

A WITNESS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

a play in ten minutes
by
Michael Perlmutter

Michael Perlmutter
1719 N. 6th St
Port Hueneme, CA 93041
805-469-2897
lmjdj@msn.com

SETTING

A simple tract home living room somewhere in the suburbs of America.

A sunny midday afternoon

CAST

DORIS A woman in her 'better years'

BOB A clean cut man in his late teens/early twenties

DAWBER ditto

(At rise:

A simple tract home living room (at least thirty years old) somewhere in the suburbs of America. The walls are decorated with family pictures and hand me down paintings. Downstage right is a door leading off to the kitchen, upstage right is a hallway doorway leading to the rest of the house. The stage left wall has an upstage Front door opening onto a porch with a view of the neighborhood. Downstage along this same wall is the main window offering curb appeal--or so was the contractors plans when the tract was built. Lace curtains now obscure the view to outside and the room suffers the debris field of being lived in too long. There is a clear sense of clutter though not one of filth. There is a sofa, two chairs and an unseen Television which we can clearly hear filling the silence with mundane daytime faire, although there is no one onstage watching the set.

There is a knock at the door. The Television refuses to answer back. Pause. Another knock. There is a small crash, something being dropped, in the kitchen offstage.)

WOMAN'S VOICE (offstage)

Shit.

(Overlapping the tail end of the comment is another rap at the door--)

WOMAN (offstage)

Coming. Be right there. I just . . .

(DORIS enters from the kitchen, a woman in her better years, wiping her hands off on her pants:)

. . . get that later.

(As she crosses to the door:)

Who is it?

(There is no answer but DORIS continues her trek all the same. She catches her foot on a loose item floating along the floor and has to kick it out of her way to keep from tripping.)

DORIS (Woman)

Shit.

(Making her way to the door she opens it without a second thought as to who might be there. Standing in the porch are BOB and DAWBER, two young men in their late teens/early twenties. They wear white shirts and black ties, are clean cut, clean shaven and adorn short well groomed hair. They carry small satchels and stand a respectful distance from the doorway itself although we can clearly see them both. There is a slight pause.)

DORIS

Yes?

BOB

Did we catch you at a bad time?

DORIS

. . . Why would you say that?

(DAWBER peers inside at the clutter of the room as BOB, better trained, focuses just on DORIS.)

BOB

We were in the neighborhood and--

DORIS

Are you Mormons?

BOB

No, ma'am.

DORIS

Jehovahs Witnesses?

BOB

Yes, Ma'am, and we're here to share with you the good news.

DORIS

You want to come in?

(Slight pause.)

BOB

No, Ma'am, we're perfectly fine right here.

DORIS

In the doorway?

BOB

Yes, Ma'am.

DORIS

You want to save my soul but you don't want to come in because it's a little messy?

(A beat.)

BOB

It wouldn't be proper, Ma'am. We're both men and you being a woman . . . Is there anyone else at home?

DORIS

Nope just me. No cats. Why? Does it smell like I have cats? That's the wind from the lady across the backyard. And I swear sometimes I catch them using my petunia boxes but what can you do? Would you like something to drink?

BOB

No, Ma'am.

DORIS

You mind if I sit down?

BOB

Feel free, it's your home.

(DORIS crosses to the sofa to sit. Though realizing the TV is on she picks up the remote first:)

DORIS

I'm just gonna put this on record and watch it later.

(Sitting on the sofa:)

You kids watch TV or you don't believe in that either?

BOB

That would be the Amish I think you're thinking about.

(Pause.)

DORIS

Well, get on with it. You're here to save my soul, let's get this over with.

(DAWBBER looks warily to BOB who does his best to stay the course:)

BOB

We've come at a bad time.

DORIS

So? Why should that make a difference? Isn't God here during the bad times? Or do you just deal with a happy God?

BOB

We want you to know that God loves you.

DORIS

(Referring to Dawber:)

Why doesn't he say anything? Does he talk? Has he taken a vow of celibacy or something?

(To Dawber:)

Have you taken a vow of celibacy?

(No reply.)

Can he talk?

DAWBER

. . . Yes, Ma'am.

DORIS

Thank God; you were beginning to freak me out for a minute.

(A beat.)

Can you come in if I keep the door open?

BOB

Well . . . if you keep it open I guess that'd be alright.

DORIS

Good. Progress. Pull up a seat.

(DAWBER follows BOB's lead as both men enter though not too far in all the same. BOB is specifically careful in his movements and DAWBER is specific in watching BOB. There is a slight pause.)

DORIS

You wanna wash up or . . . ?

(No reply.)

If you need to use the bathroom it's just down the hall on the left; second door.

BOB

No need, Ma'am but thank you.

DORIS

Well, relax you look like you just fell off the back of a truck. You want something to drink?

BOB

Uh . . .

DAWBER

Sure.

DORIS

Great. Whaddo you want? Soda? I've only got diet.

DAWBER

Diet's fine.

BOB

Thank you.

(DORIS exits into the kitchen. BOB and DAWBER remain put. BOB looks at the walls of the room as DAWBER looks to BOB. But this moment hardly even gets started as DORIS is heard shuffling past the broken debris in the kitchen:)

DORIS (offstage.)

