

Pioneer Square North; Puertas a mi Izquierda...

by A. Darryl Moton, Jr.

It stopped raining shortly after the police arrived, a trio of swaggering gargoyles identically posed, faces twisted into sneering grins, right arms cocked protectively over their pistols in a manner more exhibitionistic than practical. After briefly surveying the area, the officers slowly waded through the mess of sixty-or-so, all young men and women between the ages of fourteen and thirty, peeking over shoulders and into gym bags or guitar cases as if there were a purpose for their presence other than to pick out a few underage smokers to ineffectively cite. Not that there were any present; those rambunctious (or stupid) enough to commit such an offense kept it well-hidden, and were smart enough to eliminate all trace of their minor crime the instant they'd picked up the scent of cop, which had been a significant time prior.

Argent pretended to fiddle with the Discman in his hands, trying to keep them in plain view of the blue-suited brute squad. Reykjavik watched him and smiled, briefly appraising his friend's blue polo shirt, khaki slacks, blond hair and white skin.

"What are you so worried about?" He asked. "They're not going to bother you."

"What makes you say that?" Argent's voice was a whisper so sharp it was almost a hiss. Reykjavik held out his arm, and pulled his shirtsleeve up, exposing his dark caramel skin. "You don't fit the profile. They tend to search those of a more...delicate social standing, know what I mean?"

"No," Argent replied, "I don't know."

Reykjavik looked Argent in the eyes, twinkling azure in the dim dusk sunlight, framed by a face too grave not to be serious. He read the look immediately. "Shit, Argent," he murmured, "You've got stuff on you?"

"Of course not." The eyes contradicted the words, conveying the brand of honesty reserved for the closest of friends.

"Dammit, Argent, one of these days, you're gonna get both of our asses busted."

"Why? Are you carrying?"

A scowl began to furrow Reykjavik's brow. "You and I both know the answer to that. No"

Argent sighed in relief and focused his attention back to the police, who'd managed to corner a less-than-brilliant teenager holding a bottle of red wine. Obviously drunk, the boy refused to let the officers touch him, lurching about, moving his hands in efforts too aggressive to be friendly and, yet, too clumsy to be dangerous. "Now observe, Reykjavik," Argent chuckled. "That, my friend, is not the way to deal with the police."

Reykjavik smiled; he appreciated it when Argent addressed him by his proper name and not the nickname tattooed on the outside of his left shoulder. He craned his neck in a stretch and looked down the street. "This would be your train," he remarked. The glow of the floodlight hurt his eyes, even from four blocks.

Argent followed his gaze, sighing once again. "Thank God," he breathed, "those pigs were beginning to make me nervous."

"Pigs?" Reykjavik mused. "Who are we now, Ice-T and not a product of the white elite?" Argent smirked. "Kiss my ass."

The train coasted to a stop at the station; a half-dozen black-clad urchins, the youngest of the throngs, stepped forward to get home only slightly past curfew. Argent nodded his head, running out from underneath the shelter and skipping through puddles like a twelve-year-old. "Catch you later, man."

Reykjavik watched the train doors close and the long white beast slither up the street. At the corner stood two women, dressed in black like he, their hair coifed in the best Caucasian imitation of dreadlocks. The taller of the two had a small kitten perched on her left shoulder that mewled as stray raindrops plunked down on its head.

"Do you have the time?" a voice chimed from his right. He turned his whole body toward the voice. A girl, short and bespectacled, stood in front of him wearing a pink Candy Girl T-shirt and black nylon shorts with pink stitching. She held a blue skateboard behind her back. The hint of nipples, erect from the cold, peeked through the shirt.

Blinking, Reykjavik pulled his watch from his pocket. "Eight fifty-nine." "Thanks." The girl gave him a thin smile and walked away. Reykjavik stuffed his watch back into his pocket and stared at his shoes for a moment. When he lifted his eyes again, a scowling blue-uniformed figure stood before him.

"How are we doing tonight?" The officer asked in a mockery of politeness. Reykjavik tried not to look as defiant as he felt and shrugged. "As well as can be expected. I'm kind of glad for the rain."

