

STYLE

a Play by
James B. Campbell

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by James B. Campbell

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James Bentley Campbell

STYLE, Originally titled RACK, was first presented by The Minnesota Ensemble Theatre, directed by James Bentley Campbell.

CAST

SMITTY	a man, 30s
CAJUN	a young man
HARRY	a man, 40s
HAPPY COHEN	an old man
IRVING	a middle aged man
BARBARA	a young woman
GERTRUDE	an old woman
CHRIS	a young man
JACK	a toothless man
MARVIN	off stage man (voice)

(A mid western coat factory, the early 1970s, the shipping room. There are four work benches (desks), cardboard box forms, racks of coat orders next each bench, a time clock, a refrigerator, a coffee urn, a radio, a full length mirror, and one chair, CAJUN's personal chair. There is chute or slide used to send bundles of coats into the shipping department from another building, and an exit leading to a stock area, USL. It is 8AM, Friday morning. HAPPY COHEN enters, carrying a bag of food. He punches in. His clothes and shoes are in poor shape. He X's to his bench and brings out a hangar bearing a stained, flashy necktie. He deftly dons and knots the necktie, steps back and studies himself in the full length mirror. He strikes a pose.)

HAPPY

“...Tell me not in mournful numbers...” (CHRIS enters, carrying a bicycle wheel to an expensive 10 speed bike.)

CHRIS

Hey, old man, what's happening? How come you're wearing your good clothes?

HAPPY

Hey, Chris, what?

CHRIS

Hey what?

HAPPY

What?

CHRIS

Clean the shit out of your ears, you old fucker. What are you going to do now, eat?

HAPPY

Fuck you. It ain't eight yet. It's only five to eight. I can eat if I want to.

CHRIS

I didn't say you couldn't eat. What you got?

HAPPY

I got avocado. I got cheese, soybeans, tomatoes and hot dogs. You want some? Take some.

CHRIS

Man, it must be payday. You got everything today.

HAPPY

I got everything. Take some. But you got to pay me for the hot dogs.

CHRIS

Hot dogs? That's poison, old man. They make you impotent. You won't be able to get it up anymore.

HAPPY

Sure, I'll you have them.

CHRIS

You let me have them for free?

HAPPY

Sure, you can have them for free, but you got to pay me for them.

CHRIS

Shit. (CAJUN enters. He punches in, X's to his workbench, tosses a carton of eggs to HAPPY.) Hey, Cajun.

CAJUN

Hey babies! Happy, you happy old fucker. I see you in Barney's last night?

HAPPY

I wasn't in Barney's last night. That was Smitty. He's in there every night. I wasn't in there.

CAJUN

Sure, it was you. I seen you. Who was that black woman I see you with?

HAPPY

Yeah, that wasn't me. I don't go out with them darkies.

CAJUN

Yeah. That wasn't you.

HAPPY

I've been in there, though. And I seen them darkies. The women really go for them, you know? I don't know what it is. White women too, they beg for it. They come right up to them at the bar and they beg for it. You know what it is? It's sex. They do it better than anybody.

CHRIS

Who, white women?

HAPPY

No, darkies, godammit. You know what I mean. They do it better than anybody. Once a white woman gets it from a darky, she don't want it from anybody else. She won't look at a white man again.

CHRIS & CAJUN

“Once you go black, you don’t come back.”

CAJUN

Kind of makes you think, don’t it?

HAPPY

Yeah, that’s right.

CAJUN

Makes you think you ain’t got no cock.

HAPPY

Yeah, sure, that’s right.

CAJUN

Serve you right, you dirty ol’ redneck.

HAPPY

Yeah. Sure. That’s right. (*JACK, SMITTY, and HARRY enter. JACK exits to stock area. HARRY X’s to his desk. SMITTY X’s to coffee urn.*)

HARRY

Jackpots, Jackpots, everybody sign up. Jackpots. Happy, Chris boy?

CHRIS

Not none of me man, you want to shoot craps?

CAJUN

Yeah. Sure.

HARRY

How about you, Happy?

HAPPY

No. You guys put in five dollars every payday and you never win.

