

TRANSITION

A short play

by

Peter Snoad

Peter Snoad
50 Dunster Road
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
U.S.A.
(617) 522-4219
(617) 650-2325
psnoad@yahoo.com

© Peter Snoad 2010



Member
All rights & privileges.

TRANSITION

CHARACTERS

WALTER, a black man

ANDY, a white man

PLACE

A hotel room

TIME

The present

TRANSITION

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

WALTER

(On the phone)

You can't be serious. It's that hard to find a good French translator in France? No, no, I agree, absolutely, we need someone who...Exactly.

(There's a knock on the door.)

Come in, it's open!

ANDY enters. WALTER gives a little wave. ANDY doesn't recognize him. He looks around, confused, and hovers uncertainly.

(On the phone)

What about the German edition?

(To ANDY, with his hand over the receiver)

I'll be right there.

(Back to the phone)

I'm sorry, what was that? Really? That's great, that's terrific. Listen, I gotta go....I will...Definitely...You, too.

(Clicking his phone shut)

Andy! How you doing, man?!

He approaches ANDY and embraces him. ANDY goes along with this awkwardly.

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

ANDY

Not too much.

WALTER

Same old, same old?

ANDY

You got it.

WALTER

You don't recognize me, do you?

ANDY

What do you mean? I never forget a face. Except when I forget a face!

ANDY (CONT.)

(He laughs to cover his embarrassment)
You're the consultant, right? From...er... Wait, wait, don't tell me. Oh God, I sound like that radio show on NPR! Okay...er....

WALTER

We worked together.

ANDY

We did.

WALTER

At Ventura.

ANDY

Ventura? Really? I don't think so.

WALTER

For three years.
(Beat.)

ANDY

Where's Walter?

WALTER

You don't need to call security.

ANDY

Where is he?

WALTER

I'm right here Andy, look at me. Look at me.

ANDY

I am. But you're...

WALTER

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

ANDY

Okay, look—

WALTER

I was white and now I'm black.

ANDY

Cute, very cute.

WALTER

I know it's hard to believe—

ANDY

Who are you?

WALTER

It's me. Walter.

ANDY

(Ushering him firmly towards the door)

Look, I don't know what your game is, but I don't have time for this—

WALTER

Leslie Lesley.

ANDY

What?

WALTER

It's August, it's hotter than hell, and we're swimming across Echo Lake, and I tell you about my cousin, Leslie Fink. She's always hated being a Fink—which on some level you can understand. So she's officially changed her last name to Lesley. Which makes her Leslie Lesley. Well, you think that's the funniest damn thing you ever heard, and you are laughing and laughing and you can't stop, and then you swallow a bunch of water and all of a sudden you're fighting to stay afloat, and you have this amazed look on your face, like, damn, I am going to drown. On this beautiful summer's day. And the only reason you didn't was because I was there, as usual, to save your sorry pink ass.

ANDY

What's the tattoo look like?

WALTER

Tattoo?

ANDY

The tattoo on my ass.

WALTER

You don't have a tattoo on your ass. You're allergic to tattoos. But you've got a mole there which you're very proud of because it is shaped exactly like a mole. Molasses!

(He chuckles. Beat.)

ANDY

You've done your homework, I'll say that for you.

WALTER

It's happening all over, man. White people are turning black.

ANDY

Where is Walter?

WALTER

Of course, no one's talking about, especially white folks. They do not want to go there – oh no.

ANDY

Okay, enough of this bullshit—

WALTER

Look, Andy, I know we haven't talked since the whole Ashley thing, but I mean we were tight, man, and I want to be friends again, and when I arrived here at the hotel and I saw you were registered for the conference, too—

ANDY

I got a message from Walter asking me to come to Room 303 because he had something important to give me.

WALTER

Advice. I want to help you, man, I want to prepare you.

ANDY

Oh please—

WALTER

Andy, this is real. It's happened to me and it's probably going to happen to you.

ANDY

(Scanning the room)

Okay, where are they, where are the cameras? Hell-ooo! What is this? Some stupid reality TV show? You can't do this, this is an invasion of my privacy, there are laws...

ANDY (CONT.)

(A pause. He stares at WALTER)

It really is you.

WALTER

Yes it is.

ANDY

But biologically, physiologically, it's not possible. Is it?

(WALTER nods slowly.)

But I mean, how does it...what happens?

