

"WAITING ON THE BUS"

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After work the other day, I decided to get something to eat. As I was driving east on Lorain Avenue, my subconscious scanning radar picked up an image from afar. It was a hooded figure, toute en noire, standing on the sidewalk in front of the bus booth in front of Chipotle restaurant. From a great distance, with an infinity of things to draw one's attention, this image drew mine.

Approaching closer I thought that perhaps this was some babe in the latest urban fashion, just having to have that hoodie hood up, as I've spotted from time to time. It's the fashion. It's cool, even if a little hot in the summer. As I got closer, however, about to drive by the spot, I saw that this was actually an elderly woman, seeming a little out of place, not for her age, but for a certain je ne sais quoi. "Did she not get out often," I thought, "to dress like this?" She seemed dowdy, rather than fashionable, as in perhaps she has nothing better to wear.

As I pulled into the refreshingly not-too-full Chipotle parking lot, I parked my car in a corner, theoretically out of harm's way, as far from the building as I could get in the direction I parked.

As I got out of my car and started walking towards the door, a young woman standing behind, to the right of, and about ten feet from the bus shelter, came over to me.

"Do you have a cell phone?" she asked. "That woman is acting strange. Could you call the police?"

I say nothing at first, taking this surreal moment in, but just stand there.

"Just call 911. I'd talk to them, but I don't have time. My bus is coming soon. I live in public housing." Would calling 911 help this situation, right now, this minute? Am I a bad person if I don't call? Would it affect my karma? Will the strange lady be better off with the police?

"Are you afraid of her?" I ask.

"Yes. She was pouring Lysol on the sidewalk. What if she puts some of it in cosmetics bottles? I hope she doesn't drink any of it."

"You're afraid of her?"

"Yes. I don't want to get on the bus with her. All three of us are afraid of her. Call the police."

"What will the police do?" I ask.

"They'll help her. Since I've been living in public housing, I've seen so many things."

"What happens if the police come, and then she gets on the bus?"

A middle-aged man gets up off the bench in the shelter and comes around and says to me, "I've seen her before, but never like this. The way society is going, you are going to see a lot more of this. Just call 911."

The third person, who was standing to the left side of the shelter, comes over. He's a young man, carrying a portable music amplifier and instrument in a case, with a badge hanging from his neck, and with electronics on his belt, including a cell phone.

"He has a cell phone," I say.

"Do you think we should call the police?" I ask him.

"I've seen her before, but never like this," he says. "She's just going to get on the bus. I've been watching her. I'm afraid she'll walk out into traffic."

After about fifteen minutes of discussion, I give my apology to the young lady and take my leave to get a burrito bowl to go. As I leave, I notice the musician has his cell phone in his hand, but he's not calling. As I'm standing in the food line, the older man from outside comes in and asks the manager if she'll call the police. She agrees and has one of her employees place the call.

When I get my food, I go out to my car and sit and watch for several minutes. The bus arrives. The strange woman picks up all her bags and gets on the bus. The musician gets on the bus. The worried young lady gets on the bus. The other man runs frantically from the restaurant so he won't miss the bus. I start my car and circle around, stopping at a traffic light where I can turn onto Lorain, where the bus is headed in the opposite direction from my path. When the light changes, I turn left, pausing long enough to look at the rear of the bus on my right, stopped, rear lights blinking.