

Last, Best Hope in the Pocket

Bayo Ojikutu

Boys on the corners, in the shadows of some faraway Pocket of the ice-rust Mecca. Imagined distant, that is, distant and dependent on the core of the order, a spinning core so distant from and dependent upon them. They no longer prevail, bear little in the way of interest – they once did, or so the story goes, back when Ronnie and Goode and Burge and the Bishops and Bernie took up arms against those whom they'd armed in these cities, assailing such corner boys as rioting anarchist, provocateurs of blackouts and bankruptcies, deliverers of the collapse of civic grids and ledgers foregrounded by crumbling temples and crooked crosses.

Back when unmoored boys with no shirts, no nation nor networks, no lineage, no sense for geography, algebra nor chemistry, concocted a bear-market proof, pre-packaged portable consumer product for the ages, negotiated trade imbalances and inventory shortfalls with cartels and monopolies, and built projected housing communities along the Pocket's hem. out of their own semen and bloodshed. They were worthy of grim tales of legend and lore then. Living in totem-pole towers looming just high enough to cast shadows on each of their very own corners, primed for their lurking. There was interest in those days, yes, interest earned. Especially when one of those boys on one of these corners – or perhaps it was a slew of them on a few, but they were corner boys from the ice-rust Mecca's Pocket, nonetheless – picked up that old pay-phone just off of Marquette Street and Maryland Avenue and dialed twelve random digits without depositing coinage, only to find himself rapping with Colonel Gaddafi about the impending downfall of the

Western world order. Lurking, those boys, like I told you, while wearing no shirts. Their shadows teach them to bring painful ruin, as such is the invisible essence of darkness.

So the foundation wrote laws to prescribe these boys, and root out those corners, enforcement was executed, and the page turned. Interest moved on to lost little boys and little girls in sacred headwear strapped with ticking time, refugees with mutilated limbs sprinkled among un-mined bling and caked in oily soot. Bigger problems on darker corners, orbiting the core. The seams of the Pocket are now the stuff of billboard lists and HBO series, canceled because even a babble box audience recognizes an anachronism deep within the script. These boys standing on the corner in the ninth year of the 2-1 cent, are but last best imitations of those who came before – orphan cousins, nephews and, yes, sons, of those who heard the word of a collapse sure to come. Going through method-acted motions, throwing up signs with no symbols and pop-pop-popping their trickled-down armaments into shadows hiding mirrors.

This neo-corner boy has nothing new to say. He may rap a rhyme for you, because he figures that's all you want to hear from him anyway, yet even then it ain't his psalm he drops. He is but mimicking some babbling, bumble-weed kin from down below, a dark soul in a white cotton tee-shirt standing on a corner four score and an eon south of this Pocket. Claiming the tune as his own because he knows that you don't recognize the source.

Knew one of them once, before the corner's demise I suppose, who lived in what they called "a home" with a bunch of other sinewy boys named after unknown Prophets and misspelled myths, under the watch of an Agency. He spoke of a social worker coming to claim him weeks after months, from one of the cribs in the Pocket to which

he'd often escape. She's find him in one of those shacks tilting from the block where he'd stay with his mother's uncles, or with the old player who bought his grandmother's fifths, or maybe with that slim who had known his father back before in better days. Upon her third retrieval trip, this well-meaning State cog finally took note of the disdain cutting across the corner boy's eyes as a shack door opened to her belching lumber, and she said to the young man, ostensibly aiming to calm (or at least to distract from) the rage in the glisten of his trailing pupils: "Do not blame me, LaQuan, I'm just the Messenger, connecting the Agency to the Problem. Just doing a job, delivering, you see. Save your anger for a more prosperous channel. I'm not the root here," she absolved herself in well-enough meaning fashion, as that corner boy/state ward would have to ride in the passenger seat of her Civic for the three-mile journey back to the home, and who knew what scheming vengeance lurked behind the dark, angry drip of LaQuan surely-contrived tears?

That boy from the corner of 68th & Dobson claimed to have snapped on the social worker upon her third recitation of that plea for mercy. "If the same messenger comes around to deliver the message, this same fool script, time after time, years after year for two-thousand years, then why shouldn't I blame your ass? You are the root, far as I known it. Hell, if you don't bring the message, then you don't got a job. Then what are you? You disappear, and I'm free from the home. Your ass don't want that now, do you? Cause now what?"

LaQuan may have been exaggerating; perhaps he uttered his shadow-boxing challenge for my benefit, while remaining silent with the cog out of some fear (as he surely depended on her ride back to the home once he tired of the decrepit folly of *better*

days). But his glare surely trailed away as those last two words dripped from chapped lips, “now what”?

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