

Arthur Hughey was a creature of habit, and when people of habit bring themselves to make significant changes in their lives, the unexpected sometimes takes over. . . .

THE 63rd ST. STATION

by Avram Davidson

ARTHUR HUGHEY WOULD RATHER have gotten on one of them new IRT trains, but it would have been silly to wait in the station for another just because the one which pulled in was of the old type. It was about time, he thought, that the Transit Authority gave the IRT rider some consideration: Everything lavished on the IND or the BMT, and the third system left forlorn.

But, sitting in the old coach, he knew that he really preferred it. He did not really like new things, changed things. And he knew that eventually he *would* wait in the stations—wait and pass up the new trains and get in one of the old coaches—as long as there *were* old coaches. This was sure to make him late, and he hated being late, hated any breaks in familiar schedules. I *am a creature of habit*, he thought, with some satisfaction.

Then it hit him. For a moment he'd forgotten. He wouldn't be rid-

ing the IRT much longer, anyway. He was going to make a mighty big change, he was going to break the whole pattern of his life. And he hadn't yet told his sister. He felt a little sick.

The train went roaring down slopes and tearing around curves. Automatically, Arthur reached for a newspaper which wasn't there. How many years had he read the *Sun* in the subway (a joke which never lost savor for him) on the way home? Now there was no more *Sun* and he was unable to accustom himself to the fact. I am a creature of habit.

That was why he always got in the fifth coach: the end coaches were unsafe. Suppose the train ran into another? Or another ran into it from the other end?

"You can set the clock by Arthur," his sister Fanny said. Often. Well, she'd have to set it by someone else. He looked around the car. The woman in the ugly hat was

in her corner, chewing gum and reading the *News*. She never missed the demise of the *Sun*. Did someone set a clock by her? Because she'd been in the fifth coach, too, almost every night for a long time.

"Will your sister miss you much?" Anna had asked him. Anna. There was a nice, old-fashioned sound about that name. Not Anne: Anna. *Where thou, great Anna, whom three realms obey*—well. Would Fanny miss him? He had simply shrugged, and Anna said, "Oh, well, she'll get used to it. She can visit us and we'll visit her—real often . . . When am I going to meet her, Arthur?"

When indeed? When was the last time Fanny had visited anyone? Or anyone visited them? He didn't recall the last visitor they'd had, but the last visit they had paid was to old Mrs. Whittier in the Methodist Home in Riverdale, shortly before she died. Since then they had spent every evening at home, reading, listening to the radio—Fanny hadn't wanted a TV—"Where would we put it, Arthur?" "We could put the sideboard in storage (he hadn't dared suggest selling it or giving it away)." "Arthur! *Mother's sideboard?*"—listening to the radio, reading, he working on his stamp collection, she doing her needlework, or knitting, for the church.

They no longer attended on Sunday, but Fanny still sent in her work. Quiet evenings.

"Why forty-five isn't old! And Anna really thought so. She owned her home in Queens. That was where they'd live. And what would Fanny do? Fanny would die. She had put so much of life away from her, it would be no effort to let go of what remained. Well, he'd think of that later. Thinking of it now made him feel sick. Ninety-Sixth Street Station. Then Seventy-Second Street. Then Sixty-Third Street. He smiled.

That was one of those little private jokes he shared with Anna. No, forty-five wasn't old. And Anna wasn't yet forty. They might have children, no reason why they shouldn't have children . . . A private little joke about the Sixty-Third Street Station. He wasn't sure she would believe him when he told her.

They had lunch at the Automat. The lunch which Fanny packed for him he gave to the elevator man. He couldn't throw it away. "Did you know there's an IRT station which isn't on the maps in the subways?" he asked.

"How do you *know?*" And she smiled and opened her eyes wide and was delighted.

"I see it. Sixty-Third Street. It must be a local stop. I take the express so we never stop there, just kind of slow up a little because it's

at the top of a slope. But it isn't on the subway map."

