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## Cubicles of Isolation

Connie Singleton

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"The central neurosis of our time is emptiness," states Carl Jung. How accurately Mr. Jung depicted in one sentence the agonizing theme of the whole twentieth century. At least this is the state of mind that my pregnant body is in on the way to work today. The charcoal-gray sky blankets the captives of the white-striped center lanes in a smothering way. The year is 1974, and it is about to give way to a new one. For me, the new year will shovel on another responsibility, be it a tiny bundle, still more than I think that I am ready for.

Having spent the bleakest hours of the morning scraping and chipping the sheet of clouded, opaque ice from the windshield, the warmth of the car is at least some small crumb of comfort to me. As I listen to the radio squeak out the traffic jams, wrecks, stalled vehicles, and alternate routes, I sink lower in my seat and resolve myself to the slow, jerking, uneventful drive into Dallas once again. Traveling at the pace of a Jimmy Stewart sentence, I am able to clearly see the diverse personalities of my co-journeymen. To my left, on this carpet of cement, creeps an ancient 1953 Chevy pickup, supporting an equally ancient old man, obviously hung over, gulping coffee with one hand and puffing long drags off a well worn cigarette with the other hand. To my right floats an emerald green Jaguar that fills your nostrils with aromas of themes in the finest shops in the west. The haggard face that controls this beautiful machinery turns my direction and all but screams in frustration and agitation to be at least one car length ahead. In my rearview mirror, I can see the all-too-familiar powder blue mini-van driven by a half-crazed mother with from three to five car seats strapped into it. Mom is wildly flailing backwards, sideways, up, down, to accommodate all her cherubs at once. I caress my own unborn cherub and groan as I view what I am in for. I stare in disbelief at the compact, mustard-colored Chevette in the space directly ahead of my protruding bumper. The young woman evidently accomplished no personal hygiene or grooming at home this morning: she is pulling out electric hot rollers, teasing, spraying, and combing her hair. Now comes the full make-up job. I give her a lecture in my mind, "Didn't anyone teach you to keep both of your hands on the wheel at all times?" I honk in disgust to let her know that the light is now green. I do not care that she does not appreciate it any more than I would.

We creep and crawl, light after dreary red light, making our way as if we had all turned on our auto pilot switches. "I Owe, I Owe, So Off To Work I Go," is the attempt of one bumper sticker to make sense of this ever-so-daily trek. Heavily clothed joggers bounce by us as we sit and inch forward every now and then. Dazed men sit at the bus stops as we pass, while the unfed, homeless dogs become their instant, unwanted friends. Everyone is in a hurry, looking for the perfect opportunity to slash the nose of their vehicle into the

solid line of cars. School zones are the most dreaded signs on the road for morning drivers. We are so annoyed at being controlled by a sign that dictates our speed and provokes us to stop when a person clad in a yellow slicker trudges into the lane of traffic, laboring with his right hand to raise the red octagonal stop sign that brings us jerking to a halt once more. The Jaguar to my right takes his liberty to zip into the 7-11 for a fast cup of steamy brew and a pack of cigarettes. He gets his purchase and is back out of the parking lot without losing a car length.

As I turn onto McKinney I see the familiar dirty beige brick elementary school building to my right. The

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bundled-up children have layers of sweaters, mufflers, coats and gloves around their small bodies. Their parents drop them at this under-equipped playground early to await the opening of the building while they make their own winding trail to places of employment. As the bell peals to signify that it is 8:00 a.m., I rally back to the immediacy of my task. Only fifteen minutes to get to the bulging parking lot, find an empty spot, trudge across the cold pavement, and clock in before I'm late. I see three jam-packed lanes of traffic with people sitting car door to car door, all praying their car will cross the intersection before the light turns red again. We all have the attitude that at least three cars can go through the intersection after the red light appears. As close as I am to making work on time, it will come right down to the wire. I can feel the shoulders of my car brace themselves as if to say, "Don't even think of trying to get in front of me." The clock pounds inside my head, and the seconds that I sit on this exhaust-fumed treadmill of concrete feel like hours. We haven't nudged even a snail's length in two minutes. I jerk my neck around the steering wheel, straining to find the perpetrator of the crime. A broken car, a flat tire? At the very least, someone had better be hurt. The vehicles that encompass me hold vultures behind the wheels of their steering columns who are ready to devour the road blockage ahead. As I give up in disgust, my anguish frames a picture that denies reality. Stumbling off the orange, red, and black

graffitied slab of sidewalk is a tiny, bundled woman. The multi-colored wool stocking cap is pulled tightly down around her ears and gives her a smaller appearance. Her thick-heeled shoes and heavy beige support stockings quickly date her. In her hand she protectively grasps a white cane. Tap, tap, tap. This elderly woman's false eyes offer her no assistance across the angry, dirty, hurried light crossing. The white cane begins to knock against one car and then another. I watch in suspense as she whirls around and stands still, afraid to move deeper into the darkness. Her steps become awkward and uncertain as she travels clumsily down the rows of car doors. Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. The white compass tries to find its way back to recognition. The coal-black door that boasts a high-gloss shine quietly, but deliberately, swings open with purpose. All eyes are upon this knight in his black, pin-striped, double-breasted suit as he steps forward to take the blind princess by her wrinkled hand. The car engines seem to shush: a sweet lullaby frames this scene in the music of the streets. Six lanes—on-coming and passing traffic—halt in silence, held back by angelic wings. I sit up tall, breathing slightly: I fear I might awake and this will all be a dream. The ebony prince escorts his damsel in distress safely to shore on the other side of the sea of traffic. Her grateful face speaks more than words could ever do, but the gentle patting of the trembling hand on the Goliath, black-gloved fist shows us the genuine thank you that is being expressed to her young saviour. I travel every step with this twentieth century Samaritan, back to his coach, where

he gallantly disappears from view behind darkly tinted windows. I never saw him again.

Some fifteen years have gone by, and I still cherish reliving that day in my mind's picture album. I suppose that I drove on to work that day. The rest of that day is now a blur to me. The black clouds that held me captive are gone. The sun's warmth shines in my being now. The happiness of birth and the future are real to me today, because of the time that I was privileged to see one human being touch another human being. The overbearing rat race has been brought to its knees by the sound of the tapping of a single white cane. I don't look at my companions on the road in the same way anymore. They are real people to me, friends who will help me if I am stranded. The mothers I see flailing about in their frenzy are admirable, patient women to me now. The beauty shop on wheels I now view with sympathy for its operator's lack of time or inadequate organization. All have become fallible people like myself. But which of us will turn our back on the others' need? We all hold different roles as we behold the tiny blind woman. To some of us she is our beloved mother, honored grandmother, attached sister, long-suffering wife, dear cousin, or elderly aunt. We connect with her at our point of need. For me, this woman is an angel of human vulnerability who has been rescued by an ordinary act of love, which restores my vision of human kindness and replaces selfishness with brotherhood.

