

The Transmogrification

A One Act Play
by
Wendy Hammond

(A Kitchen. MR. WHITE sits at the table center, facing the audience, completely hidden behind the NEW YORK POST. On his right sits MRS. WHITE, on his left daughter JANE. The women watch him, trembling with terror, their forks poised above their untouched dinners. Mr. White wears a black suit and bow tie with a white shirt. Mrs. White and Jane are also in black and white. The only color on stage is a giant pink bow in Jane's hair.)

JANE
M-m-mom?

MRS. WHITE
Sh.

(Mr. White's hand appears from behind the paper. He snaps his fingers then points to his empty plate. Mrs. White jumps up, races to the counter, shovels more food onto his plate, and runs back to the table. Mr. White's hand grabs the plate and pulls it behind the paper. Horrible gobbling sounds. The plate reappears, empty.)

JANE
A-ask him.

MRS. WHITE
Sssh.

(Mr. White's hand snaps again and points to his martini glass. Mrs. White jumps up, dashes to the counter, pours a martini from a pitcher, throws in two olives, and sprints back to the table. The martini glass disappears behind the paper. Horrible gurgling sounds. The martini glass reappears empty.)

JANE
P-p-please?

MRS. WHITE

In a minute.

(Mr. White snaps and points to the martini glass, Mrs. White scurries to fill it, Mr. White's hand pulls it behind the paper, horrible gurgling sounds, and the glass reappears. Jane watches, trembling with terror, her fork poised over her dinner.)

MR. WHITE

(from behind the paper)

My boss called me a cockroach today.

MRS. WHITE

Cockroach?

(gets it)

Oh, it's a joke. Jane, it's a joke.

(Forced gales of laughter from Mrs. White. Jane looks confused. Suddenly the paper smashes down on the table giving us for the first time a view of Mr. White's face which is, at the moment, red and puffed with anger.)

MR. WHITE

It's not FUNNY!

MRS. WHITE

(frantically)

Of course not, dear. Not funny at—

MR. WHITE

I work my GUTS out for the company. I come up with IDEAS! No one else around there any ideas! I've got more ideas than all of them put together, but do they reward me?!

MRS. WHITE

(desperately)

Not at all. They don't appreciate you one little—

MR. WHITE

WRONG! THEY DO REWARD ME!

MRS. WHITE

(emphatically)

They reward you. I was wrong—

MR. WHITE

My boss says I'm a cockroach, THAT'S HOW THEY REWARD ME! He calls me into his office. He says I'm about as useful as an irritating BUG. He says he's tried to get rid of me but I just won't LEAVE. He called me a COCKROACH!

(Mrs. White jumps up, hugs and strokes him.)

MRS. WHITE

(effusively)

You're not a cockroach. I don't care what anybody says. The only reason he called you that is because he's jealous of you. Don't you think the man's jealous, Jane?

JANE

I th-th-th-th-ink m-maybe D-Daddy is b-bad at his j-j-j-j-job.

MR. WHITE

(to Mrs. White)

When is she going to learn how to talk? I can't understand a friggin' word.

MRS. WHITE

We're working on it, dear.

JANE

A-ask him, M-m-mom.

MR. WHITE

Where was I?

MRS. WHITE

You were saying your boss is jealous of you.

MR. WHITE

That's right. He's jealous. That's why he treats me like shit. I got ideas ten times better than his!

MRS. WHITE

Of course you do. Of course.

MR. WHITE

I know it. He knows it. He knows I know he knows it. He knows I know he knows everybody knows it. So he's jealous. I mean, who wouldn't be jealous?

MRS. WHITE

Of course he's jealous. Of course.

MR. WHITE

They're going to make me president of the company, you wait and see. Any day now. President of the whole damn company!

MRS. WHITE

Any day. Any minute. Any second now that phone's going to ring. Don't you think so, Jane? Don't you think your father will make the best president the company ever had?

JANE

N-n-n-n-n-no since he d-doesn't seem to g-g-g-get along with p-p-people.

