

A TALKING BONOBO CHIMP CALLED 'SMILES'

by

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29 PLAYS LATER - FINAL CHALLENGE: CLOTHES AND EVERYTHING  
(Version 1 April 2016)

CHARACTERS

SMILES - a talking bonobo (laid-back cool young chimp)

YVETTE - activist

COOPER - activist

THE MAN - variously "The Man" (Agent Smith type narrator, two  
hunters, a jailer, a border controller)

SCENES

1. The Life of Smiles
2. The Liberation of Smiles
3. The Death of Smiles



SCENE 1: THE LIFE OF SMILES

(SCENE 1A: THE MAN)

THE MAN CENTRE, YVETTE AND COOPER ON ONE SIDE, AND SMILES THE BONOBO CHIMP ON THE OTHER SIDE

THE MAN: (NARRATES) People are animals. I don't like them. At least animals are limited in how much they can make each other suffer. A whack of a thighbone, a chimp is dead, a chimp has asserted his alpha status. But people have built a whole system on this. Capitalism is the biggest thighbone yet. Like a whale's thighbone. It's insane. Even with the best intentions they can't stop killing each other. They prefer animals to each other, which is why they eat them. Look at these two, Yvette and Cooper, they're 'activists'. They're about to 'liberate' this chimp they're in love with. They think the chimp will be better off. Six square meals a day sat scratching his bollocks and they want to throw him back into the jungle. They're idiots. Not even animals are that stupid.

(SCENE 1B: YVETTE AND COOPER)

COOPER: Yvette, have you seen my invisible cloak?

YVETTE: Where did you see it last?

COOPER: I definitely had it when we were coming through customs.

YVETTE: I don't remember seeing you with it after duty free.

COOPER: I must have left it there. Damn it.

YVETTE: We'll go and look for it.

COOPER: I love that cloak.

YVETTE: I know!

COOPER: They don't make invisible cloaks like that any more. We won't see its like again.

YVETTE: What if we can't find it? We won't we able to

liberate the bonobos and get out unseen.

COOPER: I'll think of something. We can get out in disguise. Steal guards uniforms.

(SCENE 1C: SMILES)

SMILES: I keep telling myself: this is how humans live. Most of them are locked up behind bars. You're nothing special, Smiles. Just a bonobo behind bars like all the other bonobos behind bars. Mother said I was destined for great things in the human world. A talking bonobo chimp! "You're wasted in this tribe," she said. "Don't you yearn, to get out of the equatorial forest and away from the tribe?" - "But, Mother," I said, "Mother, it would be stupid to want to end this carefree life to pursue a human ideal."

SMILES EATS

THE MAN COCKS AND AIMS A RIFLE

THE MAN: I've got the mother in my sights! As soon as she falls, we run down and grab the kid. It's good money for bonobos. Okay? Okay.

HE FIRES

Dead on!

SMILES: (MIME TO DEAD MOTHER) Mother! Mother, no.. you can't be dead!?

THE MAN: (MAN ONE) Good shot! (MAN TWO) Quick, get the young'un!

THEY GRAB SMILES

SMILES: What!? Get off me, short arms! [HOWLS].

THE MAN: (ONE) Hold him! Get hold of him and get him in the crate. (TWO) Should we tranquillize him? (ONE) He's tiny, just put him in the crate.

SMILES: My Mother! You've killed her! Why? Why are you doing this? [HOWLS]

THE MAN: Now he's howling! Get in the crate you stupid ape.

SMILES: Stupid ape yourself, I'm a bloody bonobo!

THE MAN: Wazza Bazza, he really does talk! You were right! He's a goldmine on four legs! I mean two legs. Such long arms for a small chimp. And such huge bollocks.

SMILES: Let me go! [HOWLS]

THE MAN: There he is! Hey little fella, how do you like this? You're going to be very good for us. Very lucrative.

SMILES: (NARRATES) The hunters locked me up in a crate and took me away to sell me on the black market. A talking bonobo's a valuable rarity, you know. I get why they did it. Kids to feed. Whiskey to drink. Peace and love, I'm only a bonobo. Who cares?

THE MAN: Hey, bonobo! Catchee monkey! Catchee!

SMILES: Very funny.

THE MAN: Don't get lippy, chimp.

THE MAN WHACKS SMILES

See what happens when you get lippy?

SMILES: I'm a talking bonobo, what am I supposed to do?

THE MAN: Oh, you're for it, you long-armed freak.

THE MAN BEATS SMILES SAVAGELY

SMILES: (NARRATES) They abused me, teased me, and starved me. They wanted to sell me and ship me overseas, but they couldn't find a buyer. They've got this mad system called free market capitalism, but it doesn't work very well. You can buy anything, but it's hard to sell it. You try selling a talking bonobo. It freaks people out. They feel inferior.

## SCENE 2 - THE LIBERATION OF SMILES

(SCENE 2A: YVETTE AND COOPER)

YVETTE: Go down the cages. Which one's Smiles?

COOPER: They all look the same.

YVETTE: Everyone looks the same without clothes.

COOPER: There's so many of them. They look so sad.

