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SHAKE MY HANDLE

“Go away,” she moaned, swatting the dark air with her hand.

Dr. Wendy Peters had had very few good night’s sleeps in the past year. She was on call 24/7, it seemed, which she hadn’t expected when she entered the business.

Something shook her again.

Dr. Wendy spent her waking hours listening to the horror stories some people lived and to the horror stories some people thought they lived. Unfortunately, it always seemed to be a majority of the latter, and that was much harder to sort out. It didn’t help when one of these cases followed her home.

“Mommy,” Benny said, shaking Dr. Wendy again.

“Go back to bed, Ben,” she mumbled.

“It’s wet,” Benny said.

“Again, Ben?” Dr. Wendy rolled over to face Benny and propped her head up on her elbow. “If you can wake up to tell me you wet the bed, why can’t you wake up to use the toilet?”

“I don’t like how he speaks to me,” Benny said.

Dr. Wendy rolled her eyes. “You don’t like how the toilet speaks to you?”

“Yeah, he scares me.”

“Ben, he, it’s a toilet. He doesn’t speak.”

“Yes, he does. And he laughs.”

Dr. Wendy rolled her eyes in the dark room again, thinking of the samples locked up in her office. “Go back to bed, Ben.”

“I can’t, it’s wet,” Benny said.

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Dr. Wendy sighed and got up. “I should have you change your own sheets, Ben. This has been going on for a year now. You didn’t used to wet the bed.”

“We didn’t used to have Bark as our toilet.”

“Bark? You gave the toilet a name?” Dr. Wendy took the last set of sheets out of the linen closet. She would have to find time to do laundry again.

“I didn’t name him. He told me his name and then he laughed at me.” Benny stood next to Dr. Wendy, who looked from Ben up to the shelf that had held the sheets.

“When you’re taller, you’ll be changing your own sheets,” she told him.

They walked down the dark hallway. The cold wooden floor creaked gently beneath their bare feet.

Dr. Wendy stripped the bed of its soiled sheets, scrunching her nose at the pungent smell of urine. “Ben, this is ridiculous,” she declared, throwing the dirty sheets into the hallway. She tucked the new ones into the mattress. “C’mon,” Dr. Wendy said, motioning Benny to follow her. He followed and they went towards the bathroom.

Dr. Wendy took the three short steps to the yellowed-porcelain toilet. The screws that fastened the lid to the bowl and the screws that secured the bowl to the floor were red with rust. The tiled floor was stained a dark brownish-yellow around the bowl and yellow lines of rusted water streaked down the tank from under the lid. Benny stopped in front of the doorway.

“Come here, Ben. Hello, Toilet,” Dr. Wendy said. She paused a moment and continued, “Ben, it’s a toilet. It’s just a toilet.”

“His name is Bark, Mom,” Benny said. He still didn’t enter the bathroom.

“Hello, Bark,” said Dr. Wendy. She thought for a moment, *I should be sleeping. Three in the morning is not a time to be talking to a toilet. Then again, it’s more reasonable than*

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*talking to a toilet at three in the afternoon.* “Are you satisfied? Try it, Ben, see that he’s just a toilet.”

“I don’t want to talk to him,” Benny said.

“Ben, stop being ridiculous. He doesn’t talk. Toilets don’t talk. Now go to bed and tomorrow please just use the toilet. I don’t want to be woken up again.”

“But he scares me.”

Dr. Wendy sighed. “If it will help you get over this ridiculous phase, wake me up when you have to go, *before* you go, and I’ll make sure he doesn’t talk to you.” Dr. Wendy took the three steps to the doorway. “Now, go back to bed.”

Benny led Dr. Wendy back to his bed and she watched him secure himself underneath his covers. Then Dr. Wendy got back into her bed, rolled over, and fell back asleep.

When a lady tells you that she’s being followed by a creepy man, there is a chance she is right. When a lady tells you that she’s being followed by a three-headed man with the neck of a giraffe and the body of a Siamese cat and whiskers that make the Nile River seem the length of a shoelace, there is no chance she is right. That was Dr. Wendy’s expert opinion anyway.

Dr. Wendy sighed and rolled over. “Go back to bed, Ben.”

Benny nudged her again. “Mom, I have to go to the bathroom.”

“So go, Ben,” Dr. Wendy said.

“But you said I could wake you,” Benny said.

“You did, Ben, I’m awake.”

“But the toilet scares me,” Benny said.

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Dr. Wendy sighed and sat up. "Fine, let's go."

"Will we go to a different toilet?" Benny asked hopefully.

"No, Ben. You need to get over this and tonight is the night." Dr. Wendy took Benny by the hand and they walked across the old wooden floor to the bathroom. "Do your thing, Ben," Dr. Wendy said.

"I'm scared," Benny said.

"He's not talking, is he? I don't hear him, Ben. Do you hear him?"

"No," said Benny.

"So go," Dr. Wendy said, gently nudging Benny through the doorway.

"I'm scared," Benny said again.

"I'm right here, Ben. If he starts talking, I'll ask him to stop."

"But what if he doesn't listen?"

"Ben...", Dr. Wendy said sternly. She began tapping her foot, signaling her growing impatience.

Benny tiptoed carefully and cautiously to the toilet. He paused for a moment next to the bowl. He reached out two fingers and slowly lifted the lid. It creaked and Benny jumped. "I'm scared."

"Just go already."

Benny was shaking as he sat down on the toilet. "I'm scared."

"Hurry up, Benny, I would like to go back to sleep."

There was a tentative tinkling in the bottom of the bowl. It finished and all was silent for a moment. "I'm scared."

"Enough already, Benny. If you're finished, get up, close the lid, and shake my handle."

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Benny jumped up and rushed to the sink.

“Flush the toilet, Benny.”

“I’m scared,” Benny said. “I’m scared.”

Dr. Wendy didn’t say anything.

“Flush the toilet, Benny. Shake my handle.”

“Mom, I’m scared,” Benny shouted, grabbing onto Dr. Wendy’s robe.

“You need to flush the toilet.”

Dr. Wendy reached into the bathroom with Benny whimpering at her side, his knuckles whitening as he tightened his grip on her robe. Dr. Wendy slowly stretched out two fingers towards the flush handle. “I’m scared.” Dr. Wendy shook the handle, the toilet flushed, and Benny wet the bed.