

## **Manny**

You were in the war. You saw things a person shouldn't see. You had a lot of friends die. You made it out alive. They were the lucky ones.

The war never leaves you. It's always right there. In someone's quick movement, you see the enemy charging. In a loud noise, you hear a bomb. In the faces of the people around you, you see death. Death is just waiting to take them, and you.

When you came back, you tried for a little while to work things out with your spouse, Dale. You tried for probably six months. You're lucky you didn't kill Dale during the night. You're just not safe to be around. Plus, you just don't see in Dale whatever you used to. You're not sure what you used to see. Dale is probably pretty attractive. That just seems so... unimportant now.

You moved out. You told Dale you were going. Dale cried. Dale just doesn't--can't--understand. It isn't about Dale. It's about you. It's about the war. Dale still visits you sometimes. At first it was once a week or so. Now it's once a month or two. You're polite to Dale, but you don't really have anything to say. The 'answers' aren't found in meetings like the ones Dale took you to in the first six months or before you were discharged. Those just don't do anything for you. Maybe some folks, but you're too far gone.

It's alright here on the streets though. It's really relaxing, most of the time. You don't have to do anything. No one's shouting orders, unless there is some cop. Even they know not to shout at you too often. One look at you is probably enough to stop that behavior. You know you look troubled. The war left its mark on you and anyone can feel it. Makes it easier to just stay away from folks most of the time.

You have one of those signs that tells folks you're a war vet. You don't bother talking about it, unless you're into the booze. People just give what they give. Some men and a few women try to talk about it because they were there too. You don't really have anything much to say to them. The good ones recognize that, just give you the money and go their way. The bad ones want to talk and talk and talk, like it'll do any good. It won't. You just let them talk until they start yelling and then get tired. They go away. They don't give you any money. They don't come back again, either.

You drink a bit with the money. The drink helps sometimes. It's better than just food anyway. Food keeps you fed, but the drink helps your mind. Even better is when you can get some drugs to wipe it all away for a few hours. Once the booze hits your belly, but before you pass out, the stories come out. Stories about what you saw and survived. Stories about those folks who didn't make it out.

You're here at the fire tonight because another vet bought you a bunch of cheap booze. More than you could drink on your own. You decided trading some of it for the warmth of the fire and some stew would be worthwhile.

## **Who You Know**

Rich: He's alright to drink with. He talks a little, but doesn't ask too many questions. He understands just getting by.

Chris: Chris asks too many questions. Chris also talks too much. That type never amounts to any

good.

Hetty: Hetty leaves you alone. You leave Hetty alone.

Sarah: Just another young kid being chewed up by the world.

Alfred: Drinking buddy, sometimes. Alfred's got his own problems. At least he's more concerned with them than he is with yours.

Alex: Alex is walking out on the world before it walks out on Alex. Nothing wrong with that.

Flash: No one has a relationship with Flash. Flash doesn't have a relationship with Flash.

Jack: Jack's got what you need to really make the mind go away when you can afford it. You usually buy GHB (a depressant) and/or Vicodin (muscle relaxant). You've got enough money to buy some of each this evening.

Toni: There are some painful truths in that music. Toni's a musician and not half bad. You can just sit and listen to it as long as Toni will play. It's another escape.

Corvus: \*disgusted sigh\*

Rose: You saw her body two days ago in an alley on 14th street, near Elm. She had been stabbed several times.

Mel: Mel keeps a warm place, with simple food and drink. Doesn't ask too many questions. That's all you need.