

Hole In The Pocket

by

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DESCRIPTION

A well-meaning Christian woman, trying to help a man keep money from falling out of a hole in his pocket, faces the devil for good intentions.

CHARACTERS

- LOUELLA, older African American woman
- RESTON, African American man

SET

- Bench, pole for the bus stop sign, a community notice on the pole

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Bus stop. LOUELLA sits on the bench: prim, proper, bag near her feet like a dog, a well-thumbed Bible in her hands.

Next to the bench is a pole with the bus stop sign affixed to it. Taped to the pole is a “community notice” with a police artist sketch and a headline saying something like “Have you seen this man?”

RESTON stands at what would be the curb, looking down the street for the bus. His dress is ragged but not “street person”: he looks like a man who shops at Salvation Army when he has a few bucks to spare—sneakers, jeans, a loose-fitting shirt (Hawaiian, guayabera).

LOUELLA notices something about RESTON that bothers her, but she hesitates to say something until she finally does speak.

LOUELLA

Sir?

RESTON doesn't respond, keeps looking down the street.

LOUELLA

Sir?

RESTON shows he hears her, but he does not face her.

LOUELLA

Your back pocket—it's got a hole in it.

No response from RESTON.

LOUELLA

Your back pocket, with the hole—you've got money hanging out of the hole.

No response from RESTON.

LOUELLA

I wouldn't want you to lose it, especially if it's your bus money. Someone could just come along and snatch it.

RESTON

Like you?

RESTON goes back to looking for the bus.

LOUELLA

I just want to warn you—it's not a nice world around here.

RESTON reaches behind to touch his back pocket, then brings his hand forward again. LOUELLA hesitates, then speaks again.

LOUELLA

The money is still, you know, just hanging out there for all the world to see. You should shift it out of sight—I would not want you to lose what is rightfully yours.

RESTON

How do you know it's rightfully mine?

LOUELLA

It's on your person, in your possession, so I just assume it's yours. Rightfully. I'm sorry if I interfered.

RESTON

You're not sorry. I don't care about your apology. Maybe you will be the one that snatches it.

LOUELLA

Are you always this rude to someone trying to help you?

RESTON

Are you always rude enough to think you can help?

LOUELLA

Since when is it rude to try to help another person?

RESTON

How about when a person doesn't want your help.

RESTON still looks for the bus.

LOUELLA

That bus is not due for another 15 minutes, at least. Your looking for it won't bring it any faster. Why would you say you wouldn't want to be helped? All God's children can use some help.

RESTON

God's children: you might as well say "the world's garbage dump."
That's what I say, always.

This does not sit well with LOUELLA. She wants to keep her mouth shut, but she can't.

LOUELLA

That's a harsh judgment about God's world.

RESTON

From the shape it's in, it's clear he stopped owning it a long time ago.

LOUELLA

I haven't seen you here before.

RESTON

I'm not from around here.

LOUELLA
I mean at this stop.

RESTON
Like I said.

LOUELLA
Where are you from?

RESTON
I. Am. From. Mars.

LOUELLA
You don't mean that literally.

RESTON
How would you know?

LOUELLA
There are three places in the United States named Mars—I was always good in geography.

RESTON
California, Pennsylvania, Texas.

LOUELLA
I see we have something in common.

RESTON
It's none of them.

LOUELLA
It can't be the planet.

RESTON
We have nothing that's common between us, which I have said to you.

This consternates LOUELLA even more: he's a tough nut to crack, especially when he's looking for the bus and not at her.

LOUELLA

Still at least 10 minutes for that bus—assuming it comes on time. I, in fact, never assume it comes on time. They have a printed schedule, but that is simply a theory. I remember when this line had buses all the time because a lot of people lived out here and had to take it to the city center for their work. Good days, those—person could stand here and have five excellent conversations with complete strangers and feel safe and good about it all.

RESTON

This is a God-forsaken place to live.

