

## New 1933

“Shit weather for driving,” the taxi driver says over the sounds of drizzle and muttering radio.

“Yeah,” you say, wondering if it would be rude now to urge him to go faster. Aren’t New York taxi drivers supposed to be an aggressive breed? Swerving and weaving in between the chumps who believe in lane markings?

You finger the phone in your pocket. You’ve tried the usual time-sinks—TikTok, Instagram, even Free Cell—but your mind won’t stay still long enough for any of them. So you gaze out the window through raindrops, fighting the welling panic down like bailing water from a sinking canoe.

Paranoid. Idiot. Overreacting, the raindrops beat in rhythm. Maybe this’ll prove a big nothingburger and you’ll be back tomorrow.

Maybe not.

Your taxi inches through upper Manhattan. You wonder if it’d be better to buy a ticket from a machine (trackable?), or from a human ticket vendor (might have a photographic memory for faces?). Just get it on your phone like you always do (definitely trackable).

Your suitcase sits next to you, on the seat like another passenger. You hope what you’ve brought is enough. You know it isn’t. You could hardly even be trusted to name everything you threw in

there in a half-crazed frenzy twenty minutes ago. Passport. A few books. A wad of cash. Some socks. Best not to think of it, lest you remember something important that you forgot and end up telling the taxi driver to turn around, sorry, nevermind, this was stupid, just take me home, let's forget about this.

It had been a long, hard slog these past few years, as you knew it would be. Especially the election year—always and everywhere something red white and blue screaming for your attention. There were the miles-long lines at polls, people arrested for running early-voting drives and giving out waterbottles; officers pouring bleach on food, confiscating canes from old people. Election Day almost came as a relief. But you can still recall the exact sensation of the pit yawning open in your stomach as you watched the results come in from your friend's couch, condensation from a cold White Claw pooling a wet spot on your jeans.

You knew this was going to happen. We all did. And so it had.

“Shit,” your friend had said, and taken a deep swig of beer.

Should you use your credit card at the ticket machine, or cash? You may need cash later, and this could be all you've got, for now. On the other hand, you're not supposed to travel with so much. But isn't it inherently suspicious to buy a train ticket with cash?

No. People do it all the time. It's legal tender! It isn't weird. Just make sure your hand doesn't shake as you give them your cash and ID.

It all unfolded exactly how you knew it would. The street riots, just this side of violent. The impotent outrage of your Twitter feed. The protest marches that fizzled out under grey skies and too many police with mirrored visors for faces.

There was the border wall, the travel ban, the private prisons; overturning Roe, dissolving the EPA and the NPS, selling most of the land to Exxon. And all the new voter ID laws scattered around the country like so much broken glass.

There was the fire at the State Department, and though no one was harmed and only a few curtains needed replacing, Congress had declared a State of Emergency, granting the Presidency powers normally reserved for state governments. No one could prove arson—most people figured it was just kitchen grease—so blame was split evenly between Antifa, Russia, and the Democrats.

No one knew what the President was going to do with his newly expanded authority, least of all the President; but it wasn't long before the incarcerations began. It was no one you knew. But your neighborhood got quieter. The old men stopped playing dominoes and bachata outside on weekends that summer.

You will the taxi driver to go faster, for the traffic to clear; and then realize with a start that you don't actually know when the next train is. Grateful for something, anything, to do, you snatch up your phone to look up the train schedule.

The last time you went to visit your parents out in New Jersey, the train car had been nearly empty, and you settled into a window seat, looking forward to a long, quiet ride with your earbuds in and your “trainz-n-travels” playlist on Spotify.

“Ticket and ID,” the conductor said.

You pulled up the ticket on your phone.

The conductor barely glanced at it. “ID?”

“Excuse me?”

“I need a photo ID. Driver’s license, passport, State ID…”

“Um.” You fished around in your backpack for your wallet. “Sorry, I’ve just never been asked for my ID on the train before,” you said, trying to keep your voice light.

“New policy.”

When you finally excavated your State ID from the depths of your backpack, the conductor held it up to her face to examine closely. She looked back and forth between it and you with blue eyes almost the exact shade of her uniform shirt, which strained at the buttons.

She sighed, and handed you back your State ID. “I’m gonna need you to move,” she said, as if she was commenting about the color of the pleather seats. “One car up, please.”

“Uh. What?”

“You can’t sit in this car,” she enunciated, as if you were stupid. “You gotta go one car up.”

“But why?”

“New policy.”

As you stared at her, dumbstruck, her hand drew as if by a magnet to the walkie-talkie on her belt.

