

Sharon's Drive to Work

Sharon pulled out of her driveway in the indifferent manner that typified her attitude to the working week. Work was a necessary inconvenience to Sharon; it wasn't something she derived any great meaning from; she didn't feel defined by it; or empowered by it; she wasn't oppressed by it or stressed out by it; she just *did* it.

It took Sharon approximately forty minutes to get to town in the mornings, and another ten or fifteen minutes to walk to the office, depending on where she got parked, which meant that she needed to be starting up the car at no later than five past eight. The journey was by now a series of automatic responses to junctions and traffic lanes, with particular adherence to speed limits on those stretches of road which were known to contain cameras; beyond that, it was a forty minute space in which Sharon could gradually emerge from the drowsiness of night and position her mind towards the tasks ahead.

It was a magnificent morning; sunny and bright. Tracts of gleaming sky slid across the car's rear-view mirror as it sped through the countryside. Sharon didn't notice how beautiful it looked, or how lazily the bloated clouds ambled in the distance ahead; she was thinking about what she had to do that day; go to the chemist at lunchtime to pick up that prescription; have that report she was working on finished by four, and what was in the freezer for dinner? A slice of vegetable lasagne that could be microwaved from frozen. Good, it would mean that she wouldn't have to call to *Tesco's* on the way home.

A row of daffodils along the roadside signalled Sharon's entry onto the motorway; they were lined up in a glistening guard of honour for motorists on their way to work. Sharon didn't see them, the way they swooned in the breeze; the way their cheerful heads bobbed and shone; giddy with the delight of spring. She was concentrating on the current affairs show she had tuned into on the radio, in which two opposing politicians were contradicting each other and themselves for, what they assured listeners, was the sake of the national interest.

They were still arguing as Sharon approached the end of the motorway, and even as she was navigating the hills and bends on the Ardee road, there was still no clear winner of the debate; the radio commentator had apparently given up on getting any sense out of them, and brusquely cut off the discussion with a commercial break.

The cell of trees that surround St Oliver's shrine were blushing with fresh blossom that morning; the same network of knobbly branches that had shivered against winter rain only a month ago, were now garnished with an encouraging sprinkling of pink. But Sharon whisked past the shrine; she didn't notice the trees at all, or the sun that was trickled through them, peeping through the petals and branches as if playing a kind of game.

The influence of the sun was everywhere. It lived in daffodils and trees and grass and hills, intensifying nature's palette as it shone. If Sharon had glanced out of the passenger window before she turned at Macken's cross she would have seen how beautiful it made everything look; the different notes of green it sprayed onto the fields and hills surrounding the old workhouse; shades that contrasted, but yet found an affinity with one another.

It wasn't far now. The junction at the Friary church brought Sharon into town. Traffic was thicker there; cars swelled the length of the street. Buildings emerged. People grew onto footpaths; humans of different colours and shapes walking at various speeds to their destinations. Sharon felt more alert now. Her eyelids sat upright without straining. She saw some empty spaces in the car park at the marketplace as the traffic crept up towards the main throng of the town. She turned in the entrance gate and reversed neatly into the nearest space. Then she turned off the engine and looked at her watch. Good; twenty minutes to nine exactly.