

The Robbery

by Emily K. Kraus

I watched the man retreat from my room, down the narrow corridor into the hallway. I experienced a lifetime of nightmares in those seconds. His emotionless black face held a glazed expression, only the tribal knife markings on his cheeks stood out.

I can never forget 5 o'clock that afternoon. Dusk arrived picking the wind up outside my open window swirling humid air around my room. I sat on the floor intent on studying for my Chemistry final, completely oblivious to the strange voices and running feet beneath my windowsill.

It wasn't strange in the Ivory Coast, where my parents were missionaries for 12 years, to have the native people intimately involved in our lives. I was constantly surrounded by people who spoke different languages and practiced different customs.

A chill ran through my bones but I dismissed it as the smell of approaching rain filled my lungs. The darkness permeated everything as the sun continued to settle. Then I heard the doorbell ring. A few moments later a soft tapping at my door followed by my father's soothing voice brought my head up from my textbook.

Shock flooded my system as I felt the reality of the moment like an unexpected slap in the face. "Emily, we are being robbed at gunpoint, I need you to stay calm, everything will be okay." My father's voice was steady, reassuring and gentle as the man pushed him aside to allow himself into my room. The gun waved dangerously in his hand as he rummaged through my things snatching my cell phone off my desk. I heard my father say in French "This is my little girl's room, you won't find anything of value here."

A wave of shocked emotion ran up and down my spine as the man nudged my father back out the door to invade my home. Panic filled my mind as it raced over what happened. "This can't be real." I said over and over to myself. I had stared at the man's face in helpless curiosity and stunned fear. Would he return to rape and kill me? Would I ever see my dad again?

I felt a rush of intense love for my father as I watched him vanish from my sight. Would my father ever know just how much his baby girl loved him? I remained paralyzed at my desk unsure of what to do. I saw my world collapse around my very being, snatching away the people I loved most. Why was everything so quiet? The minutes kept passing slowly, but I still heard nothing.

Was my mother being hurt? Had my father been shot? I could have sworn I hadn't heard a shot. I took one pleading look at my useless mutt who was snuggled up in my bed. Her ears were perked and alert. I had completely forgotten about her existence—some guard dog. Instead of being angry with her, I found solace in her companionship. Her body relaxed and I wondered if I should venture out into the hallway. I took a few cautious steps. I held my breath and tiptoed out into the great unknown.

I continued to walk until I heard a voice close by call my name. "Emily, Emily are you there?" It was my mother's sweet voice choked with panic. "Mom?" I squeaked out. "Come unlock the bedroom door."

My whole family was locked in my parent's bedroom with the key miraculously still in the keyhole. I turned the knob and burst into uncontrollable sobs as my mother embraced me. I hadn't known what to expect and was overwhelmed by my love for my family.

"Why didn't you come for me?" I asked angrily knowing that there was nothing my family could have done. My mom started sobbing because I was the only family member who had been separated from them. She thought I had been taken away with the men. The men escaped with the little money we had on us and a few treasures.

They stole so much more than worldly possessions. After that experience my home felt like a glass enclosure waiting to be violated again. Everything would take me back to that night. My head would hit my pillow overwhelmed by the sound of my buzzing air conditioner, roosters that crowed all night long, homeless cat meows, obnoxious African tunes blaring from the neighbors defunct stereo and the inescapable vulnerability that I felt.

The one thing that remained untouched was my trust in the Lord. I asked my father what had made him so calm and steady. He said he felt the Lord's presence fill our home as soon as the evil had entered followed by a supernatural peace. I claimed the verses found in Psalm 91, "...He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield...you will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness." The Lord is my stronghold and my deliverer. In the midst of tragedy, fear, and overwhelming loss, that truth has become life to me.