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## Shadows

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## SHADOWS

The knuckled naked branches were ticking against the window. The dawn had squeaked above the horizon an hour before. My office on the third floor of the apartment building had rising damp, and there was a fight between the radiator heat and how much clanging the pipes could trumpet. The store windows shimmered with shiny colored boxes, faux snow, and dwarfs.

An ancient scent of honeysuckle preceded the long legs entering from the outer office.

“Mr. Hoffman, I want you to find out how my brother died in Vietnam.”

My insides started to twist, inhaling with my throat constricting; I started to see my squad in the bush.

Please don't turn over the rock. Why do you want to turn over the rock? Do you really want to lift up that rock?

An encircling knee bending dark shadow of sadness enrobed me following her request.

*Why does she want to disturb the shadows? The shadows live under the rocks. She doesn't have the right to unleash the cascading dominoes. Whose lives will be changed for such a selfish request?*

*Cheyenne, where is Cheyenne?*

The VC had sprung the ambush, bodies flying, rounds spitting across my head, the whistle of danger permeates the air, grenades popping.

I was the expendable new guy even though I trained as an NCO; new guys are new guys. Who do you entrust with your life? I had earned no trust and was just another body; keep firing.

Most of the squad was not visible in the bush; the VC played as ghosts. Impossible to know positions of neither men or VC. Fire fights were fluid. All tactics and plans evaporate after the first shot.

Sudden silence, the VC broke off and evaporated into the bush back into the shadows.

*Where was Cheyenne?*

A letter will be sent; "Dear Mrs. Porter, Your son was killed in action December 15, 1969, while serving bravely with the First Infantry Division North of Saigon. He died honorably fighting for his country."

Bull shit.

Cheyenne is dead and honored. Don't wake the shadows that will visit heartache on so many.

You don't have the right.

"I won't help you," I fumbled, passing her on the way to PTSD group.