

TRANSITION

A short play

by

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TRANSITION

CHARACTERS

WALTER, a black man

ANDY, a white man

PLACE

A hotel room

TIME

The present

TRANSITION

A hotel room. WALTER, smartly dressed, is talking on his cell phone.

WALTER

You have got to be kidding. It's that hard to find a good French translator in France? No, no, I agree, we need someone who...Exactly.

(There's a knock on the door.)

It's open!

ANDY enters. He doesn't recognize WALTER, who raises his hand in greeting. ANDY hovers uncertainly.

Okay...Fine, fine...And the German edition?

(To ANDY, in a familiar way, with his hand covering the phone)

I'll be right there, man.

(Back to the phone)

I'm sorry, what was that?... Really? Now that's what I call progress.

Listen, I've got another meeting...Sounds good, catch you later.

(Ending the call, then effusively)

Andy! How you doing, man?!

He approaches ANDY and embraces him. ANDY is surprised and resistant.

Look at you! No grey hairs, no belly, nothing, you look good. What's going on?

ANDY

Not too much.

WALTER

Same old, same old?

ANDY

Yeah.

WALTER

Good, good. You know, I saw you were registered for the conference, too, and I thought, hey, it's time. Right? I mean, you and Ashley – more power to you. She's an amazing woman and you are one lucky dude. No hard feelings there, seriously, water under the bridge and all that. I miss you, man. I want to get back to where we were, you know. Yeah?

ANDY

Yeah. I mean, why....yeah.

WALTER

And I have something important I want to share with you.

ANDY

Okay.

WALTER

You don't recognize me, do you?

ANDY

Sure, I do. I never forget a face. Except when I forget a face! You're the consultant from...er...Wait, wait, don't tell me. God...

WALTER

We worked together.

ANDY

We did.

WALTER

At Ventura.

ANDY

Ventura? Really?

WALTER

For three years.  
(Beat.)

ANDY

Where's Walter?

WALTER

You don't need to call security.

ANDY

Okay. Where is he?

WALTER

I'm right here. Andy. Andy! Look at me. It's me, Walter.

ANDY

But you're...

WALTER

Black, yes, but I'm the same guy.

ANDY

Okay, look—

WALTER

I was white and now I'm black. I know it's hard to believe—

ANDY

This is Room 207, right?

WALTER

At the Hilton, yes. Andy—

ANDY

My old friend, Walter White, left me a message asking me to stop by and see him—

WALTER

Leslie Lesley.

ANDY

What?

WALTER

It's August, hotter than hell, and we're swimming across Echo Lake, and I tell you about my cousin, Leslie Fink, who has always hated being a Fink, -- who wouldn't -- and she has officially changed her last name to Lesley. Which makes her Leslie Lesley. Like Major Major in Catch 22. And you think that is the funniest damn thing you ever heard, and you are laughing so hard you swallow a bunch of water and suddenly you start to sink and you are flailing around with this look of panicked disbelief on your face, like, damn, I'm going to drown, on this beautiful summer's day in Vermont, I am going to die. And the only reason you don't is because I am there, as usual, to save your sorry pink ass.

(Beat.)

ANDY

What about the tattoo?

WALTER

Tattoo?

ANDY

The tattoo on my ass. What's it look like?

WALTER

It's not a tattoo. You have a mole on your ass in the shape of a mole. They call me Mister Moleasses!

(Beat)

ANDY

It's not possible. I mean, biologically, physiologically—

WALTER

It's happening all over, man. After Obama became president, it just took off, and after eight years, man...Of course, there's all this denial and self-censorship. White folks have never wanted to talk about what it means to be black—or brown or red or yellow for that matter—and now they really don't want to go there!

ANDY

Oh my God.

WALTER

What?

ANDY

You're in black face.

WALTER laughs.

You think that's funny? How could you possibly – ?

WALTER

(Rolling up one shirtsleeve, thrusting his arm out)

Rub it. See if it comes off.

(ANDY hesitates)

Go on.

(Reluctantly, ANDY rubs the skin of WALTER's arm. He examines his finger. Nothing.)

Hey, it's good, man, it's a good thing! And you know what?

