

From Darkness to Light

It was nighttime, and I needed to go to our outdoor toilet. I was six and afraid of the dark. An older brother who used to take me was away in college. That left only my parents. My father, exhausted from a hard day of carpenter work, sunk into the living room rocking chair and slowly turned the pages of the evening newspaper. I was afraid of him, but I could ask Mother.

“Mama, I have to go to the toilet,” I whispered.

“Hubby, take Wayland to the toilet,” she said. “It’s dark, and he’s scared.” *She’s on my side*, I thought.

“There’s nothing to be afraid of,” he said firmly. “He can go by himself.” His words struck fear into my heart.

He dropped his newspaper to the floor, stood up, and reached me in two steps. He grabbed my arm, dragged me to the back door, and thrust me out into the outer darkness. The door slammed, and I was alone.

There was nowhere to turn, no place to find shelter. I pressed against the house. My tears gushed out. I hated my father for being so cruel and my mother for allowing him to take control.

After a few minutes, I ran out of tears. My eyes began to adjust to the night. Dim outlines began to appear. Were they ghosts? I had heard about ghosts and seen a few in movies.

No, I could make out the chinaberry tree I played under every day, its purple blossoms as sweet at night as in the day. Beyond it, the hen house began to materialize, its yard now empty. Soon, beyond the trees and the hen house, the clear outlines of the outhouse at the rear of our property emerged.

The moon was bright. There were no ghosts. I was no longer afraid.