



Disconnected in DC

a psecret psociety pshort pstory by Mike
Bozart [Agent 33]

(written in Apr. 2013; reformatted in July 2015; revised in Mar. 2016)

Agent 32 (code name: Monique) and I, Agent 33 (code name: Parkaar), were then summoned to Washington, DC. Not a subpoena, mind you, but we had to go. No three ways around it.

We traveled under the radar from uptown Charlotte, arriving at Union Station via a double-decker Megabus. We transferred to the Metro Red Line, got off at Silver Spring (Maryland), and walked about a kilometer to a one-point-five-star hotel on 13th Street.

As we walked to the hotel office, we observed the police raiding a hotel room. I thought: *Ah, our kind of place. Surely a short story lies in wait here.*

We threw our luggage down in the room and took a short nap. Mine was dreamless. As for Monique's, well, not sure.

Twenty-seven minutes later, we hiked over to Lotus Café for some Asian chow. It was tasty and satiated our long-travel-induced hunger. The waiter seemed to be up to something, but we didn't ask any questions.

The first night was initially uneventful. No notes were found in the hotel room. The only weird thing was that the tub faucet was fully open at 1:11 AM. Hot water was roaring out of the spout. Steam filled the bathroom.

At first I feared a major plumbing problem. But, upon twisting the (H) valve handle, the water completely stopped – not even a drip. *Now, how did that just happen?*

Monique then woke up. “How do you think that valve opened, Parkaar?”

“Maybe the maid is deaf and doesn’t realize that the hot water valve is faulty and prone to opening from slight vibrations, Agent 32.” *He must have that darn audio recorder running.*

“I’m not buying that explanation, 33. I sincerely doubt that vibration theory, Parkaar.”

“I don’t know, Monique, that little refrigerator’s compressor has a bit of a kick when it shuts off.”

Monique just rolled her eyes and pulled the covers back up. “Yeah, whatever, 33. Just get back in this bed before you get hurt.” *Get hurt? By what?*

Sleep was uninterrupted until 5:05 AM. That’s when I heard a couple arguing outside our door (# 435). I couldn’t make out the language – maybe it was Hungarian? Well, maybe. Anyway, the volume subsided after a thud on our door.

Monique was startled. “Did you hear that?!”

“Yes, I did.”

We just looked at each other, not sure of the best move (or non-move). A few minutes went by with no sounds – nothing audible. Apparently, the ruckus had passed. *Maybe just a domestic squabble.*

We drifted into a half-sleep for 50 minutes. Then we got up and made some coffee. We decided to get ready to go to the embassy.

We were out the door at 8:00 AM on the dot, and on the Metro by 8:15. The ride was morning-commuter uneventful.

Newspapers being read. Coffee being sipped. Distant gazes reflecting off the windows.

We got off the Red Line at the Dupont Circle stop and looked for the exit.

“Wow, Agent 33, this has got to be the steepest and longest escalator in the world!” *Maybe in the Top 10?*

After Monique exclaimed that, I noticed that it was indeed quite a long and steep escalator. It reminded me of one at a BART station in the San Francisco Bay area, but I forgot which one.

We then began walking around the circle and soon found Massachusetts Avenue. We turned to the east and marched right past the Embassy of the Philippines (consular affairs). Silly us, we weren't even looking up.

We went past Scott Circle. That's when we stopped and I realized our oversight. We marched back.

Well, soon I was reaching for a doorknob on a nondescript white building. I turned the brass orb, the door opened, and I was met by the gazes of about two dozen Filipino Americans.

Monique took care of her passport business. Forty-four minutes later, we were outside the embassy. *That wasn't too bad. Nice friendly staff.*

A young Filipina was standing on the sidewalk in front of the embassy with an automaton. She asked us what our plans were for the day. We told her, Krystal, that we would just be doing the usual tourist thing: taking pics down at the National Mall. She asked if she and her mechanized pal could tag

along, and we consented. *A Filipina with an automaton. I've got to write this up later.*

We strolled down 17th Street to the Washington Monument and took some photos. Then we proceeded towards the Capitol. And, finally we were in front of the White House.

“Are you hungry?” Monique suddenly asked.

“Yes, I am,” I said.

