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Workshop 3

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The expensive parking

by

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I woke up with a big headache, today, that didn't help me to find the patience I needed every morning with my younger son.

I slammed the door when I came upstairs after waiting for my children to leave to school with the school bus. I almost shouted at the driver for the five minutes delay.

I was rushing to have my cup of coffee maybe it reduces my headache; I almost dropped the coffee pot.

My husband said: "Is it your social insurance day?"

I looked at him surprised; I had never told him how much I hated having to sign on.

"You hate the procedure don't you? I wish the company were you did your last interview, will hire you soon, and save you all this agony; I know you need it more than we need the luxury". I kept looking at him surprised and silent, I thought I tried hard not to show him my agony, but his warm notice froze the words in my mouth, I didn't reply to any of what he said, and that made me angry adding to my headache.

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Ouff! Ouff! Every time I stop on the traffic light along the beach road, I try to release some of my stress by blowing out a strong breath, Oufff! On the third one, I shut the radio off, I didn't want to hear any thing no songs, no news, nothing. Because I wanted to arrive quickly and have the chore done. I couldn't even enjoy the beauty of the sea that I always loved and brought me relief looking to the open space.

I stopped on all the many traffic lights on my way, I was driving there to tell them, "Yes my previous employer included my name in the list of change and redundancy. Yes my employer did not consider the 10 years of hard work for him and in one decision (that I consider as a stupid one) he let me out. Yes, I am not employed again yet. Yes it is a humiliation being out of the position that I built".

Oh, one parking place is free on the pavement, I said to myself, this is a good sign, it means that the place is not full and there will be no delays.

Usually I prefer to park properly in the paid parking place, but this would save me one pound, which is the price of whole bread. I decide parking, and running in, thinking I will not take long, I hate being here.

The place was not really busy. I put my paper in the special box on the counter to take turn and sat down waiting to be called.

Every time I come here, enter this big room with white walls hanging on them 3 big message boards and a big counter and three employees sitting behind, and sit on one of these big wooden uncomfortable benches, I have the same thoughts. Same thing every time. Is it the bench that keeps the ideas running through me? If I change seats would it be different? , I looked around. They all look the same old, with many colour marks, hearts, letters, and initials. I chose a seat without writings maybe not having any colour

means clear of same ideas. Nothing changed, every time I remember back to the beginning of my employment and the joy I had when I received the first salary that saved us from many troubles we were having with the growing of our family. I remember clearly that day, on my way back home I stopped and bought for us the expensive cake that my children all liked and we all celebrated.

I remember the holiday to the Greek Islands my husband suggested after I had worked for two years and we wanted us to enjoy my bonus. Five amazing days spent on the beach, swimming, eating in restaurants. The children playing in Luna parks, shopping, forgetting all the worries. I have to remember the joy in my elder son's eyes when we got him his first proper bike and his Dad said to him "you see Mum is working hard to make us have more luxury in our lives", the hug my son gave me and the happy look on my other son waiting for his bike on the next spending and the glance from my husband eye throwing a kiss to me. I have to remember when my work was not only this bit of luxury but I started to see the productivity changing my life and becoming part of me enjoying success, when my direct manager called me in the managers general meeting to explain my report and appraised my work, that year I got the best employee award. I remember the long working hours before the exhibition and the fight I had with my husband for neglecting the family, but he was very proud when every one praised the result of my preparation. I have to remember the success that some people hates and they start to put sticks in the wheels. How can I forget the decision of resizing the company and then the redundancy? That day, the General Manager didn't want to talk to us individually; He called to the conference room all the redundant employees to lay the news. Thinking that the meeting was for a new project, we sat all excited. He broke to us

the news in very directed and short speech assuring that he was forced to do so because of the change of business. We all looked at each other silent, waiting for him to continue with a replacement or solution. Silence was the dominant reaction; no one had any thing to say we were all chocked. Decision was made and papers were ready to be signed.

Some times when I am in better moods I take it easier, remember only the good days and believe that I will soon find another job and better than the previous one and give myself the satisfaction and my family the bit of luxury.

But today I can only remember every thing bad, hard, unfair, and I can do nothing.

“Maria” I heard my name and went quickly to the lady, is she going to ask me again if I found a job, and I will have to tell her again that I am looking for a good one not just any thing, I don’t want to tell her that jobs are very rare, that I am waiting for one of them to call me back, and nothing else is available. It is not really her job to ask me it is the unemployment office which they give us the names and addresses of vacancies. I approached the counter, looked at her, but couldn’t recognise any of her face details; I just wanted to hear her voice saying, sign please. Suddenly, she said “sorry I need to change the ink for the printer” I forced a smile on my face and said “take your time no problem”, do I tell her do not worry we don’t have work to run for it.

I looked then to her, she had a smiling face and very spontaneous movement, she looked at me while fixing the printer and said:” so you didn’t find a job yet?” I forced another smile again and said:” not yet, I don’t want to take just any job I prefer to give myself a little more time maybe I find a similar job to my previous one.” She said again: “you are right and I know that is not easy at all, not too many available”. I nod my head

accepting what she said and luckily she finished quickly and gave me my paper, I signed it and rushed running out looking at my watch. Oh I remembered the parking, it is 20 minutes, I hope the police didn't pass by, I said to myself, then I park properly only if I am scared of the police , I don't really care about the law and being legal?. I look from far and see the police writing the fine, cutting the paper and putting it on the front glass.

My legs kept running but my head was still, "Ohhhhhhhh Gush, Ohhh Gush, Dam it, shouldn't they keep these parking free, people who come here are all unemployed and they need every penny".

I take the fine in my hand; look at it, fifteen pounds!! Oh my God, I tried to save one and I will pay now fifteen. How stupid? I sit in my driving seat and burst in tears, regretting every thing, regretting the violation of law, the stubbornness that hit my head when I am in bad mood, regretting not sticking to my believes and doing what the others do.

My tears swept many things inside my head, I sobbed, loudly, alone in the car, tears and sobs, is it really loud or I think so because I am alone in the car?

Crying, this is my reaction? It was my mistake to park here, and now I am crying, no this cant be me, I am stronger than this, this was never my way, even on the day of the bad news of the redundancy I didn't cry not because I wasn't left alone but I always thought tears never solve any problem and kept pretending that I am fine, maybe at some point I felt the tears grabbing my throat but never let go. Am I crying for the money? Am I crying for the fine that I deserve? The tears burned my eyes, I opened them looked

around if any one was looking at me. I felt better; it was like if I needed to clean my system.

I looked in the mirror, on my face a shy smile full of tears, yesterday my son was giving me a science lecture about de-toxin the body and cleaning our system, he was so cute repeating the teachers words, trying to be a small doctor, maybe I will go and tell him tears and sobs can do the same.

A car is beeping, before looking I said if it is the police I will apologise and move, but it was someone with a small white car waving with his hand out of the window, asking me if I am going away, and then urging me with moves of his hand to go quickly, he wants to park in my place.

I answered him by nodding my head, kept the smile on my face; switched on the car, put on the music and went back home singing loudly with clean system.

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