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The silence seemed out-of-place as I unlocked the iron gate and started up the walkway to my apartment. Usually the dogs next door barked at me, but they weren't in their yard. I had been ringing in the New Year at my friend Rilla's flat, and it was about an hour into 1998. Rilla's landlord had closed his dog up inside the house because the fireworks frightened him. He claimed that all Hungarians did the same on New Year's Eve.

I had my hand extended, key ready, reaching for my doorknob, when I noticed. There was no doorknob. A square hole had been neatly cut out of my front door. The door swung freely, and I glimpsed the kitchen cabinets standing wide open. That's when my mind finally connected with reality.

Someday I will live in a place where there are no thieves.

I had been robbed.

Afraid to enter alone, I raced next door to Agota and Gezá's flat and pounded on their door. Gezá opened up, and I blurted out what had happened. He quickly telephoned the police.

"Do not go inside. Wait here," he said. "The thieves may still be there. The police will come soon."

Agota made us coffee, and I waited in their kitchen. My grandmother's diamond ring filled my thoughts. Before moving, my parents had given me my inheritance from their safe deposit box, thinking the ring would be safer with me in Budapest than inside their RV during their cross-country travels. The engagement ring reminded me of my sweet grandmother. Made about 1925, the diamonds sat up tall in their platinum setting. Grandmom had never owned anything lovelier.

I proudly wore it everyday, except for this day. The ring had begun to catch on my gloves, and I feared the prongs had loosened. I needed my gloves in the chilly night air, so I took my ring off before I left, setting it on my dresser. It would have been the first thing any thief would notice.

Still, it didn't hurt to pray. As I sipped the coffee, I repeated in my mind, "God, please cause Grandmom's ring to still be there."

The police didn't arrive for almost an hour, about 2:00 in the morning. Gezá explained the situation to the two officers and translated for me. They told us to stand outside as they entered the apartment to check each room. Even if the thieves had somehow missed the ring, the policemen could easily have scooped it into a pocket. I had to trust the officers.



"Where Thieves Do Not Break In" is excerpted from Taryn's new book, [We Wait You: Waiting on God in Eastern Europe](#)



"We wait you. Why did you take so long?"

Taryn R. Hutchison was asked this poignant question after her lecture on democracy to a class in Bucharest, Romania. Communism had just fallen.

"We waited 45 years for the Americans to come and set us free. We used to say that even if you were coming in a wheelbarrow, you should be here by now."

The Americans had come at last, but it was to offer a different kind of freedom—freedom that lasts forever.

Inspiring and with humorous moments, *We Wait You: Waiting on God in Eastern Europe* is an uplifting story of hearts transformed as political systems are rebuilt. Unlike any missionary story

After several minutes, the detective arrived. He beckoned to us to follow him inside. He led me into each room and asked me what was missing. Grandmom's ring was not there. In fact, my entire jewelry box had been taken. My laptop computer and printer belonging to the office, my CD player, microwave, camera, television, and video player were all gone.

Every drawer sat ajar. The thieves had carefully combed through all my belongings. My credit cards from the States, useless in Budapest, were laid out on my bed in a straight, orderly line. Department stores and gas companies that didn't exist in Eastern Europe had been passed up. Luckily, my Visa card remained safe inside my purse.

The officers dusted the entire house for fingerprints, while the detective motioned to us to sit at the kitchen table. He wrote a few notes and then looked up, studying me.

"It was the Russian Mafia."

"How do you know?" I asked through Gezá.

"The Mafia only takes electronics and jewelry. They steal items that can be carried easily and sold quickly. If it was gypsies, they would have trashed the place and taken clothes or anything that caught their eye. The door was cut professionally, one of their trademarks. The Mafia comes in groups of at least three. One person is the look-out. The others go through each room methodically. They do not rush. They left through the back door."

I had noticed that the patio door stood wide open.

"Do you know anyone in the Mafia?" he asked me.