LOUELLA

Well, it's down on its heels—what place isn't these days? Mars, where you're from, is not like here, I take it.

RESTON

What you don't know about Mars would make any place not worth living in.

LOUELLA

I'm not sure I understand that. I think it sounded rude.

RESTON

You think you have goodness in you.

LOUELLA

Now I know that was rude.

RESTON

You think this goodness will protect and save you.

LOUELLA

Is that kind of negativity what they believe on Mars?

RESTON

What you don't know about Mars would make any place not worth living in.

LOUELLA

Have I offended you in some way?

RESTON

This is a God-forsaken place to live.

LOUELLA

That's not my fault.

RESTON

You wouldn't have enough guts to make it your fault. Because you have goodness. Because you want to help people.

LOUELLA

Now you have lost me completely.

LOUELLA raises her book.

LOUELLA

Helping people, helping them to be good, that's our work upon this earth—so much wickedness and strife, we have to battle against—

LOUELLA swallows her words as RESTON, for the first time, faces her. The edge of the money sticking out of his back pocket is visible.

Before LOUELLA can move, RESTON takes LOUELLA by the arm—not roughly but firmly—stands her up and makes her look at the sketch on the pole. She does, then looks back and forth between the sketch and RESTON. RESTON speaks as if quoting.

RESTON

Have. You. Seen. This. Man.

RESTON lets her sink back onto the bench.

As RESTON sits next to her, he pulls a small-caliber pistol from his waistband. He takes her Bible, sets it on his lap, then puts the gun on top of it. LOUELLA steals a glance in the direction of the bus.

RESTON

Ten minutes, you said. Nothing is coming.

LOUELLA

They have schedules but sometimes they come ahead of [time]—

RESTON

Not to this God-forsaken place.

LOUELLA

You just need to have hope—

RESTON

From the Lord and Savior.

LOUELLA

Gift freely offered.

RESTON

In a God-forsaken place, there is no pleasure but in being mean.
Being mean. I am waiting to be carried away.

LOUELLA

It doesn't matter what you've done, there is always forgiveness
avail[able]—

But LOUELLA stops as she sees what she believes to be anguish cross RESTON's face—here is her chance.

LOUELLA

Always forgiveness, son. Christ is always ready to offer
forgiveness, even for—

LOUELLA indicates the notice on the pole.

LOUELLA

—for whatever it was—for any transgression—Christ rose from
the dead—

RESTON

See—see—now, this is where—I wish he had just stayed dead
because I wasn't there to see if he—the stone rolled back but
nothing left—and I wasn't there, so how do I know what true is?
Would have been better to just let dead be dead, then I could
check the bones, then I could believe. He upset everything, left
me not knowing—I'd be better off if I didn't not know.

LOUELLA

Like being on Mars. God-forsaken.

LOUELLA gazes at him, tenderness in her face. She reaches out to touch him.

LOUELLA

You are one of my lost sons, you are one of my hungry children—

As LOUELLA touches him, RESTON recoils as if bitten by a snake. He jams the Bible against her heart and fires three times.

SOUND: Three gunshots, with reverb.

LOUELLA clutches the Bible to her as she slumps dead to the ground. RESTON looks around as if he expects something to erupt from the sky. Nothing does, of course, so he looks down at LOUELLA—she doesn't resurrect either.

RESTON

You'd be a better woman if someone shot you three times every day through the heart. God-forsaken. No real pleasure but in being mean. And maybe even then no real pleasure at all.

RESTON stands, puts the gun back in his waistband under his shirt. He tears down the poster, folds it, and puts it into his back pocket where the money is, takes the money from the back pocket and puts into his front pocket. He pulls out a bus schedule from his other back pocket and consults it. He looks down the road, back at the schedule.

RESTON

You were wrong about the time.

RESTON folds the schedule, puts it back.

RESTON

Figures. No real pleasure at all.

RESTON exits.