

The Secret Life of Cubicle 4

Penned by Mercedes Baines

One, two, three, four... five

One, two, three, four... five

Onetwothree f-f-f-igh...five

One- keep going, two- keep going, -three...stopstopstopstopstop

There she is... cubicle 1,2,3 fffffour.

Clicking away at her keyboard...

Cubicle 4 is the only one with no name.

The rest of the cubicles have names: Lila, Meagan, Danielle & Una

Her name is on back order.

She does have 4 name tags- all with the same name (in case she forgets who she is)- which happens often))- 2 attach with *magnets*, which, make her nervous because "*Caution do not use with pacemaker*" is imprinted on the back.

No, no, she doesn't *have* a pacemaker but if it's not good for the weakened ones, why risk it? The other name tags have pins, which annoy her as they put holes in her silk blouses.

So fashion wins and she wears the magnet

She just lowers her heart rate through meditation she learned from her yoga DVDs. She finds she can answer emails with her mind when she

mediates. Though most *claim* they don't get her replies. But when she checks her sent folder they HAVE been sent.

Office politics are so petty.

Good thing she's in the union and they CANNOT fire her for transcending email. It's really not her problem if her office colleagues have not reached the next level. Besides, it's Work Safe reducing wrist strain as one doesn't have to mouse when one is mind mailing.

(Did you know she can spend 7 hours just answering emails? I didn't think this was possible, either. Before her life in cubicle 4, she had a naïve life vision.)

It occurs to her daily she might die in Cubicle 4.

There is some natural light.

If she leans to the right keeping one bum cheek on her office chair she can see a glimpse of courtyard and The Fountain. She exercises her eyes by changing focus and staring beyond the computer screen. She programmed a pop up window to remind her to look away and over to The Fountain at regular intervals... She takes her breaks by The Fountain.

It's *supposed* to be restorative.

Relaxing.

A reminder that she must flow like water, surrender, breathe in, catch the flu from the recycled air

Or worse- catch ennui.

That's French.

It's depression as a lifestyle choice.

Being in a cubicle affects her behaviour in peculiar ways. She keeps items in Ziploc bags. Not sandwiches but items she's trying to contain, toiletries, tampons, resentment, festering thoughts...

Sometimes she loses her capacity for verbs. She fears a time when only those close to her will understand her. Like everyone's special cousin Harvey who's a bit tiched but means well.

Is it middle age or her pacemaker name tag magnet interfering with her memory?

How did this happen? Yes, she asks herself this all the time...

On her daily bus commute, she tallies all the things to be thankful for: She has all her teeth, unlike the construction worker drinking yogurt from a tub like it's coffee...

She has good fashion sense, unlike the young woman dressed in a corset and velour jumpsuit wrapped around her boyfriend like a Hollywood starlet -

And, she's easy going...

She smiles, her blood pressure lowering... Then recalls one morning when a withered man with a yellow-green crust under his nose butted into the bus line. Why do people do this? It was an obvious line with a person before her and after her- albeit a crooked line- a casual west coast

line- half committed- not a queue but a line and she was obvious in her claim as to where she was in the line...!!

She reprimands herself for being culturally rigid and whispers under her breath:

“I don’t care, I don’t care, I don’t care.”

She starts to cry.

(Which happens often.)

Perhaps she’s premenstrual or she needs a dose of ginseng to brighten up. Maybe if she eats more Omega 3’s she’ll be able to get it together. She almost bought those chocolate squares at the health food store. The cashier said they were FULL of omega 3’s. And only 49 cents!! That’s if she liked the taste of Omega 3’s. She wasn’t confident she knew what Omega 3’s tasted like. But, she wouldn’t be a very responsible eco healthy bird warrior woman if she didn’t eat Omega’s 3’s, now would she?..But what about oatmeal? Is that out of fashion now? Is it Flax seed now, or is it only the oil? She found it all so very confusing.

Once, after a particularly gruelling meeting that added 20 to do’s to her task list she blurts out:

“Don’t you know who I am?

I danced half naked in a restaurant;

I sang off key in Toronto,

I performed to an almost empty theatre on numerous occasions.

I felt alive.

I wasn't always –this...

Yes, I have done greater things. I had aspirations, dreams..."

That's a lie...she never really dreamed except at 4 years old she wanted to be a go- go dancer on the Tom Jones Show and later a forensic scientist like Quincy.

A dream deferred,
detoured,
disturbed...

She has a reoccurring nightmare that a trap door in her cubicle leads to an old forgotten pathway acting as a quick uplink to the minds of the staff. It was like The Matrix: seeming order with seething pulse underneath- all the time knocking, knocking, sometimes reducing oxygen flow, the sound of hands, bodies sliding down windows " let me out...let-me-out..." Office workers slumped in ergonomic chairs still emailing:

forward-

attach-

delete-

save-

copy to folder-

but with eyes closed, breathing shallow until it all goes dim....

