**Section 60**

I should be glad to have a job.
In this economy I should be thrilled to have a job, any job
But I hate my job.
Not because it‘s hard or the pay sucks.
Actually the job is easy.
Just enter data all day into a computerized database.
Pretty easy.
Boring though.
I hate it.

My job is a new position.
It may not last.
Government job.
Federal government job.
I am so thrilled to have a job.
It took so long to find this one.
It seemed like a great job.
I type fast.
I like details.
I’m really very well organized.
For me it should be a perfect job,
If it lasts.
I hate it.

I work in a beautiful place.
Soft rolling green hills with trees in the background.
Washington cherry blossoms bloom in spring.
The Lincoln Memorial is right across the river.
I come into it out of traffic
Out of the city
Into this place of beauty
And memories
And final peace.
Arlington.
This is where my office is,
Cubicle really in a bigger room
But I have a specific job.
I hate it.

Every day when I get to work
I find a sheaf of papers and a table full of clear plastic envelopes
With various items inside
My job is to catalog the information on the papers
And the contents of the envelopes into the database.
That’s what I do.
All day.
Every day.
Nine to five.
I hate it.

My work is centered on Section 60.
That’s where the troops from Iraq and Afghanistan
Now sleep in their final resting place.
Each of those white markers lined up like stone soldiers
Has a name and information on the front
And a number on the back.
Every day is the same.
I type in the number of the gravestone.
A name comes up.
I type in the information from the paper.
I type in the contents of the clear plastic envelopes.
I try not to think.
I try not to see.
I try to just type without any awareness.
I hate it.

People come here every day
To see their loved ones,
To touch the stone that is all that is left,
To try and hold onto the memory of their lost loved ones
And leave things behind.
A small pebble left on top of the gravestone,
Flowers and birthday balloons,
A father’s medal left under his son’s name,
A son’s football helmet left in front of his father’s gravestone.
I hate it.

The army used to come by and throw it all away,
Into the trash,
Into dumpsters,
Like it was just garbage.
But then, after some complaints,
They decided to catalog it all,
Keep it in boxes buried away,
Record and file it all,
Store it for history,
And posterity.
That’s what I do.
All day.
I hate it.

I try not to think
As I type in the information on the paper.
Item: one ball
Details: well worn, grass stained baseball
Item: one teddy bear
Details: Brown, one eye missing
Item: a photograph
Details: Young woman and a little girl blowing out candles
With a note on the back that says “Sandra’s third birthday party.
We miss you. Love Carol and Sandra.”
I stop.
Close the envelope and put it in the box
With the same number as the gravestone
So it can be archived.
I take a deep breath and move on
To the next list and envelope.
I hate it.

I went to Section 60 last Memorial Day
And watched as the people moved among the white tombstones,
Knelt and touched the silent granite
And wept as they prayed.
One woman lay down on top of the grave.
A small boy played with toy soldiers in the grass
As his mother arranged flowers.
A young girl kissed the stone,
Turned and bravely walked away
And then fell into her mother’s arms in tears.
An older man saluted,
A tear running down his cheek.
I just watched from the distance,
Absorbed the images
And slowly walked back to my car.
I hate it.

“It’s just a job,”
I tell myself as I start the next entry.
Item: Silver CD
Details: “Our Songs” written on the CD with a black Sharpie
Item: Baseball cap
Details: Chicago Cubs, faded blue
Item: baseball glove
Details: Rawlings catcher’s mitt, well worn
Item: Birthday card
Details: Note saying “So proud of you son on your 22nd birthday.
We made your favorite chocolate cake with that dark frosting you like.
Love, Mom and Dad.”
Another stop and a deep breath.
It’s just a job.
I hate it.

After my first few days I thought I’d get used to it,
That I’d be able to just type and not think,
Just enter data without feeling anything,
Just move on through the stuff
But it’s been months now
And it gets no easier.
Item: Photograph of a young man in a tux and his date
Details: High school prom picture with a note on the back,
“Rachel and her date at the prom. You should have seen how beautiful
Your daughter looked that night. Her smile looks just like yours.
I miss you so much and I’ll love you always, Janet.”
Another deep breath and a sip of coffee
On to the next one.
I hate it.

In the distance,
When the wind is right,
If it is quiet enough
Sometimes I hear Taps lingering in the air
And the rifle cracks.
I enter another number.
I begin another entry.
Item: Toy plastic soldier with a note attached by red rubber band
Details: Toy marine in dress blues and a note that reads
“Daddy, when I grow up I want to be a Marine just like you.
I wish you would come home. Love Jimmie.”
Item: anniversary card
Details: White card with a rainbow and flowers. The card reads, “I see you every night
When I look at our star. Happy 10th anniversary, darling.
I miss you so much. Love Susan.”
I remind myself that it’s just a job
And I really need this job.
I hate it.

I type in another number.
Another name comes up.
I open the next envelope
And start typing.
Item: Handmade pottery bowl
Details: Painted red, white and blue pottery bowl with lettering
Saying “For all your flowers, Daddy. Love Doris”
With a heart for the dot above the letter “i” in her name.
I stopped again. Sipped some more cold coffee
And thought about my six year old son at school.
I closed my eyes and thanked God for His grace
And for having a job.
I hate it.
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