

Fred had offered to drive her to the Richland branch of the Department of Motor Vehicles the following Tuesday, for her driver's exam. Though she still resented the idea, she knew better than to arrive for her test alone. Her anger and resentment still fresh, Edna climbed into the passenger seat of her Buick. She fumbled for the seat restraint after Fred reminded her it would be required before even starting the vehicle for the exam. Menacing clouds loomed overhead and light rainfall danced across the windshield.

By the time they pulled up to the red brick, single story building with the American flag fluttering in the gusty wind, dark clouds blanketed the sky. Fred followed Edna inside and took a seat in the back of the room. Edna approached the counter and pulled off a ticket, relieved there were few other customers. She sat with Fred, clutching her purse, and checking the clock, until her number was called only ten minutes later. Her heart fluttered with all the nervousness of a teenage girl applying for a license for the first time. The female Department of Motor Vehicles clerk behind the counter spoke only to bark orders. She never looked up, only pointed to the vision testing machine. Edna placed her forehead against the bar, bumping the glasses she was not used to wearing. Flustered, she pushed herself to focus on the blurry characters she knew were the key to her being able to drive in the future. She stuttered the letters to the woman who glowered at her. The clerk mumbled she had passed, though barely, and moved her along to the next attendant. Edna sighed, her neck muscles loosened. A middle-aged woman with no hint of pleasantries, dressed in a light brown uniform, approached. She ordered Edna to move her car to the front parking spot and wait for her to come out and begin the test.

Palms sweaty, Edna pulled the car in front of the building. She shuddered at the thought of driving in the constant rain, but there was nothing she could do now. She gripped the steering wheel, ready to show everyone she was still capable of driving.

The examiner marched over to the driver side window and motioned for Edna to roll it down. She proceeded to follow orders, turning on her indicators and lights, and stepping on the brakes. The unsmiling female with eyes of steel, walked around studying the lights and checking the tires. Edna's stomach churned watching the woman maneuver around the car, finally opening the passenger door and slamming it behind her, sending a spray of water across the seat.

Reaching across, the examiner fastened her seat belt and faced Edna. "Is your seat belt secure?"

Edna tugged on it, smug, she had it in place.

"If you are ready, you may start the car." The snappy abrupt tone relayed indifference and impatience. There was no concern for the examinee, it was just a job, all business.

Edna puzzled over the nonsense. "Imagine, after over seventy years of driving you make me take a driving test. I never needed an exam to drive when I first started driving." The car lurched forward.

"Pull into the street and head toward Riverside Boulevard."

Startled, Edna glanced across the seat. She couldn't remember where Riverside was. She turned the car right and studied the cars speeding past. She recalled when she was a young girl

and there weren't many cars. Mostly she and her mother used streetcars, or the bus, when they went downtown to shop.

“Turn right, here, Mrs. Pearson. We're heading to Riverside, remember? Now, turn left at the next intersection.”

The woman's constant shifting in the passenger seat made Edna nervous. She kept shouting out orders to turn right, turn left, and make sudden stops.

“Mrs. Pearson, you need to pick up your speed a bit, stay with the flow of traffic.”

Edna shot a glance across the seat. She seethed at the condescending tone.

“Okay, Mrs. Pearson, I need you to turn right at the next light, then pull into the outdoor market down a few blocks on the left. Park the car in one of the diagonal parking spots behind the stand.”

Edna didn't like how fast the orders were flying. She didn't understand. It wasn't right to put her through all of this. “You're making me nervous.” Her fingers clenched the wheel. A dull thud banged in her chest. “I'm perfectly capable of driving. I just don't know where all these cars came from.”

“The traffic is fairly light, Mrs. Pearson. Are you sure you're comfortable driving?”

“Don't tell me about the traffic. There are cars everywhere. The last time I came to Seattle there were hardly any cars.”

“We're not in Seattle, Mrs. Pearson, We're in Richland.”

Confused, Edna glanced over at her passenger. The woman was staring at her, mouth agape. Flustered, Edna returned her gaze to the road. “I don’t understand. I recognize the old stores and the outdoor market.” Her mind was in a haze. She just wanted to be done with all this nonsense.

“Watch out. There’s a stop sign.” A loud voice screeched from next to her.

