

In Someone Else's Shadow

By Jan-Michelle Sawyer

Once upon a time there was a Little Girl whose best friend was the Shadow. She and the Shadow went everywhere, did everything with each other and were constant companions. The Little Girl and the Shadow were inseparable.

One day the Little Girl asked the Shadow to teach her something that they could do together. The Shadow was always in the habit of whispering “words of wisdom” to her young friend, except, on this day, the Shadow had nothing new to whisper.

The Shadow observed that the Little Girl had grown weary and restless. She had been content to idle away the hours of her day watching T.V. or reading magazines for entertainment, but lately all the news and entertainment seemed to be repeating its tragic tale and it all had simply grown stale for the Little Girl.

"Why don't you say something?" bellowed the Little Girl. "Teach me something new! I want to know where the stars and wind come from. I want to know what makes me sigh when I watch a sad movie, or why I am hungry to know more today than I did yesterday."

The Shadow was the Little Girl's protector and, after some reflection, the Shadow spoke: "The stars are Angels who watch over us at night. The wind comes from a cave very far away where a beautiful Princess lives. When the Princess sighs, her breath awakens the air and stirs the winds to blow. You are sad when watching a movie because you believe in the story being told.

The Little Girl was so used to hearing these kinds of answers to her questions, that for the most part, she had often thought of them as riddles. But today was different. The Little Girl was not satisfied with the Shadow's answers. All of these riddles had been told to her, but she had no stories of her own to tell. The Little Girl hungered for more.

So, The Little Girl went to her mother who was washing some clothes and she asked: "Mother...who am I?"

The Little Girl's mother looked at her daughter with a bright warm smile and said, "You are mommy's and daddy's Little Girl! Now, go and play honey, I have some chores to finish."

The Little Girl walked away from her mother happy and with a reassured smile, but she still felt that something was missing. "I must be more than just my parent's Little Girl," she sighed. "The Shadow says that I am... 'sugar and spice and everything nice'. But I don't feel like 'sugar and spice'."

The Shadow grew concerned that the Little Girl was asking so many questions. This wasn't like the Little Girl. The Shadow was very protective, and so she thought it best to take care of the Little Girl's questions once and for all.

"Little Girl...I'll tell you 'who' you are and then you won't have to ask again," the Shadow assured her.

"Please do tell me, as you have been with me since the day I was born," the Little Girl replied.

"All right then. You are a Little Girl who plays with dolls and is sweet, soft and nice. You play quietly and speak when you are spoken to. Someday, you'll be a good cook and sew your favorite clothes. And, you will always be helpful to others. It's not necessary that you go to college, as you will just get married someday and you will need to be a helper to your husband and family. Everything that you are has already been determined. You won't have to worry. Your world, Little Girl, will be safely cared for you, by others!"

With this last sentence, the Shadow pulled back her shoulders and felt very proud of herself for answering the Little Girl's questions, once and for all. After all, the Shadow's job was to make sure the Little Girl knew who she was and what was expected of her.

There was a long silence. Finally, the Little Girl spoke: "How can you tell me that this is who I am? This is someone else's description of who I am, not my own. I'm not a Little Girl who lives in someone else's Shadow!"

"Now listen here," scoffed The Shadow. "You can't question me. I have been around for eons and I know what everyone expects of you."

At this point, the Little Girl realized that the Shadow was only doing her job, just as there were Shadows for every Little Girl and every Little Boy on the earth. It is the Shadow's job to keep traditions alive.

But the Little Girl felt very sad and this sadness wasn't something that she could shake off or pretend that it didn't really bother her. The sadness stayed with the Little Girl for days and days. The Shadow was of no further help and couldn't get her little friend to accept what the Shadow said. For days, the Little Girl kept to herself and was very quiet.

One day, a friend of the Little Girl came to her house to visit. She said to the Little Girl: "A bunch of us are going to form an all-girl baseball team. Come play with us. You can be our pitcher!"

At this news, the Little Girl jumped off her bed in a flash and ran down the stair leaving her girlfriend behind. Just then, the Shadow stopped the Little Girl right at the door and said: "Little Girls should find something better to do, other than playing baseball."

The Little Girl was devastated. Playing baseball with her girlfriends was exactly what she wanted to do! The Little Girl became very angry and said to the Shadow: "You can't stop me from playing. You can't...you just can't...I won't let you!"

The little girl burst from the front door and ran as fast as she could away from the Shadow. The Shadow was, for the first time in the Little Girl's life, no longer with her.

The Little Girl ran far away from the Shadow. When she stopped running, the Little Girl sat down by a tree and started to cry. She was there for a short time, until a beautiful Deer came up to her. Gently, the Deer asked: "Little Girl, why are you crying? Are you lost?"

