

Never take a Taxi on the FDR

"Hey Cochise! Easy on the stop and go!" Randy shouted to the Indian-Pakistani-Persian-Whatnot taxi driver who was doing the herky-jerky gas and brake pedal dance in the continuous glacier/parking lot that was the FDR between 34th and Houston.

Randy was heading south with only one exit to go but he may as well have been on the moon at the rate they were going. He hated being late, especially for work.

Hated it, hated it, hated it.

Randy hated most things these days. He hated his job, hated New York, and most of all, he hated the people who lived there. Always in a fucking hurry, always late for some big shot business meeting. Always in his fucking way. Like now.

He thought about pulling out his fake cop badge and ordering the driver to stop slamming the brake pedal. Detective Buzz Fenwall, one of the regulars at the bar, had given him the badge. It looked completely authentic. Usually, you have to pay big bucks to the Policeman's Benevolent Fund to get one, but after all the free drinks he'd poured into Buzz and his cronies, like some kind of state-sanctioned protection racket, Randy figured he deserved a badge *and* a citation. Buzz really liked Randy and actually thought they were friends. Randy thought Buzz was just another Fred and called him that.

Randy felt the badge in one pocket and his 9mm Browning semi-automatic in the other. The gun felt much more appealing.

Randy had been on the verge of a rampage for two weeks now and after what happened to his bike, he was a hair's breadth away from totally losing it. He had always known it was not particularly wise for someone of his temperament to carry a gun in certain situations, so he had a list of self-imposed restricted areas, like his parent's house and the bar. He silently cursed himself for not having had the foresight to include taxicabs. Then he cursed his Irish genetic code for inscribing him with a hair-trigger temper matched only by his complete intolerance of all living things. But most of all, he cursed the owner of the formerly sleek BMW who knocked over his bike while parking in the back alley behind the bar and forced him for the first time in ten years to travel via this rolling, clunky, stinky slice of yellow hell.

The Beemer boomer had probably knocked down Randy's bike in his haste to come inside and try to pass for "downtown" in his slim black jeans and Gucci motorcycle jacket. At least that's the way it went in Randy's imagination. For all he knew, it could have been the fourteenth car that came before him. But in a classic example of guilt by association, the BMW parked in front of his fallen black and chrome steed would have to pay the price.

The damage was slight to Randy's Fat Boy H-D, (a bent tailpipe and a broken rearview mirror) but it was enough to keep the bike in the shop today, forcing him to take a cab to work. And it was also enough for Randy to pound the BMW back into the Stone Age with a wrought iron fence post he found in the vacant lot next to the alley.

"He didn't even leave a note!" Randy fumed.

It was the third time this year someone had tipped his bike and *NOT ONE OF THEM BOTHERED TO LEAVE A NOTE!* Remembering the ensuing destruction, Randy felt practically giddy with self-righteous rage—congratulating himself on being an instrument of God's good vengeance.

FUCK! Why wouldn't this driver stop POUNDING THE FUCKING BRAKES?

Due to his chronic impatience, Randy had developed a number of mental strategies that kept him reasonably under control in this kind of panicky situation. His specific coping mechanism for the FDR was what he called "the rolling park bench." Basically, it consisted of him getting the driver to move into the lane closest to the East River so Randy could pretend he was relaxing on park bench on a carefree Sunday afternoon, watching the barges and tugboats chugging up and down the river. That the bench had wheels was seen as yet another benefit, gently gliding him to a variety of pleasant viewpoints without having to get up and walk around.

The driver was fucking it up.

"HEY! I SAID KNOCK IT OFF!"

The driver's head popped up like a jack-in-the-box. He hit the brakes so hard Randy smacked his forehead against the Plexiglas "security" barrier, immediately causing him to wonder whether it was really bulletproof.

"Why you be yelling at me?" the driver asked in a *rat tat tat* staccato riff so fast it sounded like, "Whyoobeeyeahme?"

"I'M YELLING BECAUSE YOU'RE FUCKING UP MY PARK BENCH!" Randy shouted back as loudly as he could, his hand immediately gripping the butt of his pistol in the deep right pocket of his black leather trench coat.

At first the driver couldn't think of what to say in response, but after a brief pause he hollered back decisively, "YOU ARE A STUPIDHEAD!"

Randy was flustered by this unexpected line of attack. Without thinking he blurted back, "*I* am a stupidhead? No, *you* are the STUPIDHEAD!"

"No, *you* are the STUPIDHEAD!" the cab driver repeated, gaining confidence.

"No, *YOU* are the *STUPIDHEAD!*" Randy shot back even louder than before.

"No, *YOU* are the *STUPID STUPIDHEAD!*" countered the driver, who crossed his arms over his chest to indicate the matter was now closed for discussion. Since the traffic had come to a complete standstill, it really didn't matter that his hands had abandoned the steering wheel.

Randy paused and started to laugh. All of his anger evaporated. He felt one of those rare moments where he was suddenly filled with grace. He eased the gun back into his pocket, relaxed and said, "C'mon Fred, lets go," pointing to the traffic which was clearing up ahead.

