

# “What Matters Most”

by

Marie Chatfield

The last thing you expect on the first Sunday of the new year – a sunny, peaceful kind of day – is to discover that your fully-packed car is no longer fully-packed. The shattered glass on the driveway is as shocking as it is revealing. At first, you don't believe it. This sort of thing doesn't happen to you: it happens to nameless people in police reports and the sheets of data that the neighborhood association passes out while trying to garner support for 24-hour patrols. Your car isn't really empty.

Then you realize – of course it is, you idiot.

But surely someone just woke up earlier than you and unpacked the car, an act of unexpected kindness. Then again, as you look and see the glass shards cover the bare back seat – where your sister slept last night with little room to sit among the suitcases and stuff your family has amassed – the truth cannot be ignored.

You think about what was lost – stolen – and it sits on your chest like a weight. The new laptop you received for Christmas, the one you barely had a chance to use. Clothes, medicines, books. But what makes you burst into tears is this: “My cowboy boots and Bible!” Two presents from your grandparents, back when they were still plural in life and name. You spoke in church once, and even then you said that your Bible was your most valuable possession. Now it is gone, in the hands of someone who doesn't appreciate its true value, the significance of its weight and the love between its pages. You can buy another Bible, but you can't buy the inscription on the front cover, the highlighted passages, the memories of holding that Bible and crying for your dead grandfather.

You want to put a sign on the front yard, one that reads, “To whomever broke into our car, please return the Bible. Just put it on the front step, no questions asked.” But even you know that's silly, and that it won't happen. You want to call your grandmother and cry, but instead you go inside the house where your family is holding an emergency meeting.

The four of you sit, slightly shell-shocked, and think of all the things you could have done differently. When you arrived at 1:00 AM, fresh from a wedding in Corpus, none of you were thinking clearly. The neighbor had parked his car in the driveway, like you suggested, but it was

blocking the way to the garage. You could have moved the other cars and put the loaded Suburban in the garage where it belonged, but you were tired. You wanted your beds. So you left the fully packed car three feet from the street, right next to the streetlight in full view, and you went to bed carrying only a few random items.

Now you take stock of what you brought in and what they left, and you don't know whether to laugh or cry or thank God for small mercies. You just happened to take in your purse, so your wallet wasn't stolen like your father's. Your sister left hers, along with her iPod, in the pocket behind the driver's seat; the thieves must not have found them, or those possessions too would be gone. They left the homemade kolaches your mother labored in the kitchen over – “They have bad taste!” she declares with a smile. Your father's dirty laundry lies on the ground next to the dog's leash and the broken shards of glass. They left your new coats, both of them. “Idiots,” you mutter, “that's a \$200 coat from Banana Republic!” But you are glad they left it, just as you are glad that your sister didn't pack her beloved bass guitar, only the small ukulele she's had for less than a week. “I hope they get some use out of it,” she says.

Your father makes calls, canceling his credit cards and discovering that they made a charge – 5:30 AM at the Citgo 5.7 miles from your house. Your mother finds the owner's instruction manual to a 1993 Ford Bronco laying in the gutter, three feet from the car, but there's no specific vehicle information inside. You picture a Bronco loaded down with your family's suitcases, and wonder how it all fit. Everyone has lost something: your father's golf clubs, your mother's cookbooks, your sister's favorite colored pencils, your scarf from Breckenridge. And then there is all the precious effort and time that is lost – on your mother's work laptop and in your sister's annotated copy of *Frankenstein*, and on your USB drive that has your entire computer science dossier. You go through stages, anger and frustration. Your father says, “We could have moved one car, and we wouldn't have this mess.” There are millions of things you could have done, should have done, would have done if you knew. But you didn't, which is why you say, “We learn.”

And you do. Because when it's all said and done, after the police show up and don't even take fingerprints then leave with the glass still on the driveway, you realize something. You don't really miss the laptop, the clothes, the rest of your stuff. You regret losing your boots and your Bible, but they can be replaced, and your grandmother can write a new inscription inside the front cover. You know that you will realize the extent of what was lost in the days to come, understand how much work and how many favorite shirts are gone forever. But you also know that when you go to church this morning, you will sit together as a family and thank God that you are all safe. You kiss your mother on the cheek and say, “I love you,” and she smiles as she repeats it back. And then you go put on jeans instead of your normal dress-and-heels and you head to church, leaving the scene of the crime behind you.