So she would stop by his desk in the office where they worked and smile and ask, "What's new at Sixty-Third Street?" Or he would say, "I had a date with Mabel last night." That was the name he'd given to the woman in the ugly hat. He'd say, "We went with Legs and Shoulders to the penny arcade"—something like that. Anna and he got a lot of fun out of it.

The woman's name *had* to be Mabel. That was the kind of woman she was. And the two men he usually saw waiting on the platform at Sixty-Third Street—well, he just *knew* that they were called Legs and Shoulders: that padded-out jacket, those long, long limbs—they couldn't be called anything else.

The train came to Seventy-Second Street and again Arthur felt sick. What he was doing was right. A man should marry. It wasn't his fault that Fanny had built no life for herself. He shouldn't be expected to give his up—But he knew the arguments too well. He and Fanny had lived alone for twenty-five years. Since Mother died. Fanny would not believe him. He knew her. And when, finally she *did* believe him, what then? He felt cold and ill. And he knew that it was impossible. He couldn't do it. He gazed with anguish at the bleak subway

station. There was a sign there among the advertisements, one of those Bible Society posters. *Now, therefore choose life, that ye may live.*

But he couldn't. He simply couldn't do it.

He must get off at the next stop and call Anna and tell her. There was nothing else. The train pulled out of Seventy-Second Street. Now that he had made up his mind, Arthur no longer felt ill. Just a little numb. He would get off at the next stop, call Anna. Not put it off for a minute.

The train went baying up the slope, slowed down at Sixty-Third Street, stopped. Arthur jumped to his feet. It had never stopped here before. The doors opened. Get out and call Anna. He stood, irresolute. The woman in the ugly hat looked up and caught his eye.

"Hurry," she said. "They'll only be here a minute. Hur-ry!"

"I can't give her up," Arthur found himself explaining, pleading.

"*Hur-ry!* It was no use. He had to give her up.

He started out. Legs and Shoulders grinned at him, grinned broadly.

"Look who's here!" said Legs.

"Well, at last!" said Shoulders.

The train started with a click and a clatter. The woman in the ugly hat began a scream that went on and on and on. The train ground to a halt. She stopped

screaming. She put a stick of gum in her mouth, turned a page in her newspaper, and began to read.

"If they'd put a steering wheel or something on this thing," Legs said, "one man could do it alone."

"You always got a beef. Easy on the curve," said Shoulders. The lights were very bright.

"Well, I thought for a while here we weren't going to make our quota," Legs remarked. "Fifty-one, fifty-two."

"We *always* make our quota. Don't the Boss see to it? Sometimes," Shoulders pointed out, "it just takes a little longer; that's all. Fifty-eight—Hey. The beer still cold in fifty-nine?"

Legs sounded a bit hurt. "Fifty-nine is always reserved for

beer," he said. "No matter *what* happens: no warm beer. Sixty-one—"

"Sixty-two. Sixty Three. *Here* we are," said Shoulders, cheerfully. He pulled the long, deep drawer all the way out. "Every modern convenience," he said. "Got your end?"

"Got it," Legs said. "*Up* we go. Easy. Easy. That's right."

The units were well-designed; the stretcher was a perfect fit.

"Well . . . I guess . . ." Shoulders grunted a bit. "I guess we buy Mabel a new hat."

"Guess so," Legs answered. "Good old Mabel."

They gave the drawer a push and it rolled back in with a click and a clatter.

Communication

These creatures find it extremely difficult
 To communicate, being limited
 To five chief feelers and a decad
 Or two of minor tendrils, but this fault
 Is somewhat compensated for by a cult
 Among them called poets who, upon a thread
 Of words, string accretions of irritated
 Awareness which communicate like salt
 In a common wound. I found this practice quaint
 And piquant to an extreme and adopting
 It for my private use was the next logical
 Step in my accumulative survey. Want
 May yet teach these deaf-mutes how to sing.
 In the meantime, I note their ancient fall.

—Walter H. Kerr