Oh boy. The funny and terrible thing about grace is that it makes you think other people must be feeling the same way too. Unfortunately, the driver, whose real name was Abdul Nazzari Mekahamna Nabi, was not feeling even the slightest twinge of grace and was, in fact, feeling even bolder than before, interpreting Randy's sudden withdrawal from the "stupidhead" contest as a complete capitulation and an admittance of his utter cowardice. Abdul pushed onward, feeling certain victory within his grasp.

"My name is not Fred! Why are you be calling me Fred? You are a *STUPID STUPIDHEAD!*"

Randy chaffed and bristled but tried to hang onto the slender tether of his grace, already floating away like a kid's party balloon.

"C'mon Geronimo, wagons ho!" Randy said, still trying to sound affable, but the failure of the taxi to proceed had already caused the cars behind them to start braying their horns like a herd of crazed donkeys. The horns quickly took their toll.

"*LET'S GO!*" he yelled, back up at full volume again.

Instead of accelerating, Abdul did the unthinkable. He threw the transmission lever into PARK. A thousand horns blared almost instantaneously, as if an instinctive alarm had gone off in every driver's head, screaming: "Protect the HIVE!"

Abdul had violated the most sacred tenet of New York Driving: NEVER STOP! It doesn't matter if there's only three inches of space between you and the bumper ahead – fill two of them! He knew what he was doing. He was going to make this *STUPIDHEAD* suffer and say he was sorry. He just sat there and smiled into Randy's beet red face, enjoying his total dominance over the loud, tall, angry man.

Randy pulled out his gun. What else could he do? He pulled out his gun and tapped it on the Plexiglas behind Abdul's face and growled out his next command like an old tire rolling over dusty gravel.

"Move."

"No sirree," Abdul replied, shaky with fear, but holding his ground.

Randy was stunned. He had never stuck his gun in someone's face before, but in all the times he imagined it (about twenty to thirty times a day), he never, ever thought someone would actually just *sit* there. His size and intimidation tactics had always been so effective that he rarely had to *do* anything to enforce his commands. Now that he had actually pulled his weapon, he was faced with a momentous decision. Use it or not use it.

Fate quickly intervened. Sensing Randy's indecision, Abdul laughed and practically spit in Randy's face, "You are a big pussyboy, aren't you?"

That was all it took. Three thousand years of Irish breeding kicked in and swiftly took away any uncertainty or even any choice Randy could have had in the matter.

"Why you...FUCK!" he snarled, cold and slow. He reached around the outside window and put the barrel of his gun right next to the Abdul's ear. *BANG!* The bullet simultaneously exploded Abdul's eardrum, ripped off the top half of his ear and blew out the windshield in a glorious shower of crystal hail.

Luckily, no one was struck by the happily whizzing bullet, free at last from the prison of Randy's gun. At that moment, he wouldn't have cared if it hit a newborn baby.

Abdul didn't care much either. He was too busy screaming in agony and then in horror when he realized he could no longer hear his own shouts.

Randy quickly took advantage of the situation. Jumping from the back seat, he threw open the driver's door and yelled, "*Get out, you fuck!*"

Amazingly, Abdul managed to croak out a barely audible "Nope," still trying to regain the upper hand. The horns behind them were howling louder than ever as the drivers struggled to squeeze around the taxi into the only lane that the never-ending construction of the FDR had left available. The drivers who were able to pass them increased their rubbernecking to enjoy the spectacle. Those trapped in back, deprived of the entertainment, began getting out of their cars and screaming at the top of their lungs, neck veins threatening to burst any second.

The sound was so loud Randy was tempted to start shooting randomly into the crowd, but when he heard someone yell, "Shoot him!" he turned his attention to the cocked pistol he still pointed at Abdul. Abdul looked at Randy and moved his leg to step on the gas, but Randy saw it coming and fired again into the driver's leg, shattering his thigh bone but missing Abdul's knee, his intended target. Abdul passed out at that point, blessedly freeing Randy from more of his foolish defiance.

Unfortunately, the crowd immediately assumed Abdul's role of "fly in the ointment" as they shouted alternating choruses of "MOVE IT!" and "KILL HIM!" like two sides of a grade school classroom singing "Row, row, row your boat..."

Suddenly, Randy became completely calm. He held the pistol above his head and fired a round into the muddy, gray sky like the sheriff in Dodge City. A total hush fell over the crowd. Randy glared at all the stunned drivers, panning the pistol across their faces, just waiting for someone to say another word. Nobody did.

"At least something works like it's supposed to," Randy muttered, reaching into the car, pulling out Abdul's limp body. It felt like a hundred and fifty pound bag of dirty laundry. Smelled like it too.

Randy dumped him against the highway railing. He looked back at all the people who were starting to grumble, like crowds in westerns always do. He pointed the

pistol back at them and the beautiful silence instantly returned. Then without a sound or a smile, Randy climbed into the black and yellow taxi and calmly drove away.