

## **This Place Too Is Left Behind**

by Leslie Rose

He's trying to settle in. He's trying to fit in, get work, find some meaning in his new civilian life. Home doesn't seem like the place he left behind. Sure, his beautiful old Chevy pickup is parked in the driveway, still wrecked from the short leave before his second deployment. But Portland's become too loud, full of untrustworthy traffic and suspicious thoughts.

He's moved the TV onto the patio and attempts to sleep outside on the rattan couch, even though it's winter. We're not quite sure what to ask him this time, leaving space for him to tell his story, if he wants to. He doesn't say much. One day, though, he takes a plastic water bottle and bowls it across the concrete. *This is how incoming sounds*, he tells us. We watch as the basement becomes his own private little explosion: cammies, boots seeping Iraqi sand, tattered maps and ragged letters, old candy, books. To get to the laundry room, we would have to walk across his dress blues, if we didn't hang them up in a quiet closet.

One quick day, he grabs a few items from the floor, throws them into his backpack, and rushes from the city. The forest and solitude are what he needs. Maybe so. We send our love and support trailing out the door behind him. We wander downstairs and begin tidying up, washing and folding clothes, packing up medals and ribbons strewn under the couch, tucking what's left behind in boxes for the attic.

He calls often from the cabin. Sometimes we can tell he's pacing, restless, maybe has too much room for all his thoughts and feelings. Other times he calls to relate the goofy antics of wild turkeys, the sunrise over the eastern mountains, the snowflakes, cool blessings falling on his upturned face as he stares at the midnight sky. We breathe a sigh of relief. Maybe this place will help him integrate the nightmare he's been through with what is now. We hope he is finding some peace.

This place too is left behind. We follow, picking up the pieces, saving tangible scraps. So maybe, one day, one place, he can reweave his life into a warm blanket and carry it along with him wherever he's going next.