

JUMPING THE LINE

By James Collins.

Maurice was tired. It had been a long day and he was on his way by subway to his second job. Maurice was a bull of a man. A stonemason by trade and a bricklayer, he stood 5 foot 10 and weighed over 200 pounds. On weekends at his third job, he carried casks of beer on his shoulders, up and down ladders into various bars and restaurants. Because of his multiple jobs, he only received five hours rest at home each night. Any chance he got, he rested and the commuting period, for him, was a time to sleep. As part of his routine, he took the shuttle from 42nd St. and Times Square over to 42nd St. and Lexington. This was during rush hour. Barriers of steel chains that led to the doorways of the various subway cars kept the mobs in line. Maurice followed his routine for years. During rush hour, the trains came every five minutes. As the Lexington Avenue train screeched to a halt, the sliding doors opened and the mobs rushed out across the platform to the waiting open doors on a connecting train across the platform. Then the horde patiently waiting for the Lexington train, in their turn, rushed into the mostly empty car, pushed, and shoved to get a seat. Knowing this routine, Maurice got on the line, walked up to the doorway jammed with people and allowed anyone who wanted to cram into the car go past him. Then he stopped and waited for the next train. Now he was first in line. When the next train showed up there were at least 20 or 30 seats available. He always grabbed a seat, dozed off, and woke up 45 minutes later, just in time for the stop where he got off. Maurice looked forward to this window of rest and gave up five minutes of his precious time to guarantee a seat. However, a lack of sleep made him a little edgy and restless. You did not want to trifle with Maurice when he was in this mood.

To pass the five minute waiting time, Maurice read his newspaper. The line behind him started to grow, and there were at least 30 people patiently waiting for the next train to arrive. Then the problem started. A young man in his 30s decided he was special and did not have to follow the rules. He felt he was entitled. Obviously in a hurry, he walked on the outside of the steel barrier jump the line of 30+ people and made the mistake of standing in front of Maurice. When clouds darken the sky, you know a storm is about to appear; when a cloud appeared on Maurice's face, you knew something was going to happen. New Yorkers, especially in the subway do not speak to one another. It can be very dangerous because there are many crazy people walking the streets of New York. Maurice as head of security for the New York Herald Tribune had encountered many of these and disarmed several who wanted to kill an editor. He was not adverse to confrontation and his very size and demeanor intimidated people. However, tonight, Maurice was very tired. He gritted his teeth, clenched his fist and considered his alternatives. Then he selected a scenario smiled and waited. Maurice heard the train coming through the tunnel. As it screeched to a halt in front of the mob, the doors opened and, as if a starting gun fired, the mobs leaned forward to rush across the platform. At that moment, Maurice shoved young man hard enough to propel him into the middle of the mob that carried him across the platform through the open doors and into the connecting train going in a different direction. Before the interloper could get off, the doors closed. The rest of the people in the line applauded. Maurice stepped forward, entered the car, took a seat and went to sleep. Maurice was still tired.

THE END