The Little Girl looked up to the face of the smiling Deer and in-between her tears said: "No, I'm not lost but I feel like I am lost inside. The Shadow tells me I can't do things that I know are really all-right for me to do. I feel scared

and confused. And sometimes when the Shadow tells me things about who I am...I feel so alone inside. So, I've run away from my Shadow."

"Oh yes," smiled the Deer..."we Animals know about the Shadow's of humans. They mean well, because they are just telling you what they have been told to believe in for hundreds of years. The Shadow only knows what the rules are...the right way to do something and the wrong way to do something. Shadows rarely understand that there are many ways to do and understand things."

"I hate My Shadow right now," cried the Little Girl. "I'll just run further into the forest if the Shadow tries to make me be someone, I am not."

"Hurrah for you," cheered the Deer. "But maybe there is another way you can meet the Shadow in the sun's light and still be you. Follow me into the forest. There are a few friends of mine I'd like you to meet."

The Little Girl stood up from under the tree and dried her tears. Instinctively, the Little Girl trusted the Deer who had, in an instant, felt so dear to her and vaguely familiar. Quietly, she walked with the Deer into the lush green forest.

The forest was sparkling with a vibrant kind of energy. The air was light and cool. The Little Girl thought the forest was a magical place, a place where she could think about her life and feel some peace.

After walking for a while in silence, the Deer brought the Little Girl to a stream where her friend, the Frog, was sitting on one of the rocks.

"Hello," called out the Deer. "I want you to meet a friend of mine."

"Well, any friend of the Deer's is a friend of mine," boasted the Frog. "What brings you to the forest?"

"I want to know who I am," the Little Girl proudly stated. "Do you know who I am?"

"No, I'm afraid that I don't, but maybe I can help you if we talk and listen to one another for awhile."

"Well," began the Little Girl, "I feel so guilty to be questioning the Shadow who has been with me since I was born."

"It's more than O.K. for you to question," shared the Frog. "When you question, you are questioning yourself. A self-reflective mind can question its own beliefs and understandings. And a mind that doesn't question itself, is really no mind at all."

"Yes," spoke the Deer. "There is always more to see than anyone sees, and more to know too. As you humans grow older, you learn to believe in what you want to. It's up to you to decide what is worth believing in."

The Frog spoke assuredly, "You have questions about yourself that come from your experiences while growing up. The Shadow is a very big part of your life. You learn from the Shadow, your family, friends and other people that you meet."

"When you look at something" explained the Frog, "your understanding of what you are looking at is held together by the Shadow's very presence. You see, the Shadow's beliefs are woven into what you understand."

"Maybe asking these questions is really O.K.," replied the little Girl. "I just have a strong desire to know more than what is directly in front of my nose. I want to know more than I know."

"Good for you," praised the Deer. "Your life is one experience after another, and the way that you think about your life is the way that you will live your life. If you see your life as an adventure, then it will be that for you, and so much more! Come now, let's walk farther into the forest. There are more friends of mine I want you to meet."

With that announcement, the Deer and the Little Girl said their good-byes to the Frog and proceeded to walk deeper into the forest.

"Whooo-who goes there?" called out the Owl. Startled, the Deer looked up only to see her friend the Owl, perched high above them on a tree limb.

"Hello up there," greeted the Deer.

"Oh, it's you, Deer, and who do you have there with you?"

"She is a Little Girl from town and she has some questions for you. I've told her you are very wise."

With that news, the Owl puffed up her chest and welcomed the Little Girl. "How can I help?"

"I want to know how I can learn from all that the Shadow teaches me and still be myself? I want to know who I am," the Little Girl replied.

"Ooohhh," cooed the Owl. "Learning who you are will be a very long journey. But at least you have started your journey...and that's important. Humans have a funny way of 'seeing' the world. One way they do is by making up stories about 'the way things are.' These stories get told so often, they are accepted as true, even when they may not be true! Telling these stories over and over again makes humans feel secure."

"What humans sometimes don't understand," continued the Owl, "is that the more you repeat a story, the more that story seems to be true. If you tell yourself something often enough, you begin to believe that the story is true. And, there may be lots and lots of stories yet untold."

"I can see how my world has become all of the stories told to me by the Shadow," said the Little Girl. "I always felt deep inside that there were other stories to be shared. I want to know, if there is more to know."

"You must not be 'hard' on the Shadow," said the Deer. "The Shadow is simply the keeper of stories."

"Oh, I see," said the Little Girl. "Rather than fighting with the Shadow, maybe I can listen more patiently and discover new things about myself along the way."

"Splendid," said the Owl. "You are on your way. Perhaps you and the Deer can walk up to the Rabbit's house and say 'hello'."

