CARTAGE HOUSE

BY

JAY HAREZ

During the Prohibition Era Chicago became a war-zone. The city was divided between the Italians and the Irish and citizens were frequently caught in the crossfire. This is the story of how that war ended.

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TITLE CARD ONE –

Across America the Volstead Act and the prohibition against the purchase of alcohol created an economic boom for those willing to take the risks that came with selling bootleg liquor.

TITLE CARD TWO -

In Chicago Al Capone controlled the South Side of the city and Bugs Moran controlled the North Side. Both men wanted the others territory, territory worth millions.

TITLE CARD THREE -

The warring gangs had fought to a stalemate. Something had to give.

EXT – NIGHT, AERIAL VIEW OF OLD CHICAGO

City lights everywhere, offices, apartments, a few spotlights oscillating in the distance

ON SCREEN: January 1929 Chicago’s North Side

EXT. – NIGHT - CHURCH

Snow falls on an old church. Several cars are parked outside and several men are standing around in trench coats holding either a shotgun or a Thompson machine gun.

INT. - NIGHT - CHURCH

A well-dressed man AL CAPONE is sitting in old-time wooden folding chair flanked by two giant guys with Tommy guns. One man is FRANK NITTI wearing a white double-breasted suit. A couple of more goons with machine guns stand at the rear of the church near the door, two more stand by the windows watching the perimeter. Seated in a semi-circle facing Capone are the MINISTER, a YOUNG PORTER, and an OLD BLACK MAID. A clock on the wall shows 2 a.m.

CAPONE

I thank you gentlemen, and lady, for taking the time.

MINISTER

I don’t see how we had much choice.

CAPONE

If my invitation seemed curt it was only because time is of the essence.

YOUNG PORTER

You mean you’re losing to the Irish.

FRANK NITTI

You watch that tongue boy or you’ll find out what your own ass tastes like.

CAPONE

Frank, respect where we are.

FRANK NITTI

Sorry boss.

CAPONE

It seems that this young man reads the papers.

YOUNG PORTER

My daddy taught me.

CAPONE

Good on him and good for you. A father should pass something along.

OLD BLACK WOMAN

What can we do for you Mr. Capone?

CAPONE

As you know I run a business that’s frowned upon by some members of law enforcement. But I say that it’s every man’s right to do what he wants in his own home.

OLD BLACK WOMAN

Every man?

CAPONE

Yeah, even if he’s colored.

MINISTER

Even if he’s colored?

CAPONE

As things are you people stay on your side of the street and mine do the same. Maybe someday that will be different but for now that’s how things are and I don’t promise any changes.

YOUNG PORTER

I appreciate you clearing that up.

FRANK NITTI

Kid you got a mouth on you.

YOUNG PORTER

I don’t imagine your boss traveled to the North Side under cover of darkness to discuss the future of coloreds in Chicago.

CAPONE

You’re a train porter right, what are you planning to pass down to your son?

YOUNG PORTER

Pardon?

CAPONE

Right now your people have jobs as porters, maids, cooks, and ministers, all jobs that very few white people will do. So what about the next generation?

MINISTER

Sir, your business is destroying our community. We are flooded with cheap liquor right now and you’re offering more of the same. I would need to pray on anything you proposed.

CAPONE

I encourage you to do that, but I’m not here to talk about booze. What I need is information.

OLD BLACK WOMAN

I don’t see how you think we could know something you don’t already.

CAPONE

Neither do the Irish and that’s my point.

YOUNG PORTER

Begging your pardon again, but could you put that in simple terms that even we coloreds can understand.

CAPONE

I would be delighted to. White people generally don’t see you.

OLD BLACK WOMAN

The police seem to see us just fine.

FRANK NITTI

You mean Irish cops.

MINISTER

They don’t say whether they’re Irish. They do their talking with a sap and a thirty-eight.