YVETTE: They're miserable. My God, how far down does it go?

YVETTE THINKS, AND COOPER INTERRUPTS

COOPER: Yvette. No. We can't free all of them.

YVETTE: Why not? They're all sentient creatures.

COOPER: They don't talk.

YVETTE: So they're not important?

COOPER: We need a spokesman. A spokes-chimp. Come on.

YVETTE: He must be somewhere. What about that one?

COOPER: God, look at those bollocks. They seem to follow you round the room.

YVETTE: Hello? Doesn't talk.

COOPER: He's more like a pair of bollocks attached to a chimp than a bonobo.

YVETTE: What's the useless bit of skin on the end of a penis called?

COOPER: A bonobo.

YVETTE: Bollocks is it.

COOPER: None of these is Smiles. None of them can talk.

YVETTE: Let's just swap one of these bonobos for Smiles and get out of here.

COOPER: They don't talk!

YVETTE: Humans can barely communicate - who's gonna know the difference?

(SCENE 2B: SMILES)

SMILES: (NARRATES) I was in the cage for days. Misery was all around me, and within me. The men would take me out of the cage and try to make me talk. When I wouldn't talk, they beat me. But I'd done with talking. Why talk when noone is listening?

THE MAN: (MAN ONE) You said he'd talk. (MAN TWO) He talked before. (ONE) Why isn't he talking now then? (TWO) He's being awkward. (ONE) Do him with the hose again. (TWO) Didn't work. (ONE) He's probably depressed. Can't we beat him up again? (TWO) Let's do him with the hose, and then beat him up. (ONE) Agreed.

THE MAN BEATS SMILES

(TWO) Is it working? (ONE) He's not talking. (TWO) Talk, you ignorant monkey. (ONE) We can't sell a chimp that doesn't talk. (TWO) He'll talk! (ONE) If he doesn't talk in twenty-four hours, shoot him. Shoot him anyway. We can eat him. (TWO) Isn't that cannibalism? (ONE) Just shoot the monkey.

SMILES: (NARRATES) I was bloody and battered and starving. I lay coiled on the hard floor of the cage and thought my time had come. Bye bye, bonobo. Then I spotted something. Each time the man bent down to give me some of that vile derogatory gruel... (WHISPERS) *his key belt was right there within my grasp*. You see, people: a talking bonobo is one thing, but a bonobo with a gift for strategems, that's next level, right? You get me. And the next time the man came round...

THE MAN: Here's your plate of shit, stupid ape. You want it? Eh?

THE MAN SLAPS SMILES A BIT

Want this plate of shit?

SLAPS HIM SOME MORE

Stuff it in your hairy face? Eat it, shit eater. That's good shit.

HE SLAPS SMILES AGAIN AND SMILES  
REACHES UP AND WRENCHES THE KEYS FROM  
THE MAN'S BELT

IN A MOMENT SMILES UNLOCKS THE CAGE  
DOOR WHILE THE MAN IS WHIRLING AND  
GRABS THE MAN AND KNOCKS HIM OUT, THEN  
SMILES ESCAPES

(SCENE 2C: YVETTE AND COOPER)

YVETTE: Smiles isn't here. These chimps couldn't talk if you put them on daytime TV.

COOPER: Wait, what's this? The door's open.

YVETTE: Oh shit, there's a man laid out. He's bleeding!

COOPER: Has Smiles escaped? What the!?

WITH A MOAN THE MAN STARTS TO REVIVE

YVETTE: Knock him out!

COOPER: What do you mean knock him out?

YVETTE: Knock him out so he doesn't raise the alarm!

COOPER: How?

YVETTE: Whack him.

COOPER: With what?

YVETTE: With a... Oh, for God's sake. Shall I do it?

YVETTE KNOCKS THE MAN OUT AGAIN

Don't judge me. Come on, let's find this bonobo.

(SCENE 2D: SMILES)

SMILES: (NARRATES) Peace and love, man. I didn't feel too bad about hurting the man. After all, he's only a man. A talking man, sure. Nothing you'd pay to see in a circus. He'd probably wake up and wonder how he'd been outdone by a bonobo.

(SCENE 2E: YVETTE AND COOPER)

YVETTE: Where is that damn monkey?

COOPER: We need to think. Rationalise. We need to think like bonobos. If you were a bonobo fleeing from an animal prison, where would you go?

YVETTE: Up!

COOPER: Yes! Up!

YVETTE: I'm shit at climbing.

COOPER: We'll have to just climb. Think like a bonobo!

THEY CLIMB

YVETTE: I can see him!

COOPER: Where?

YVETTE: He's... he's having a snack, I think.

THEY ENCOUNTER SMILES

SMILES: Hey guys. You must be the breakout party. You're late.

COOPER: My God, he really can talk!

YVETTE: This is wonderful!

COOPER: It's a biological marvel!

YVETTE: What's he eating?

COOPER: A hamburger!

YVETTE: Amazing!

SMILES: Guys, it's only a hamburger. I got it off these guards here. I had to hit them. I had to knock them out a bit. Peace and love, man.

YVETTE: What did you do?

