“Zen of Tipping”

My friend Lou used to walk up to strangers and tip them—no, really—he'd cruise the South Side, pick out the businessman on his way to lunch, the slacker hanging by the Beehive, the young girl walking her dog, and he'd go up, pull out a dollar and say, Here's a tip for you. I think you're doing a really good job today. Then Lou would walk away as the tipee stood in mystified silence. Sometimes he would cut it short with, Keep up the fine work. People thought Lou was weird, but he wasn't. He didn't have much, worked as a waiter. I don't know why he did it. But I know it wasn't about the magnanimous gesture, an easy way to feel important, it wasn't interrupting the impenetrable edge of the individual—you'd have to ask Lou—maybe it was about being awake, hand-to-hand sweetness, a chain of kindnesses, or fun—the tenderness we forget in each other.

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