HARRY

Sure, everybody wins sometime. I once got me one hundred sixty-eight dollars. Jack there got himself seventy-five dollars just last week and that was just the first week. Who'd you have last week, Jack-boy?

JACK

The Twins. What happens is you get a number from zero to nine and if your number comes up in the winning score, then you got it. Say you get a three, right? So, the point is, if there's a three in the winning score, you win, see?

HAPPY

Yeah, that's pretty good. You ought to do that, Chris.

CHRIS

You want to do it, you do it.

HAPPY

No, if you do it though, I'll do it.

CHRIS

You do anything I do?

HAPPY

Sure.

CHRIS

Crazy old man.

CAJUN

Sounds ok to me, man. I win, how much do I get?

HARRY

Well, that depends. Sometimes everybody puts in more money, but this week we're doing just five.

CAJUN (*Leaves chair, X's to HARRY.*)

Give me a number. I win you know what I'm going to do? You know my friend Freight Train? I win, I'm going to buy his Buick.

HARRY

The Cajun gets a five. You give a five, you get a five.

CAJUN

Out of sight. (*SMITTY takes CAJUN's chair.*)

JACK

I'm in.

HARRY

Jack gets an oh. The big oh for Jacky-boy.

CAJUN

What you going to do you win, man?

JACK

Ah, the little woman gets it.

CAJUN

You give it to your old lady, man?

JACK

Sure, What else? I don't drink no more. You would do the same thing.

CAJUN

Say, listen. You tell your old lady to buy you some teeth, ok?

JACK

I got teeth. I don't feel like wearing them. Mind your own business, see?

CAJUN

Don't tell me what to do, man. I'll punch you right out. I ain't kidding.

HAPPY

Hey, watch that.

CAJUN (*X's to his chair.*)

Don't think I won't do it. Last night I was outside of Barney's, man, I took on three guys. One guy, I punched out two of his teeth. Knocked them right out. Pow! Poom! That's all.

SMITTY(*Gets up.*)

Hey, Harry, I'll take a number.

HARRY

Yes sir, Smitty gets the nine and that's all she wrote, folks, the jackpot is full up for the day.

SMITTY

Can't be full up, Harry. You still got a seven.

HARRY

Nope. Seven's all gone. Jerry S. bought it last night just before he went home. Lucky seven. All full up.

SMITTY

Yeah, but you ain't wrote it in yet.

HARRY

Just about to. Here we go. The lucky seven to Jerry S.

HAPPY

Hey, where is he? It's past eight. Maybe it's his day off?

CHRIS

Don't worry about other people, old man. Today's payday. He'll be here.

HAPPY

Yeah, he's a funny guy, you know? He's funny inside, I mean.

CHRIS

He's funny inside, you're funny outside, what's the difference?

HAPPY

Yeah, that's right. (*BUZZER sounds.*)

SMITTY

Got a lot of goddam work to do. Five full racks by the chute last night and I know that bastard Marvin's got five more this morning. Let's go, Cajun, you got to help me. We got five whole racks to do. I do all the goddam work around here. Marvin sends them down the goddam chute and Freddy sends'm up the goddam elevator, and I got to put all them goddam racks away myself. (*BUZZER.*)

CAJUN

Go to goddam work, fuck goddam wife, eat goddam lunch, goddam...

SMITTY

You don't make fun of me, Cajun. Irving gave you to me to help me 'cause you was too slow packing. Now c'mon, let's go. Take those forty-two-fifty-threes over there and put them away. (*BUZZER.*) I got to go to the chute.

CAJUN

Man, you got to go to the shithouse and pick up your brains. I ain't doin' nothin' you tell me, unnerstand? You ain't my fucking boss, Irving is. From now on you say anything to me, you know what? I ain't never going to pay no attention to you, man. I'm going to do whatever I feel like doing and if you keep giving me your crazy shit, I'm going to fucking kill you.

SMITTY

Oh yeah?

CAJUN

Yeah.

SMITTY

We'll see about that. (*BUZZER.*) Shut up, Marvin! Goddam it, I'm coming. I've got to get some help here. (*X's to the chute and pulls an empty rack alongside the slide.*) Hey, Marvin?

Marvin (*Off.*)

Yessir, this is Marvin. You ready to go?

SMITTY

Yeah!