SMILES: I was hungry!

COOPER: This is great! Since we couldn't find the invisible cloak, we can take their uniforms and escape that way, just like I said!

YVETTE: We can walk out of here!

COOPER: Come on, undress them.

YVETTE: Quick! Smiles, hurry!

SMILES: Can I at least finish my hamburger?

(SCENE 2F: THE MAN)

THE MAN: (ADDRESSING THE OTHER ACTORS) Why do I have to do this bit? Couldn't there be a voice-over on tape?

COOPER: Look, someone has to narrate the next bit while Smiles finishes his hamburger and we get changed into these disguises.

THE MAN: So cheap. I've already played about six different people and all you three have to do is run around and eat hamburgers.

SMILES: Hey man, I'm just the bonobo.

COOPER: Bollocks, a talking bonobo!

THE MAN: Ridiculous. (NARRATOR) The three of them escaped from the animal prison disguised as guards. They found the guards' normal clothes, which as soon as they were outside they changed into. Then they made their way to the airport. Happy now?

(SCENE 2G: AIRPORT)

THE THREE MOVE SLOWLY TOWARD THE MAN  
(BORDER CONTROLLER)

YVETTE: Another airport! Can't everyone live in the same place?

SMILES: I said the same thing to my mother. Before she was murdered by you people.

COOPER: We didn't kill her! It was The Man, man.

SMILES: You're *all* The Man, man.

COOPER: We were trying to help you.

YVETTE: You two! We absolutely need to get on this plane. Cooper, your moustache!

COOPER APPLIES HIS MOUSTACHE

YVETTE FINALISES SMILES'S COMICALLY  
ILL-FITTING CLOTHES AND DISGUISE

THEY APPROACH THE MAN (BORDER  
CONTROLLER)

THE MAN: Hello. That's a very hairy faced boy. Is he all right?

YVETTE: He's our son.

THE MAN: He doesn't look like you.

YVETTE: He takes after his father. Don't you, son?

SMILES: Thanks a bunch.

THE MAN: Where are you folks headed?

YVETTE: Oh...

COOPER: Trying to get away from it all...

YVETTE: There's this Trap Street in London. It doesn't exist on any maps and on Leap Day the universe can't harm you. On February 29th you are safe from all things.

COOPER: For one day the planets can't reach you. You're free.

THE MAN: Newly weds, eh? Go on.

SCENE 3 - THE DEATH OF SMILES

(SCENE 3A: SMILES ET AL)

SMILES: (NARRATES) I went along with them, but I had a plan.

YVETTE: What plan?

SMILES: Peace and love, people. They took me away to London. We had Moule Frites and strong ale and I taught the cockneys all the old bonobo dancing.

COOPER AND YVETTE DANCE

They were rubbish. I mean, people can't even peel a banana the right way round.

COOPER: Only an inhuman mind would open a bag of crisps upside down.

SMILES: Yeah, you keep doing your thing, man. It seems to have worked out well for you. I keep telling

you, it's easy: peace and love, man.

YVETTE: Peace and love - why did we never think of that?

COOPER: We need to think like bonobos.

SMILES: (NARRATES) You see, my plan was always to return to the Congo, and to avenge my mother's death. As I was nursed back to health, I befriended new bonobo playmates, and learned new skills.

YVETTE: Look at you, you're so smart!

COOPER: And look at his bollocks! The size of them!

SMILES WAVES GOODBYE

YVETTE: It was a bittersweet parting.

COOPER: When we parted...

YVETTE: ...with Smiles, our famous talking bonobo...

COOPER: We released him back into the wild.

YVETTE: Where he belonged.

COOPER: His own place, his own tribe, his own...

YVETTE: ...people!

COOPER: His own people.

(SCENE 3B: THE MAN)

THE MAN: Sentimental shite.

THE MAN COCKS AND AIMS A RIFLE

THE MAN: (ONE) I've got him in my sights! (TWO) Wazza Bazza! Monkey meat that's good to eat. (ONE) Isn't this a bit like cannibalism? (TWO) Just shoot the damn monkey.

HE FIRES

THERE IS SCREAMING. SMILES FALLS.

YVETTE: Smiles!

COOPER: Please, Smiles!

YVETTE: This can't be the end!

COOPER: Why!? Why!?

THEY SUPPORT SMILES

SMILES: Ah, you guys. It's okay. You heard what I said, right? It's simple. Peace and love. I suppose you want me to lay down my life for you in an allegorical way, right? That's cool too. What is the difference really between us? Language? Clothes? Sexual positions?

PAUSE

Guys, I'm really bleeding here.

SMILES DIES

YVETTE: Smiles, you can't die.

COOPER: Don't go, little chimp! Smiles!

THEY HUDDLE ROUND THE DEAD CHIMP

THE MAN: (narrates) People are animals. I watched the little fellow slip away into death, and a part of *me* died with him. He seemed so noble. So elevated. As if he still had lessons to teach us all about how to live, with each other, and with ourselves. Peace and love. Peace and love, people, that's what the bonobo said. And then I said to myself... "Bugger me, a talking chimp."

CURTAIN