

The Light Within Sample Chapter

She sat there hunched and crying, ashamed and broken. Fallen to her knees, curled up tight, she held her wet face in her hands. When she was a child, covering her eyes had ensured that she was invisible to the monster, but this time the ugly demon was within and therefore too close to be anything but exposed.

Autumn's cold crept all around her, yet she refused to raise her eyes. She prayed for life to cease. And cease it would, as it had been known to her.

The night closed in. The darkness engulfed her. The road was deserted, and she was alone, as she had wished.

She sat back on her heels and looked around. No audience was there to feel sorry for her, and within she felt different about the hurts that sent her walking the deserted road on this dark night. Instead of the usual judgment and anger toward her husband, she felt shame at a role she was now realizing she'd played in the night's events, perhaps in much of the drama of her life.

It had seemed simple enough, Judy reflected. Just a little help at home was all she was asking for. Why was that so difficult?

She'd had a hard day at work. So many people waited for the last minute to pay their bills, which made the mailroom crazy the first week of every month. Even the fifteen minutes she worked past quitting time didn't make her feel any more caught up than she had felt first thing in the morning.

After arriving at her house and slamming the car into park, Judy dashed onto the front porch and met Sarah, the kids' babysitter, at the door.

"Sorry for being late. I tried to rush."

"No problem. I knew you'd be along soon." Sarah didn't seem irritated, though she did appear ready and waiting to leave. "The kids are in the family room watching TV."

"How were they today?"

"Oh, you know," Sarah answered with a shrug of her shoulders.

Judy did know. Jamie and Peter were a handful. One would think at the ages of thirteen and ten they would be more mature, get along better, or ignore each other altogether. But no, they fought and teased mercilessly. It wore Judy out. She hated to admit it, but she loved her job, if for no other reason than for its therapeutic properties because it offered a respite from home.

"Thank you. I really do appreciate you watching them for me after school each day."

"That's okay. I get my homework done. It gives me something to do." She stepped out the door onto the front porch and waved good-bye.

It was dinnertime, half past six, and Judy had no idea what to get the kids to eat. She stepped into the family room to say hi and stopped short. There were candy wrappers spilling off the coffee table, two empty bowls laced with ice cream residue, and a large bowl half filled with popcorn, the rest of which was strewn about the floor. The kids were sprawled out on the couch cushions, which had been taken off the couch and stacked up on the floor.

Judy was tired and irritated as she spoke. "Anybody hungry for dinner?"

"Nope," the kids answered in unison.

Peter looked up and, taking the lollipop out of his mouth, greeted his mother. “Hi, Mom.” Just as quickly Jamie kicked him. “Ow!” He immediately rubbed his sore leg.

“Shh, I can’t hear the show.”

Judy shook her head slowly in disbelief. *How can this be?* she wondered as she turned and left the room. She couldn’t make them respect each other, and they obviously didn’t respect her. Fighting the temptation to begin screaming at them for their obvious screwed-up behavior, she opted to try to relax and called Rich, her husband, instead.

“Hi, honey. I just got home and wondered if you’ll be here for dinner tonight.”

“No, not tonight,” Rich answered quickly.

“Are you sure? The kids aren’t hungry. What would you like? I’ll cook.” Judy felt as though she was begging, and that wasn’t sitting right in her gut.

“No. Really, I’ve got a lot of work to do here.” Rich was insistent, which was just the trigger Judy needed.

“Okay. You know what? I’m sick of living like this!” She could feel her temper rising along with her voice. “I worked hard all day too, but I come home and deal with these rotten kids. Don’t you think it’s time you helped out around here too?”

There was silence on the phone line, but only briefly. “Okay, Judy. If it will make you happy, I’ll come home for dinner. I don’t really care what you cook. Anything will be fine. I’ll be there in about half an hour.”

Rich’s calm tone did nothing to ease Judy’s mood. She hung up the phone and went to rummage in the refrigerator. Upon opening the refrigerator door, she saw what looked like juice spilled throughout. The condiments were all sitting in a puddle of red, which was still dripping down the back wall and forming a pool under the see-through crisper.

Judy gritted her teeth, but even that could not contain the wail that came up from deep within her. “Jamie! Peter! Who made this mess?”

Rolling her eyes and balling her fists, she felt as though she might explode. The kids were heard running up the stairs, giggling loudly as they went. Suppressing the urge to follow but fearful of her own actions, Judy focused her aggression on the task before her. She pulled all the contents out of the refrigerator, dripping juice all across the floor as she loaded them on the table. The liquid that laced the bottom of the jars and bottles now was spreading across the table to engulf Peter’s school field-trip forms, yesterday’s mail, and the pictures she took of some beautiful foliage, which she had printed to show Kasey at work. Judy was grabbing towels and muttering angrily as she rushed around the kitchen chaotically.

