

## The Mothers of Section Sixty

They come each Sunday with their flowers and beach chairs, their photos and mementos of times now past, to sit by the beloved headstones that mark the last resting place of their warrior sons or daughters, these women of Section Sixty. Despite the fact that Arlington National Cemetery has strict regulations regarding decorating trees that stand amongst the headstones, or leaving pictures and sweet remembrances at the gravesites, these mothers leave them nonetheless, even knowing that in a week, or two, or three, they will be swept away by the ground's caretakers, and that they will come back afterward with new pictures, new flowers, new love.

The Cemetery has become a gathering place for the tears of the mothers who have lost sons in America's current battlegrounds, and also for the sharing of sympathy, of love, of strength, of courage. They meet each other beside the familiar gravesites, waving 'hello' softly to those who are now familiar to the heart, leaving alone those who seem to need their privacy – the ones who have eyes and hearts only open to one voice, one image, one heart – the heart of the one who lays in the ground.

The mothers who return week after week come with small rituals – one with a journal that she writes in, another with balloons to celebrate a birthday or anniversary, a third with a letter, a toy, or a small gift from a young child barely old enough to remember the one lost – a sister or brother who is growing up with a legend instead of a living being. These young ones do not understand death yet, and still they know what reverence is without knowing what the word means. They know enough to leave their small offerings in the hands of the mothers who convey to the headstones, messages from those beloved ones they will never know.

One mother has been coming weekly for the past three years. She is the oldest member of the Sunday group. She says, when asked about the special balloons she brought, that it is her son's birthday, the third since his death. That she thought it would get easier three years later, but it has gotten harder, for only now is she beginning to realize the finality of it all. Only now is she feeling that he is never coming back. And as she says this to one of the other women - as they both sit and gaze at each other and at the vast sea of white headstones marking the endless rows of graves - as she says this, a tear slides down her face. Just a single tear. All of the tears of the past are now rolled into this one.

The woman she speaks to is silent. She understands silently. She nods, silently. She sits and stares at the flowers she has placed at the base of the headstone – yellow and white daisies and a few white and pink carnations tied with a florist's bow. They speak to the heart in this sea of solemn markers. They speak of love, of remembrance, of a bond that is only truly known to a mother's heart.

Each of the mothers of Section Sixty carries the threads of the relationship forward in the only way she knows how, by vanquishing death, by allowing, indeed, insisting, that love is stronger than death and that therefore the relationship goes on and on, as it needs to, as it must.

This tribute to love is fathomless and eternal. It is unending and deep as the ocean is deep. Through Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring, it outlives all that would deny it, all that would seek to place it in a box and put it on a shelf somewhere. Instead, these warrior mothers remain fierce in their devotion to their sons, to each other, to the life of their own hearts. They remain fierce in their determination to remember, to never forget, to never allow love's embers to die out.

This is their endless gift, the gift that allows love to triumph over death, and they give it willingly, gladly, with an inner need that is ultimately compelling. Over and over they will give this gift until the body tires and the eyes close, and even then, the heart will still remember.

## About the Author

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