The Importance of People

Ruth Cunningham

GLASS HOUSES ARE HANDY

"I HATE you! *I hate you!!* I HATE YOU!!!" Billy shrieked his defiance as Miss Hart forcibly removed him from the



I hate you!

sandbox where he had been gleefully throwing sand in other youngsters' eyes and hair. Miss Hart had tried gentle persuasion, reason, and command, but nothing had worked the way the psychology books said it was supposed to.

Billy was punctuating his cries of hate with some pretty vicious kicks on Miss Hart's shins, and aimless wild punches with his free hand. Miss Hart felt a flush of anger rise from her neck to her face. No youngster in her room could get by with such impertinence! She'd show him! All at once, she realized that her grip on Billy's arm was exerting greater force than was necessary for mere restraint. At the same moment she had a sudden memory of an incident which had occurred that morning concerning use of the school bus.

"What made me think of that business about the bus at a time like this?" Miss Hart wondered. "I guess it's this hot feeling around the ears. I was mad clear through about that bus affair, and maybe I'm angry now."

They say a drowning man sees his whole life in review in the few seconds before he goes down for the last time. Certainly Miss Hart was too busy at the moment to worry about thoughts of drowning men, but later she realized that the fast thinking she did then was at about the speed of a life review in a second or two.

This was the day for which she had asked for a bus to take her children to the zoo. Then at nine o'clock, Mrs. Reynolds had asked her to postpone the trip.

"The reasons were pretty good, really," Miss Hart admitted. Another group wanted to see a particular exhibit at the museum, and this was the last day of the showing. "Then why did I get so angry?" she asked herself. "I wanted to act just like Billy. I wanted to shout, 'I hate you!' at the top of my lungs. I didn't, of course, but that dirty look I gave Mrs. Reynolds was almost as good, and the way I stalked out of the room was pretty sure to let her know what I meant!



Dirty look

"But it wasn't fair! My request was in earlier. What right has someone else to ask me to change my plans? Does that other teacher think she's so much more important than I am? I guess I'm as important as anybody else around here! . . . ."

Billy was still kicking and screaming. Gently, Miss Hart released her grasp,

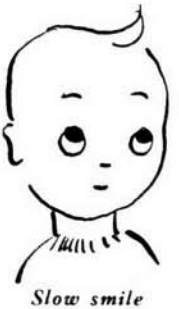


Turning things over

stooped down and looked in his eyes.

"I know how you feel, Billy," she said quietly. "I feel that way, too, sometimes. Everybody feels that way once in a while. We don't like to be told we can't do things we want to do. But just remember this: we all like you, even if we don't always like the things you do. Now why don't you go play on the jungle-gym?"

Billy's startled expression was almost comical. This wasn't what he had expected at all! Miss Hart could almost see how he was turning things over in his mind. Should he stamp his foot and say, "No!" Should he keep on screaming and kicking? Miss Hart waited patiently for his decision. The slow smile he finally mustered before he trotted happily toward the jungle-gym was worth a month's salary to his teacher!



Slow smile

That night Miss Hart's entry in her diary read like this:

"Learned something about being angry today. Didn't actually tell Mrs. Reynolds I hated her, but I presented reasonable facsimile thereof! Billy said he hated me (no mere facsimiles for him; he used a direct approach). We both used the same excuses for being angry:

1. We were kept from doing what we wanted to do by 'circumstances beyond our control.' I wanted to go to the zoo with my group. Billy wanted to throw sand. We got sore when we couldn't have our way.
2. We felt our personal status was threatened. To me the threat came from Mrs. Reynolds and that other teacher. I remember saying to myself that I was just as important as anybody else. Why should I be singled out for a special punishment? I suppose Billy had similar thoughts; I threatened his status. He, too, wanted to be just as important as others in the group. In fact, throwing sand may have been his way of trying to prove his importance to the other youngsters.
3. I suppose the psychologists would say we used anger as a 'guilt projection.' Both Billy and I knew we were acting as we weren't supposed to, as our reason said we shouldn't, so we both became the more angry. Then we were ashamed at being angry, and that made us all the more annoyed with ourselves and the world.



Dear diary

"There may have been other reasons back of what each of us did, of course, but we had enough in common for me to understand. I'm glad, sometimes, that I live in a glass house. I think I'll begin to look for more things I have in common with youngsters who misbehave. Maybe there are more of them than I realize. Glass houses can come in handy!"

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