"We'll do just that," said the Deer. And with a few good-byes spoken, she and the Little Girl continued on their walk into the forest.

"I've got too much to do...hurry-hurry, always work to be done," complained the Rabbit.

"Hold on Mr. Rabbit! It's me the Deer and I've brought a new friend, the Little Girl, to meet you."

"Hmmmphf, are you an actual Little Girl or the possibility of being a Little Girl?" teased the Rabbit.

"What on earth do you mean?" said the Little Girl.

At that moment, the Rabbit stopped just long enough to sit up straight and with all seriousness said to the Little Girl, "Things are always more than what can be seen or measured. The Shadow tells you that you are...a Little Girl. You are a Little Girl AND you are also your own potential. You can be more than someone else's Shadow."

"For example, let's say that an ordinary window is a certain size and shape made of glass. But the window has the potential to let light through, or to break if struck by a stone," said the Rabbit.

"The Rabbit means that you humans have a way of describing yourself by a name, your age, eye color, or whether or not you are a boy or girl. This is all fine because you are actually these things. But, on the other hand, there is always your potential, such as being artistic, or quick-witted or an athletic type of person. Being a Little Girl and being athletic can both be true at the same time. Believing only in one description over the other, which the Shadow has a tendency to do, simply limits the opportunity to know who you are."

"So, you humans," continued the Deer, "have to be careful about how you describe things, such as describing who you are. You're more than a Little Girl. You are a Little Girl and actually so much more!"

With this bit of information, the Little Girl felt dizzy and overwhelmed. "It's all just so much to take in," she said to the Rabbit and the Deer.

"Don't worry," said the Deer. "Everything will present itself and become clearer when you are ready."

"Can we sit by the stream for a while," asked the Little Girl. "I would just like to sit for a while."

The Deer and Little Girl thanked the Rabbit and then walked slowly to the edge of the stream.

Several minutes passed while the Deer and the Little Girl rested quietly by the stream. Not a word was spoken.

As the Little Girl thought to herself of all that had been shared with her, she began to feel lighter. Somehow knowing that there were so many more options to learn from, the Little Girl began to see that the Shadow was an important friend to her. The Little Girl wanted to maintain contact with the Shadow, while being in touch with herself.

The Little Girl also realized that it was too easy to focus on what was wrong with the Shadow. After all, she and the Shadow had always been together for forever. And the Little Girl had not found her to be wrong or bad. The Little Girl really wanted to be partners with the Shadow in discovering all about life.

Just as the Little Girl found she could think no further, she and the Deer heard a voice from the stream. They turned to look at one another as they listened to the friendly, babbling voice...one full of light-heartedness and laughter.

"Ho-ho Little Girl," called out the stream. "I see that you have had a very full day talking and listening to your friends in the forest. Are you closer to knowing who you are?"

"Well, I know that there is a long journey ahead of me, a journey filled with many possibilities. I know that the Shadow needn't be my enemy, but instead she can be my friend, by helping me learn the traditions of my past," stated the Little Girl.

The stream bubbled happily and said: "It will take you awhile to know who you are. The Shadow has been one guide in your life and there will be many others to come your way. As long as your heart has a willingness and intention to know more than the Shadow states as being true, you will be just fine."

"Your relationship with the Shadow can now be truly creative," agreed the Deer.

"I do feel so much better," said the Little Girl. "I've learned so much today just by sharing and listening to your friendly and supportive words. Thank you so much!"

"You are very welcome," said the Deer. "It's growing late in the day. Perhaps we should walk back to the edge of the forest."

"Yes, it is time to go home," sighed the Little Girl.

Upon arriving at the edge of the forest, the Little Girl said good-bye to her newfound friend, the Deer. As she started to head home, the Little Girl looked up to see her Shadow standing right before her eyes.

"I have been worried about you," the Shadow spoke softly.

"Yes, I know," she said. "I went to the forest where I could think for a while and hear my own voice."

"Was YOUR voice kind to you?" inquired the Shadow.

Looking deeper into the Shadow's eyes, the Little Girl saw softness in the Shadow she had never seen before. She didn't know if the Shadow was really softer, or IF she was simply willing to see the Shadow differently and in a new light.

"Yes Shadow, my voice is kind to me and to you, too! There is so much I want to learn from you and I want to learn from others, as well."

"But what if these 'others' are not from our traditions," the Shadow asked in fear.

"There is room for ALL voices and we are strong enough to allow them to be heard. I'm excited about OUR future. There is so much to learn and know about one's self. Please come with me and be my partner on this journey."

And with that invitation of friendship spoken, the Little Girl and the Shadow held hands and walked together into the sun's light.

The End