MR. WHITE

(to Mrs. White)

You've got to do something with her. I can't understand a friggin' word.

JANE

P-p-please, Mom?

MRS. WHITE

In a minute.

JANE

I'd ask him m-m-myself b-but he d-d-doesn't understand a f-f-riggin' word.

MR. WHITE

Where was I?

MRS. WHITE

President.

MR. WHITE

President, that's right. I'm going to be president of the whole damn conglomerate. That's why my boss is jealous of me.

MRS. WHITE

Of course that's why. Of course.

MR. WHITE

You know? I feel better. I think. I was depressed when I came home from work but now I think I feel better. I think. Thank you, Snooks.

MRS. WHITE

Anytime, Sweetums.

MR. WHITE

(pinching her cheeks)

You are the cutest thing, Mufkins.

MRS. WHITE

So are you, Darling Pie.

JANE

M-m-mom?

MRS. WHITE

Alright, Jane.

JANE

P-p-please?

MRS. WHITE

Ok. Ah... Sugarlips?

MR. WHITE

What?

MRS. WHITE

We've got a...

MR. WHITE

What?

MRS. WHITE

We want to... Well...

MR. WHITE

What.

MRS. WHITE

Ah... well...

MR. WHITE

What.

MRS. WHITE

You see...

MR. WHITE

WHAT.

MRS. WHITE

It's just...

MR. WHITE
WHAT!

JANE
W-w-w-we have s-s-s-s-something to ask y-y-y-y-y-y-you.

MR. WHITE
WHAT THE FUCK IS SHE SAYING?

MRS. WHITE
We have something to ask you.

MR. WHITE
(calming down)
Oh. OK. What?

MRS. WHITE
Well. It'll mean so much to Jane.

MR. WHITE
What!

MRS. WHITE
Jane really has her heart set on it.

MR. WHITE
WHAT.

MRS. WHITE
I mean all day long she plays records—Beethoven, Bach, Brahms—and she practices her dancing. So I thought... Well...

MR. WHITE
WHAT!

MRS. WHITE
In the middle of the night, too. I get up to go to the bathroom and there she is humming waltzes—Strauss mostly—and dancing all around her room. So we were wondering... Well...

MR. WHITE
WHAT!! WHAT!! WHAT!!

MRS. WHITE

I mean if you could see how lonely she looks as she pirouettes across the back of the couch, tears streaming down her face making puddles all over the cushions, so we though... ah...

MR. WHITE

You're beginning to bug me.

MRS. WHITE

Well... ah...

MR. WHITE

You're really beginning to bug me.

MRS. WHITE

We want... Well Jane wants...

MR. WHITE

I am definitely BUGGED!

MRS. WHITE

Well maybe Jane better tell you. Tell him, Jane.

JANE

I w-want to g-go to the ch-ch-church d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d—

MRS. WHITE

Come on, Jane.

JANE

d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d—

MRS. WHITE

Come on!

JANE

d-d-dance tonight.

MR. WHITE

WHAT THE FUCK IS SHE SAYING?

MRS. WHITE

(blurts)

She wants to go to the church dance tonight.

(winces)

(Silence)

MR. WHITE

She what?

JANE

P-p-p-p-please?

MR. WHITE

There's something I don't understand here. Who paid for this house? Did you pay for this house?

MRS. WHITE

No, dear.

MR. WHITE

Did you pay for this house?

JANE

N-n-n-n-n-n-n-n—

MR. WHITE

Then who paid for this house?

MRS. WHITE

You did, dear.

JANE

Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE

Who pays for food around here? Who pays for clothes and electricity and heat?

MRS. WHITE

You do, dear.

JANE

Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE

Who pays for TVs and DVD players and stereos and iPods?

MRS. WHITE

You do, dear.

JANE

Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE

Who pays for cell phones and lap tops? Who pays for refrigerators and stoves and dishwashers and sinks and counters and tiles and wallpaper and lamps?

MRS. WHITE

You do, dear.

