

A TRICK OF THE LIGHT

A new comedy
By

Peter Moore

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Contact: Peter Moore
1801 Goodrich Ave.
St. Paul MN 55105
Pdmoore444@gmail.com
612 201 9353

Characters (may be of any race)- 3 men, 2 women

Eddie- 40s

Marty- 40s

Darrell- 40s

Beth- 40s

Waitress/Usher/Leslie/Calista- 20s

There's no need for a realistic set. One or two pieces of furniture can come on and off to suggest location. The scenes should flow into one another as fluidly as possible. The show is performed without an intermission.

A TRICK OF THE LIGHT

(Lights up on Marty on a sofa, looking at Eddie. A beat. Eddie turns to the audience.)

EDDIE

He sat there, stunned. Pretty much like I knew he would.

MARTY

Do it again.

(Eddie makes a small hand gesture, waits a beat, then does the reverse of it. Marty jumps off the sofa and begins to pace.)

MARTY

Oh my God. Oh my God. Wow. Oh my God...

EDDIE *(to audience)*

I didn't say anything.

MARTY

It's for real, isn't it. Sweet jumping Moses, it's for real!

EDDIE *(shrugging)*

Yeah, pretty much.

MARTY

But how? How are you doing this? When did it start? Can you control it? What are you going to do? How can you be so calm? Oh my God...

EDDIE *(to audience)*

Marty's been my best friend for a long time, and as long as I've known him he's always been a fairly anxious person, so this was nothing new, but still. It wasn't very... helpful. *(to Marty)* Marty, sit down, ok? You're gonna break something. I know it's a shock-believe me, I know- but just sit down and breathe a second, ok?

MARTY

We gotta call a press conference, we gotta make a video, get a website. *(he stops suddenly)* Who else have you told about this?

EDDIE

Nobody. I couldn't even decide if I should tell you, but then when it didn't go away after a few days, I thought I should tell somebody. Y'know, just in case.

MARTY

In case what?

EDDIE

Well, in case I got stuck or something and couldn't get back. It's not like I know a lot about this. It might disappear as suddenly as it came and if I were gone when it did, who'd know what had happened?

MARTY

I feel a little sick. Do you feel sick? How are you?

EDDIE

I'm fine. It doesn't affect me a bit. Nothing else changes, you just can't see me, is all.

MARTY

But when you...when you...

EDDIE

I call it switching.

MARTY

You named it already?

EDDIE

Well, it's not really a name, more of a description. I couldn't keep thinking of it as Being Able To Turn Invisible Whenever I Want. The shorthand helps.

MARTY

Unbelievable. In-freaking-credible. Ok, ok, let's just everybody calm down and go over this from the beginning. Step by step, one thing at a time, approach it from a rational, scientific point of view, there's gotta be an explanation for this.

EDDIE

Oh, I'm sure there's an explanation. It just might be a little hard to find. I've been trying for almost a week now.

MARTY

A week? A *week*? You discover a way to rearrange the physical universe as we know it and you don't tell anyone for a week?

EDDIE

Well, there was a lot going on at work.

MARTY

Ok...

EDDIE

And then Beth got sick, and then the dog got sick...

MARTY

Uh-huh...

EDDIE

...really, they were both throwing up all over, it was pretty gross...

MARTY

Fine, yes, good, ok, you were busy! That's what we'll tell the Nobel Committee when they ask what the hold up was!

EDDIE

You can't mention this to anyone. I mean it, this is just between us, ok? Promise?

MARTY

Sure, good, I promise. For now. *(Eddie looks at him)* Well, it's bound to come out, isn't it? I mean, sure you'll be careful at first and not go invisible right where everyone can see you... so to speak... but sooner or later you're going to be somewhere and go all see-through and stuff and forget and pick up a glass or a pita chip or something that's going to be just floating there right in front of everyone. And that's when all holy hell is going to break loose!

