

**Catch of the Day**

**A short play**

**By Rich Espey**

**Characters**

**CHUCK**, 30, a real estate risk analyst interested in Kelly

**KELLY**, 20, a waitress at a sushi bar

**MR. FUGU**, a blowfish who later happens to look a lot like a sushi chef

**Setting**

A sushi bar, the present

**Synopsis:** Chuck likes Kelly but Kelly won't give Chuck the time of day until he orders potentially lethal suspicious sashimi.

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## Catch of the Day

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*Blue light with ripples of white light suggests we're looking at water. MR. FUGU is a Tiger Blowfish, swimming in a tank. He swims a little, then talks to us.*

**MR. FUGU**

I am Mr. Fugu.

Fugu means blowfish  
I secrete deadly poisons  
Yet taste delicious

*MR. FUGU continues to swim around while a yellow light reveals CHUCK, 30ish, pretty good looking but not amazing, sitting at a sushi bar on his cellphone. He's dressed in a suit and his shoes have just been shined.*

*KELLY, 20, is behind the sushi bar. She's nice looking and might be out of reach for CHUCK. She's wearing a nice white blouse and dark slacks. She pours CHUCK a glass of water. Neither CHUCK nor KELLY sees MR. FUGU.*

**CHUCK**

*(on the phone)* Dude, that's why it's called a risk analysis. Look, you shoulda known they couldn't handle the payments. Who in their right mind is still flipping condos? Listen, I gotta get back to you.

*CHUCK ends his call.*

*(to KELLY)* Nobody comprehends risk analysis, ya know? Ya know? So what's good today?

**KELLY**

Depends what you're willing to risk.

**MR. FUGU**

Tingling lips, light head  
Skin on fire from lover's touch  
If I'm prepared right  
Intoxication

**CHUCK**

You guys have a "catch of the day", a special?

**KELLY**

It's all special. Take a chance.

**MR. FUGU**

Cut me wrong? Headache,  
nausea, paralysis  
Conscious agony...death!

**CHUCK**

*(looking at the sushi menu)* Dynamite roll...what's in a dynamite roll?

**KELLY**

Spicy tuna inside, spicy mayonnaise outside.

**CHUCK**

That's dynamite?

**KELLY**

The chef uses a blowtorch to burn the mayonnaise.

**CHUCK**

Pretty risky.

**KELLY**

Pretty hot.

**CHUCK**

Do you like it?

**KELLY**

Doesn't matter if I like it.

**CHUCK**

What's in a spider roll?

**KELLY**

Soft shell crab tempura.

**CHUCK**

Is that the one with the legs sticking up?

**KELLY**

Yes.

**CHUCK**

You like that one? With the legs all sticking up?

**KELLY**

I'll be back in a minute when -

**CHUCK**

Eel roll. Never had that one. Is it good?

I don't know your taste.

**KELLY**

What does eel taste like?

**CHUCK**

I don't know what you've tasted.

**KELLY**

How does it feel on your lips? Does it remind you of anything? You know... "Tastes like..."

**CHUCK**

Let me know when you've decided.

**KELLY**

How about a "roll in the hay"? What's that?

**CHUCK**

Same as California roll but with lemon grass shoots wrapped around.

**KELLY**

To make it look like...

**CHUCK**

Hay.

**KELLY**

Like it's been wrapped in hay.

**CHUCK**

Yes.

**KELLY**

I'd like a roll in the hay. Ha ha.

**CHUCK**

Yes.

**KELLY**

Can I have a roll in the hay? How about a roll in the hay? Do you like a roll in the hay?

**CHUCK**

Yes, that's funny. I get that all the time.

**KELLY**

I bet you do. But seriously...do you like it?

**CHUCK**

Do you want the roll in the hay or should I just get you your usual?

**KELLY**

You know my usual?

**CHUCK**

Salmon and avocado.

**KELLY**

You know my usual.

**CHUCK**

Same as everyone else. Not exactly risky. Not what I'd expect of a risk analyst.

**KELLY**

Salmon and avocado too boring for you?

**CHUCK**

It pays my tuition. Even if it is the cheapest one on the menu.

**KELLY**

*(looking at the menu)* "Roll in the hay" is...not the cheapest. But maybe a roll in the hay will become my usual...our usual.

**CHUCK**

And I assume "water's fine", as usual?

**KELLY**

No. No, I'll have...hot tea...with a drizzle of honey.

**CHUCK**

*MR.FUGU is now a sushi chef off to the side. He prepares the "roll in the hay"*

**MR. FUGU**

How do we know when love is real? How do we know what is truth and what is crap? How do we slice the toxin from the delicacy? And most importantly, how do we know when to take a risk? A real risk!

*KELLY presents CHUCK with his meal.*

Roll in the hay. Tea. Enjoy.

**KELLY**

Did you drizzle honey in it?

**CHUCK**

Would you care for anything else?

**KELLY**

Yeah. Yeah. I'm gonna get... another roll.

**CHUCK**

Salmon and avocado?

**KELLY**

**CHUCK**

If I took you out, what would you order?

**KELLY**

I'll give you a few minutes to decide.

**CHUCK**

What do you like? Lump crab? Yellowtail? Cucumber? Or maybe you're not into sushi. Some nice hibachi steak sizzling to perfection. Or succulent beef tips in a warm teriyaki sauce? Do you like succulent beef tips? Served over a luscious warm bed of rice? Would you have that at our first meal?