JANE

Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE

Who pays pans and dishes and silverware and glasses and dust pans and sponges and mops? Who pays for Ivory soap and Ajax cleanser and Mr. Clean?

MRS. WHITE

You do, dear.

JANE

Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE

And therefore, who is the boss around here? Who gets to make up the rules?

MRS. WHITE

You do, dear.

JANE

Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE

Good. Very good. Now I seem to recall a rule, one of the most important rules, that says that my daughter and my wife are supposed to be there each evening when I get home from working my GUTS out ALL DAY. That they are supposed to take CARE of me, give me LOVE and AFFECTION. They are NOT supposed to ABANDON me. They are NOT supposed to FORSAKE me for things like church dances after I've been DEFILED and DEBASED and ABUSED and HUMILIATED ALL DAY EVERY DAY AT WORK so they can have things like TVs and DVD players and stereos and iPods and cell phones and lap tops and refrigerators and stoves and dishwashers and sinks and counters and tiles and wallpaper and lamp and pans and dishes and silverware and glasses and dust pans and sponges and mops and Ivory soap and Ajax cleanser and Mr. CLEAN!

JANE

M-m-m-mom? H-help m-m-m-m-me.

MR. WHITE

Can't you shut her UP!

JANE

I w-w-w-w-w-want to g-go to the d-d-d-d-d-dance.

MRS. WHITE

(terrified)

Ah... well... it's just we've been thinking, dear. Jane isn't so young anymore. Most girls her age have careers and families by now. What's so awful about letting her go out just this once?

MR. WHITE

Wait a minute. Are you defying me?

MRS. WHITE

No. I'm just... asking a question. I think I should be... allowed to ask a question... now and then... And I think Jane... should be allowed to go to this dance!

MR. WHITE

My God. This is mutiny.

MRS. WHITE

If that's how you want to put it.

(Pause.)

MR. WHITE

I seem to recall there was once another mutiny. Do you remember that mutiny?

MRS. WHITE

Yes.

MR. WHITE

What happened after that mutiny?

MRS. WHITE

You put us out. You locked the doors.

MR. WHITE

And?

MRS. WHITE

It was cold.

MR. WHITE

And?

MRS. WHITE

We got frostbite.

MR. WHITE

And?

MRS. WHITE

Jane lost a finger and I lost three toes.

MR. WHITE

Good. Very good. Now I'm going to read my paper and there will be no more talk of mutiny. Terrible things happen when there is talk of mutiny. Betrayers are punished. Remember Brutus? Remember Judas?

(He opens the paper completely covering himself again. His hand appears from behind the paper, snaps and points to his empty plate. Mrs. White jumps up, shovels more food

onto the plate, and throws it back on the table. Mr. White pulls it behind the paper. Horrible gobbling sounds. Immediately the plate appears, empty.)

JANE

(to Mr. White)

I d-d-d-don't have any f-f-friends.

MRS. WHITE

Sssh.

JANE

I w-want to g-g-g-go to the d-dance so I can make f-friends.

MRS. WHITE

Let him read, Sweetheart. He's had a bad day.

JANE

Other p-p-people have f-friends.

MRS. WHITE

Sssh.

JANE

W-w-why c-c-can't I?

MRS. WHITE

We'll ask him tomorrow.

JANE

(to Mrs. White)

Ask him n-now! I'm t-tired of tomorrow. I'm thirty-five years old and I've never made any friends. I want to go to the dance tonight!

MRS. WHITE

Jane, your stutter!

JANE

I want to go to the dance!

MRS. WHITE

Your stutter is gone!

JANE

(joyously)

Please let me go to the dance!

MRS. WHITE

(joyously)

Please let Jane go to the dance, please!

(Mr. White slams down the paper. Silence.)

MR. WHITE

(very calm)

You know? You are really really bugging me. In fact, you're beginning to look like a bug. In fact, you're beginning to look like a cockroach.

MRS. WHITE

Cockroach?

MR. WHITE

Yes.

