

CHOPS

by Michael Rychlewski

for John Francis Delaney

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August 10, 2016

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CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

- VINCE 50s. Owner of Vinnie's. A bartender personality on Rush Street in the glory days of the late 50's, 60's and 70's.
- KAKI Could be 25, could be 35. A smart, sexy woman.
- WALT 50s. Old friend of VINCE. A card-player/hustler/ladies' man front and center in the same Rush Street heyday. He was top-notch in all three areas, but now he's worried he might not have the chops anymore. Jazz freak.
- PHILLY 50s. Old friends with both guys. Another jazz freak.

PLACE

Vinnie's, an old-time Chicago neighborhood bar with an excellent jazz jukebox. The walls are filled with memorabilia from Vince's glory days on Rush Street. The front door is down right, bathrooms up right. Behind the bar is a door that leads to a back room and a basement. There are some dirty glasses on a few tables.

TIME

Late on a Sunday night, October, 1984

AT RISE: "Straight, No Chaser" by Thelonious Monk plays on the box. Vince walks briskly to the front door and looks out the small square window in the door—first one way, then the other. He walks behind the bar, puts a key in the register and rings the night's total. Not good. He counts the money, rubber-bands it, and exits to the kitchen. After a few moments the front door opens and Kaki enters wearing a sexy dress. She stands there and surveys the room. The music ends. Vince returns, sees her, freezes. She regards him with the hint of a smile.

KAKI

You don't know who I am? *(beat)* I'm Warren Beatty.

(Beat. WALT bursts open the front door and gestures to KAKI with mock-incredulity.)

WALT

Warren Beatty? Oh my God! Ladies and gentlemen! Could I have your attention please! It's Warren Beatty! Could we have a nice round of applause for *Warren Beatty!* *(a loud aside)* Who's Warren Beatty? *(He and KAKI burst out laughing.)* Classic, Vince! You should have seen the look on Beatty's face. "You're gonna be sorry you said that." And he walks out. The Crazy Horse. They were scouting locations for *Mickey One*. When was that? Sixty-one? Sixty-two?

VINCE

Round there.

WALT

Vince, this is Kaki. We met over at Danny's tonight. She's an industrial artist. Just moved here from L.A. May I procure you a libation?

KAKI

Certainly. Do you have Lillet?

VINCE

I *just* ran out.

WALT

How about a Kir Royale?

KAKI

No. I need something with a little acceleration. Can you make a sidecar?

WALT

Can he make a sidecar!?

KAKI

Straight up.

(VINCE makes the drinks as she takes in the room.)

WALT

Yeah. I'm catching the last set and this lovely young lady sits down next to me and we start talking jazz. She buys me a cocktail. I buy her a cocktail. Before you know it it's midnight! I said, "Hey! Wanna go to a place where you can hear *all* the greats?" (*gestures to the jukebox; then a quick pop-quiz tone*) Who was Duke Ellington's first trumpet in the Cotton years?

KAKI

Cootie Williams.

WALT

(*gestures to VINCE "Is-she-good-or-what?"*) I got Cootie in there. On "Creole Love Call." The sultriest jazz song ever written.

KAKI

Play it.

WALT

Nah. I think we need a tune with more...

KAKI

Got any Amad Jamal? (*crosses to the jukebox*)

WALT

"Poinciana!" Only one of my all-time favorites. (*testing again*) Israel Crosby on bass?

KAKI

Vernel Fournier on drums.

WALT

(*To VINCE again*) Huh!? *Huh?! I was there the night they recorded it. Pershing Lounge! 64th and Cottage Grove!*

KAKI

Wow!

WALT

So how was business tonight?

VINCE

Decent.

WALT

Decent?

VINCE

Yeah. Good.

WALT
Good. Great.

KAKI
You got some knock-out selections here.

WALT
Best in the city. All eras, all styles, with a slight prejudice towards Bebop. Four or five new records every week, just to keep it fresh.

KAKI
(strolls, surveys the photos) That's you with Lenny Bruce! Jackie Mason! *(can't place one)*

VINCE
Shecky Greene. The Elbow Room. Use to come in there and steal my material. *(He pours.)*

WALT
(takes an old felt hat off the wall, flips it to VINCE.) He wore this one at The Plugged Nickel.

VINCE
(puts the hat on, goes into his routine) Who wants to hear a song!? You wanna hear a ten-dollar song or a twenty-dollar song!?

KAKI
What's the difference?

VINCE
Ten bucks! *(They all laugh.)*

WALT
So. Waddaya think?

KAKI
Style.

WALT
Vince, you passed the test.

VINCE
I'm relieved.

KAKI
(sips her drink) Mmmmmm. Delicious!

WALT
(a litany) "Two parts cognac, one part Cointreau, squirt of a lemon, stirred not shaken, twenty-

one times, counter-clockwise, strained into a chilled cocktail glass with sugar on the *outside* of the rim.” Am I right?

VINCE

Always.

WALT

You just got served by the best bartender in the history of Rush Street.

KAKI

I’m honored. (*gestures to the hats*) So which one did you wear at the Gaslight?

VINCE

How'd you know I worked at the Gaslight? (*looks at WALT, who gestures “not me”*)

KAKI

If you were the best bartender on Rush Street... It was *the* joint. Two and two.

VINCE

Do I know you?

KAKI

I was in a Bud commercial a couple years ago.

VINCE

I thought you were an industrial artist.

KAKI

A girl can’t chew gum and kiss?

WALT

Ohhh! She shoots she scores!

KAKI

So was it as good as they say, the Gaslight?

VINCE

Greatest club in America. Bar none.

KAKI

Tell me a Gaslight story.

VINCE

Actually, I was just about to close up.

KAKI

Just one! *(little girl voice)* I'll be my bedtime story.

WALT

Tell her the hookers and the walnuts!

VINCE

You tell her—you were there.

KAKI

So you were a regular, huh?

WALT

I'd go there two three times a month. Play a little liar's poker with the old farts from the Union Club. Make a couple hundred a night.

VINCE

Not to mention all the Shriners you fleeced.

WALT

(mock boy-scout honor gesture) I've never fleeced a Shriner in my life!

KAKI

What does Walter do? He never told me.

VINCE

Walter doesn't do anything. He's independently bored.

WALT

Me? Bored? Never! Just yesterday some people offered to back me in a gin game. Georgie and them. Ten bucks a point. Make thirty G's in an afternoon. I declined.

KAKI

Why!?

WALT

Because the guy I'd be playing is as good as I am. If you're gonna play cards to make money, rule one is play somebody you can beat.

(KAKI laughs a light sensual laugh.)

You have a great laugh you know that? You remind me of a lady I used to know down in Mexico City. Same kind of vibe. Same kind of eyes!

KAKI

Dark and mysterious?

WALT

Fearless.