Flaky tempura  
Golden, like a woman's face  
In late summer sun

Tender green mussels  
Sautéed in sweet and sour sauce  
A tongue's pure pleasure

Fleshy sea scallops  
Dripping in lemon butter  
Like a soft, moist kiss

Wasabi chicken  
Bone-in breasts smothered by  
Colossal mangos...

**KELLY**

Fugu!

**CHUCK**

Come again?

**KELLY**

Fugu!

**CHUCK**

I don't see it on the –

**KELLY**

Sashimi.

*She points to the menu.*

**CHUCK**

Fifty bucks. Not that that's a problem. The real estate sector is coming back. No, it really is. We're good. The sashimis are generally more expensive, aren't they?

**KELLY**

Sashimi means "pierced body".

**CHUCK**

Ah. And you like sashimi.

**KELLY**

Fugu sashimi.

**CHUCK**

Fugu.

**KELLY**

Fugu is blowfish. A delicacy. Intoxicating when prepared right.

**CHUCK**

Prepared right?

**KELLY**

And toxic when prepared wrong.

**CHUCK**

What happens if it's prepared wrong?

**KELLY**

Wouldn't you rather know what happens if it's prepared right? That sweet numbness, that spirit of abandon, surrender to the sheer pleasure of being at one with your body, your partner's body...

**CHUCK**

Like I said, what happens if it's prepared wrong?

**KELLY**

Life is full of risks. Some are worth taking.

**CHUCK**

Like I said, what happens if it's prepared wrong?

**KELLY**

"Deadening of the tongue and lips, dizziness, and vomiting. These are followed by numbness and prickling over the body, rapid heart rate, decreased blood pressure, and muscle paralysis. Death results from suffocation as diaphragm muscles are paralyzed. Patients who live longer than 24 hours are expected to survive, although the poison can cause comas lasting several days. Many people report being fully conscious during the entirety of the coma, and can often remember everything that was said while they were supposedly unconscious." Wikipedia.

*KELLY and CHUCK stare at each other for a while. It's interesting.*

**CHUCK**

Bring it.

*MR. FUGU prepares the fugu sashimi and talks to us.*

**MR. FUGU**

Shintaro Kusakabe ate fugu to win back a lost lover. She wept at his side for four days. He heard every sob. He later said the sound of her cries gave him the strength to survive. But she was sobbing because he would not die. Needless to say, they did not reunite. Fugu is like that sometimes.

*KELLY brings CHUCK the fugu sashimi.*

**KELLY**

Fugu. And fresh chopsticks. Enjoy.

**CHUCK**

How do I know...

**KELLY**

Only one out of three applicants passes the test to receive a license to prepare fugu. Our chef has a license.

**CHUCK**

You're sure?

**KELLY**

I should know. He's my father.

**MR. FUGU**

In Japan, there is a well known expression: "I want to eat fugu, but I don't want to die". There is another expression, too. It is "Here is your salmon and avocado roll. Thanks for once again ordering the cheapest thing on the menu. Enjoy." This second expression, however, is not as well known as the first one. Have you ever thought to yourself, "I want to eat fugu, but I don't want to die"?

**CHUCK**

And if I eat it?

**KELLY**

Pure pleasure.

**CHUCK**

You promise?

**KELLY**

Promise.

**CHUCK**

But the risk...



**KELLY**

The death rate from fugu has decreased substantially in recent years.

**CHUCK**

But this fugu...

**KELLY**

This fugu?

**CHUCK**

You've had this fugu?

**KELLY**

Not this fugu.

*MR. FUGU is now a blowfish again, and he swims around and speaks to us. CHUCK and KELLY still don't see him.*

**MR. FUGU**

Due to the rigorous examination process, it is generally safe to eat the sliced fugu sold in restaurants or markets. Furthermore, most fugu sold nowadays comes from fish with only a small amount of toxin. *(beat)* Citation needed. Wikipedia.

**CHUCK**

You first.

*(KELLY does not respond.)*

Eat it with me.

**KELLY**

I will eat fugu with you one day. But not today. Today you must eat fugu alone. There are your chopsticks.

**CHUCK**

It occurs to me...I've been eating here for months, and I don't even know your name.

**KELLY**

It's Kelly.

**CHUCK**

I'm Chuck.

**KELLY**

Eat your fugu, Chuck. Or will you eat your fugu, Chuck? You are doing a risk analysis. I can see that. And by the way, I comprehend risk analysis.

**CHUCK**

And if I eat the fugu, Kelly...

**KELLY**

We'll see.

*KELLY and CHUCK stare at each other for a while. It's interesting once again. CHUCK lifts the fugu to his lips and freezes. MR. FUGU speaks to us.*

**MR. FUGU**

Will Chuck eat the fugu? Will he live? Will he die? Will Kelly be impressed by Chuck? Or is she merely having fun with the concept of inappropriate risk-taking by a young adult male still wrestling with juvenile tendencies? Will they live happily ever after, or is Chuck just Kelly's catch of the day?

I don't know.

And neither will you.

The point is...would you eat fugu? And more importantly, is there anyone in the world for whom you would eat fugu?

Is there?

If there is, then you have a good catch.

Happy sushi! Enjoy!

*MR. FUGU bows to us. Blackout.*

**End of Play**