Crap--Shit.

(Catches herself--aloud to the two men:)

Sorry.

(She returns with two cans of diet soda.)

Cans okay?

BOB

. . . Sure. Thank you, Ma'am.

DORIS

Doris. Named after Doris Day. She was before your time. Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

BOB

Yes. We firmly believe in Jesus Christ. He was the greatest prophet God has ever sent.

DORIS

You believe he was the son of God?

BOB

We are all--

DORIS

So He said, but do you believe he was the begotten son?

BOB

Are you trying to trick us?

DORIS

Just wanted to know where you're coming from.

BOB

Do *you* believe in Jesus Christ?

DORIS

Firmly. You believe He can forgive sins?

BOB

Only God can forgive sin.

DORIS

But Jesus forgave sin. Doesn't that make Him God?

(A beat.)

BOB

Do you go to church, Ma'am?

DORIS

Doris.

BOB

Doris.

DORIS

And what is your name?

BOB

I'm Bob and this is Dawber.

DORIS

"Dawber"? That's your name?

DAWBER

Yes, Ma'am.

DORIS

Wha'd they call you growing up?

DAWBER

Dobbie.

DORIS

Dobbie and Bobby? I love it. Dobbie and Bobby, have you met Jesus Christ?

BOB

. . . I've spoken with him.

DORIS

And has He spoken to you?

BOB

Through the Scriptures.

DORIS

So . . . how do you handle where Jesus said, "I am God."?

BOB

He never actually said, "I am God"--he said he was *sent* by God.

DORIS

Read the book of John.

BOB

He was sent--

DORIS

"To preach the good news to the poor; to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

(There is an appreciative pause.)

BOB

I think we've taken up enough of your time . . .

DORIS

Why?

BOB

Thank you for the sodas.

DORIS

Where are you going? You're going to give up on me that fast--?

DORIS

You obviously already go to church.

DORIS

No, I don't. I just sit here all day watching TV.

BOB

You clearly don't need to be saved.

DORIS

Says who?

BOB

Lady--DORIS, I don't want to get into this with you--I don't have time for--

DORIS

Why? What's wrong with me that you don't have time for?

BOB

Do you believe Jesus was the son of God?

DORIS

Yes.

BOB

(Carefully choosing his words:)

Then you obviously don't want to listen to anything I have to offer.

DORIS

Is. "Is" is the proper verb. As in "is" the son of God.

BOB

(Setting down the soda on a table.)

You see? Thank you for your time. Have a nice day.

DORIS

How dare you.

BOB

Excuse me?

DORIS

I am worth saving. But I'm not worth the trouble, is that it?

BOB

This . . . is the wrong time.

DORIS

Of course it's the wrong time. It's always the wrong time. But you don't just give up like that. You don't offer salvation with one hand then yank it away with the other because you think it's just too hard. How long have you been at this?

(But BOB has stepped toward the open doorway, waiting for DAWBER to follow.)

DAWBER

Six months.

BOB

I'll be out on the porch.

(DAWBER looks to BOB unsure what to do next.)

DORIS

You don't leave a man behind.

(BOB is stopped. Neither moving back in or further out.)

DORIS

You've had a bad day? Have I caught *you* at a bad time?

BOB

. . . No, Ma'am.

(There is a pause. DORIS watches DAWBER watching BOB; she studies BOB a little closer. BOB doesn't return eye contact. He stands in the doorway carefully holding himself up. DORIS's demeanor softens.)

DORIS

Tell me about it. Tell me what happened.

(There is another pause.)

DAWBER

The people at the end of the block . . . The guy who lives there . . . lit into him pretty good.

DORIS

Charlie?

DAWBER

I think that was his name, yes, Ma'am.

DORIS

He's always been a character, that one.

BOB

Thank you for the hospitality, Ma'am, I'm sorry but we have to get going now.

DORIS

(Putting it together now:)

Did he hit you?

(No reply. But by the way BOB is holding himself up and DAWBER's concern it is clear that BOB has been struck.)

He gets that way when he's off his meds.

BOB

It's not his fault, Ma'am.

DORIS

You need to come in and sit down.

BOB

We really should be going. Nothing . . . to be looked at or . . . concern yourself about . . .

DORIS

I think God'll understand. He took a day off himself, you know.

BOB

I'll be alright. I just . . . I need a little air.

(He steps outside, beyond our sight.)

DORIS

Is he going to be alright?

DAWBBER

Yes, Ma'am. God is good.

DORIS

(Watching Bob from inside:)

God is great, yeah, but is he gonna be alright?

DAWBBER

Thank you for your concern, Ma'am.

DORIS

DORIS. It's . . .

(Still watching:)

Your friend is lying on the grass. Why is he lying on my grass?

(DAWBBER looks to verify the same. He politely exits following out through the front door to check on Bob.)

DORIS

(Watching from inside:)

Is he alright?

(No reply.)

Is he . . .

(Watching:)

Is he breathing? Is he-- . . . ?

(She follows her own concern outside, catching sight of the neighbors as she goes.)

Charlie Faner, you did this! Charlie!!? What do you think you're looking at?

(Back to Dawber:)

Is he . . . ?

(But she is out the door and offstage now.)

Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God

END