The officer nodded. "Mind if I ask you to please remove your hands from your pockets?"

Reykjavik, unaware he'd had his hands obscured, darted his eyes toward the policeman's gun hand, perched menacingly above the steel weapon. Shit, he thought. "No problem, sir," he replied, maintaining his false cordiality.

He kept his eyes locked on the officer's as he eased his empty hands out of the blue carpenter jeans he always wore. The palpable relief stemming from the officer's face both amused and angered him. He briefly wondered what their expression on the cop's face would register if, instead of long-fingered caramel hands, he drew a pair of snub-nosed pistols from the pockets. He found he was almost grimacing and immediately re-applied his stoic humility.

"Anything in those pockets?" The officer asked.

"Not really, just my wallet and my watch,"

"Your watch?"

"It's a pocket watch. Sir."

The officer nodded slightly. "Mind if I take a look—"

"Not at all," Reykjavik interrupted. He lifted his arms slightly, inviting a search.

The officer appraised the look on his face for a moment, then nodded and moved his hand away from the gun and onto his belt. "That's alright," he said. "You see a girl, about five-three, wearing a pink t-shirt and black shorts?"

Lie, Reykjavik's brain hissed. He's just picking on you. "You just missed her," he said. "You know her at all?"

"No; she just asked me what time it was."

The officer's face registered distrust, but he nodded nonetheless. "Sorry to disturb you," he muttered unconvincingly, and walked on.

Reykjavik followed the blue uniform as it moved onto another youth, chocolate-skinned, wearing a pale blue t-shirt with the North Carolina Tar Heels logo on it. Shoving his hands back into his jeans, Reykjavik thumbed the black gel pen pressed gently against his right leg. He had lied to the cop. *Oops. I wonder if I've just broken any laws.* He clicked the pen once, feeling the ballpoint press into his skin. He imagined the point burrowing into the cop's eyeball, wondering what color fluid would spray from the wound as he picked and gouged at it.

A cackling laugh distracted him for a moment. Reykjavik followed the sound to a group

of high school-aged kids engaged in a game of Magic. The stray raindrops became more plentiful and he pulled the hood of the sweatshirt over his head. He caught wind of another policeman and turned to face him.

The boots were the first thing he remembered, combat boots, standard-issue for the army rather than the police force. He was thin, with the hint of military-trained muscle beneath the blue monkey suit. His suntanned skin bronzed the entirety of his face save for the crew-cut black hair at the top. His eyes were a blazing baby blue, soft in hue but ferocious in shape and countenance, resembling an owl's orbs. He walked with a measured, trained stride, not the swagger of the falsely confident, but a concealing lope. Every gentle motion of his body told the tale of a man trained to fight-and die-for his country.

It had been a clear, cool summer evening almost a year before. Reykjavik had decided to bypass the train that evening, instead traveling via the skateboard he'd owned since he was ten. He'd never bothered to learn the daring, dangerous stunts the skater kids had shown him; the board was four wheels of convenient transportation that traveled the distance between two points. He had just turned down a back street and was coasting down the middle of the road. The entire area to himself, he closed his eyes, enjoying the feel of the wind against his face.

He opened his eyes to round a corner and was blinded by twin suns. Yelping in pain, he lost his balance and fell off the board.

"FREEZE!" a voice louder than God's exclaimed. Reykjavik, disoriented, rolled onto his stomach and tried to rub the spots from his vision.

"I said FREEZE!!" the voice repeated.

A silhouetted figure appeared in the light; Reykjavik lifted his left hand to shield his eyes and get a better look. "What?" he asked.

"Put your hands in the air," the voice demanded.

"What?"

"Put 'em in the air, now!!"

Reykjavik complied. The figure began to take on human shape as it slowly approached him. He could see the vague outline of the gun belt, empty on one side. The man was touching the radio on his right shoulder with his opposite hand. "Seven-nine to four-nine," he barked, "I got him at the corner of Hill and Barkley. Over?"

“Copy, seven-nine,” the radio spat back. “Hill and Barkley. I’m en route.”

