

a COSMIC
COLLISION *with*
FAITH

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DEDICATION

For my girls, Teeya and Tyra—
Thank you for being my biggest fans.

You are my greatest gifts.
You remind me that with a sincere trust in God.
All things are possible.
His Grace, His Mercy, and His Favor
Makes the impossible, possible

For my sisters, Pam and Wanda—
Thank you for being my compass.
You grounded me when I wanted to fly higher and faster than life allows.

“I genuinely wanted to give all the glory to God—that was my heart’s desire. I knew that without His Grace and Mercy, none of it would have been possible. But somewhere, tucked quietly beneath my gratitude, was a small voice whispering for recognition. Not from others, but God Himself. I had poured myself out—trying to stay within His will. Yet, though I wanted, desired to lay it all at His feet—trust Him, a part of me still hoped He saw how hard I had tried. It wasn’t pride exactly, but a yearning to know that the efforts mattered—I mattered!”

Clarice Taylor

Introduction

The small group of soldiers tied their tents together and nestled them between the trees. The intense humidity had given way to treacherous rains in the region. Paul had been on other missions, but this would be the first one of this type. It was simple, standby to secure the drones, for both preflight and recovery. The squadron was under his command, and he recognized what that meant.

“It is going to be a long night, no denying that.” Paul began speaking, trying to find the words that would instill confidence, as if he really was in control. “Do not forget, your job at this moment is to wait. Actively wait. We are always ready, regardless of the circumstances. We are the best at what we do! So, let's tighten up, and stay dry. Get a couple of hours of sleep in while we can.”

As the rain continued, each soldier blended into the backdrop of the jungle, retreating within to their own mental thoughts.

Separating the sounds of thunder from the explosions caused by the drone attack was unsettling. Late into the night, they could still hear the drones as they took flight toward their intended targets. The distant horizon's dull flashes of light from the rockets hitting their targets cascaded across the cover of darkness. The night was endless.

Then, just before daybreak, the rain stopped. The quietness of the jungle set in. The sound of impacts slowed. And after several hours, though each one felt like an endless day, the brutal signs of destruction ceased.

“Let's go!” Paul said as he gathered his gear.

The unit moved with resentment. Not towards Paul or the mission. But the call of the jungle was not a very forgiving one. The terrain, along with the hidden dangers of the relentless predators—snakes, spiders, giant mosquitoes, and other creatures made the brave soldiers want to go screaming through the dense vegetation.

The air was thick with the scent of wetness. Foliage mingled with the smoke from the blast extended for miles. They had been walking for most of the day, engaging in small talk, joking around while still being on alert. There was always someone watching, ahead and behind as they etched their way closer to their target.

The sun had begun to set when they came upon a small village. Instinctively, everyone stopped. Laid out in front of them with the setting sun casting shadows over the horrific landscape, they saw bodies. They were scattered everywhere. Spread along the dirt roads that connected the small stone houses, were lines of people that had been shot in their backs, falling in their tracks as they tried to get away.

There was nothing else out of place. There were no signs of conflict, no apparent signs of struggle. Just dead bodies...which made the bloody bodies even more evident. The smell of the jungle was no match for this. The aroma of death overtook them.

"I don't understand. I thought it was supposed to be empty." One of the soldiers said not recognizing how much his voice carried through the still air.

Paul responded in a subdued tone, "This is not the results of the drone strike. We are too far south. The village is still a few more miles ahead. Pair up, start looking for survivors."

"Survivors? Not likely."

Even with the latest technology, the search for any survivors seemed to be hopeless. But that didn't stop Paul. He knew what it felt like to be hurt and alone. The team continued to walk every inch of the small village. The more area they explored, the more they realized the attack had occurred only hours beforehand.

There could still be survivors.

Paul suddenly started to move with a sense of urgency. His heart pounding in his chest, mind occupied with the words of a small prayer. This eerie inner silence grew within him.

He then made this glaring observation. ‘Where are the men?’

“Keep your eyes open.” Speaking to the unit, with a cautionary tone. “We don’t know what to expect.” Paul was trying to alert them of something more. The only bodies visible were women and children.

That’s when he heard it, a faint, muffled cry. Paul’s heart seemed to echo outside his body into the air. Listening intensely, he followed the faint sound. There, a few feet away, peeking from beneath a lifeless body, he spotted a small foot. He quickly fell to his knees and rolled the figure off.

