

# STYLE

a Play by  
James B. Campbell

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STYLE, originally titled RACK, was first presented by The Minnesota Ensemble Theatre of Minneapolis in 1973 with the following cast:

James Campbell.....SMITTY, a man, 30s  
David George.....CAJUN, a young man  
Randall Hill.....HARRY, a man, 40s  
Bernard Kreilkamp.....HAPPY COHEN, an old man  
John Nicolazzi.....IRVING, a middle-aged man  
Susan Pochapsky.....BARBARA, a young woman  
Mary Shultz.....GERTRUDE, an old woman  
Todd Knaeble.....CHRIS, a young man  
Al Simonsen.....JACK, a toothless man  
P.A. voice.....MARVIN

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

Sure, 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 let 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, crosses to his workbench, tosses a carton of eggs to HAPPY, hangs up his coat.)

CHRIS

Hey, Cajun.

CAJUN

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

HAPPY (X to refrigerator.)

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 in there. 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."

HAPPY

Yeah. That's right.

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 enters, then SMITTY, then HARRY.  
JACK exits to stock area. HARRY Xs to  
his bench. SMITTY Xs to coffee urn.)

HARRY

Jackpots. Jackpots everybody, c'mon and 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, not me. You never win at that stuff. You guys put in  
five dollars every payday and you never win.

HARRY

Sure, everybody wins sometime. Bound to. Last summer, one  
Friday I 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. The Twins did it for me, Harry, my good man. But  
it doesn't go like that. What happens is you get a number  
from zero to nine and if your number comes up in the score  
then you got it. Say you get a three, right? So say  
somebody wins thirteen-oh. It doesn't matter who, the point  
is there's a three in the score and only one person gets a  
three in the winning score, so he wins, 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 bread do I get?

HARRY

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

CAJUN

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

(CAJUN Xs SMITTY takes CAJUN's chair.)

HARRY

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

CAJUN

Out of sight.

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 all to your old lady, man?

JACK

Sure. What else would I do with it? 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. You 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

(CAJUN Xs to chair, bullies SMITTY out of it.)

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

Hey Harry, I'll take a number.

HARRY

Yes sir, Smitty. 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 eight o'clock. 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.

(CAJUN ignores him.)

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. It never stops, and I got to put all them goddam racks away myself.

(BUZZER.)

CAJUN

Goddam, got to go to work, fuck my goddam wife, eat my 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 shit house and pick up your brains. I ain't doin' nothin' you tell me, understand? 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 goddam help around here.

(SMITTY Xs 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.)

OOHHKEEEE!

(A bundle of coats flies out of the chute door. 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 again. This Sisyphus-like routine is repeated throughout the play. It is always the same bundle of coats. HAPPY is cooking his hot dogs. CHRIS packs for a while and then, seeing that things are slow, goes into the house and takes a nap. CAJUN talks to HAPPY. HARRY reads a newspaper. He keeps his bench very orderly. He is never seen to do any packing.)

HAPPY

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

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

HAPPY

Yeah. Look, don't worry. I'm boiling them. Kill all the germs.

(CHRIS exits.)

HAPPY

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 been here a while, I never knew you was married. When was you married?

HARRY

Happy got married in Hollywood. He was a movie star and 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 in this place. 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

Yeah, man. I think I'll go to automotive school next fall but I got to get on unemployment first or I can't make it.

HAPPY

Why don't you do drawing? You learn how to do that, there's a lot of money in that. You could draw pictures in magazines.

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 their eyes on me...

(IRVING has entered during HAPPY's last speech. HARRY has noticed and makes a show of working. CAJUN exits on IRVING's first words.)

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, 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 not 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 the 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 anymore 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 busy we have to have some orders in front of us so it looks good. You know those people in the office come out and 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? 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 don't come to work like this. I put a tie on after I get here. Who wants to dress up for this place?

IRVING

What a crew. What an incredible crew.

(He looks around.)

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. 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 enters.)

CHRIS

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's 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 anyone 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 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 all the time, like you had something to do whether you 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 is a 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 much too 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 there I haven't read yet, Irving.

IRVING

Well, you're getting better. Years ago he used to hold the paper upside down. He could only read his paycheck.

HARRY

It was easy, Irving. Everything was numbers.

(IRVING exits into stock area. CAJUN reappears.)

HAPPY

Well now you've done it. He's going to write you an official letter this time. One more and you're out.

CHRIS

"One more and you're out." What the fuck are you, Little Sir Echo?

HAPPY

Hey, you just said the same thing he did.

CHRIS

No shit. Old man, you dense, you know that?

HAPPY

Dense? I'm smarter than all you guys. You're all assholes anyway to be working in this place.

HARRY

That's right. Happy's smarter than anybody. He used to be in pictures. He used to fuck Hedda Hopper.

HAPPY

Yeah, you shut up about her.

CAJUN

Who the fuck is Hedda Hopper?

CHRIS

She was Happy's leading lady.

CAJUN

Leading lady?

HARRY

Yeah, she used to lead him around by his cock.

HAPPY

You shut up about her. She was a real star. She had class. She said hello to me once. Came right up to me and said hello. And I was just a nobody. And she did that to plenty of other people too. She had class. Who do you got now? Those phony young television assholes? they're not real, you know that? We had real people with style and class and guts back then. People you wouldn't even know about: Veronica Lake, Ward Bond, Bogart, --- you might know him.

CAJUN

Hey man, they all dead folks. You living in the past.

HAPPY

No, I ain't living in the past. I don't believe in that. I don't believe in the future either. I believe in right now, and right now everything is full of shit.

CHRIS

Just like you.

HAPPY

Yeah sure, that's right.

CAJUN

Hey, you saying I'm full of shit, man?

HAPPY

Sure you're full of shit. I ain't afraid of you guys.

CHRIS

Let's fight old man...Fucker, you ain't got a chance....

(CHRIS starts sparring with HAPPY. HAPPY is enjoying it, and laughing as he fights, but he can hardly move. CHRIS jumps around, making fast, teasing jabs and crosses.)

HAPPY

...You hold still a minute....

CHRIS

Crazy old man...You going to get hurt...

HAPPY

Yah...bullshit...You come around to my good side...I'll show you something...