

Midnight at the Crossroads

by Arthur Rickydoc Flowers

Cast your vision, young hoodoo, as far as you can see. Determine the challenges the tribe will face. Prepare the tribal soul to meet them:

You ready, ask the Conqueror.

Ready as I'm gon be.

So. Here we are, my boy sitting a porch on the bitter end of Memphis, in the world but not of it, watching over the leafy perimeter of the riverbank and contemplating the nature of the Universe when the message from Stackolee arrive, *ping*, on your phone - *the bridge, midnight*

Of course. You savor the universe for a few more treasured minutes. Life has its moments does it not. And the bill that always come due. The bridge. Of course. Of course. The Crossroads. Always the fucking Crossroads. Now that it has actually come down to it a curious peace attends thee. Check your watch. Quarter till.

The bridge. The one cross the expressway into the Roost. Riverside Park. Of course. Of course. Where else would he be. You adorn yourself with 101 talismans and a full complement of mojo. After due deliberation you pocket your pistol, and with barely a thought choose a bottle from your bottletree.

Papa Joe appear with a crab claw fetish. *In the name of Gullah Jack*, he say. We patron we. You accept the Blessing . . . and roll on over to de crossroads, in your right hand the smoothnicity of blue glass and in your left the roughgrip of your pistol, the night a thunderous quiet, the woods a softshoe do-wop, the river's contribution a quiet humming in your soul.

You conscious of every little thing, the ground beneath your feet, the wind against your skin, the smell of impending spring. It is no longer no longer Papa Joe beside you. It is Papa Gede Nibo Bey La Kwa. Da Fisherman. Da Wata Fetcher. Full regalia. Wanganegresse chastise you, gently, cause you fragile now. Did you really think we would send you out there alone, that we would so dismiss your service in this your time of need. *Silly boy.*

The Crossroads is right down the street but the short walk there is an eternity and 1st time ever you notice the air is full of tiny little insects, so many you wonder how you breathe without choking on them as they gradually become a still life you move through dimensionally and the only sound you hear is a slithering in the woods alongside you lets you know Damballah snaking it. First time ever since Blind Mary's death release him. Vengent.

When you get to the bridge that cross over the expressway into the Park you hesitate. Somewhere on Riverside a bulldog sense you out and begin to bark, but even the Conqueror don't venture into the Park this time of night. *Let's be real.* Just then the moon unsheathe itself and there he is, other side of the bridge, Shadows in shadows on shadows. Stackolee himself. OG Staggerlee, *Showtime.*

You cross the bridge and Stackolee sneer, hollow and resonant, like it been drug from the depths of the sea. Well, well, well, look at this, old man Conquer, out and about. Finally. Was wondering what it would take to get you to come out and play. How many folk I was gon have to take off the Board. How long you was gon hide behind your little horse there. Starting to wonder if you was gon show up at all.

Stack turn sideways, so whip thin you blink you miss him. Aint personal, BrotherBlood, you still my boy. Just can't let you claim what you carry. The world might not respect you, Hoodoo Lord, but I do. I know what you capable of and Ima stop this high hoodoo poison before it root. That Chosen People scenario you rolling. That aint no Blessing, Thats a Curse. Always has been. You still a thief, Brotherme. Still a thief of souls. I could, however, use a man of your talents. A man with your particular skill set. You still got some say in this matter.

You hear the Babajohn telling you with a little compassion you could be profound. You think about all the folk you have let down and you can only hope there is a measure of redemption here. Perhaps even a touch of Fa. I am a spiritdoctor in the line of O. Killens. A Hoodoo Lord of the Delta. *I am not a thief of souls.* I am the High Hoodoo of Memphis. By God and all thats Holy nobody will go hungry on my shift.

Around you the haints of Fort Pillow have begun to gather. *Do not fear. We are here.* And it's like time glitch while the pattern settle into place and you see the futures you need to see and you see the paths thereof. The crossroads beckon. Call you by name. This time you will answer. You not generally one of those conjures just Know Things. Generally, you have to Figure Shit Out. But this time you Know.

You Know what must be done. Always have, I Believe.

Pass the chalice, my brother, say Staggerlee from the depths of far away. Work with me, Hoodoo Lord, and I will make sure you get Paid. Serve me and I will make sure you get the Respect you deserve. I will give you Say So, this world and beyond. I will give you Dominion.

You don't bother to reply. Whatever need to be said been said. Got to be explaining shit at this point in the Text it is a failure of Craft.

I concur, say Stackolee. What say we get this show on the road. He reach for his blue steel 44. The one thats built on a bulldog frame, tombstone bullets wid de ball and chain. That's when the Conqueror come down on you and a sibilant rustling distract Stackolee's draw. Make him look down and say what the fuck. He remember his purpose but he a tad tardy.

Staggerlee pop a cap and the Conqueror cap a soul.
I'm done fucking around. I own the crossroads.

*In the name of the Conqueror,
let this Work be done:*

you need me
you call me

I will come