

The Monster
by
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I was sitting at a stop light when the call came over the radio. Every man on the force remembers where he was when the call came out. Even the dispatcher's voice was different, the calm coolness gave way to a frantic quickness. There were shots fired at 2200 Pioneer Drive.

That was the elementary school.

My heart sank. It was only a few blocks away and I knew that I'd be the first one there. Who'd be shooting a gun near the school? Or at the school?

I came up on the side of the building and saw the kids running around from the rear. They weren't playing. They were running in fear.

My car slid far too far when I hit the brakes. I don't really remember drawing my gun, it was just in my hand when I reached the building. I heard a shot being fired just as I approached the corner.

And children screaming.

I didn't know what I'd find when I rounded the corner, what kind of bastard would shoot at children? I'd seen death before but the most senseless deaths were those of children. They were always innocent, always the victim. They were the ones doing nothing when the car hit them, or too young to know the difference between reality and fantasy when the gun went off, or just fascinated with the light when the curtains caught fire. They were the ones just acting their age when their parents beat them to death. I'd never seen a kid doing something wrong when his vitals ceased in the emergency room.

Another shot. I rounded the corner and my very worst fears were realized. Kids, motionless on the ground. Six, maybe seven years old. A lone adult lay on the ground with his eyes open. I couldn't tell if he was alive or not, but he wore a suit, probably a teacher or staff, probably ran out to stop the carnage. Failing miserably.

My feeling of self disappeared, I was no longer a man. I was a force, a force with a gun sent to end this. Police procedure was forgotten, my comrades forgotten, my own safety was forgotten, horror took over.

Another shot.

I instantly homed in on the source. My only goal was to stop it. Only a monster would shoot a child. I glimpsed a spark in the monkey bars. The bullets were real. I didn't care about right or wrong, I wasn't thinking about my job, a monster was in my sights.

The monster took aim, another boy was down, another among many. My gun was much too close to miss. Unless I pulled my trigger now another child would be shot for sure. The moment lasted a lifetime.

The fallen boy and the monster locked eyes, for hours or days, I couldn't tell.

Slowly the realization crept up on me and into my soul. For a brief moment, one that lasted forever, I didn't know what to do. My world shook--shook right down to the fiber of my being. I had the aim, I had the shot, but

the decision to pull the trigger faltered. To save a life by taking a life, my God, what do I do?

The monster was a little girl...