

Raymond had just finished brewing coffee over the camp stove in bay number two when a pickup truck pulled into the parking lot. The driver's door creaked open, and an old man in coveralls got out and slammed it shut. He headed towards the boarded office. He shoved the door open slightly and jingled the bells hanging on the push bar, calling inside through the crack.

"Hello? Anybody here?"

It was his first visitor since Raymond returned from the VA Hospital. His Harley and all his worldly goods had been stashed here during his psychiatric evaluation. He was detoxified, diagnosed with posttraumatic-stress and sent home with a bag of pills. Some of them made him sleep at night, some calmed him down during the day, but in the end his wits were so dull that he no longer cared whether he lived or died. Booze seemed simpler.

"Yeah, I'm back here. Come on in if you can stand the place."

"You living in here?"

"Welcome to my universe," Raymond said, sweeping his arms wide. "It doesn't look like much, but it's a lot better than some of the places I've lived in the past few years. Can I help you?"

"Sorry. My name is Clarence Biederman. My wife Vernie passed away a few months back. We had a farm north of town. She worked as hard at it as I did. I'm too old to farm it alone, so I'm selling out and moving to town."

"Look, I only have a toilet and cold running water, so this isn't a Holiday Inn."

"No, no, I've got a place to stay. That's not why I'm here. We've been living off what I make building cabinets. I'm looking for a place to set up a shop. I'm selling off everything on the farm, but keeping my woodworking equipment. Lou Baxter said I ought to come over here and talk to you."

"Lou sent you?"

"Yessir, he did,"

"What else did he tell you?"

"That's about it. Said you was back from the war and having a hard time of it, and that we might be able to help each other out."

"He didn't tell you that he wouldn't hire me back in my old job?"

"I don't recollect him saying anything about that. What kinda work did you do?"

"I was a reporter."

"Why wouldn't he hire you?"

"He said, and I quote, 'This town is too small for me to take a risk on a drunk.'"

"You too, huh?"