

“The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier”

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My brother is dead. He died in the battlefields of France during the war. He won't come home, he never will. He is gone for good, dead. I recite this poem of truth everyday, every hour, every minute. Yet no matter how many times I tell myself this, it doesn't sink in. Maybe it's the fact that his body is lost, nowhere to be found. I still expect him to come down for breakfast and give everybody his devilish grin, but he never comes.

Thomas never wanted to be a hero, that might be the hardest part. He waited until he was drafted and when he was he sobbed all night. Thomas told me he wouldn't go to war, that he couldn't go to war. That was the first and last time I would ever see my brother cry. It was a peculiar feeling, my older brother, my idol was crying. No, he wasn't crying, he was sobbing, begging God to let him stay with his family. As sad as it is, he never had a choice, Thomas had to go.

My mother, father, two younger sisters and I are currently on a train to Washington D.C. Like many other families who lost brothers and sons, we were invited to the dedication of The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The body was chosen by Sargent Edward F. Younger on October 24. He laid a spray of white roses on the third casket to the left. One out of the four bodies that were exhumed was chosen to be the unknown. Only one.

"Was it a husband or a brother?" My thoughts were interrupted by a kind looking lady with wispy gray hair.

"A brother," I looked at my sisters, "he was our older brother."

The train stopped. We were there, the moment I had been equally dreading and looking forward to for weeks. I grabbed my youngest sister Adeline's hand, she had just turned eight. I looked at my other sister Cora, sweet little eleven year-old Cora. Eight and eleven was too young to mourn a brother I thought. Did they even understand the significance of the dedication? Yes, I

knew they did, they understood we were honoring the lost soldiers. Our lost soldier. I looked at my mother and father. They looked so tired, my mother has cried herself to sleep every night since Thomas's death. My father lost his only son, his heir.

As we shuffled into the crowd of people, I realized how much this meant to them. How much this meant to me. They were honoring my brother, well not specifically him, they were honoring all of the lost brothers. Honoring men not just from World War I, but from the Civil War and the wars that have yet to come. This was so much more than I realized, so much more than I could have dreamed.

President Warren G. Harding stood behind the podium with a look of authority and said, "We are met today to pay the impersonal tribute. The name of him whose body lies before us took flight with his imperishable soul. We know not whence he came, but only that his death marks him with the everlasting glory of an American dying for his country." At twelve o'clock sharp there was a two minute silence, a silence that every American citizen would partake in. During the silence I mindlessly asked myself, is this Thomas. It hit me like a train, was this Thomas? Was my only brother inside that marble casket? The man we were all honoring. I looked around, cool wet tears filled my eyes. I saw every mother, every father, every wife, every brother, every sister, every son and every daughter. I knew at that moment they were all thinking the same thing. Was it him in that casket? Was their own version of Thomas in that casket.

After the silence, Congressman Hamilton Fish calmly laid a wreath on the tomb in honor of those who died during the war. He looked sad, but at peace. Two Gold Star Mothers then placed a wreath for all of the mothers who lost their son in battle.

A few hours have passed and we are now back on the train. We were going home. Going home without Thomas. We had gone home without him before, but today felt different. We had

officially said goodbye. Something became clear to me today, it is important to remember and celebrate all those who fought for our country. They gave up their lives for all of us, for the better of their country whether they expected to or not. So, from now on I will honor not only Thomas, not only my family that served, but every single soldier. They gave up their most valuable gift for us, they gave their life. So many like my brother. My Thomas died, but he didn't die in vain. He helped save our country like many other men before him and I will never forget that so long as I live.

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