ANDY

What?

WALTER

You could be next!

ANDY  
No.

WALTER  
I'm serious.

ANDY  
No way. There's no reason for me to be black.

WALTER  
What, you don't deserve it?

ANDY  
No, that's not what I—

WALTER  
Hold on a second. Stay still.  
(He examines ANDY's eyes.)

ANDY  
What?

WALTER  
Yep.

ANDY  
What?

WALTER  
(Excited, encouraging)  
The little black dots on your cornea, that's the first sign. Brother, my brother, your transition has begun!

ANDY rushes to a wall mirror and checks his eyes. He sees the dot, too.

ANDY  
That could be anything, inflammation, allergic reaction, glaucoma—

WALTER  
It's not.

ANDY  
This is not happening.

WALTER

It's happening. Welcome to the club!

ANDY

But why? I mean...

WALTER

Natural progression. White people have been acting black for years, talking black, playing black music pretending it's white. Dancing black. You got any idea what you look like dancing black? It's pathetic, man, let me tell you, it's embarrassing. And to think I did that shit when I was white!

ANDY

But I don't want to be black! No disrespect, I mean—

WALTER

And none taken. Just think of it this way, man. We're only human. We all come from Africa anyway, and now we're all going back there, going back to Mama. It's beautiful!

ANDY

When?

WALTER

When what?

ANDY

When will I actually... turn black?

WALTER

Oh, okay, I thought maybe you were talking about black identity, because that is, like, a lifetime undertaking, man. And totally fascinating, it will blow your mind. Has for me, and I'm barely out of diapers myself! I mean, being black, it's incredible, man, let me tell you, it is so rich, you have no idea – well, of course you don't, but you think you do starting out. I mean, you've read your your Toni Morrison and your Ta-Nehisi Coates and your Henry Louis Gates, and you've watched "Eyes on the Prize" and "Roots", and you are totally down with Kanye West or whoever it is—

ANDY

When!?

WALTER

It varies. Could be two months, two weeks, two hours—

ANDY

I could be black in two hours! But the conference, I'm on a panel.

WALTER

Black people do sit on panels.

ANDY

Can I, like, delay the process?

WALTER

Take a pill?

ANDY

Don't fuck with me, man, okay, I mean—

WALTER

Andy, the first thing you got to realize is that you are no longer in control. Okay? You just got to give it up. Which is very hard for white folks. Believe me, I've been there.

ANDY

But what do I do, I mean....where do I start....?

WALTER

(Handing him a small book)

I said I had something important to give you.

ANDY

(Reading the title)

"Becoming Black: A Survival Guide".

WALTER

Hot off the presses.

ANDY

You wrote this?

WALTER

Your autographed copy.

ANDY

Thanks. This is really something. How's it doing? I mean, is it...?

WALTER

Flying off the shelves.

ANDY

Great.

WALTER

I try not to think of it as panic buying.

ANDY

Right.

WALTER

I self-published to start with, no one would touch it. And I got a little buzz going, and a small publisher picked it up and ran with it and since then, boom -- we've gone global. Europe, Canada, Australia. Maine. Maine is big. Wisconsin, too.

ANDY

Wow. Congratulations. That's, er...that's real exciting.

WALTER

Read it and then we'll talk. Okay?

ANDY

Yeah. Okay. Is there stuff in here about how you, like, deal with family?

WALTER

You mean, when you turn black and they're still white?

ANDY

Yeah.

WALTER

Chapter three.

ANDY

Great. God, my parents, I mean....And Ashley.

WALTER

You and Ashley. I gotta to admit, okay, I was kind of surprised. I mean, she and I were never right for each other, but you guys – it didn't seem like a perfect match either.

ANDY

Actually, we're getting married.

WALTER

No kidding, congratulations! That is awesome, man.

ANDY

Yeah, well, I don't know, man, I mean this is going to freak her out.

WALTER

No, it won't.

ANDY

Of course it will!

WALTER

Trust me, Ashley will be totally cool with this.

ANDY

Really? Why?

WALTER

I saw her on the subway this morning.

ANDY

And?

WALTER

She's black now.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY.

