

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Eric McKinley

I opened the door without looking. You know how you do, like sometimes when you answer the phone without checking the caller ID. Then a week later you find yourself helping a friend move to a fifth floor walkup on a sweltering July Saturday, or attending your grandmother's poetry reading at the nursing home. It was like that. I opened the door without looking.

"Blessed morning to you, sir."

"If you say so."

"How are you today?"

The woman's smile was determined, expansive. Maybe they gave out pills at Kingdom Hall. I wish this woman, Delores, would simply tell me so. She might get somewhere then.

"Delores, I'm gonna be real with you, I'm pretty friggin' hung over."

"How do you know my name?"

"Dee, you knock on my door every other Friday morning. You've told me your name. I'm off on Fridays. So, on Thursdays I go out and get hammered. It's why I'm hazy. Why I look this way. It's why every two weeks I fuck up and open the door for you."

"Or maybe you think I have something you need to hear?"

"Or, maybe I like embarrassing you?"

"Sir, I'm doing Jehovah's business. I can't be embarrassed."

"Evidently."

Delores was right. As I stood there in my twelve-year-old, green, threadbare, terry-cloth bathrobe, failing to make eye contact, scratching myself, she stood on my porch in her tight black coat, buttoned up and with a pitiful fur collar. And she was undeterred.

"Do you know about the coming of Jehovah?"

"I didn't even know Jehovah had a girlfriend."

Delores tilted her head and frowned at me. "You should visit the Hall and hear some truth."

"Dee, I appreciate it. But I'm pretty stocked up on truth right here."

She ignored this. I noticed her shifting to the left, trying to see around me, perhaps looking to see if there was someone else at home she could talk to. Delores was out of luck. There was no one. I live in my dead mother's house. My only friends are from meetings, which is the only way I can face them. No women have been by in a while. In fact, Dee might be my number one. I moved to my right to block her, and we sway, to and fro, as if we were dancers making time.

"What are you looking for?" I said.

Delores was startled. "Oh nothing. Just trying to take some weight off my feet. I'm on them all day."

I smiled. "So they permit lying in this cult of yours?"

"It's not a cult."

"Yeah well, what is it?"

"It's a calling."

"You're called to bother people at home, lie to them and snoop inside their houses."

Delores checked the top button of her coat. It was still fastened.

"Are you embarrassed now?" I asked.

She straightened up some more. "I think I'll leave you to your day, sir."

"My day usually doesn't start for another four hours."

"Be that as it may . . ." She turned to go. Delores reached the second concrete step.

"Hold up," I said.

She stopped.

"Can we make a deal?"

"What kind of deal?"

"If I buy one of your pamphlets, will you promise not to ring my bell anymore?"

"No," Delores said.

"No? What do you mean no?"

"I mean, I can't do that. If you buy a *Watchtowers*, the Hall requires me to come back and discuss it with you, answer your questions."

"The Hall requires . . . listen, I'm not talking about reading the thing. I'm talking quid pro quo. I get you a sale, you leave me be."

"Sir, I'm not on commission."

"You could've fooled me. And stop calling me sir. Never mind. I was trying to do us both a favor."

As the sun burned my eyes through leafless trees, Delores pulled a loosely wrapped package out of her bag.

"There's an interesting article in this latest issue about what it means to truly give, to give without expecting to get."

"Dee, everyone's giving to get."

"Not Jehovah."

"Shit lady, listen. I'm going inside to get my wallet. I'm going to give you ten bucks. In exchange, you give me as many pamphlets as you want and the satisfaction of sleeping soundly on a Friday morning. Now, do we have a deal or not?"

Delores nodded. Her face had regained its calm slack. She tapped her right foot.

"Okay, wait," I said.

With that, I went upstairs for the wallet in Thursday night's jeans. My steps creaked both up and down. My banister flexed when I held it. I made sure to re-tie my robe as I returned to the front door. There, I saw three *Watchtowers* on my door mat which read: OH SHIT. NOT YOU AGAIN. Delores wasn't there. I checked my downstairs to see if she had snuck inside. She hadn't. After picking the package up off the mat, I looked down my vacant street, sighed, and closed the door.