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8 MILLION STORIES: JUST TAKE IT

Being a little crazy is the best way to survive the city

By Nubia DuVall

It's always a big deal when I get a seat on the D train when I'm returning home from work. Snatching a seat to avoid the aggressive pushing of those coming on and getting off is like finding a two-for-one happy hour at a bar near the office.

I got lucky and found a seat right away at the 49th street Rockefeller Center stop. I nestled myself between a businessman listening to his iPod and an old woman with a red pushcart. She was probably in her late sixties and was wearing an old-fashioned brown wig. I could tell it was a wig because her real gray hair was poking out from underneath.

The old woman was rummaging through her cart and mumbling to herself. It was one of those carts that people normally use to carry their groceries or laundry around in their neighborhood. Hers seemed to be a mobile home—it contained a plethora of random items: a radio, a blow dryer, canned food and even socks. For some reason, I felt like she was going to say something to me so I tried not to look in her direction.

As if she read my thoughts, she turned, looked at me with her wild hazel eyes, and said, "Here! Take this box of tissues." She lifted a blue Kleenex box from her cart and shoved it in front of my face.

"Oh, no thank you," I said as I shook my head and tried not to laugh. Just my luck. I sit next to a chatterbox who is suddenly feeling charitable. Unfortunately, this lady was persistent.

"Come on! I have plenty—just take it!" She tried to push the box into my lap but I slowly pushed it away.

"Just take it. I have plenty!" she repeated loudly and shoved it toward me again. I looked into her cart, and she was right, she had a few dozen small and large packages of tissues—too bad she didn't have anything worthwhile, like a portable DVD player.

Everyone around us was staring at our interaction, and I began to feel uncomfortable. No one was laughing yet, but I figured people would start if this continued. I wondered, "Should I take the tissues just to appease this woman so she will shut up?" I decided it was better to refuse. What if I accepted and then she tried to give me her socks next?

I politely nudged the box away a second time and replied nicely, "Really. I don't need any tissues."

"What? You don't give a fuck? OK! Ha-ha-ha!" Ms. Tissues continued to laugh as she returned the box to the top of her cart.

I was surprised such crude language was coming out of her mouth, but she probably figured that at her age, she had the right to say whatever she wanted. She quickly returned to cart rummaging; the items on top looked like they were going to topple over.

Seconds later, this busybody decided she wanted to get off at the express stop at 125th street, which was still minutes away. The train was full, so there was barely room to move, but she stood up anyway and tried to push her way to the door.

“Excuse me!” Ms. Tissues yelled at a young man, standing with his back to her, “I’m trying to get off!” She pushed her red cart, which was now substituting as a weapon, against his legs.

The man looked at her incredulously and said, “There’s no where for me to go! Can’t you wait until we stop?”

Ms. Tissues obviously didn’t care because she just kept hitting his feet and legs with her cart, repeating the command, “Move!”

At this point, we all started to giggle. Ms. Tissues was lucky she had already proven that she was in desperate need of a psychiatric ward (and luckily she was like 70 years old) because if not, there would have been a huge fight.

The man had no choice but to move—unless he wanted major checker-patterned bruises—so he squeezed out of her way. The little old lady probably moved about 10 inches and was satisfied until we reached 125th street. Then the waves parted for Ms. Tissues so that she and her junk cart could exit without causing any harm. As she sashayed off the train, I realized that being a little crazy is a good survival skill for senior citizens in New York—you’ll always get the right-of-way.

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