“What’s going-“ Reykjavik began, but stopped as soon as the gun barrel flashed silver in the light.

“Shut your fucking mouth,” the officer hissed. “Put your hands behind your head and shut up.”

Reykjavik said and did nothing, frozen by the silvery glint, caught between confusion, panic, and terror.

“Now, boy,” the officer snarled, “before I lose my patience.”

Something inside of him clicked. Slowly, he got his hands behind his head and got to his feet. He stumbled a bit without the benefit of his hands to steady himself, but after a moment, he was standing straight up. At full height, he stood a few inches taller than the cop, who looked him over for a moment, deciding what to do.

“What’s going on here?” Reykjavik asked again.

The cop was on him in a moment. Reykjavik felt a stinging pain as the cop buried the barrel of the gun in his temple. “Did I say you could talk?” he growled.

Stars dancing at the edge of his vision, Reykjavik shook his head no.

The barrel retreated. “You shut up unless I say you can speak. Understand, boy?”

As his awareness returned, Reykjavik felt himself bristle at the cop’s choice of words. He nodded, darting his eyes to the cop’s badge, momentarily visible as the cop shifted his weight; the number read 6379. Below it was the name Johns cast in capital letters.

Johns barked into his radio again. “Four-nine, where the hell are you? I have the suspect detained.”

“Copy, seven-nine, I’m almost there.”

Reykjavik’s confusion returned. “Suspect? Am I under arrest-“

“Shut up,” Johns snarled, taking a step toward him.

“Not until I understand-“

“I said, shut up.” The barrel caught the light once more.

Reykjavik felt the blood rush to the side of his head; he could tell it was swelling by the throbbing he heard behind his ears. He tried one last time to appeal to the cop’s sense of legality and propriety. “I have a right,” he began, “to know why-“

Something clicked. Reykjavik heard it and didn’t know exactly what it was other than that it didn’t come from his body. He froze again, eyeing Johns, poised no more than three

feet from him.

A voice from the opposite direction piped up. "Jesus Christ...Johns, what the hell are you doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing?" Johns answered, calm for the first time, gun unwavering. "I am detaining a suspect."

"Suspect?" Out of the corner of his eye, Reykjavik saw another cop, about six-foot six, and rounder than his partner. "Description of the perp had him at five-eight or under. This guy's taller than you are."

"So?"

The other cop walked through the light, behind Johns, to where Reykjavik's skateboard had rolled away. "This board yours, son?" he asked.

Reykjavik nodded. "Yes, sir."

The other cop slowly walked toward his partner. "Suspect also escaped on foot, Johns." Johns said nothing, yet still did not lower his weapon.

"If he's the suspect, then where's the purse he supposedly stole?" The other cop was so calm Reykjavik wondered if things like this happened often.

"He could have stashed it somewhere," Johns answered.

"And found the skateboard, all while we were chasing him? Not likely; you got the wrong guy. Put the gun down."

At first, Johns did nothing. Then, he took another step toward Reykjavik.

"Johns," the other cop warned.

Gaze still frozen on Reykjavik, Johns lowered the gun. The other cop looked at him, then at Reykjavik. "Go home," he said.

Reykjavik turned around, away from the two cops. He slowly took one step, then another, then another. By ten steps, he was jogging. By fifteen, he was sprinting, tears rolling down his cheeks, skateboard long forgotten.

The lights of another train appeared blocks away. Reykjavik shook himself aware and glared at Johns. The policeman passed him without a second thought, instead approaching a gaggle of kids surrounding the drunken teen. The cops who had originally tried to subdue him were standing aside. One of them held the bottle of wine, empty, perhaps hoping that it indicated some degree of success or status.

Johns said something. Reykjavik couldn't hear what, nor did he care to. He turned to watch the train inch toward him, stopping at an intersection to allow traffic to cross.

There was a lot of traffic, and it wasn't moving very quickly. Reykjavik saw the cars easing their way through the intersection, honking stupidly, as if the noise would somehow affect the current situation. He glanced back toward Johns.