WALTER

You go to sleep white, and you wake up black.

ANDY

Just like that?

WALTER

Pretty much. The thing is there's no real warning except for the eyes.

ANDY

The eyes?

WALTER

(Peering into ANDY's eyes)

Wait a minute.

ANDY

What are you doing?

WALTER

Hold still. Yup.

ANDY

What? What?

WALTER

It's started.

ANDY

What's started?

WALTER

Your transition. You have these tiny black dots on your cornea. It's the first sign.

ANDY rushes over to a wall mirror.

ANDY

I don't see anything.

WALTER

Denial reflex. It's typical. Look again.

ANDY

Oh my God.

WALTER

What?

ANDY

I don't believe this. You want to be friends again, you want to pick up where we left off, and you come to me in black face?

WALTER

No—

ANDY

I don't know, man, something has happened to you, and whatever it is, it is not pretty. I am outta here.

WALTER

(Rolling up one shirtsleeve)

Rub it.

ANDY

(As he moves to exit)

You need professional help.

WALTER

(Thrusting his arm in front of ANDY to bar his way)

Rub it off. Go on.

(ANDY stops, hesitates.)

Do it.

Reluctantly, ANDY rubs the skin of WALTER's arm. It stays black. He rubs it again – harder this time. Same result.

WALTER

Welcome to the club.

ANDY

No. No!

WALTER

You and I have some work to do.

ANDY

I can't be black! Okay, tell me why. Why is this happening? Why would this possibly be happening?

WALTER

It's a natural progression. White folks have pretended to be black for years. Talking black. Playing black music. Dancing black. You got any idea what you look like dancing black? It is sad, man, in fact it's more than sad, it is pitiful. And to think I did that shit myself....Of course, the whole Obama thing has really accelerated the process.

ANDY

No, no, I don't believe this.

WALTER

Think of it this way. We all come from Africa, every one of us, and now we're all going back there, we're all going back to Mama. It's beautiful.

ANDY

When?

WALTER

When what?

ANDY

When will I turn black?

WALTER

You mean, your skin?

ANDY

Yes!

WALTER

Okay, okay. I thought maybe you were talking about black identity. Because that is a whole other dimension, man, and it takes years, I mean,

WALTER (CONT.)

it's basically a lifetime project. And it's tough, let me tell you, it is a challenge. Totally fascinating, though, it will blow your socks off, it has for me—and I'm barely out of diapers myself. The thing is, when you start out, you think you have some idea, right? You've read your Walter Mosley and your Alice Walker and your Henry Louis Gates, and you've watched "Eyes on the Prize", and you are totally down with Kanye West or whoever it is. Except it's nothing, man. You don't know shit, you are nowhere, you might as well be on Mars. But, see, I can help you—

ANDY

When!?

WALTER

Hard to say. Could be two months, two weeks, two hours—

ANDY

I could be black in two hours!

WALTER

Give or take.

ANDY

But I can't, I mean the conference—

WALTER

I know, the timing is terrible.

ANDY

I'm on a panel!

WALTER

Black people do sit on panels. It has been known.

ANDY

This is not happening.

WALTER

Andy! There are a lot of positives, okay? You need to—

ANDY

What the hell am I going to do?

WALTER

(Handing ANDY a small book)
Start with this.

ANDY

(Reading the title)
“Becoming Black: A Survival Guide”.

WALTER

I’ve signed it for you.

ANDY

You wrote this?

WALTER

Yes, I did.

ANDY

Wow. Thanks. This is...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

Of course, I had to publish it myself to start with, through my website, no one else would touch it. But then we got some buzz going, and a small publisher picked it up, and now we’ve gone global. Europe, Canada, Australia. Wisconsin.

ANDY

Congratulations. You must be very excited.

WALTER

Read it and then we’ll talk. Okay?

ANDY

Okay. Is there stuff in here about...er...?

WALTER

What?

ANDY

How you deal with family and...

WALTER

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

ANDY

Yeah.

WALTER

Chapter Four.

ANDY

Great. God, my parents, I mean, I can't imagine it. And Ashley.

WALTER

You still together?

ANDY

Yeah.

WALTER

I gotta say, man, I'm surprised. I mean, she and I were never right for each other, but I didn't think you guys were a perfect match either.

ANDY

Actually, we're getting married.

WALTER

No kidding! Mazeltov!

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