Corktown or Through the Valley of Dry Bones
by Jeff Augustin

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Commissioned by Western Washington University
Characters
Jackee – Fourteen Year Old then Seventeen Year Old Black Male
Corner Prophet – Black Woman, Timeless in Age
Ty – Teenage Male Any Ethnicity
Cop – White American Male
Phylicia – Seventeen Year Old then Twenty Year Old Black Woman
Sherman – Fifteen Year Old Black Male
Atlas – Seventeen Year Old then Twenty Year Old Black Male
Reverend Johnson – Black Male
Bus Driver – Woman Any Ethnicity
Teach for America Girl – White American Woman
Ellen – Any Ethnicity
Clarke – White American Man
Homeless Person – Any Ethnicity/Any Gender/Any Age
Cop #2 – Any Ethnicity
Cop #3 – Any Ethnicity
Coffee Shop Owner – White American Any Gender
Sammy – White American Male
Mother – Black Woman, Mother of Jackee/Phylicia/Sherman
Customer One - White American Any Gender
Customer Two - White American Any Gender
Barista (Doubled by the actor playing Ty)

Doubling
Double as you feel fit or don’t double at all. But the actor playing Jackee should not play any other character.

Setting
Recent Past/Present Time/Future
Corktown – A once Great American City.

Note:
—— A silent moment when a character reveals or holds back a truth. A time when language is too much or not enough

Part One & Two - The set should not be elaborate. It should be more of a space. Feel free to suggest locations with props, chairs, blocks, tables, and bodies. Don’t feel tied down to any kind of realism. It’ll drive you crazy. Feel free to make it site specific. Moving from space to space. The audience should feel apart of the world. Want to have the action be around them.

The more you can create with the cast the better, whether it’s a sound effect, the creation of a location, lighting. It’s okay for us to see the theatre magic. This is about a community creating a world, an identity.

Part Three – Should return us to conventional theater, proscenium style. It should feel very different from Part One & Two.
Part One: The Great American Ruins

(JACKEE enters with a crate of flashlights. He is a nerdy, yet stylish kid. He moves with an elegance, a fourteen year old who is very one with his body. He sets the crate down at his feet. He stares out at the audience. When he’s ready, only when he’s ready, he begins.)

JACKEE
Mounds of stone, brick, iron and cement sprouted from the ground, from the core of the earth and grew into gods. Towers so large they could block out the sun, the moon on any given day. Gods of industry – combustion engines, alternative fuel, four-wheel power drive – pure Americana. We even created our own sound, born from the depths of our belly, released with a blues, a jazz, a funk.

(Softly, the cast can be heard in the wings, singing, joyously – like a hymn, like Motown. Their voices sounding like millions. He listens, moves.)

It became our anthem, our cry. Thousands descended to work, to live in the city. 1.6 million with some change to be exact. It was a time of high culture, economic gain, enlightenment. But like the Byzantine, Roman, and British empires we fell. Crumbled under our own weight, our own arrogance.

(The singing stops.)

What’s left?

(Answering his own question…)

Ruins. Fragments of memories and dreams to those who lived it. History to those who came after. A culture, a people fighting to regain what once was.

(A slight beat)

It’s strange how we always strive for what we were, rather than pushing towards something new, something that will survive.

(A hooded figure enters with a boom box, music blasting A dirty/ratchet rap song. We can’t see their face. The figure pulls out a can of spray paint and begins their art on the back wall.)

For those who ain’t paid yet, this shit ain’t free. I don’t know if you’re aware, but this city is bankrupted. So work ain’t easy to come by and a brother’s trying to get to college. So pay up for a safe and proper tour of the Corktown.

Some ground rules. I know I’m young, but you got to follow my instructions. This is my hood, my place. I know how it works and how it doesn’t.
JACKEE
You can call me Jac-KAY. Not like Jackie Onassis, but like Jackee Harry from 227. My mama was a big fan.

And please put your phones on silent. And no texting, I can see you. That shit’s just rude. Oh and if the cops come as we’re touring the ruins, run. And if you get caught, you’re on your own. So please pay attention to the closest exit. It may not be the door, window, or back alley we enter through.

Alright grab a light.

Through the valley we go.