MARVIN (*Off.*)

Well, sir, here we are...twenty six-forty-three-twenty-sevens with no hoods. Okaaay?

SMITTY (*A Call.*)

OOHHKEEE!

(A bundle of coats flies out of the chute. SMITTY hangs them one by one on the rack. He takes the rack around the house to MARVIN, who takes them up to the top of the chute and dumps them down again. It is always the same bundle of coats. HAPPY is cooking his hot dogs. CHRIS goes into the house and takes a nap. HARRY reads a newspaper.)

HAPPY (*To CHRIS.*)

Hey, where are you going?

CHRIS

What?

HAPPY

What?

CHRIS

Seriously, why don't you get a hearing aid?

HAPPY

What?

CHRIS

Forget it.

HAPPY

I got a hearing aid but I don't use it.

CHRIS

I can dig it.

HAPPY

You want some of these?

CHRIS (*Exiting.*)

Later. Finish what you're doing to them first.

HAPPY

Yeah. Look, don't worry. I'm boiling them. Kill all the germs. I can do any kind of cooking I want, but here I only got a hot plate. I ain't got a woman or anything like some of you guys. You guys got someone to cook for you, you can't do it yourselves.

HARRY

Happy was married once though, isn't that right, Happy?

HAPPY

Yeah, sure, I was married two months.

CAJUN

Man, I never knew you was married. When was you married?

HARRY

Happy got married in Hollywood. He was a movie star. He went to college.

HAPPY

Nah, I wasn't a movie star.

HARRY

Happy went to Pepperdine College. He learned to spell.

HAPPY

You guys laugh. I was only there three months though. I couldn't stick it. But you should stick it. You're young. You and Chris. You got your

whole lives ahead of you and you fool around in here. There's no future. This is for bums like me. You, you should go to art school or something. You're always drawing those pictures and cartoons on packing tissue and things, aren't you? Don't waste your time in this place.

CAJUN

No, I can't do that.

HAPPY

You're afraid, that's all. You should be big enough to just go and do it.

CAJUN

I got to keep the wife and kid. This is the best I could get, you know 'cause I been in the joint and everything. I was in Stillwater two years. I forged a check once.

HAPPY

Yeah. What's that like, being arrested and in jail and stuff. How is that?

CAJUN

Shit. The joint ain't much. If you watch your ass. Literally. My Pap was in there when I came up. I got to see him just before he got out as I was going in. He says, "Boy, everything's cool if you just do one thing, watch your ass. When you get your bunk, you go in you see stuff on it...candy, cigarettes, fruit maybe, aftershave...don't touch it. Unless you goddam want to peddle your ass." ...He was right. In my block you hear somebody butt-fucking away, all night long. Don't make no difference. We got prison all around us. You know that fucking cheap rope we tie boxes with? Where do you think it comes from? That's how big companies save money...they got prison slaves making rope, paper, boxes, all kinds of shit. Everybody's under arrest, man...(SMITTY *passes through with another rack of coats.*) Some folks is more under arrest than others, that's all. Ain't you never been arrested? Where've you been? We all been busted.

HAPPY

No. They never did that to me.

HARRY

Only in the movies, right, Happy?

HAPPY

Yeah, that's right. Only in the movies. I couldn't make it out there though. I was good looking though. A couple of people told me. They had eyes on me...

*(IRVING has entered during HAPPY's last speech.
HARRY makes a show of working. CAJUN exits.)*

IRVING

Yeah, I've got my eyes on you too. I've been looking at you for five minutes and I ain't seen you do a goddam thing except stuff your face. "Cohen, the movie star." Well you ain't good looking now, buddy boy. You look like a piece of shit. Put that goddam stuff down. You're supposed to be working now.

HAPPY

I'm working, I'm working. A guy can eat while he's working, can't he?

IRVING

You can't, you stupid son of a bitch. You can't chew and pack at the same time. I know you can't.

HAPPY

Sure I can. I'll bet you money I can.

IRVING

You want to bet money, asshole? I'll bet you ten dollars. Ten dollars you can't pack and chew at the same time.

HAPPY

I ain't got no ten dollars, you know that.

IRVING

You're full of shit, I know that. Here's a ten dollar bill. Put up or shut up.