A bizarre tableau had formed. Johns had confronted the larger boy directly, and the crowd had circled around the two. The other cops were on the outside, trying to control the mob. One of the cops was speaking into the radio on his left shoulder.

With a gust of wind and the whoosh of hydraulics, the train arrived. Reykjavik walked to the nearest car doors and hopped in. He was almost in his seat when the yelling started. Amazed, he leaned out the door. The angry mob was running in all directions; the cops, guns drawn, were dispersing all they saw. The door to the car began to close. Reykjavik stepped back until a flash of pink caught his eye. The candy girl was moving toward him.

Reykjavik saw the girl's face for only an instant, not pleading, but definitely in need of help. He lunged at the door, getting his hand in the way long enough to halt its closing. The candy girl jumped through the door, into the car. Reykjavik let go of the door, and it shut. He watched the situation unfold as the train pulled away, windows displaying the action in letterbox format. Just as the train picked up speed, he saw Johns, hand at his right side, a panicked look on his face. Around him, the crowd began to thin as people ran away in every direction. Reykjavik smiled slightly, enjoying the entropy, and marveling at the lack of control the cop must have been feeling.

"Crazy shit, huh?" the girl said.

Reykjavik turned to face her. She looked older than he first thought; the outfit made her look as if she were in her mid-teens, but her face was a bit more mature, wiser. She could very well have been older than his twenty-four years, but he doubted she was older than twenty-one. "Yeah," he replied.

"That has never happened before as long as I've lived here." She wore a slight grin that seemed out-of-place beneath eyes that appraised him with detachment. Her skateboard was on the seat next to her; a knapsack was slung over her left shoulder. Above her eyes, she had pulled her pink hair into a ponytail. Reykjavik saw hints of black underneath; it intrigued him.

"And how long has that been?" he asked.

“Six years,” she replied. “What are you looking at?”

“Sorry,” he said. The smile returned briefly, dancing across his lips. “Your hair is very interesting.”

“Well, I hope that’s a compliment.” She reached behind her head, pulling out the rubber band that kept the ponytail in place. The pink portion of her hair fell forward, exposing black hair underneath. She deftly folded the pink under the black in one movement, pulling her hair back into a ponytail.

“Nice trick,” Reykjavik observed, genuinely impressed.

“Thanks.”

He turned his body around and sat down fully. He checked his watch; nine-twenty. The sun was going down, and the lights from the city stores danced across the inside of the car as the train passed. He eyed the girl for an instant; she clutched her knapsack tightly and was looking around the car. “What happened back there” he asked.

The girl paused briefly. “Well, the cops were trying to bust Evan—the boy with the wine bottle, because he’s underage. Well, Evan’s stupid ass was so drunk, he thought he could pick a fight with ‘em. So he throws a shit-fit, and keeps most of the cops away, but this one fucking super-pig stands his ground.”

“Johns,” Reykjavik said.

“Excuse me?”

“The super-pig. Johns is his name.”

The girl’s face wrinkled, suspicious. “And how do you know that?”

“I don’t want to go into detail. Go on.”

The girl thought for a second, then decide he was trustworthy enough to continue. “So Evan starts acting all bad-ass, and super-Johns just freezes up, and we all panic, ‘cause Evan talks a good game, but he’s just a big softie and it looks like he’s gonna get his ass beat. So ... one of us ...” she nodded and grinned. “One of us takes Johns’ gun, and hides it in the crowd. And that’s when it all went nuts.”

Sirens whined in the distance, growing louder. “Hmm,” Reykjavik huffed. “Sounds like the police are pissed.”

The girl’s eyes widened, but only for a moment. “Shit,” she muttered, hopping to her feet and looking around the car again. “Are there cameras in this car?”

“I think so,” he replied, eyes searching the ceiling until he spotted one. A bumper sticker

had been placed over the lens. Fuck You, it read. “Up there,” he laughed, pointing to it. “You won’t have to worry about it.”

“Good,” the girl replied. She turned to Reykjavik, an air of humility entering her features for the first time. “I need to take my shirt off,” she said, “and I’m not...” she trailed off.