CAPONE

I know, see, I read the papers too. Last week not two blocks over, a colored boy got caught with a pint of that coffin varnish the mics sell to your people and got shot for resisting. You know as well as I do that the police had no reason to kill him.

OLD BLACK MAID

That’s what police do around here.

FRANK NITTI

Irish police.

YOUNG PORTER

A white man with a badge is a white man with a badge.

CAPONE

On the South Side, my…excuse me, Chicago’s cops would think twice about killing one of my customers. That’s why I have a good relationship with the…Negros on the South side. There’s even opportunity for the smart ones that can keep their mouth shut.

OLD BLACK MAID

I’m too old to be driving fast cars and shooting up the place. Your business is dangerous, too dangerous for my liking.

CAPONE

Business will continue whether you participate or not. It’s up to you to decide who you want running things. Is it these Irish fucks…sorry Minister…or someone who sees the opportunity in maintaining friendly relations with everyone?

MINISTER

Not to belabor the point but what exactly is it you want from us?

CAPONE

Hmm, belabor, that’s a good word. Frank, remind me to look that up when we get back.

FRANK NITTI

Will do boss.

CAPONE

To answer your question, I don’t want nothing from you as individuals, as a community however, you can be my eyes and ears. Like I said, white people don’t see you. You hear things and see things without being either, and you no doubt have friends and family in similar occupations, dozens even.

FRANK NITTI

Could be hundreds the way you people make babies.

CAPONE

I would reward the individuals who passed that information along.

FRANK NITTI

The boss is generous like that.

CAPONE

Thank you for saying so Frank.

OLD MAID

What kind of information you want?

CAPONE

Nothing special, who eats where, what train this guy takes, who drives what, who has a wife uptown and a girlfriend downtown, that sort of thing.

OLD MAID

And for this information you’re offering what, protection from the police and more cheap booze?

CAPONE

I can’t guarantee that every guy with a badge will behave themselves, I guarantee that they will answer for their actions if they do not. I subscribe to the philosophy that pigs get fed and hogs get slaughtered. There’s plenty of cash to go around and I have no problem sharing so long as no one person thinks they are entitled to more than their fair share.

YOUNG PORTER

You seem to have done better than most selling booze.

CAPONE

It is true; I get the lion’s share, but that’s because I’m the lion. Now take a moment to decide if you want to be under the lion’s protection or on the lion’s menu. Unfortunately the hour grows late. Thank you for your time.

(Capone stands and puts on his coat)

CAPONE (continued)

Oh, and I left a little something out back. Boys let’s go.

Capone and company exit the church with almost military precision. Three men in front, followed by Nitti, then Capone, then three more. The church doors close and we hear multiple engines firing up outside then the cars driving away.

INT. VEHICLE NIGHT

Capone and Nitti sitting in back, two guys up front.

AL CAPONE

Frank, would you ever consider the possibility that one-hundred years from now a smoke could be a city councilman?

FRANK NITTI

An eggplant, holding citywide office, a hundred years from now?

AL CAPONE

Maybe.

FRANK NITTI

I will be gratefully dead before then.

AL CAPONE

I think it’s gonna happen Frank. And to prove my point about their potential, I’m gonna put my money where my mouth is.

FRANK NITTI

How’s that?

AL CAPONE

I got a c-note says it’s the porter that comes through with something useful for us.

FRANK NITTI

Al, you’re on, but my monies on the reverend; the clergy, they’re always in somebodies shit.

EXT. – NIGHT – REAR OF CHURCH

The Minister, the Maid and the Porter are looking in the back of shipping truck, several crates of booze stacked up and covered.

MINISTER

How many bottles you count?

YOUNG PORTER

Around seven hundred.

MINISTER

Dear Lord.

OLD BLACK MAID

At two dollars apiece that’s well over a thousand dollars, damn close to fifteen-hunut and I’m going to be too old to work soon.

YOUNG PORTER

If we work em through the jukes we can get twenty-one shots per bottle and at fiteen cent a shot…

MINISTER

The Devil himself is at our doorstep.