MRS. WHITE

(gets it)

Oh, it's a joke. Jane, it's a joke.

(forced gales of laughter)

MR. WHITE

IT'S NOT FUNNY!

(Silence.)

MR. WHITE

What's that?

MRS. WHITE

What?

MR. WHITE

On your arm.

MRS. WHITE

Where?

MR. WHITE

There.

MRS. WHITE

I don't see anything.

MR. WHITE

I do. It's changing color.

MRS. WHITE

No.

MR. WHITE

Cockroach color.

MRS. WHITE

I don't think so.

MR. WHITE

Oh my God.

MRS. WHITE

What?

MR. WHITE

Your eyes are getting bigger.

MRS. WHITE

Oh now...

MR. WHITE

You're growing antenna. Little insect legs are popping out of your body.

MRS. WHITE

Don't be silly.

MR. WHITE

You're doubting my word?

MRS. WHITE

No, but—

MR. WHITE

I've always been right before.

MRS. WHITE

I know, but—

MR. WHITE

I'm boss in this house. Right?

MRS. WHITE

Yes you're the boss, but—

MR. WHITE

Jane? Isn't she looking more and more like a cockroach?

(stands over Jane threateningly)

Tell the truth.

JANE

(terrified)

W-w-well. Sh-sh-she is ch-ch-changing c-c-c-color.

MR. WHITE

She is changing color.

MRS. WHITE

I thought you couldn't understand a word Jane says.

MR. WHITE

You thought wrong.

(points to Mrs. White's head)

What are those up there, Jane?

JANE

Ant-t-tenna.

MR. WHITE

Antenna.

MRS. WHITE

I can't change into a cockroach just because you say so.

MR. WHITE

Oh no? Look at that.

(He holds a shiny pan in front of her face. She looks at her reflection and screams.)

MRS. WHITE

OH MY GOD! OH MY GOD!

(She starts running around in circles trying to pull the skin off her arms and face.)

MRS. WHITE

HELP! HELP! WHAT DO I DO?! WHAT DO I DO?!

MR. WHITE

I'M not the cockroach. My boss was wrong. YOU'RE the fucking cockroach. It's YOU.

JANE

(anguished)

M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-mom!

MRS. WHITE

(screams and doubles over)

MY BODY IS CHANGING! I CAN FEEL IT! MY BODY IS CHANGING!

(Her body curls and writhes as it changes into the shape of a cockroach.)

JANE

D-d-don't L-l-listen to him!

MR. WHITE

(as Mrs. White changes)

It's finally coming out, how disgusting you are, how ugly you really fucking ARE.

JANE

D-don't let him d-d-d-do this to you!

MR. WHITE

The way you grovel before me, it's fucking DISGUSTING. The way you try to please me doing every little thing I say—

JANE

D-don't b-believe him!

MR. WHITE

Tonight's the second time in your life you ever even QUESTIONED me and look where it's got you. YOU'RE TURNING INTO A COCKROACH!

JANE

He's n-not God, he's just y-your husband! D-d-don't b-believe him!

MR. WHITE

You HAVE to believe me, you disgusting little cockroach. You can't think for yourself. Every thought in your head was put there by ME. You're not a person; you're a BLOB, a little fucking spineless BUG scurrying around every time I fucking snap my fingers!

JANE

Ty-tyrant!

MR. WHITE

I fucking HATE being married to you, do you fucking know that? Whimpering, simpering, this whole fucking marriage you've fucking disGUSTED me and now I fucking know why!

JANE

D-dictator!

MR. WHITE

You're a fucking COCKROACH! That's why my fucking boss fucking called me that today. Your fucking cockroachness fucking rubbed the fuck off on ME!

MRS. WHITE

Help me! Please! I don't want to be a cockroach!

MR. WHITE

Then you better choose. Either you're MY WIFE. Or you're her mother THE COCKROACH.

JANE

D-d-don't l-l-listen to him!

MRS. WHITE

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

(Silence.)

I'm not the cockroach! I'M NOT THE COCKROACH!

