. One time I could have sworn I made out a tiny shape before it vanished as I looked for it.

Nearly a month went by with this happening and my friends were beginning to notice the changes in me that couldn't quite be written off as my still grieving for Amanda. My best friend Nicole had started making it a point to come by and try to talk to me. She told me that she was there for me if I needed someone to talk to. That she knew Amanda and I had been close but that I needed to move on with my life. I couldn't help noticing that Nicole was talking and acting towards me the same way I had been for Amanda. I started to get angry at Nicole and told her not to talk to me.

I knew that Nicole meant well, but I was too tired and my mind felt enormously strained these days. I knew I should apologize to Nicole and make it up to her somehow but how could I explain what was happening to her? I'm not sure I even fully understood what was happening to me.

Something else that Nicole had said chilled me to my core as well. She told me that I was starting to develop the same peculiar habits that Amanda had been demonstrating. Including constantly rubbing my arms and running my hands through my hair. Both of which I knew I had been doing to try and stop the insidious itching and crawling sensations that were always present now.

As time went on, what I thought were hallucinations started revealing themselves to be anything but. I saw one of them for the first time plain as day. They were horrible looking things. They looked and moved a bit like spiders, but they somehow looked even more horrible. Even more...well...*alien*. They had bulbous red eyes and creepy spindly legs. I couldn't see a mouth on them, but it might have been hidden within the grotesque insect like hairs that covered their bodies. I watched as the one I had spotted crawled across the floor, up a wall, and disappeared through the ceiling.

My first instinct was to issue a high pitched scream. I had to cover this up by lying to my mother that I saw a spider crawl out of the sink drain and back down again. It was a believable lie. All things considered it wasn't far from the truth. Unfortunately this wasn't the last time I would see one of those things. Although I managed to keep from screaming from that point forward I began to see them everywhere. I could see them walking on *me* even. I could avoid them sometimes if I saw them walking towards me, but as often as not they could come through a wall or through the floor and start walking on me before I had a chance to get out of the way.

Once they were on me, nothing worked to get them off. If I tried to brush them off my hand would go right through them. I couldn't step on them either for the same reason. As far as the creatures themselves were concerned, they didn't seem to care about me or even notice that I was reacting to them.

This was also true for other people. The horrible bugs didn't restrict themselves to crawling on

me. They crawled all over everything and everybody. I had to endure a history class while watching one of them continually poke it's head into my teachers mouth while she lectured. This was so horrible to watch that I had been left fighting the urge to vomit all through class, but she didn't seem to be aware that anything unusual was happening.

As you can imagine, after a few months of this I could feel my sanity slipping away. I want to tell someone but who would believe me? I could have told Nicole I suppose, but I never did. I don't think she would believe me anymore than I had believed Amanda. I wouldn't even believe myself if I hadn't been experiencing this stuff first hand. I think maybe Amanda had it right. Once these things have presented themselves to you, the only way you can escape them is to die.

That's what I'll be doing as soon as I finish writing this all down. I've already got a razor ready and I'm running a hot bath as I write. It's a longer and more detailed suicide note than what Amanda had written and it should give you all a better idea of why I'm taking this drastic measure. I don't want any of my friends or family to think that they're responsible for what I've done. Like I said in the beginning, I don't even blame Amanda.

I'll conclude this with some of my theories about what I think has happened to me. I tried to come up with ideas as to what these monstrous insect like beings were. I considered that they might be some kind of aliens that were slowly taking over the world. I'd considered that the government had released them for some reason and that most people couldn't see them. I'd even wondered if they might be from some parallel dimension or something and were crossing over to our own.

Of course, there was the easiest explanation for the creatures. If Amanda was to be believed, which I certainly did now, then the creatures had been crawling on me long before I could see them or feel them myself. It's entirely possible that they had been crawling all over everything the whole time. Maybe they had always been there and I, like Amanda, had only been able to feel them and see them as I came to believe in them more.

You know, now that I think about it... I never felt them or saw them once until I learned that they had existed. I think that was true for Amanda as well. Now I'm hoping that whoever reads this will think I'm just a crazy teenager who lost one of her friends and started having delusions. Because I think realizing that they're there and even half-believing in them is all that's needed to start feeling them and seeing them. If you've even half-believed my story, you may be starting to feel them crawl on you already.