(Eddie makes the switching gesture, picks up a seat cushion from off the couch. Marty reacts as Eddie tosses it back onto the couch and switches back)

Oh my God! *(a beat)* Really? That's kind of unusual, isn't it? The cushion vanished. Shouldn't I just have seen it floating in mid-air? That's what happens in the movies.

EDDIE

The movies only look like real life. Nothing ever happens in the world the way it does in the movies. Why should this be any different?

MARTY

OK, so have you figured out any rules yet? Like what's... allowed and what isn't?

EDDIE

Well, I know that I can switch anytime by doing this...*(he starts to make the gesture)*

MARTY

No, really, that's ok, I get it. I don't need to see it...I mean not see it...again.

EDDIE

...and doing it in reverse brings me back.

MARTY

And you don't have to be naked for this to work.

EDDIE

No. Obviously.

MARTY

Good. It gets too cold here for that. How about if you sit on something?

EDDIE

It stays visible.

MARTY

Or eat something?

EDDIE

It disappears.

MARTY

What about when you pee?

EDDIE

Marty...

MARTY

No, seriously, that would be so weird to see this stream coming out of nowhere, you know?

EDDIE

It hasn't been an issue, ok?

MARTY

I'm just trying to cover all the bases here, ok? Claude Rains isn't around to help us out.

EDDIE

Very funny. And I told you, this is nothing like the movies.

MARTY

Well, it's nothing like anything that's ever happened before, either. The movies might be the only template we've got.

(The lights fade on Marty as Eddie comes downstage and addresses the audience)

EDDIE

Have you ever done anything for the first time? I don't mean like your first plane trip or your first kiss or the first time you had pesto. I mean doing something that has never been

done before. By anybody. Ever. Because until this whole invisible thing started, the most unusual thing I'd ever done was to try eating Jello with chopsticks. Which was kind of fun, actually, but hardly earth-shattering. Mine is not what you'd call a glamorous, fast-lane sort of life. I mean, I'm not a complete shlub, I don't spend my days in my parent's basement playing computer games in my underwear, I have a job and a wife and a house and some friends and I've always felt like the world was a pretty good, if not terribly va-va-va-voom-let-the-good-times-roll sort of place. So why something this...odd...would happen to me, of all people, was almost as baffling as the event itself. And even more baffling than that, now that I think about it, was why I didn't tell my wife about it right away.

(The lights come up on Beth)

I guess the first thing you should know about Beth is that...*(he suddenly stops, thinks for a second)* Actually, you know what? Let's hold off on Beth for a while.

BETH

Oh. Is there a problem?

EDDIE

No, no, not at all. I just think I want them to meet Darrell first.

(The lights fade out on Beth)

Darrell's one of my colleagues. I mean, he's a friend, too, not just a co-worker, and a very good guy, but he's kind of funny.

(The lights come up on Darrell)

And when I say 'funny', I don't mean funny-ha-ha, although he is pretty funny-ha-ha, but more funny-strange, even though he's not really all that strange, he's just...see, the thing is, Darrell likes to tell jokes. A lot. Like, almost constantly.

DARRELL

Oh! What do you call four Spanish teachers in quicksand? Quatro cinco!

EDDIE

And he knows a ton of them. Whatever the subject is, he'll think of a joke that relates to it. You could be having a serious discussion about, say, marriage, and he'll suddenly say...

DARRELL

Old married couple on their 50th anniversary, they're sitting there and she suddenly reaches over and slugs him, he says, "What was that for?" and she says, "That's for 50 years of bad sex!" He thinks about it for a second, reaches over and slugs her back, she says, "What was that for?" and he says, "That's for knowing the difference!"

EDDIE

Or rock and roll, maybe...

DARRELL

Oh. You know the difference between a drummer and a large pepperoni pizza? The pizza can feed a family of four!

