

Never Hate the Wrong People

IT WAS NOT THE RUSH HOUR and that is one of the reasons why it shouldn't have happened. But the local was so long in coming and so many people got on at each station that by Twenty-eighth Street the car offered a good imitation of the rush hour. People clogged the aisles and stayed put no matter how many cries of "Getting off"—"Getting off" arose from us getting-offers as we fought our way to freedom.

Holding my briefcase like a combination of shield and battering-ram, I had gained that narrow strait between doorjamb and centerpost when I met the final obstacle—an extraordinarily broad-beamed Italian lady who had a mind to get on the train. Our transportation destinies were in conflict and there was only one thing to do if mine were to be realized. The door was trying to close and I was in imminent danger of being carried on to Thirty-third Street. The alien lady must be compelled to give ground.

"You poosha me!" she boomed, and once more, "You poosha me!" and she aimed a sideswipe which had it reached its mark must have been crippling. I neatly evaded her arm and swerved on; she surged into the car and hated me with true Latin abandon.

So as I walked on I was naturally formulating in my mind all those things I would have liked to say to that large woman who had hated me so ineffectually (I being good at dodging). She would not have understood subtleties, nor statistics, nor philosophizing.

"Madam, I know who you are hating but I can assure you that you are hating the wrong person. Think not of me but of the man who caused that jam (men are always causing jams). Think of the man who cut down train service so that you and I both had to wait long minutes to get our nickel's worth of ride—the officials who agreed to make both you and me uncomfortable and pushing.

"Did it ever occur to you, Madam," I would continue, "that not only is our train service cut down but those same men and others in this hard-headed city of ours are scheming to make you and me pay fifty to one hundred percent more for the privilege of being pushed and shoved? Men who are driven to want to get ever more unearned dollars—men who hope to cut down even the pitiful fraction they now pay to the city out of the ground rent they collect? These men are working to reduce their taxation at our expense by making us give sev-

en and a half to ten cents for a subway ride. Why don't you go and poosha them?"

I am sure that my Italian friend by now would have lost the hate that I had seen blazing in her black eyes. But it would have been followed by the blankness of puzzlement. She would want to know just who to hate and push in return for the pushing I had administered to her. Would I kindly name the precise villain who had signed the order decreasing train service? Would I show her the city official who had engineered the transfer of the subways to the city and thus made it a matter of civic pride to accept poor service? Or would it be best to go and push the secretary of the real estate board who was fixing to increase his membership's revenue while squeezing pennies and half-pennies out of the poverty of the common woman like me and my Italian friend?

"It is hard to put your finger on these men," I would then have to admit. "They obliterate themselves under the titles of boards and committees and conferences and associations and all such things. Individually they are not very bad men. Many of them have wives and children who they love as tenderly, perhaps, as you love your own bambini. They do not realize what they have done and are doing to you and me. They would feel a pang of regret could they know that they were responsible for the minor fracas which occurred but now when I was trying to leave the car at Twenty-eighth Street.

"Much as I hate to make the admission I have to concede that it is probably best (if you must hate someone) that you spend your wrath upon the one who actually pushed you rather than storing it up and leaving it to canker and fester in your mind by hating what is basically an abstraction. The best way to hate an abstraction is to write a letter to the newspapers and I am afraid you couldn't do that. Short of hating the wrong person, Madam," I would finish, "it is much the best thing not to hate anyone and—I do not know any right people to hate."

And by then, breathing once more the spirit of intelligent cooperation and love for mankind—a spirit which will eventually improve subway service and keep down fares if anything will—I reached the goal of my travels. And as I surged through the door and moved on the elevator, I was grateful that there was no charge for riding on it.

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