“Not wearing a bra,” he finished.

She blushed. “Right.”

Nodding, Reykjavik covered his head with the hood of his sweatshirt and turned away from her. His shirt smelled of coconut. He briefly wondered why.

After almost thirty seconds, he heard the girl address him again. “You can turn around, now.”

Reykjavik tossed up the hood and inhaled cool air for a few seconds before turning around. The girl had turned her shirt inside-out, completing her transformation from pink-swathed nymph to pseudo-gothic commuter. She was still standing, leaning over toward his side of the car, looking out. The sirens got louder.

The train stopped for a moment at an empty stop before moving on. The sirens faded and the girl, sighing with relief, sat back down. Reykjavik moved a few seats toward her, sitting right across the aisle. Once he was re-seated, the girl held her hand out to him.

“Katie,” she said.

He took it, noticing a pink digital watch on her wrist. “Reykjavik,” he said.

“Gesundheit.”

“No, that’s my name. Reykjavik Constantine Moore.”

“Oh,” Katie chuckled, “You weren’t kidding.”

He shook his head, shrugging. “With a name like mine, I can’t afford to.”

“Well, it’s certainly a mouthful.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Katie.”

“Same to you, Reyk-ya-vik.” She enunciated every syllable with a flourish.

“You know,” he said, “the cops asked me about you.”

The concern quickly re-appeared on her face. “Oh?”

“Yeah,” he continued. “I told him I didn’t know who you were or where you went.”

She smiled once more. “Thanks.”

The train entered the tunnel, the only one on its’ route. The colored city lights were replaced with uniformly intermittent tunnel lights that flickered as they passed. The train

picked up speed, and the lights flashed like strobes. Katie's eyes followed the lights for a moment as they shot past, over Reykjavik's head.

There was a long silence as he let the rocking motion of the train nudge and shake his body. He examined her face. Smooth, rounded chin, small nose. She's a little more than cute. Wonder where her glasses went.

"How did you get it?" Katie asked suddenly.

"Excuse me?"

"How does one get a name like 'Reykjavik Constantine?'"

He smiled. "My mother always wanted to go to Iceland, and my dad was a very well-read history major."

She fumbled with the knapsack. "I bet you got a lot of shit for it."

"Eh, not really. Many a nickname has been christened for me in the past."

"Like what?"

"Rey, Rick, Vic...I never answered to them, though."

"Why not?"

He sighed and wrapped his arms around himself; the air-conditioning in the car made his wet sweatshirt feel cold and clammy. "I like my name."

Katie looked at him, amazed. "So, you never went by a nickname?"

He nodded. "Briefly...in college."

"And what was it?"

"Zero."

Katie rolled the word around in her mouth, then briefly appraised him. "I've never heard that one before," she said, "that's a good one. Pretty appropriate."

"How so?"

The girl paused and looked Reykjavik over before responding. "You seem like the kind of guy who can easily disappear into a situation," she said. "It's like you're your own camouflage."

"Thanks, I think." He countered her grin with one of his own, a lopsided half-sneer. "Suddenly," he intoned, "I feel uncomfortable at the disproportionate amount of stuff I'm revealing."

"Well, what more do you want?" She joked. "I already took off my shirt for you."

"Hey, I didn't peek."

Katie feigned seriousness and looked out the window. “Thanks,” she said, “but I never asked you to turn away. That’s your loss.”

Reykjavik shook his head. “You don’t like questions, do you?”

“You haven’t asked me any good ones.”

“Fine, then,” he replied. “Why were the cops looking for you?”

Katie started, then looked at him out of the corner of her eye. “Well,” she began, “There are some stories circulating that I deal in a certain brand of artificial emotion inducer.”

He laughed. “I haven’t heard that one before. It’s a good one.” His laugh turned into a yawn; the trip and conversation had given him some much-needed occasion to relax. “So,” he continued, “how much validity should I apply to these rumors?”