(She points a crooked finger at Jane.)

SHE'S the cockroach!

JANE

C-c-c-c-c-cockroach?

(gets it)

Oh, it's a j-j-j-joke. R-right?

(gales of forced laughter)

MRS. WHITE

IT'S NOT FUNNY!

(Immediately Jane is silent. Mrs. White's body begins to straighten out.)

MR. WHITE

(points to Jane's arm)

What's that?

MRS. WHITE

(takes the cue)

Yeah. What's that?

JANE

W-w-w-what?

MRS. WHITE

Your arms are changing color.

JANE

N-n-n-n-no.

MR. WHITE

She's calling you a liar.

MRS. WHITE

(takes the cue)

ARE YOU CALLING YOUR MOTHER A LIAR?

JANE

N-n-n-no.

MRS. WHITE

Good. Because mother's don't lie. Do they?

JANE

N-n-n-n-n-n-n-n—

MRS. WHITE

DO THEY?

JANE

M-m-m-m-mothers d-d-don't l-l-lie.

MRS. WHITE

If I say your arms are changing color, THEY'RE CHANGING COLOR!

MR. WHITE

(encouraging Mrs. White)

Good. Very good.

(Mrs. White has now resumed her human shape.)

MRS. WHITE

Look! Your eyes are getting big.

JANE

D-d-d-daddy, is it t-true?

MRS. WHITE

OF COURSE IT'S TRUE. MOTHER SAYS SO. Look! Little insect legs are popping out all over your body!

JANE

Oh n-no!

(She doubles over and begins to twist and writhe into the shape of a cockroach.)

D-d-d-don't d-d-do this, M-mom! P-please!

MRS. WHITE

I never wanted a child, did you know that? I HATE children! I HATE THEM. They're DISGUSTING.

MR. WHITE

(coaching her)

Fucking disgusting.

MRS. WHITE

They're FUCKING disgusting. Crying and puking and pissing and shitting and getting their periods! CAN YOU IMAGINE ANYTHING MORE FUCKING DISGUSTING?

JANE

(as she changes)

P-p-please d-don't do this to m-me!

MRS. WHITE

And now you're fucking turning into a fucking cockroach which is even MORE FUCKING DISGUSTING!

JANE

S-stop it! M-m-m-m-m-mom!

MRS. WHITE

That's why your father fucking called ME a fucking cockroach. YOUR fucking cockroachness fucking rubbed the fuck off on ME!

JANE

(writhing)

P-p-p-p-p-p-p-please! P-p-p-p-p-leeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee....

(Jane is now on the floor completely in the shape of a cockroach. High-pitched insect noises come from her mouth.)

MR. WHITE

Pretty good. For a woman.

MRS. WHITE

Thanks.

MR. WHITE

I think we better call the exterminator.

MRS. WHITE

Oh no. For one little bug?

MR. WHITE

A pretty big bug.

MRS. WHITE

I think it's cold, poor thing. Maybe I better go get it a blanket.

MR. WHITE

Bugs don't need blankets. Bugs need exterminators. Snuggums.
(kisses her)

MRS. WHITE

I'll call them first thing in the morning. Snuckie.

MR. WHITE

(pinching her cheeks)
You are the cutest thing.

MRS. WHITE

You're pretty cute yourself, Pumpkin Buns.

(They kiss. She pulls away.)

MRS. WHITE

I don't know, Silky Tums. I feel... well... did I really have to turn Jane into a...

MR. WHITE

Can't be helped now, my little Pie Face. It's done.

MRS. WHITE

I guess so.

MR. WHITE

How 'bout let's go to bed, Snuggle Sweets.

MRS. WHITE

Good idea, Fancy Fingers.

MR. WHITE

You know something, Snooks?

MRS. WHITE

What, Tingle Tongue?

MR. WHITE

I was depressed when I came home from work. But now I feel so much better.

(They exit. Jane is left behind on the floor in the shape of a cockroach making high-pitched insect squeaking noises. Lights fade out. End of play.)