"No, of course not," I said. Gezá assured him I was a good, quiet girl, and I did not run in those circles.

"If you had been home, they would have killed you."

After almost three hours, the police officers left as the new day began to break. Gezá, who had stayed up all night to help, instructed me to push my hutch against the door after he left. I could no longer lock myself in. I couldn't warm up in my flat either. All night, both doors had remained open. I cranked up the heat, put on my warmest layers, and burrowed under my down comforter.

My first thoughts were of thankfulness that my treasure wasn't tied up in things but sat secure in heaven. Someday I will live in a place where there are no thieves. I praised God that He had protected me and my neighbors from harm, glad I hadn't come home early from the party. I thanked Him by faith, remembering that I am to express gratitude in all things, affirming that He somehow allowed this to enter my life through the filter of His great hands of love. I cried as I thanked the Lord for the gift of letting me borrow Grandmom's beautiful ring for all those months, thanking Him especially for having been blessed with such a sweet grandmother.

I recited words of comfort that dwelled deep inside, as my eyes refused to close. "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

His Word calmed my heart. I rehearsed the well-worn promises of Psalm 23, scrunching lower under my comforter, wrapping myself in God's love.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me. They rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Thou hast anointed my head with oil. My cup

you've read before, it is told by a regular person attempting to manage real life—mud and all—in a foreign culture while struggling to wait on God.

We are launching the new [WOTH Writer's Blog](#) with Taryn Hutchison as our first guest host! She will be covering the many aspects to "Writing Your Story" with each of her weekly posts in November. Learn how to give voice to your stories from a published author. Get inspired to write by joining Taryn and others on the [WOTH Writer's Blog](#).

overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

As sleep eluded me, hot tears escaped from my eyes, and my body convulsed in silent sobs.

I walked around in shock all day, never once thinking about eating. I was sure the burglary had been a nightmare. I only had to look at the hole in my front door or the black smear of fingerprint goop on every surface to realize that wasn't true.

I thought surely God would prove Himself mighty by returning my ring to me. Maybe the thieves would be apprehended and dramatically turn from crime, giving their lives to Christ. That's how I would write that script. Perhaps one day I would spot the ring glistening along the side of the road as I walked to the bus. I had read of people finding a family heirloom washed up on the sands of the beach. God would do the same for me, I just knew it.

Throughout the day, I kept remembering other pieces of jewelry that had been stolen. I thought of my first ring, a heart-shaped birthstone, given to me by my aunt in elementary school and re-sized recently. My uncle who died young had chosen a bracelet for me in Korea, where he served as peacekeeper after the war. I had nothing else from Uncle Wade. An old boyfriend had given me a jade set. I didn't care about him anymore, but I liked remembering that, once upon a time, I had a boyfriend. My other grandmother's pearl necklace, lapis earrings I bought in Turkey, a fake ruby ring I bartered for in the Cotswolds, my teenage charm bracelet, all were gone. Each piece reminded me of a certain person or a distinct time in my life. The Mafia hadn't just taken my jewelry; they had taken pieces of my heart. Each memory stabbed me afresh.

Agota stopped by to check on me. I told her that I had hope that the ring would turn up. Maybe the thieves had a hole in their bag, and it fell out in our yard. Later I stood at the window and saw her four little girls combing the yard with a rake and a flashlight. They were looking for my ring. The girls did find my useless can of pepper spray, a joke left behind by my burglars.

The police asked me to come in to file an official report and bring a complete list of every missing object—but not today or tomorrow because of the New Year's holiday. They wouldn't start searching until after I filed the report. When we arrived, the police told Gezá and me that the Mafia works quickly, and since my robbery happened three days before, they were sure my things had been sold. My frustration mounted. So why did they make me wait? They suggested I search pawn shops myself. The detective asked me again if I had any connections to the Mafia.