Paul froze. There was the most beautiful child he had ever seen. She couldn’t have been more than two years old, still crying when Paul freed her. She must have felt the weight of the body lifted, cause amid her cries, she turned her little head towards him. Looking directly into his eyes, she suddenly stopped crying, smiled, barely moving her dried out lips. But the smile was undeniable, at least to Paul. The unexplainable connection had been sealed. He fell in love with her and would risk it all to secure her passage. Regardless of the dangers of the mission, Paul was not willing to let her go. She was a reminder for him of all that was good in the world.

His heart smiled!

Breathe In-Breathe Out

Visions of destruction bombarded his inner sight as he stared out the window, guided by knowledge he knew he was not privy to.

'I gotta get out of here.' Paul quickly grabbed his bag, took a few other things off his desk, including the watch, threw them in the bag and turned off the lights. Leaving midday like this was quite uncommon for him. Paul was typically the first person at the office and the last one to leave.

As he rushed down the hallway heading to the elevator, several people tried to stop him. Some with pending questions, while others were just being friendly.

Paul kept repeating to himself, *'I don't have time for this.'*

"Hi Mr. Martin, leaving?"

Paul never slowed down. He couldn't. The only response he could muster was just a faint smile, accompanied by a slight nod. He wanted, no needed to get out of there. He needed a place where he could wrestle with the information he had just learned. How could he come to grips with it?

How was he supposed to live with this? He couldn't even see how to begin comprehending any of it.

Paul reached the elevator. He began pushing the button like it was a lifeline. It seemed like it was taking forever. The world had to be playing a cruel joke on him. He began to think even the elevator was in on it. The floor numbers were at a crawl. The elevator was stopping at every floor. It was an obvious attempt to mock him in his hour of desperation. He knew it was insane to think that way, but he didn't know what else to do.

Finally, the doors opened, and he stepped in. That's when he heard someone yell.

"Hold the elevator!" The voice echoing from down the hall.

"They're too far away...I don't have time for this."

Paul started erratically pushing the button to close the door. They finally began to inch closer together.

Just as he began to settle back, Paul saw this oversized hand shoot through the narrowing gap, preventing the door from closing. The elevator doors jerked back open. Standing before him was one of his employees.

"Sorry about that—I almost missed it," the employee said as he slipped into the elevator, barely glancing at the person already inside.

"Yes you did—almost miss it!" Paul said in a dry, borderline sarcastic tone.

The employee stiffened. Finding Paul in the elevator was unexpected, and a bit awkward. It wasn't exactly proper protocol to ask someone of Paul's rank to hold the door, and now he was on the elevator with his boss.

Flustered, "Good afternoon Sir, uh...I—I have some things I need to go over with you," the young man came across as someone trying too hard to appear as an important asset to his superior.

Paul as well was trying to maintain a level of professionalism, responded, "No problem. Schedule a meeting for early next week." He didn't trust himself to say anything else. He didn't want to get into anything for fear of a total mental breakdown, right there on the elevator.

Paul's eyes kept drifting up, watching the floor numbers. People got on and off. All seemed to want to make small talk. On any other day, Paul was the one everyone wanted to be associated with. He was typically a well-liked individual. Everyone wanted to be a part of his team. But today, he had been less than sociable. He just wanted to unravel in peace, away from everyone and everything.

When they finally made it to the ground level, the elevator dinged, and the elevator opened. Paul rushed out without saying another word. He was on autopilot. As he made his way across the lobby, his legs started to buckle. The

very air that he was breathing felt like increased pressure on his chest. His muscles were being deprived of oxygen, legs gave out causing him to stumble.

"Just a little farther," he muttered, startled by how loud the words were as they slipped out. He made his way to his car, fumbling to steady his hands as he reached out for the door reader.

"Press button, open door," repeating—"press button, open door." He was calling out the steps as if they were part of a complicated task. He had learned the ritual as a coping mechanism. It gave him the illusion of control, a way to defend himself against the chaos hammering in his chest.

Something had rattled him.

By the time Paul opened the car door and slipped into the driver's seat, every nerve in his body felt like they were being snapped from their weave. He gripped the steering wheel, then released it, then gripped it again—his fingers drained of blood from the repetition trying to steady himself—to drown out the frustration from what he had discovered. It was too overwhelming—too unbelievable.

"This can't be happening, no, no, no," he kept repeating, still barely aware of the volume the words were escaping from the pit of his soul. With no outlet for the enormous pressure building within, he started to pound the steering wheel with his fist, hitting it continuously. That's when he noticed someone from security walking towards him.

"Are you okay, Mr. Martin?"

Quickly gaining his composure and defusing the outburst, Paul lied.

"Yes, sorry. I'm mad at myself. It's my anniversary, and I forgot to pick up a surprise for my wife," he said with a forced smile.

"Better take care of that! We know how they can be." Both laughed as Paul waved and drove away.

Continue the story.

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