

SCENE ONE.

It's 1918 Chicago. This is the back room of a bar/theater establishment, the Pekin.

An upright piano is in one corner. On the walls are posters of sheet music from the turn of the century: Coon Songs, Ragtime and a WW I poster. They are askew.

In the center of the room is a table stacked with four chairs. In the back is a long bar with a couple of stools. A picture of two women and "two" men---one of whom is a woman dressed as a man, hangs above the bar---it's actually a video wall. They are dressed in turn-of-the-twentieth century clothes. The picture turns into a video screen/live performances during the memory section.

We hear the voices of two men. DUPREE AND JACKSON. Dupree is a dapper dresser, a smooth talker. Jackson is a Chicago police officer, but he doesn't wear a uniform. His badge is on his suit jacket. Jackson is first. He has a lighted match in his hand.

JACKSON

(shivers)

Gettin' chilly outside.

(beat)

Where's the light?

DUPREE

I got it.

He turns on the lone hanging light.

DUPREE (CONT'D)

You sure nobody's here?

JACKSON

I checked. Been closed for a couple of months. Rumor has it that politicians closed it outta spite. Too many mixed couples dancin' up in here.

Dupree looks around.

DUPREE

Time flies.

He stares around him and focuses on
the picture over the bar.

Jackson goes back and forth
bringing booze in.

JACKSON

What you mean?

DUPREE

Ten years ago, there was standin' room only in this place.
Band was over there. The dance floor was right here. Theater
in the front.

Dupree points to the picture

DUPREE (CONT'D)

Those were some of the performers. There was also this this
theater critic. Sylvester...Sylvester, I can't remember his
full name. He used to be a singer himself and thought he knew
everything about show business. Anyway, he'd give performers
the blues.

JACKSON

(indifferent)

Before my time.

DUPREE

That there is Nettie Taylor, the singer and comedian. The
woman with the long hair, I can't remember her name either,
but she was a dancer....those hips, those hips.

He swivels his hips.

DUPREE (CONT'D)

There was Carter Douglas, singer, actor, juggler, and there's
Tenna...

Jackson looks up from arranging
chairs and tables.

JACKSON

Where's the other girl?

DUPREE

Tenna? She's the heavysset man. We used to call her Sistermister. She was a coon shouter. They call them blues singers now.

Jackson starts taking down the chairs and rearranging the table.

JACKSON

(shakes his head)

You all in the entertainment business got yourselves some funny ways.

DUPREE

I'm not in the entertainment business no more, Jackson. Just a chauffeur.

(beat)

When did you come to Chicago?

JACKSON

Five...maybe six years ago.

DUPREE

Then you missed the Pekin in its heyday. Where're you from?

JACKSON

Where else?

DUPREE AND JACKSON

Mississippi.

JACKSON

You?

DUPREE

New Orleans.

JACKSON

Seem like since I been here, I ain't never met no colored people born in Chicago. Seem like they just got herded here like a bunch a cows ready for slaughter.

(beat)

This'll do, right?

Jackson shows Dupree the seating.

DUPREE

Yeah. How'd you get in?

Jackson holds up keys.

JACKSON
Told the boys down at the station I was usin' it to conduct police business.

DUPREE
And they believed you?

JACKSON
No, but since I know them peckerwoods gettin' pay offs from the I-talians, ain't nothin' they can do about it. I keep my mouth shut. They do the same.

(beat)
You sure this okay?

DUPREE
Yeah, that'll suit him fine. Big Man wants this place so's nobody'll bother us while they work.

JACKSON
Sooner they finish the better. I can close this down so's no one's the wiser.

Jackson is leaving. Dupree hears music and stops to listen.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
You comin'?

DUPREE
You hear music?

JACKSON
Naw. You think someone's in here?

Jackson pulls out his gun and carefully searches.

DUPREE
I could have sworn I heard music.

Satisfied that there is no one except in Dupree's imagination, Jackson puts the gun back.

JACKSON
You just rememberin' your youth. You was in the band, right?

DUPREE
(humming)

Thought I heard music.

Faint sound of the Pekin Rag by Joe
Jordan.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tj1
dDkwWu-s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tj1dDkwWu-s)

JACKSON
You just as stuck on this place as Big Man. Hope he knows
what he's doin'.

DUPREE
He don't, but that ain't never stopped him before. He didn't
get as far as he has by not takin' risks.

JACKSON
Hope this thing he doin' gonna net him that money for this
place, 'cause I need to get me a job where I don't smell like
dead cow or shot at. I wanna wear a black uniform with gold
shiny buttons and wear a pair of good leather shoes.

He mimics opening a car door.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
Welcome to the Pekin, step this way.

DUPREE
Why'd you become a police officer?

JACKSON
The nigger before me got shot. The job was open. Let's go.

Dupree turns off the light. The
room goes dark.

END OF SCENE ONE