EDDIE

He and Marty and I are all big movie buffs and we were talking once about that film Tom Hanks was in about the Somali pirates and he suddenly said:

DARRELL

Pirate walks into a bar with a steering wheel sticking out of his fly, and the bartender says, "What the hell is that?", and the pirate says (*pirate voice*), "I don't know, but it's drivin' me nuts!"

EDDIE

I sometimes wonder if he's like this because of his nickname. His last name is Speshel...

DARRELL (*to Eddie*)

Spe-SHELL! It's German and it's pronounced Spe-SHELL! You know this!

EDDIE

...so of course we call him Blue Light.

DARRELL (*to audience*)

Wow. So clever. Isn't that clever?

EDDIE

Pretty obvious, I know, but it's still kind of funny. And it suits him somehow. *Everything* reminds him of a joke or a funny anecdote. One time I mentioned I was going in for my annual physical and he immediately said:

DARRELL

Guy goes to the doctor, doctor says, "Well, you're going to have to stop masturbating," guy says, "How come?" and the doctor says, "Because I'm trying to examine you!"

EDDIE

Most of the time it's fun, it's just that he tends to repeat himself, because we see each other fairly often. And anytime one of us tells him he needs some new gags, he just says...

DARRELL

People tell me I should have my jokes protected, but I always say, they're old enough to take care of themselves!

(Lights come up on Marty seated at a restaurant table. During the following, Eddie and Darrell join him and prepare to order)

EDDIE

The three of us get together every few weeks or so for breakfast. My wife calls it the BBC, which stands for Better Boys Club. We usually go to the same neighborhood spot, where the waitresses are an ever changing crew of college kids, which is why no one ever recognizes us. *(the waitress arrives)* Or at least that's what we tell ourselves.

MARTY *(handing her his menu)*

Yeah, I'll have the half Tex-Mex.

DARRELL

And I'll have the other half.

EDDIE

I'll have the oatmeal and whole wheat toast.

WAITRESS

Awesome.

(She exits)

DARRELL

Wow, she's cute!

EDDIE

They're all cute. They're college kids, that's their job.

DARRELL

Yeah, I know. I've got moisturizer older than she is. Besides, what would I have to say to a 22 year old after I've rolled over and said, "Good morning"?

MARTY

I know what she'd say to you.

DARRELL

What?

MARTY

"How'd you get in here?!"

EDDIE

She waited on us last time, remember?

DARRELL

I know. My favorite's the tall one who looks like Katherine Hepburn, but with piercings.

MARTY

I mean, we're semi-regulars here, it'd be nice to be remembered every so often.

DARRELL

Never gonna happen. We're too old. Oh- prostitute goes into the old folks home and says to this old man, "Old man, I'm gonna give you some super sex," and the old man says, "I'll take the soup!"

MARTY

Look, I know we're not in the first blush of youth or anything, but it's not like we're decrepit old geezers.

EDDIE

No, but that's how they see us.

DARRELL

Actually, they don't see us at all.

EDDIE

No. You think so?

DARRELL

No question. Women that age don't see us. If someone asked the Lovely Bones there to describe us fifteen minutes after we left, she couldn't do it. Guys our age, we just disappear. We're invisible. Oh- sandwich walks into a bar and the waitress says, "Sorry, we don't serve food here."

MARTY

Battery walks into a bar and the waitress says, "Ok, I'll serve you, but don't start anything!"

DARRELL

Polar bear walks into a bar, says to the waitress, "Gimme a...beer." Waitress says, "Why the big pause?", polar bear says (*looking at his hands*), "I don't know, my dad had 'em, too!"

EDDIE

Hey Blue Light, you still addicted to brake fluid?

DARRELL

Yeah, but I can stop anytime! Hey, did I tell you I have an uncle in Alaska?

MARTY

Nome?

DARRELL

Of course I know him, he's my uncle!

