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I used to enjoy setting out for work – light playing over the owner-occupied homes, surveillance cameras and drought-resistant gravel gardens of Spumante Court, my neighbours heading off in their tall, gleaming cars as if to war, all of us

suited up for battle. On a fine spring morning, the drive along the leafy upper reaches of Blue Nun Road was a roll of drums. Eucalypts and flowering shrubs still mark the entrance to the crematorium there, but these days the traffic backs up for blocks at the intersection. Once onto Cold Duck Parade, we inch past the fast-food joints and car dealerships, the discount outlets and service stations. When the sun is out, windscreens intensify the glare. If the smoke is bad, the overhead warnings light up: *Wind up Windows. Switch on Recycled Air.* Then comes the free-for-all of finding a parking spot within walking distance of the station.

As for the train, it no longer provides a tranquil interval in which to plug in my earphones and allow Coldplay to carry me away, soothed by the compound aroma of toothpaste, deodorant and takeaway coffee. Quite often now I have to stand all the way. One morning a girl sitting near me yanked down her mask, hung her head between her knees and vomited. We all kept our eyes down, thinking, Is it starting again? It's rumoured that The Next One will be gastrointestinal. We busied ourselves with hand sanitiser. Officers in protective clothing were waiting at the next station to take the girl away. We were ordered onto the platform and had to stand in the stabby sun while railway staff sealed off the carriage. More officers arrived to register everyone who'd

been travelling in the contaminated space and check our ID. The officer checking mine took her time about it. Sydney always says that facial recognition technology only works with white people. By the time the officer moved away, a headache had started up along my hairline. I released a nervous cough into my elbow – people turned and glared. The loudspeaker announced that we might have to present at a pop-up clinic for testing. Allowed to resume our commute, we had to cram ourselves into packed carriages. For the rest of the journey, I tried not to breathe. I was three hours late for work. By lunchtime, someone was hammering nails between my eyes. I looked down, and there, near the bottom of my trouser leg, was a vomity speck.

Even the Department is not what it used to be. For one thing, Lorna's gone. She used to work in Evaluations, which is my section. In Evaluations, we act as a clearing house for Security. If a case involves terrorism, we're bypassed, and the investigating authority goes directly to our colleagues upstairs. But as the number of proscribed acts and organisations increases, so too does the number of cases in which Security has a potential but not clear-cut interest. These murkier cases arrive in our section every day, and we evaluate the risk they pose. How many times have I tried to explain this to Sydney? In his opinion, working for the Department

equals complicity with a police state. He throws around terms like 'coercive powers' and 'unlawful surveillance of private citizens', and I repeat, 'I'm only an administrator.' Any reasonable person could see that I coerce no one. I simply recommend. A recommendation is no more coercive than a suggestion. Security makes all the decisions that count. Here in Evaluations, we evaluate. That's all.