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The Monsters and the Weak

The sun beat like a hammer, not a cloud was in the sky.
 The mid-day air ran thick with dust, my throat was parched and dry.
 With microphone clutched tight in hand and cameraman in tow,
 I ducked beneath a fallen roof, surprised to hear "stay low."

My eyes blinked several times before in shadow I could see,
 the figure stretched across the rubble, steps away from me.
 He wore a cloak of burlap strips, all shades of grey and brown,
 that hung in tatters till he seemed to melt into the ground.

He never turned his head or took his eye from off the scope,
 but pointed through the broken wall and down the rocky slope.
 "About eight hundred yards," he said, his whispered words concise,
 "beneath the baggy jacket he is wearing a device."

A chill ran up my spine despite the swelter of the heat,
 "You think he's gonna set it off along the crowded street?"
 The sniper gave a weary sigh and said "I wouldn't doubt it,"
 "unless there's something this old gun and I can do about it."

A thunderclap, a tongue of flame, the still abruptly shattered;
 while citizens that walked the street were just as quickly scattered.
 Till only one remained, a body crumpled on the ground,
 The threat to oh so many ended by a single round.

And yet the sniper had no cheer, no hint of any gloat, instead
 he pulled a logbook out and quietly he wrote.
 "Hey, I could put you on TV, that shot was quite a story!"
 But he surprised me once again -- "I got no wish for glory."

"Are you for real?" I asked in awe, "You don't want fame or credit?"
 He looked at me with saddened eyes and said "you just don't get it."
 "You see that shot-up length of wall, the one without a door?"
 before a mortar hit, it used to be a grocery store."

"But don't go thinking that to bomb a store is all that cruel,
 the rubble just across the street -- it used to be a school.
 The little kids played soccer in the field out by the road,"
 His head hung low, "They never thought a car would just
 explode."

"As bad as all this is though, it could be a whole lot worse,
 "He swallowed hard, the words came from his mouth just like a
 curse.
 "Today the fight's on foreign land, on streets that aren't my own,"
 "I'm here today 'cause if I fail, the next fight's back at home."

"And I won't let my Safeway burn, my neighbors dead inside,
 don't wanna get a call from school that says my daughter died;
 I pray that not a one of them will know the things I see,
 nor have the work of terrorists etched in their memory."


"So you can keep your trophies and your fleeting bit of fame,
 I don't care if I make the news, or if they speak my name."
 He glanced toward the camera and his brow began to knot,
 "If you're looking for a story, why not give this one a shot."

"Just tell the truth of what you see, without the slant or spin;
 that most of us are OK and we're coming home again.
 And why not tell our folks back home about the good we've done,
 how when they see Americans, the kids come at a run."

You tell 'em what it means to folks here just to speak their mind,
 without the fear that tyranny is just a step behind;
 Describe the desert miles they walk in their first chance to vote,
 or ask a soldier if he's proud, I'm sure you'll get a quote."

He turned and slid the rifle in a drag bag thickly padded,
 then looked again with eyes of steel as quietly he added;
 "And maybe just remind the few, if ill of us they speak,
 that we are all that stands between the monsters and the weak."

Michael Marks



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