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Lang 363

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**The Raincoat**

“I'm telling you, it's not stupid.” Louis pleaded, both hands wiping his tired face with his fingers from under the bridge of his round glasses to the tip of his chin, looking up to the bright July sky.

“No see you don't know, this is exactly what I mean! Tall guys get away with anything; TOO MUCH!” Campbell jowled. “You can wear a sweater vest and a pair of parachute pants and it will look like you walked off Project Runway, but a short guy cannot wear a raincoat around his waist, period.”

Aggressively flapping the two sides of the unzipped yellow raincoat, fanning wind under his arms, Campbell measures out his pace catching up with Louis’s longer, more commodious stride.

“That's completely not true” Louis interjects “I see shorter guys all the time with the waist cape.”

“But they shouldn't, anyone under 5 '8 with active hips…”

“Active hips?”

“Yes active, they’re bulky since I started going to the gym”

“You ride the elliptical for thirty minutes marathon man”

“A shorter guy with bulkier glutes is going to undo the knot as he walks, then the jacket rides down the waist till it's dragging on the ground behind them like a gortex wedding dress.”

“If you got Houdini hips then tuck it into your belt. You’re taking this very personal you know.”

“Sorry, I'm stressed and it's hot and I got this STUPID jacket on because Nostradamus on channel eight said there was a hundred percent chance of rain. I’d be less wet without the jacket.”

“But not as prepared.”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

“Or as stylish.”

“Okay what's that supposed to mean?”

“It means there's not a cloud in the sky and you’re wearing a jacket in eighty degree weather like you have some allergy to the sun.”

“Listen, I tie the jacket around my waist. It unfurls; the more it unfurls the more it drags, the more it drags the more it's pulled by detritus…”

“Detritus?”

“It's trash, college; food, cans, sticks, rocks…”

“How would a rock get downtown?

“HUH!?”

“I mean a stick I get, they break off a tree all the time but where’s the rock come from?”

“I don't know, from road construction. Anyway the jacket is then pulled entirely clear from my waist by said DETRITUS and its then walked on by eight million New Yorkers who treat it like a Walmart greeter on black friday”

“So tuck it in”

“Yeah ok.”

Campbell warps the Patagonia raincoat into his black leather belt, Louis watches and remarks “Nice belt.”.

“Looks good right, it's reversible but I cant use the other side, the whole thing is branded.”

“With what”

“Made in Taiwan.”

“That's why I don't buy those, it's so stupid.”

“Moronic.”

Louis, taken aback “What was wrong with my word.” The two men trade a glance, filled with mutual annoyance and admiration. Their eyes smile back up to the orange iris in the atmosphere of the late afternoon, just beginning to sink behind the city, the skyline trademarked by its late day silhouette. Louis looks down from the late day lamp light to unfurl his forehead and unwind his eyes, noticing a corner store across the street. “Hey, you mind if I go in there for a bit, I've got some stuff I've been meaning to pick up.”

“Sure, I've got to grab some things for tonight.”

“Marlene?”

“Uh huh.”

“Which date is this?”

“Number three.”

“You know what's after three, you slide into home.”

“I hope, don't exactly have the best batting average”

“Is that a euphemism for impotence or not getting laid.”

“The latter.”

“Or both?”

“Trust me it's only the latter” A disgustingly smarmy smile grows on Campbell’s lips “it gets plenty of exercise in the off season.”

“Jesus Cam.”

The odd couple walks side by side through the automatic doors, Campbell leading the way toward the back, Louis behind rolls his eyes when Cam stops in front of the men’s wellness section.

“Hey” Cam looks over his shoulder “what condoms do you get”

“Well it depends”

“When does it depend?”

“How well the relationship is, like if it's the first time i'll get a more conservative contraceptive, but if things have been steady ill, ya know; Spice it up.

“How so?”

“Ill get a flavored pack.”

“Why?”

“I don't know. It makes me feel like I'm going the extra mile and in some way it must enhance the experience for the other party.”

“I don't see that being the case; Now can you help me out here.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No its personal”

“Personal, I’ve seen you naked”

“And I didn’t “ok” that either. YMCA locker rooms are more exposed than a petting zoo.” Louis mutters.

“Fine, get your stuff, I'll meet you at the register.”

“Don't get the lambskins.”

“I'm allergic to latex.”

“Then start a family, it's not right.”

Campbell scoffs as he watches Louis walk down the other aisle and grabs the only brand of lambskins off the hanger.

After a few minutes Louis shoots Cam a look from across the bodega, raises his semi-full basket and signals toward the register. Cam returns an upturned index finger to which Louis returns the apologetic open-handed salute. Then turning around he takes a moment to mull, looking down at his basket, the weight beginning to nag his right hand, shrugs and walks over to the register.

“Louis, Louis?” Campbell searches for his forlorn friend who he presumes has been patiently waiting.

“Cam, up here!” A shout comes from the register where an tumultuous chat between Louis and the cashier has broken out.