HAPPY

I can too. You're just being silly making a bet like that. I'm going to bet no ten dollars with you.

IRVING

No, you'll play craps all day with your good buddy Chris, though, won't you? I'm going to take those goddam dice away from you next time I hear anybody throwing them, I don't care whose they are. And that food goes too. No more cooking that shit during work time, get it? And you put away those fucking jackpots. I don't want to see them around here either. How many times have you read that newspaper?

HARRY

I just have to have something to look at, Irving. We can't pack what we haven't got.

IRVING

What do you mean, you can't pack what you haven't got? You got three orders sitting right here on this rack in front of you. Now put away those fucking newspapers, and let's go.

HARRY

Anything you say, Irving, anything you say. I was just trying to point out that when it's not too busy we have to have some orders in front of us so it looks good. You know those people in the office see something in front like that, they think we're busy and they don't complain.

IRVING

These are air shipments! These are fucking air shipments! They were supposed to go out yesterday afternoon. You stand around playing with your putz and reading the funnies when you got work in front of you? You put away that goddam newspaper and get busy, you schmuck. I could get shit-faced gorillas in here and pay them bananas and they'd pack better than you bums. You stink. All of you.

HAPPY

Hey, you shouldn't talk like that to another person, you know that? That ain't right.

IRVING

Who's a person? Are you a person? A person doesn't eat shit like you eat. Look, you got that crap dripping down the front of your shirt, for Christ's sake!

HAPPY

That's not from now. That was weeks ago.

IRVING

You've been wearing the same goddam shirt for weeks? Why don't you wear clean clothes once? You call yourself a person? How can a person come to work like that?

HAPPY

I put a tie on after I get here.

IRVING (*Looking around.*)

What a crew. What an incredible crew... Where's your buddy, Chris?

HAPPY

I don't know. He's around here.

IRVING

Around here? Around where?

HAPPY

I don't know. Maybe he's in the can.

IRVING

He's in the can, my ass. I'll find him. And don't watch me. You've got some packing to do. Go and do it. You don't have to tell him I'm here, I'll announce myself. (IRVING *spies CHRIS lying down.*) ...Chris? Chris, come out here. C'mon, I see you. I know you're in there, sleeping. I can see your goddam feet. C'mon out here!

CHRIS (*Entering.*)

Hi, Irving, what's happening?

IRVING

What's happening? I'll tell you what's happening. You're going to get a letter. That's what happening. This will be letter number two for you. When you get letter number three, out you go. I don't care if you can pack faster than anybody else or better than anybody else. When you punch in here you work until break time and then you can go beddy-byes...

CHRIS

I wasn't sleeping, Irving, I was just...

IRVING

Bullshit, you weren't sleeping. Don't give me that. You lie like a son of a bitch. You listen to me, you lying bastard, I come in here and catch you sleeping one more time, I'm going to throw your ass right out on the street so fast it'll make your goddam head spin and your union won't have shit to say about it. You guys don't appreciate anything and that's why you're in here. I want to see MOTION, if you have something to do or not. (SMITTY *returns with rack to the chute.*) I'm tired of getting shit from the higher-ups

because you guys fool around, leave a few minutes early, eat when you should be working, and take fucking naps all the time. This isn't a goddam kindergarten, this a goddam factory. Don't want to work? Go home. What right have you got to fuck up my life? I work here too, you know. I'm too much nice around here. That's the trouble. No more being nice.

CHRIS

I'm sorry, Irving...

HAPPY

Yeah, we're sorry, Irving...

IRVING

"We're sorry..." What the fuck are you, Little Sir Echo? Sorry isn't good enough. You get the "Dear John" anyway. The only time you guys take anything seriously is when I start writing letters. That's when you feel sorry. Any other time is bullshit.

CHRIS

Ok man, write me a letter. You on a correspondence trip, do it. But shit, there's nothing to do out here. You got to get those guys in there to send out some orders sometime, you know.

IRVING

Don't worry about those guys in there. You are going to have a lot of work to do today. Harry the Bookie, put away the funny papers. At least buy yourself a new one, that one's a week old.

HARRY

There are parts in here that I haven't read yet, Irving.