(Lights fade on JACKEE. The music from the hooded figure takes over the speakers. His/Her work is done. The figure steps back to admire it. It reads: HIPSTERS, GO HOME. The word “hipsters” has the circle and strike through line associated with No Smoking signs on airplanes. Proud of himself/herself the figure exits bobbing to the music. The music rises, crescendos. Blackout.)
Chapter One:

(As if watching the sunrise, a vibrant orange and violet hits the back wall, illuminating the graffiti. We’re on a street corner. CORNER PROPHET is giving her morning broadcast, some might call it a rant. She uses a megaphone.)

CORNER PROPHET
Don’t be this climate change’s fool. It’s winter. Pull out those nasty long johns, plaid shirts - not that white hipster shit plaid – the practical thick durable shit. And put away those 1990s cargo pants, strong flip-to-the-flops

(Spotting a young woman across the way)

Hey girl, take off those jean shorts. I mean, I’m loving the sight of your sweet voluptuous flesh, but you need to get down, down with a down jacket.

(TY enters.)

TY
Morning Proph

CORNER PROPHET
Morning Ty

TY
What’s the Times?

CORNER PROPHET
What section you interested in?

TY
Local baby

CORNER PROPHET
Well, Mrs. Jenkins on third and MLK got rushed to the hospital, the sugar finally hit her, shame too. She been working hard to keep her glucose levels down – even stopped making her delectable apple pie, damn shame. She even cut out her daily faygo pop –

TY
Aww, which flavor?

CORNER PROPHET
Red

TY

Awww…that’s the best

5
CORNER PROPHET
Don’t she know. She even started running. Started a little club with a few of the other older ladies at the church. Sight to see. But sometimes late is as bad as never. Watch what you put in your body now kid. Remember it’s a temple, treat it right.

TY
I got to send her some flowers. She’s the only person to ever come into Crown Fried and ask me how I’m doing. I always got to ask people how they doing, but they never ask me.

CORNER PROPHET
People ain’t comin’ up right anymore.

TY
Ain’t that the truth. What else you got?

CORNER PROPHET
Little Lionel on Hughes and Hurston got a full-ride to some yuppie school in Boston – early decision too

TY
What ball that fool play?

(COP enters unseen. He listens/eavesdrops)

CORNER PROPHET
None, academic. But James on Fifth and MLK got football scouts up his ass. Genius Phylicia Jones is still waiting for her early decision letter from that school across the pond. The Combs are moving to Mississippi or Missouri or Minnesota or Montana one of those M states. The Carver projects are being condemned, the city is giving free homes to writers, while they got people like me plaguing the streets. You can cut down fifth after work tonight. The fifth street boys are having a bachelor party for T. So they’ll all be at the Player’s Club all night and all morning.

TY
Nice watching out

CORNER PROPHET
Candice is having her sweet sixteen on Saturday. Ratchet ass girl. You think Reverend Johnson would raise a civil child. And that little Jackee boy is giving people tours.

TY
Of what?

CORNER PROPHET
Corktown.
TY
Who the hell wants a tour of Corktown?

CORNER PROPHET
Everyone. It’s The Great American Ruins, baby.

TY
He making money off of it?

CORNER PROPHET
A nice chunk of change. So watch out for him will you.

TY
Will do.

CORNER PROPHET
Your bus is coming, better run

(Checking his watch…)

TY
I got another five minutes

CORNER PROPHET
Naw, you don’t.

(He points)

Here it comes.

TY
Shit.

(TY runs)

CORNER PROPHET
Yo, Ty. The Times ain’t free baby

(Running back…)

TY
Shit, sorry.

(He throws some change in CORNER PROPHET’S can. Running off…)

Later Proph
CORNER PROPHET

Be good baby.

(COP sneaks up behind CORNER PROPHET)

COP

Excuse –

(Startled, CORNER PROPHET spins around and instinctively gets in a fighting position)

CORNER PROPHET

Motherfuck –

(On realizing he’s not a threat..)

What the fuck is wrong with you? You can’t just sneak up on people like that.

COP

Sorry, didn’t mean to –

CORNER PROPHET

Who the fuck are you?

COP

I’m the neighborhood officer.