The shriek startled Edna. A loud horn blasted. Panicked, Edna slammed on the brakes. She lunged forward, restrained by the seat belt shoulder strap. The car skidded to a stop sideways on the slippery street. Her pulse raced and her breathing was shallow. A black shiny car swooshed by in front of her. She blinked momentarily from the glare. Her mind grew muddled.



Edna gazed in awe at the black shiny metal which reflected the sunlight as it bumped along the street. Her eyes widened. She had never seen a car before. Everyone on the street was running out for a look. Soon the whole street was lined with people.

“Isn’t it pretty? See the lights, like little chandeliers, hanging from the side?” Edna giggled like all six-year-olds do, as the car with its little wheels tried to get through the crowd which had poured into the middle of the cobblestone street. Sometimes, in wet weather, Edna had seen the horse drawn carriages lose their footing and slip on the smooth stones.

“Mrs. Pearson. Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

Dazed, Edna turned and studied the face of the woman next to her. She smiled and clambered down from the trolley she was riding in, and hurried over to the sidewalk. “Come on,

we have to hurry.” Edna looked down the street. She could see people gathering at the outdoor market. She was surprised by the cement walkways though. They weren’t made from wooden planks that went *squish* on rainy days. They weren’t even covered with an awning, like most of the sidewalks she and Mother followed on their way to the Public Market downtown.

“Mrs. Pearson, stop. You can’t walk away like that.” A stern faced woman scurried alongside.

Edna dashed along the street. She wanted to see the Indians who had slept on the sidewalks the night before. Early in the morning the market always came alive with the Indians selling brightly woven, colored, handmade, blankets and baskets. Edna loved to watch as the Indian women wove the reeds of different colors in and out and wrapped them around to make such beautiful and useful baskets. A firm grip took hold of her arm. Edna turned and pleaded. “Please can’t we buy one? I like the baskets so much.”

“What are you talking about, Mrs. Pearson? We need to get back to your car. We can’t leave it in the middle of the street.”

Edna yanked away and wandered down the street against protests, and melted into the crowd. The damp crisp air chilled her, and she tightened the red scarf which her mother crocheted, around her neck. She was thankful Mother was with her to keep her from becoming lost in the maze of sellers and buyers.

“Mrs. Pearson, please, we have to go back.” Edna ignored the urging tone at her side. She wondered who the bothersome woman was, suddenly realizing her mother was nowhere in sight. She puzzled over where her mother had gone.

The market was buzzing with activity and the air filled with the sweet aroma of fresh sweet melons, spicy herbs and bouquets of flowers. She squeezed through the people gathered in front of the first few stalls. The Farmer's Market was one of her favorite places. She especially loved going in the mornings when the farmers backed their wagons up to the wooden stalls and unloaded their produce and dairy goods. Edna liked to browse but Mother kept insisting they get going. She turned around to face the impatient tone, not at all like her mother's.

"Mrs. Pearson, please. We have to get back in the car. It's blocking the street."

A large hand encompassed hers, a comforting arm wrapped around her shoulder and led her from the produce stand. She blinked and studied the uniform of the gray haired woman.

"Where's Mother? What happened to Mother?"

"Mrs. Pearson, your mother's not here."

The firmness of the voice startled Edna. She didn't understand why this unfamiliar woman appeared so angry.

"I think that's enough for today. We need to get back."

Edna turned with questioning eyes. "Where are we going?"

"Mrs. Pearson, you're disoriented. We need to get back to the DMV."

Edna brought her hands to her warm cheeks then rubbed her sweaty palms on her coat. She looked around at the crowd, which had gathered, gawking at her, shaking their heads. The woman led her down the street to a big white car parked in the middle of the road.

The woman opened the door and helped her into the passenger seat. “I don’t think you should drive.” Climbing behind the steering wheel the strange woman drove her back to a large brick building with a sign, “Department of Motor Vehicles.”

“Come on inside. Is there still someone waiting here who can take you home?” The woman’s voice softened. She approached and offered her arm.

Edna pulled away and frowned.

Shaking her head, the examiner delivered her message. “We can’t give you a drivers’ license in your condition. Have your friend take your car home, Mrs. Pearson, sell it.”

Edna didn’t understand what had just happened. What did the woman mean, *her condition*? She shuddered at the thought she was losing her driver’s license. Imagine, being told she couldn’t drive anymore. What was she going to do? Edna scowled. Too proud to admit her failing, she crossed her arms. “I don’t want to drive any more anyway.” She was so mad she could chew coal.