(They all laugh as the lights fade on them and Eddie steps out and addresses the audience)

EDDIE

See? It's fun, and we actually do occasionally talk about real things, not just jokes and movies, so nobody really minds when he throws an amusing wrench into the conversation.

(Lights suddenly come back up on Darrell)

DARRELL *(Borscht Belt accent)*

A wrench! That's where the Jewish cowboys go!

(Lights go out on Darrell)

EDDIE *(to audience)*

OK, he completely distracted me, where were we? Right, turning invisible. When it first happened, it didn't even freak me out that much. I guess it just seemed like the logical progression of how my day had been going. There was no hot water that morning and the dog had been projectile vomiting- seriously, it was like he was applying stucco or something- and I had just cleaned up all this dog puke and had washed my hands and shook some water off them and- poof. Well, poof really isn't the right word, there was no weird sound or anything, I just suddenly couldn't see my hands or feet or any of the rest of me, and I remember thinking, "Oh, great. First the water heater goes out, then the dog's yorking all over everything, and now I'm invisible. That's just dandy." And then for some reason I shook my hands again and I was back. Just like that. So I figured it hadn't actually happened, that I was just tired or hungry or having an acid flashback, never mind that I've never done acid, or it was probably just a trick of the light or something and that's when I noticed I was trembling a little- a lot, actually- so I went into the bedroom and sat down in the closet and when I'd settled down a bit I got up and went to find Beth. Because if anyone could make sense of this, it was her.

(Lights up on Beth in a robe sitting in front of a laptop)

What I was going to say about Beth before is that she's smart. She's lots of other things, too- kind, supportive, opinionated, kicks my butt when I need it, knows who James Mason was, everything you want in a spouse, really- but her smarts are what stand out about her. She works in a medical research lab doing exactly what, I've never been sure, but I know it involves mice a lot of the time and that they've come up with some pretty important findings. The lab, not the mice.

BETH

You need to get a new joke, we're all tired of that one. And you are very well aware of what I do and you even find it interesting.

EDDIE

Yes, I do, but that doesn't mean I understand it most of the time.

BETH

I don't need you to understand it. I just need you to listen to me talk about it and be empathetic when I'm frustrated with it and remind me why I do it.

EDDIE

Because you look cute in a lab coat.

BETH

Exactly. The whole adding-to-the-body-of-human-knowledge-and-maybe-changing-the-world thing is just a fun perk. What's up?

EDDIE

Um...how you feeling?

BETH

Better. I think I can go back in to work tomorrow. How's the pooch?

EDDIE

He'll live. I think he finally got whatever disagreed with him out of his system. And into every crevice of the floorboards.

BETH

You're a sweetie for looking after us. You doing alright? You look a little off.

EDDIE

Oh, I'm ok. I just...uh...well. I think I just became invisible.

BETH *(smiling)*

Oh, no! What happened? The checkout girl didn't respond to a witticism of yours? The cute bank teller called you 'sir'?

EDDIE

No, I mean for real.

BETH

Oh, it's real, alright. You're lucky you're just noticing it now. Women get it way before guys. You go through your whole life as a reasonably attractive female and then suddenly one day, you're gone. No one notices you. Not just men, everybody. You just don't

register. *(she starts to pack up her computer)* I'm sorry, punkin, but it happens to everybody. Count your blessings, you've had a good run.

EDDIE

Um, that's not what I...

BETH

And for what it's worth, I still think you're a delightful bit of strudel!

(She gives him a peck and exits. He watches her leave)

EDDIE *(to audience)*

And I don't know why I didn't pursue it. I wanted to tell her, show her even, say to her, "You know about science-y stuff, you're the smartest person I know, is there an explanation for this or should I just, y'know, not to be overly dramatic about it or anything, but should I just plan on being a freak who lives in a cave in the mountains, alone and unloved, not to mention unseen, for the rest of my wretched existence?" But I didn't. I guess I was, I don't know, yes I do, I was a little scared. I mean, Beth's not a scary person at all, it's not that, she's just a little...absolute. I mean, she's a scientist, her whole world is all about cause and effect, and until I had an explanation for this, I didn't want to get blamed. Beth's very much a we-create-our-own-destinies-and-are-responsible-in-some-way-for-whatever-happens-to-us-so-don't-try-to-blame-fate-or-the-stars-or-the-way-you-were-potty-trained type of person and I just wasn't ready to accept responsibility for whatever was happening to me.