CORNER PROPHET

Neighborhood who?

COP

Cop.

(A slight beat)

CORNER PROPHET

I ain’t bothering anybody.

COP

I know.

COP

——

CORNER PROPHET

——

COP

——

CORNER PROPHET

——
Then what are you doing here?

Patrolling?

Someone get killed?

No

Robbed?

No

Then what you patrolling for?

Your safety

Excuse me?

Your safety

(CORNER PROPHET laughs.)

——

Oh, you’re serious.

Yes.

——

——
CORNER PROPHET
When did y’all start patrolling?

COP
Recently assigned to this area. A few of us are.

(CORNER PROPHET takes a moment, considering this new bit of info.)

CORNER PROPHET
Hhmmm

(There’s more to that thought, that “hhmmm”, but CORNER PROPHET offers nothing more.)

COP
I actually do have some questions.

CORNER PROPHET
Don’t we all.

COP
And you seem to know a lot

CORNER PROPHET
Not as much as you think

COP
And I’m new around here.

CORNER PROPHET
Fresh like a fetus.

COP
And I was wondering

CORNER PROPHET
The unfamiliar creates such uncertainty.

COP
Is this your home?

CORNER PROPHET
Born and raised. Once thought I’d be the next James Baldwin, Richard Wright, travel the world and lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers. But couldn’t write to save my life. Good at watching, good at talking, great at love making, but ain’t got no skills for writing. So now, I watch, talk, fuck and drink – always in that order.
COP
Uh…okay. But, uh is this corner your home. Where you sleep?

CORNER PROPHET
I ain’t barbaric, I don’t sleep on the streets. I can always find a nice warm nook – a shelter, a church pew, a neighbor’s house.

COP
Okay. But you know everything that happens here?

CORNER PROPHET
A good neighbor, keeps an eye out.

COP
Do you know who did that?

CORNER PROPHET
Not my taste. I prefer the graffiti of the 80s, the 90s, the real artsy shit.

COP
Okay

CORNER PROPHET
I guess you can call me a purist. There’s a lack of purity in the world.

COP
Sure

CORNER PROPHET
Everyone is too busy with irony.

COP
Do you know whose work this is?

CORNER PROPHET
Why it matter?

COP
It’s illegal

CORNER PROPHET
It’s all over this city
We’re trying to clean up.

Better late than never, right?

This used to be Reginald’s Goods where you could get a Forty, a Jamaican patty, and honey bun for $3.75. You know what they’re building here? Will I be able to buy a honey bun?

It’s going to be a coffee shop. An organic coffee only coffee shop.

What’s so special about organic coffee?

The health benefits. My girlfriend and I just switched to organic coffee and we feel more energized. I think it adds years to your life.

(Hmmmm)

(Again there is more, but she gives nothing else. A beat)

So, who did it?

(CORNER PROPHET studies it hard. Pulls out a little magnifying glass from her pocket. She looks at it like an art appraiser.)

(A beat. She puts the magnifying glass away. She’s done appraising)

So?
CORNER PROPHET
The Times ain’t free baby.

COP
What?

CORNER PROPHET
You pay for the NY Times?

COP
No, I watch CNN.

CORNER PROPHET
Well I am a one-woman twenty-four hour news cycle. Brought to you by Time Warner Cable.

(She picks-up his can)

The shit ain’t free.

(COP digs in his pocket. Finds some change, a single Altoid and lint. He removes lint and puts the rest in the can.)

That’s all you got?

(He checks he other pocket. Finds another Altoid. He places it in the can)

COP
Who did it?

CORNER PROPHET
Don’t know.

COP
You just said –

CORNER PROPHET
I never said I knew who did it. But since you paid for news. Pull out your winter coat. It’s going to snow, three feet of snow tonight.

COP
It’s 75 degrees.

CORNER PROPHET
Going to drop. Drop fast and drop hard. Don’t be climate change’s fool.
(COP watches her.)

COP
You’re fucking crazy.

CORNER PROPHET
Maybe. Maybe not. But it’s going snow. Smell the air. Go ahead

(COP smells the air. A beat)

COP
Hhmmm

(A slight beat)

You’re right.

CORNER PROPHET
Always am.

(Lights fade down on them)