

WHAT CAN I SAY?

by Abraham McNeil Adams

VINCE and CHARLIE in CHARLIE's study. Books, papers, detritus that might indicate we are in a writer's house. VINCE is a man of color. CHARLIE is white.

VINCE I think it's dangerous

CHARLIE It's just a play. Let's go to lunch.

VINCE Two white men onstage talking about how they are oppressed?

CHARLIE They are oppressed. In the play.

VINCE *White men* cannot be oppressed.

CHARLIE It's a play. They'd be in prison. Prison is a form of oppression. Its a metaphor.

VINCE Pick a different metaphor.

CHARLIE It's dystopian. Do you want Dim Sum or Mexican?

VINCE You think white people are gonna become oppressed.

CHARLIE If present thinking persists.

VINCE That's absurd.

CHARLIE History is cyclical. If we don't learn from our mistakes—

VINCE History's mistakes have largely been made by white people.

CHARLIE I'm not disagreeing. Pick a place to eat.

VINCE But you're afraid that somehow white folks are gonna end up hold the shit stick if we don't "change our thinking"?

CHARLIE I'm saying we'll never achieve the kind of socially just society everyone says they want if we keep playing the blame game.

VINCE There has to be some accountability and I'm not that hungry.

CHARLIE Again, not disagreeing.

VINCE Don't write this play.

CHARLIE Why not? I'm leaning toward Dim Sum.

VINCE Because its racist.

CHARLIE It's not racist, it's a *play*.

VINCE There are racist plays.

CHARLIE I'm worried about where we're headed. I feel like I need to say something.

VINCE You don't need to say anything and Dim Sum gives me gas.

CHARLIE Are you censoring me?

VINCE Who's we?

CHARLIE What?

VINCE You said "I'm worried about where we're headed."

CHARLIE We, the collective we, society.

VINCE Oh, I thought you meant white men.

CHARLIE I mean all of us. Can you just pick someplace please?

VINCE But there are only two white men in your play.

CHARLIE There's a black security guard.

VINCE Wonderful.

CHARLIE Why can't I write this play?

VINCE Because you are white!

CHARLIE Because of what I am there are limits to what I can do?

VINCE Kinda.

CHARLIE See, this is what I mean. Its two sides of the same coin.

VINCE Yeah. Your side has always been up so how you gonna describe what's down?

CHARLIE We can't limit people because of who or what they are.

VINCE You don't know the landscape.

CHARLIE The landscape?

VINCE You are just butt-hurt right now because you can't say and do what you want anymore.

CHARLIE I've never been able to say or do what I want. Decide already!

VINCE The world is changing. I told you I'm not hungry.

CHARLIE Of course its changing. Its always changing. I'm worried about what its changing into.

VINCE It's changing for the better.

CHARLIE Of course you would think so.

VINCE What's that supposed to mean?

CHARLIE I can't write something because of the color of my skin.

VINCE Because your skin color blinds you to your bias.

CHARLIE I wanna start a conversation.

VINCE Try starting a different conversation. One that comes from an informed place.

CHARLIE Dim sum it is.

VINCE Ugh.

CHARLIE So I can't contribute?

VINCE Not like this.

CHARLIE To the current conversation. To this moment, right now.

VINCE You can contribute by listening and supporting.

CHARLIE I have been listening and I have been trying to be supportive.

VINCE Good for you. Keep it up. Write something else.

CHARLIE I'm being yelled at all the time for shit I haven't done.

VINCE Growth is painful.

CHARLIE You know what else is painful? Hunger.

VINCE I think I just want a smoothie. What's your goal in writing this play?

CHARLIE A smoothie?

VINCE I'm trying to lose weight.

CHARLIE To like, get people to consider why it might not be such a good idea to judge others by

the color of their skin.

VINCE White people have been doing that for centuries.

CHARLIE Things are different now! I need something more substantial than a smoothie.

VINCE No they are not! Same shit, different decade.

CHARLIE I'm trying to call out toxic thinking that will get us into trouble later. Blanket statements and wide assumptions that persist stereotypes. So, Mexican?

VINCE "Later", Charlie? I'm talking about right now. Right here. There are people dying. Everyday, just for being black, or brown, or other. This is not theoretical or imaginary, its right now. You need to focus on that.

CHARLIE But I can't speak to that.

VINCE I don't care where we eat, just don't write this play.

CHARLIE So I can speak to people dying because of the color of their skin but not to people being judged for the color of theirs?

VINCE You've never been judged for your color.

CHARLIE I feel like I'm being judged right now.

VINCE I'm making you aware of your color. I'm not judging. There's a difference.

CHARLIE But I can't write those stories. They aren't my stories. I write those stories people will say I'm whitewashing their experience.

VINCE I didn't say write anyone else's story. I'm saying write stories from where you are.

CHARLIE I thought I was.

VINCE Are you angry? Hurt? Upset by what you see?

CHARLIE Of course.

VINCE Then fucking write that. That's the right stuff. Don't go trying to make folks believe white people are gonna wind up being oppressed. That's fantasy cuckoo shit . Tell it how you see it. From where you stand. Don't flip the script.

CHARLIE I just want to write it the way I want to write it.

VINCE You can't. You're white.

CHARLIE That's kinda my point.

VINCE You don't have a point Charlie. There are just some things you can't say. You understand?

CHARLIE No.

VINCE Good. Now where we eating?

END OF PLAY