She caught his eyes fully. “Would you believe me if I said none?” She asked, half-kidding. As the train exited the tunnel, the artificial lights momentarily shut off. The sun had gone down, and the full moon glowed fiercely in the summer sky. Reykjavik stared at her eyes, a dark color neither gray nor green, whose glint the moon almost gave a lurid gleam. He paused for more than a few seconds before responding. “Judging from your eyes, I imagine you can get anyone to believe anything.” Good one, Reykjavik; could we get any cornier?

A look he had not yet seen crossed Katie’s face. It took a second, perhaps for the both of them, to understand the look was amazement. They sat in silence for what felt like days, looking at each other, saying nothing.

Finally, Katie sighed, smiling full and genuine, reaching into her pocket and producing a scrap of paper. “Do you have a pen?” She asked. Reykjavik nodded and produced the gel pen from his pocket. She took it, scribbled on the paper, and put it into the knapsack.

As she handed the pen back to him, his curiosity got the better of him. “Why did you ask me for the time?”

“Excuse me?”

“Earlier, at the station, you asked me what time it was, but I noticed that you’re wearing a watch.”

Katie nodded, remembering. She turned her head to look out her window. “How far are you riding?”

“I’m exiting at the next stop.”

She said nothing, and continued to say nothing as the train eased into the transit station.

Reykjavik slowly got up and started to walk off the train. He looked at her one last time,

watched her staring out her window, and the hopped out the door.

The doors were almost closed when she blocked them with her skateboard. She nodded to him. "How did you know super-pig's name?"

"Johns?"

"Yeah."

Reykjavik sighed. "About a year ago, he tried to bust me for some robbery."

The door started to close again. Katie kicked it back open. "Did you do it?"

"Would you believe me if I said yes?"

She examined his face before responding. "No," she chuckled. "No, I wouldn't." She handed him the knapsack. "Here," she said, "take it. I don't need it."

He took it in his hands. It was far heavier than he expected it to be. "Why did you ask me the time?"

She kicked the door open again. "Because you were cute." She smiled, then leaned forward and kissed him. Reykjavik, only momentarily surprised, returned the kiss gently. Her mouth was warm, and she tasted like something he couldn't identify. Oranges, he thought. Maybe oranges.

It was a long, gentle kiss. Katie finally broke it and stepped back. "See you around, Reykjavik," she said.

The door closed, and the train finally resumed its course. Reykjavik stood for a few moments, basking in the moonlight, marveling at the kiss, etching it into his memory and feeling the weight of the knapsack. Satisfied, he jumped across the tracks and walked across the parking lot toward the harsh fluorescent light of the gas station across the street.

Halfway across the lot, headlights flared. Momentarily alarmed, Reykjavik froze.

Argent let out a lycanthropic howl. "Reykjavik, my friend!"

Sighing with relief, Reykjavik approached the car. The closer he got, the stronger the smell of marijuana permeated his senses. "Hi, Argent," he sighed.

"High? Damn straight I'm high," Argent bellowed in response. He gestured to a trio of others in the car. "Me and the fellas heard that shit on the radio about that riot at the train station. Some cop lost his piece. We were afraid we were gonna lose you, buddy."

"Yep," Reykjavik dryly replied, "I'm a survivor." He coughed uncomfortably; marijuana gave him a headache. "But, if you'll excuse me, I'm tired. I'm going home."

"Word," Argent laughed, and slapped him five. "Take it easy, Reykjavik; you sleep, I

smoke. Adios!” He hopped in the car, and the headlights went out.

Reykjavik resumed walking. He made almost to the edge of the parking lot when the weight of the knapsack proved too curious to endure. He opened it, first pulling out the scrap of paper. On it was scribbled “Katie Jennings: 226-4617.”

The gun was the only other thing in the knapsack, catching the light of the moon on its barrel. Reykjavik laughed, amazed at how small it looked in his hand.

Get rid of it, Reykjavik. Wipe the fucking thing clean and throw it somewhere no one’ll find it.

He smiled at himself and looked at the phone number. “She’s nothing but trouble,” he said to no one in particular, looking up and eyeing the phone booth at the gas station. “Nothing but trouble.” He hoped she had an answering machine.