I did. I had forgotten. Eszter, the Hungarian secretary in our office, had recently separated from a man involved in the Mafia. Janos had served as a liaison to get our cars fixed. I had turned over my Passat to him to work on the electric windows. When he brought it back, along with a hefty bill, I noticed that it had been driven hundreds of kilometers.

I called Janos in to my office and confronted him. I told him I would warn the others. He cursed at me. He made a lot of money from the Americans, and he didn't want to be exposed and lose the income. I told Janos I didn't appreciate his language and asked him to leave. As I held the door open for him, Grandmom's ring caught his eye.

“That is a beautiful ring. How much is it worth?” he asked.

“It's none of your business,” I said.

Eszter begged me not to turn in Janos. I relented, against my better judgment. Janos's disgruntled clients had thrown rocks, covered in death threats, through her window. I didn't want to add to the difficulties for her and the children.

The police suspected the Mafia had been watching me for weeks. Once again I had been stalked and violated. Something had been taken from me by force, against my will.

I couldn't sleep for weeks. Even after my landlord finally replaced the lock and installed an alarm, I still didn't feel safe. I couldn't let down my guard at home, still shaken from the trauma and saddened by the loss.

I e-mailed friends all over the world, asking them to pray for me. They responded immediately. God wrapped His arms of love tightly around me through my friends, family, and ministry partners. They felt heartsick for me and understood my sleeplessness. Many validated the fact that I needed to grieve this loss. Only a few people made unnecessary comments like, "Look on the bright side. It's only things."

I knew I had lost things and not people. I knew there is no comparison between a robbery and a death. But I still felt legitimately sad and uneasy.

Teammates invited me to their homes for dinner, trying to coax me away from the scene of the crime. I didn't know why, but I didn't want to go. One family came to my place with a fondue pot and all the fixings. We had a wonderful evening together. They asked me all about the robbery. Their son played my piano as the cheese bubbled. We laughed together and had a delightful conversation. They truly ministered to me.

Afterwards, I thought about what they had done for me. They helped me feel like my home was a good place to be. I enjoyed being at home that evening. They brought laughter back. I needed to talk about what had happened, and they helped me process it. I realized the reason I didn't want to go out is that I didn't want to come home alone again, after dark. Logical or not, I feared a repeat of the other night.

My friends knew what I needed, because they had been robbed themselves. I tucked this away in my heart to be able to pull it out someday myself, to comfort someone else in need.

About six weeks after the break-in, I had a break-through time alone with God. I forgave everyone with whom I felt angry. I absolved the thieves, the police who didn't work very hard on my case, my landlord who took his time fixing my lock, my teammates who didn't demonstrate care for me, people who made stupid and hurtful comments, and myself for taking the ring off that night. I even forgave God for allowing my precious things to be taken when He knew I would have to deal with it alone. I released healing tears and felt a burden removed from my shoulders.

I had moved through most of the stages of grief: denial, depression, anger, and now acceptance. I had skipped the bargaining phase. I guess I knew I could never be good enough to live up to a bargain with God, so I didn't try.

As I traveled the next few months, the staff I visited ministered to me in practical ways. Krystyna helped me buy my first new earrings in Poland, a crystal pair that cost about five dollars. Velislava and I went shopping in Bulgaria for a marcasite ring. Nikki helped me pick out a handmade silver bracelet in Albania. My new jewelry meant almost as much to me as the pieces I had lost. It represented these new friends and their countries which I dearly loved.

I had wept with the staff for a few years now as they poured out the struggles of their hearts to me. This year they cried with me.



Author bio: Taryn is the author of **We Wait You: Waiting on God in Eastern Europe**. She served on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ for 21 years, living in Eastern Europe for 10 of those years. For the past seven years, she has been an administrative assistant at Golden Gate Seminary near San Francisco. Her favorite book recommendation: **The Sacred Romance: Drawing Closer to the Heart of God** by Curtis and Eldridge. And her favorite Christmas cookie is the chocolate kiss cookie.



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