Rich stepped in the door, none the wiser. Immediately Judy snapped her attention on him. “See what the kids have done? Like I don’t have enough to do around here? Do you think I need to clean up messes like this?”

“What happened?” Rich asked as he stood in the entryway looking in.

“How should I know? Nobody has admitted anything to me!” She waved an angry finger toward the family room. “They ran in the opposite direction when I asked!”

“Do you want some help?” Rich took a timid step toward the table and picked up a dripping newspaper.

Judy looked at the paper then at Rich’s face. She was breathing heavily, and her face was red. “Don’t just stand there letting it drip! Get something to clean it up. You are

such an idiot!" She threw an already stained and wet hand towel in his general direction. It landed on the floor by his feet.

Rich put the paper back down on the wet table. He looked at his wife with an expression of amazement, which further infuriated her.

"What? What? Okay then, don't bother helping. Just stand there like an idiot and stare at me!" Judy resumed her frantic attempts at cleaning up the mess while continuing to mutter under her breath.

Rich walked through the room to get away from the situation but paused momentarily at the doorway. "You are a piece of work, Judy. You really are."

His words hurt, and in response she turned and charged at him, stopping short by a foot. She spoke through clenched teeth as she fought back the tears that threatened to show her weaker side. "Do you really think so? Well, why don't you take care of things around here for a change then? I'm done!"

Judy turned and stormed back through the kitchen and out the front door, leaving Rich to care for the kids and the house on his own.

It was dark as she drove away, yelling at the emptiness around her. She drove aimlessly as the uncontrollable tears blurred her vision. She screamed out at all the hurts and frustrations that made her hate being home.

Now, hours later, as she sat reflecting on tonight's fighting, she felt clarity taking hold.

Makeup was smeared on her face, the face she applied for her audience. It was part of her image, an image meticulously tended. She was loved and sought out by many, yet they never really knew her. They laughed at her quips and comments about others' failures. Oh, she was funny. They had compassion for her frustrations and offered her advice and help, which she never accepted. *Pride*, she called it, a play by the martyr in reality.

Within the walls of their house, her husband and children had a different view of Judy. This had always made her angry. She felt constant irritation toward those she believed encouraged her worst to show.

It was what she chose to be that fed this very attitude. The overscheduled lifestyle that brought her much praise by outsiders always left her short on time and short on patience at home and with herself. Her insides constantly churned with anxiety, stress, and fear. It seemed the simplest of matters, if not played out as she planned, would threaten to push her over the edge.

She was envied by many, yet she was her own failure. The energies spent, the sleep lost, the love now seemingly nonexistent, all cloaked her in darkness. She was ready to give up, for try as she might, things didn't seem to be turning out as she had wanted.

She had done everything for her family. She did the laundry, the cooking, and the cleaning. The kids didn't have to lift a finger. She ran all the errands and held a full-time job. No matter how much she did for her family, they did not seem to appreciate her or her efforts.

She wiped her cheeks, feeling chilled as the night wore on, but was not ready to rise and face the messy home life she had just run from. She felt compelled to remain, so she leaned against the trunk of the nearest tree and pondered the odd sensation that was now filling her in her darkest moment—peace.

It was not a familiar sensation to her and could only be explained as emptiness—yet not empty at all. In fact, it was quite the opposite. It was a fullness that pushed out all thoughts, concerns, and fear. It left just being.

Not wanting this sensation to disappear, she sat quietly and, closing her eyes, breathed slowly, in and out, in and out. Chills ran down her spine, and she felt almost giddy.

Oddly enough, she had a sense of what this was. This was how powerful and ever present God was. That still, small voice was now able to pierce her darkness. She finally had reached the end of herself, and there he was.

A memory, a time when Judy was a child, popped into her head. Her best friend had attended Sunday school every week. Judy had spent many weekends at her house, so she was exposed to the wonderful stories of the Bible they taught in those classes. She thought back to those stories now. Only bits and pieces could be conjured up in her mind, but Judy was sure there were messages within those stories that could prove quite helpful now. Perhaps the peace she had always sought for her home life would be found there, rather than in her own futile efforts.

After some time, Judy rose, and shedding the ashes of her life, she walked back down the road with a new outlook and great hope. She felt unbeatable. After a quarter-of-a-mile hike in the moonlight, she climbed into the car she had abandoned. She sat there quietly then spoke in a hushed tone, “You have me on unfamiliar ground. I feel like a different person. Nothing has changed, but everything has changed. Help me to hold on to this peace, to you, as I return home to my screaming kids and frustrated husband.”

Judy felt his peace wrap around her in response. She chuckled quietly at the thought that she had just traded her heavy load for this lightweight cloak of protection. It seemed quite unfair, but she knew she needed it to walk back in the door.