She's clearly unhappy in her present occupation.

“I will die here.” She whispers, her lip quivering as she clicks ‘send’ on another email.

Then, serendipitously,
most delightfully
and with great relief,
she turned a corner and her life changed.

It started just after Christmas holidays, when she was trying to get back on track after too much feasting and family feuding. As tradition dictates, her family feuded *silently*- each gesture lousy with tacit understanding. A soup ladle dropped heavily means dad’s fed up; Christmas wrap left on the floor means you don’t care anymore and even though there is a gift receipt enclosed - never, never, Ever return the gift. She always gained a few pounds...

Her strategy to get back on track, was to take her breaks by the fountain, eat her lunch slowly and mindfully and engage in positive self talk, as outlined in Oprah.

She was just finishing her low fat mayo tuna salad sandwich when...

Yes.

A voice.

A smooth soothing voice.

Flowing from the fountain!

Heat surged through her body.

She took a sip of her filtered water, gulped slowly...

The Fountain's burbles formed words she could understand!

She sat silent, hinged forward, gaping at the fountain, straining to hear again- hoping and fearing ...

It knew her name.

“Okay, okay, okay” she whispered to herself “This is the beginning of crazy...this is the beginning of a long stress leave...”

The Voice spoke again.

She felt a deep thrill.

From that day on, she took her breaks by The Fountain rain or shine. The Voice in the Fountain said it had flowed to her- travelled through evaporated river water in the mountains and rained down into this fountain just a few metres away from her cubicle.

Week after week, their conversations grew more colourful,
poetical,

heretical;

she began to think larger.

She began to accept the possibility of life without dental coverage ...
A life of flow, whimsy, change
The Voice inspired her to write poetry. She penned emails in rhyming couplets and iambic pentameter. She saw metaphors everywhere she looked. She wore berets and black turtle necks. She could suddenly speak the romantic languages.

She began to worry when she grew scales.

At first, she thought it was just dry skin.
That often happened when the seasons changed...
But her torso was now iridescent - blue, green, violet in hue...
She stopped eating meat, craved dark leafy greens lightly steamed with sesame oil.
She liberated the fish from the aquarium in the boardroom.

The water flowing into her cubicle began around the same time that a tiny ridge formed on the back of her neck.
Not unlike a fin.
In fact it was a fin – a dorsal fin...
She found she could make it move side to side.
She hid it under her turtleneck- she wore her hair down.
It surprised her that she wasn't more upset about the fin but it wasn't exactly a blemish... it was pretty in a way...

Something was happening.

No one find the source of the water that just bubbled up, pooled around her feet, then trickled down the aisle, past cubicle 3,2 , & 1.

She adjusted.

She wore boots.

She put her computer on her desk.

She wrote her meeting notes as epic poems.

She drank more water than the 6-8 glasses recommended and prepared.

And then, one Tuesday afternoon, she decided to stay late and finish a budget. Cubicle 1,2,3 and 5 stepped over the gentle trickle of water and said goodnight.

She was alone.

Yes.

Alone.

And, yes.

The water.

The water began to flow and flow and flow... from the lunch room to the board room currents of water gushed in all directions.

She leaned out of her cubicle and looked to the fountain

It was overflowing...

She smiled.

Water was filling up the courtyard, pressing against the window teeming by like a babbling brook past her cubicle.

She stood up and took off her turtleneck. Her torso glistened with splendiferous scales. She stretched up her arms and fell sideways into a river of water. Her feet and legs were now the most exquisite tail. The river was rushing rapidly. She pushed through it, relishing the strength of her new body. She swam around the office that now looked like something from a strange deep sea dive...cubicle contents floating and listing in the current of the river.

Her river.

It started to move faster coursing through the building. Everything looked wondrous underwater; paper moved in currents like schools of fish, office chairs floated upside down, swirling like creatures dancing in the water. She was in bliss, she was happy...she turned and hovered in a current.

In the distance, muted by the water, she heard a persistent beeping.

She swam towards it.

It was coming from her cubicle.

It was an email alert.

How curious.

Usually it's just one flourish of tones not repeating like that. Maybe the screen was frozen...

She floated above it. Deciding what to do...

Her hand reached down...

A sudden intake of breath. Her eyes popped open. Drool down the side of face. Her head snapped up.

Shit!!!!

She was awake

And not in a river.

Her eyes grazed across the computer screen. An alert flashed informing her she had exceeded her mailbox limit.

She wept.

Wept whole heartedly.

Because she does this often, cubicle 123 and 5 kept working.

But she...after the final shudder sobs and chest heaves

She did not keep working...

She stood up

stepped out of her cubicle

A slow steady stream of water flowed away from her and down the aisle

She smiled

Touched the back of her neck

and followed the water out the door...

FIN