

The Tower



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My watch beeps, 0300 hours. Here I am in the tower doing what a soldier does best: guard and protect. Childs, my battle buddy, has fallen asleep; knowing he's tired, I let him rest. He seems so peaceful, lost in a world of dreams instead of this cold reality of war. How I envy Childs. Even in sleep, I can never escape this place. The nightmares take over.

In the distance, the dogs howl. The wind dances through the brush. The moonlight brightens the field, but it does not provide enough illumination for me to see the enemy. Tall grass and small bushes give them an advantage over me: they have plenty of places to hide, but I only have this guard shack.

Dark shadows play devious games with my mind. Are they out there? Can they see me? A chain-linked fence is the only thing that separates them from me. No intimidating barbed wire, or concrete wall, only a simple fence, constructed by local nationals. How can I trust that the enemy wasn't among the builders? The enemy. The bad guys. Yet in their eyes, I am the bad guy. Our two worlds are divided, but are we truly so different? We both fight to defend our beliefs. I fight for my country and to defend my freedom; they fight to defend their people. We will fight until the end, with weapons, fists, whatever means necessary. I think about the fight, and my mind wanders.

The paranoia pounces on me. Here I am, high in a tower, a great target. The wooden tower has no shield, no window, and no bullet-proof material. Half-filled sand bags offer my only protection. The next tower,

with my closest back up, is about a mile away. Too far to hear my screams. What if the enemy crosses the fence without me noticing, and what if they take me? What if they somehow come up behind me and surprise me?

My heart races and my mind swirls in a panic. I see the bushes move in the distance. At least I think they moved. I hear noises. Or maybe that's my heartbeat. I can't tell anymore. It's them. They're coming at me. I can't see them, but I know they can see me. A single shot could kill me. I wouldn't have the chance to fight back, and my battle buddy wouldn't know where to shoot.

PANIC! I need to talk to someone. I pick up the radio to call the Sergeant of the Guard. Fumbling, I press the button to talk but get a long beep instead. The battery is dead. PANIC!

"Childs!" I shake my battle and wake him from his deep slumber. "Our battery is dead," I tell him as he comes to. The look in his eyes scares me, like it's not really him. PANIC! The dogs howl and I nearly scream. Just then I hear the familiar sound of the Apaches flying above. The Sergeant of the Guard pulls up in the humvee. I feel safe again, or at least as safe as I am able to feel.

"What's going on?" my battle buddy asks.

"My battery is dead," I tell him as the sergeant makes his way up the tower stairs. We exchange batteries, and I conduct a radio check; everything is back to normal.

I look at my watch and realize my shift is almost over. I laugh to myself. Just another night on tower guard.