

From Darkness to Light

It was dark outside. I needed to go to our outdoor toilet, but 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 to ask 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 sat silent for a brief moment, then dropped his newspaper to the floor, stood up, and reached me in two steps. He grabbed me by my arm, dragged me to the back door, and thrust me into the outer darkness. The door slammed, and I was alone.

I pressed against the house. 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 adjusting 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 see 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 bright moon’s clear outlines of the outhouse at the rear of our property emerged.

There were no ghosts. I was no longer afraid.