The Cashier points to Campbell as he runs up to Louis “You and your friend stay here, I'm calling the cops.”

“What happened” Cam pleads

The cashier slams an orange rotary phone on the counter taking his index finger and waves it at Louis “Sundance over here is trying to steal condoms!” Then swings it into the dial and picks up the receiver.

Campbell’s eyes grow wide, his heart begins to race as the air runs out of his chest. The swish of the dial, the weight of the phone and the authority in his finger said it all. He began to feel the stares from the surveillance cameras and eyes from the outside looking in he was sure were there. In a moment of panic and with a breathless command Butch looked to Sundance and said “Run.”

Campbell ran past Louis, grabbing him by the arm on his way with such pace that the automatic doors couldn't anticipate his speed, scraping Cam’s belt as they made their escape.

Fifteen minutes later, thing one and two are in the back of a yellow cab heading out of Brooklyn on the Jackie Robinson parkway not having said a word to one another in the elapsed time.

“I don't get the big deal” Louis chuckles “Everyone steals condoms.”.

Campbell’s face while still clenched in shock, shifts to a befuddled fury “Where the fuck are you from?”

Twenty two minutes later and the cab turns down a semi suburban-esc street in Queens, the yellow cab pulls over and an argument can be heard as the backdoors open.

“All im saying is why cause a muckrake over a pack of condoms”

Campbell yells back “And ALL IM SAYING IS why not just buy the condoms?!”

“MY SEXUAL NEEDS ARE MY BUSINESS!” Louis screams.

Both shake their heads and turn to walk down the sidewalk and are immediately in front of a split game of neighborhood street hockey. As their cab drives through where the game was, both sides of the street are filled with middle schoolers in hockey pads who have all seemed to have forgotten to resume play, staring at the two embittered brothers.

Both sides were frozen without anything smart to say until out of mercy the street lights turned on and everyone went their separate ways to their homes. Louis and Campbell looked at each other, not moments ago stonewalled now laughing through tears, leaning on one another as they traipsed toward Marlene’s.

“Hey, in the cab Marlene texted me and said her parents are turning this into a last minute business dinner with some foreign buyers. Anyway she said I could bring someone with me as a buffer.”

Louis upturns his head confused “Isn't Marlene the buffer?”

“No’ Campbell continues “Marlene is the bridge between me and the parents, you are the buffer to prevent a lowel in conversation. This way everyone has someone to talk to.”

“Well’ Louis thought “I'm already out here.”

As the two walk up the steps of the Brooklyn brownstone, Campbell looks down at his belt “Shit” he mutters “I scratched my belt during our getaway”

“It's reversible right?” Louis inquired.

“Yeah but…” Campbell unclips and rotates the belt to the brown side with MADE IN TAIWAN branded across the front.

“Oh yeah, still the scratch is pretty bad”.

“Yeah,” Campbell agrees, tucking his raincoat back into his belt. Once adjusted, he lifts the lion's head knocker and swings it against the door, Louis cringing at the force to which it was thrown.

“What asshole” was heard muffled from inside the historic home, as the steps approached Campbell took a step back behind Louis who was promptly face to face with a union man inside a Tom Ford suit whose warm welcome was “Who are you with?”

“Marlene?” Campbell whimpered from behind Louis. The well-off dock worker looked at Louis, tall and toned with a few wrinkles in his head and a clean cut of hair then contracted it with Campbell. The short, squatty boyish runt hiding behind his mountainous friend.

“You must be Campbell” glaring down at the chimp-esc child.

The businessman arrived ten minutes later, five after that our double act was tossed out, followed by turn of the century insults and leaving behind a reversible belt. Campbell, now walks with his raincoat sewn through his belt loops in a last attempt to keep some sense of style through big sky thinking.

“I didn't think the investors would be Chinese” Cam weakly muttered

“They really did not like that belt huh” Louis head half turned to Cam’s

“Not as much as they hated your welcome gift”

“They said they wanted to explore the city, I was just trying to provide them with a safe means to facilitate the New York experience”

“You gave a bunch of married businessmen flavored condoms.”

“They could have said no”

“You passed it to them at the table with the bread.”

“I wanted them gone, it feels incriminating to still have them.”

Suddenly from behind a flash of blue and red accompanied by the chilling wail from a police siren make the two stop in the tracks. They wait in silence, the crunch of the tires echo’s through their heads as it slows to a halt. The door opens followed the precision of boots marching closer and closer, the two frozen on the sidewalk in Queens. Finally the cop walks almost passed them, then turning on the balls of his feet he looks the over through his aviators “Good evening Gentleman. Have we been to any bodegas in Brooklyn tonight, because you match the descriptions of two suspects.”

“What might that b-be officer?” Campbell stuttered.

“Well” the officer complied, “First is a tall man, round glasses, black hair.” gesturing to Louis. “And the other, thirty five year old child with, hrmm, Active hips.”