

**TRAIN INCIDENT**  
**BY JAMES J. COLLINS**

It was an injustice pure and simple but in this case, it also drew gales of laughter.

This summer morning, on the Bronx IRT, was a normal workday. People packed the 161st station all trying to go in different directions at the same time. As the Manhattan bound train stopped, and the doors opened, it appeared that the cars were totally filled. However, the train seemed to breathe and expand like a living thing to accommodate the horde that pushed and shoved to get on board. Several hundred people managed to squeeze onto the already overcrowded cars, forcing those who managed to stay two inches away from their neighbor into intimate contact. The press of bodies side to side and back to back kept you immobilized. There was no way to move unless the door opened.

As was the custom, New Yorkers did not look at one another. Instead, they tried to stay perfectly isolated by ignoring all those in the immediate vicinity. Rather, they stared at the advertisements placed along the border of the car wall and the ceiling. Each colorful display, edited by the graffiti artist of the week, was examined a dozen times between stops by those in viewing range. They had no choice, for to stare at other passengers was to tempt fate. Due to the heat, humidity, and the jostling, eye-to-eye contact often resulted in confrontation, and sometimes a brawl. The most frightening thing was you never knew whom you were dealing with on the New York subway- hero, saint or madman.

As a junior in college, I had a summer job on the docks on the lower east side loading trucks with cargo. I stood there in the car, imprisoned by the horde, swaying back and forth in unison with them, when the train shifted as it rounded the curves of the tracks. Standing six foot two, I looked over the heads of the majority of the people in the car. Eighty feet down at the other end of the car, I spotted two of the girls from the neighborhood, Nancy Mullen, and Betty O'Hara. They had gotten on at the same station but I had not seen them because of the crush of the crowd.

As the train traversed the tunnel carrying the horde under the sidewalks of New York, an altercation broke out. Nancy Mullen was screaming at the top of her voice, "You pervert! Get your hands off me." With that, the young guy in his twenties, next to her, let out a bellow, "OOww" as he jumped back after receiving a kick to the ankles. Simultaneously, Nancy slapped him in the face with her left hand and hit him on the head with the pocketbook in her right hand. The guy was spluttering, "What ...what ...what's... wrong?" as he covered his face from the onslaught. Now Betty joined in, and both girls were pummeling the guy with their bags while he was hopping from the kicks. It was amazing how a filled subway car can open a clear space when trouble starts. All of the people in the train retreated from the melee. The object of all this attention had backed against a door trying to protect himself from the beating, and kicks administered by the two girls. Lucky for him the train was just coming into a station, and he was more than

happy to vacate the car. He rushed off red faced, and vanished into the crowd. It was not until then that the girls stopped hollering.

I pushed my way out the door, ran down the platform, and ducked into the door at the other end of the train. The space was just starting to fill up with people, for the show was over; New Yorkers have a notoriously short memory after any event.

"Hey, Nancy," I said, as I pushed over to the two girls who were patting their clothes back into presentable shape, "what was that all about? Are you all right? I saw the fight but I couldn't get here in time to help."

"Oh hi Jimmy. There was a pervert in the car," she said, as she patted her hair back into shape.

"What happened?"

"Well, I'm here talking to Betty, and you know how crowded this car was, don't you?"

"Yeah, I was down at the other end. You couldn't even move in here."

"We're just standing here talking about the dance this Friday night, and all of a sudden, I feel this guy put his hand around my waist, so I let him have it!"

"Wait a minute", said Betty, as she turned quickly to face Nancy, "That wasn't him. That was me. As the car lurched, I thought I was going to fall so I reached over to get my balance."

With that, I started to laugh. "You mean you just beat the hell out of some poor innocent clerk who's probably hiding out in a store up on the street trying to figure out what just happened to him. For the next couple of weeks any of the hundred or so people on this train who see him will treat him like a pervert."

"Well, if you were a girl you would understand. Plenty of creeps ride these crowded trains, and they are pushing up against you trying to grab you and run their hands all over you. They pick on the young girls on their way to high school, and love to get a young kid by herself. Most of these kids are too embarrassed to say or do anything and these creeps know it. They take full advantage. I was just standing there and I felt this arm go around my waist. I turned around, and he was right next to me smiling at me just like they do when they think they have you. I didn't hesitate. I kicked him in the shins, and did a number on him. It was a mistake, but tough muffins. It just wasn't his day."

It was an injustice to the poor guy, and there was no way to correct it but it was funny.

**THE END**