“One car up, please,” she repeated. “Or I will need to call security.”

You weren’t sure what train security involved, but it probably meant getting off at the next stop, and there wasn’t another train for an hour. And you wanted to get back to your playlist. So you picked yourself up and moved to the next car.

The ride back was rainy, but uneventful.

As so far this ride has been. Painfully slow, but uneventful. You’ve barely made it to Midtown. There is a train in twenty minutes. It’s going to be close, but you just might make it if you run.

There were the unfortunately-timed “Juneteenth Laws”, which made an ironic anniversary of the newly federal holiday by requiring people “of foreign descent” to register with their local authorities.

The penalty for not registering was a hefty fine, as you found out for yourself one sweltering day in July on hold with ConEdison. You just wanted to get your air conditioning working again,

what do you mean my utility bill is unpaid? I'm sorry, you're going to have to call your bank. It says here you're overdrawn. I'm *what?*

An hour of hold music and chipper ads later, you learned that, according to the new federal laws, you fell under the new definition of “people of foreign national or ethnic descent or heritage, non-American tribal affiliations, or unknown origin”, and had incurred the penalty fine for failing to register, your bank account was overdrawn, and the fine would continue to accrue interest until such time as you paid said fine and obtained the appropriate registration slash identification card from your local DMV, thank you very much, your time is valuable to us, would you like to complete a short five-question survey about your customer experience today?

Your new State ID looked pretty much the same as your driver's license, except yellow, and with an even less flattering picture of you. The lady behind the safety glass had smiled sweetly over her candy-red-framed reading glasses as she tapped her candy-red nail at the QR code on the back, saying how this new ID was going to make everything easier for you, from shopping to traveling to voting. “It's got your fingerprints, credit card, medical information, vaccine status—all stored up there in the cloud,” she said, like someone who wasn't totally sure what the cloud was. “Don't lose it, now. It's like your driver's license and your passport rolled up into one.”

You thanked her and tucked the card into your wallet, hoping you'd never have to take it out.

But of course you did have to take it out—more and more often lately. At first it was only on the train out to New Jersey. Now it's everywhere, from the subway to the supermarket. You finally bought a clear plastic holder that clipped it to your clothes like everyone else so you wouldn't have to keep fishing it out all the time.

You had shown it to this cabbie after hailing him, before he'd even asked. You tried to detect any slight hesitation before he waved you in, but you couldn't tell.

"Shit weather," he repeats now, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel.

"Yeah," you say again, wishing he would focus on driving.

"S'posed to be a big one, you know," he continues. "I can never keep straight with the, what do they call, the tropical depression, level one, two, yadda yadda. It's a damn hurricane and it's gonna be wet."

Oh, yes. The TV pundits have been wearing somber faces all week, tracking Tropical Storm Ezekiel with microscopic attention, a storm "of biblical proportions" headed our way. Know your zone, they kept saying, in case you have to evacuate. As if we haven't done this before. As if whole sections of the subway map weren't still down from Superstorm Frank this time last year, which turned Broadway into a great white river and just about flattened the tri-state area.

The cabbie practically turns around in his seat. "That why you're gettin' outta Dodge?" he says.

"Yeah," you say with a tight smile.

Just a concerned kid, going to help Mom and Dad batten down the hatches. Suitcase full of waterbottles and batteries and peanut butter cookies, not whatever random shit you jammed in there forty minutes ago.

No reason to panic and turn around, thinking this is all just a big mistake. There was going to be a storm, there could be no doubt about that.

There could be doubt about the police standing at subway turnstiles, conducting random searches and asking for your documentation.

There could be skepticism about the Proud Boys gathering on corners to wave rifles in the air and, on at least one occasion, shoot out the windows of a bodega, shattering glass and causing nearby businesses to board up.

There was no way to prove that those Proud Boys had anything to do with the group in Texas that mobbed a local library, seized all the books in the Black History Month display, plus some reference books for good measure, and set them all on fire.

The rumors about whole communities in rural upstate disappearing overnight, no one knowing for sure where they had gone or when they planned to return, were just that: rumors.

You could find ways to disbelieve your eyes, and your ears, and your friends, and the sensation in the pit of your stomach.

You could walk right past the giant red swastika spray-painted over your building's front door, still fresh and sticky and dripping, when you came home from work today.

Or you could be in a yellow taxi thirty minutes later, headed to Penn Station with a suitcase haphazardly stuffed with whatever you thought you might need for an indefinite amount of time,



making a beeline for your parents' house so you can decide where you are going to go, and, if all else fails, at least be together.

But there is going to be a storm. There can be no doubt about that.