(Lights up on Marty at the restaurant table)

MARTY

Which might be a nice summation of your life right there.

EDDIE *(joining him)*

Oh it is not! I've always owned up to my mistakes. Are you saying this whole invisible thing is my fault?

MARTY

I dunno. Could be. As Sherlock Holmes famously said, "Once you've eliminated all the other possibilities, whatever remains, however unlikely, is probably your fault."

EDDIE

That's not what he said.

MARTY *(studying the menu)*

No, but still. You buttered your bread, you have to lie in it.

EDDIE *(to audience)*

This will probably surprise you, but Marty's an actor. You'd never have guessed that, right? He's not flashy and he isn't always 'on', so people are usually surprised when they learn what he does. And he's not an 'aspiring' or 'struggling' actor, either, he really does earn a living at it, doesn't have a day job or anything. He does a lot of theater, a lot of commercials and training videos for corporations; occasionally when a big movie shoots in town he'll usually get a part in it. His wife's a teacher, so at least there's one steady income in their house, but he really does alright. They even have a couple kids. I couldn't handle the uncertainty of that business, and being the anxious person that he is I know it can get tough for him, but he's been doing it long enough that he's just used to it. He has a little joke he likes to trot out:

MARTY *(to audience)*

You know the five stages of the actor's career? *(ticking them off on his fingers)* Who's Marty Silver? Get me Marty Silver! Get me a *young* Marty Silver! Get me a Marty Silver *type!* Who's Marty Silver?

EDDIE

You're a better man than I, Gunga Din. I need the security of that weekly paycheck.

MARTY

Well, you don't really have any more security than I do.

(Darrell enters, joins them)

You could get downsized, the company could go under, lots of possibilities. The only real difference between what I do and you do is that...

DARRELL

Did you just say do-do?

MARTY

No, I didn't-didn't. No, the only difference is I *know* I'm going to lose my job. The play closes, the movie wraps and you're out there hustling again. It's the only sure thing about what I do.

DARRELL *(making a small, contained gesture)*

You know why actors sometimes do this? *(as he dramatically does a much larger version of the same gesture)* Because there isn't always room to do *this!*

MARTY

Anything can happen to anybody at any time for any reason, as you know better than most. Security is a myth. It's a comforting bedtime story we tell ourselves so we don't spend our lives paralyzed by fear and paranoia. *(Darrell chuckles)* What.

DARRELL

You just made me think of the paranoid dyslexic. He was absolutely convinced he was following somebody. Why should Eddie know better than most?

MARTY

Know what?

DARRELL

You said anything can happen to anybody anytime, and then added in a decidedly pointed and meaningful way while you looked directly at Eddie, *as you know better than most!*

MARTY

Oh, c'mon, it wasn't that obvious.

DARRELL

Are you kidding? Helen Keller would've noticed. Oh! You remember Helen Keller's favorite color?

EDDIE

Corduroy. You've told us that one.

MARTY

And the one about how she burned her fingers reading the waffle iron.

DARRELL

So that means I must have told you about how her parents used to punish her by re-arranging the furniture.

MARTY

Yes, you did, you did indeed.

EDDIE

Several times, I believe. Although not as often as the one about the pirate on Wheel of Fortune.

(They each clap a hand over one eye, pirate voices)

ALL

I'd like to buy an I!

(The waitress has entered in time to see this)

WAITRESS *(cautiously)*

Um...are you, like, ready, or...?

(They all look at her with their hand still over one eye)