“How about you, Krystal?” Monique asked while looking at her red automaton. *What a strange thing. So creepy! Why does she tote that around? I'm sure Parkaar likes it.*

“Yes,” Krystal said. “I could eat a horse!” She giggled.

We began walking back through the Foggy Bottom area, looking for a restaurant with rice. When we got to M Street, we turned west. We literally stumbled upon a step-down joint called Sala Thai.

We were promptly seated. I ordered while the ladies chatted at the large, thick, wooden, ten-seater, communal-style table. Soon the food arrived, and we were chomping away. *This is some good grub. If I lived in DC, I'd be here semiweekly. / I love the taste! / They made a good choice.*

More customers entered. It was obviously a popular Asian eatery. However, seating was limited. It got crowded fast. People kept brushing our backs.

Soon a pair of 50-ish Caucasian gentlemen sat across from each other, right next to us at the long common table. They began an intriguing conversation at a volume that was

intended to be overheard. The bearded guy opened the volley with a comment about some spy book.

“Mazorgski wrote about that affair, Ed. The first 100 pages were riveting. I couldn’t put it down. But, then it got really wonkish. Very inside game.”

“Blightener is an easy read, but you can tell that he never worked for NSA or the CIA.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty obvious that he’s guessing in spots.”

“You think that Kerry can man up to China, Steve?”

“Well, Ed, Chinese guns were fired at him in ‘nam. He won’t be forgetting that.”

“I don’t know, Steve, he seems like an egghead pussy. These guys are playing way more ruthless than he realizes.”

“Well, I guess we shall see.”

“Ah, our food is here, Steve-O.” *Steve-O?*

Their heads turned downward, as they began to feast on their rice-and-curry dishes. After an initial round of devouring, they came up for air and rejoined their conversation.

“Blightener said that he sometimes leaves first-draft pages of the novel that he is currently working on in random places, Steve. Hotel rooms, coffee shops, even inside newspapers.”

“That’s crazy as hell, but novel, and sounds just like him, Ed.”

“He said that he got the idea when he found a short story on a folded pamphlet on a couch in the San Francisco airport.”

“Man, that is seriously whacked. Off-the-charts whacked.”

Monique then notices that the bearded guy's (Steve's) knapsack is unzipped. She very discreetly slips a copy of *SFO |_| SOFA* (a recent short story) inside. She looks at me and Krystal. I nod.

Three minutes later, we are all finished eating. We get up to leave. The two intriguing conversationalists seem oblivious to our exit.

Once outside on the sidewalk, I looked at Monique. “What exactly did you put in that man's knapsack?”

“One of the short stories – the San Francisco airport one.”
[SFO |_| SOFA is the actual title]

“Oh, wow! He's gonna flip when he sees that in there. Excellent move, 32. Ernie will probably give you a bonus for that one.” *Yeah, right? Check's forever in the mail.*

“I wonder if he will look up psecret psociety on Facebook and send us a friend request,” Monique said.

“Yeah, I wonder,” I replied.

“Maybe he'll think it is just too weird. I mean, what are the chances of some obscure, single-sheet-of-paper, short story ending up in your luggage?” Agent 32 asked.

“Next to nil,” I answered.

“Heck, I just hope he doesn't spy on us.” Monique stated.

“Spy on us?” I asked with a surprised look.

“Did you hear their conversation? They themselves seem like spies. After all, we are in Washington, 33.”

Krystal, who had been intently listening to our rambling discussion as we ambled up Connecticut Avenue, finally had a question. “Do you think they left the water on?” *What water? / How much does she know?*

I started to chuckle to play it off. Soon it was uproarious nervous laughter from all three of us. *Yeah, this is definitely worth a write-up.*

And, as the laughter subsided, we were back at Dupont Circle, searching for the Metro entrance.

“There it is, over there!” Krystal shouted as she led us over to the long and steep escalator. *Funny, for a Filipina just up from Florida, she knows Washington pretty good.*

We all hopped aboard for the mile-long descent. Ok, a slight exaggeration there. It is quite an escalator, though. Check it out if/when in DC.

When we were about two-thirds of the way down, I noticed an orange sheet of paper on the flat metal section between the down and up escalators. It was quietly resting on the snow trap.

As we went by, I snatched it. It was a half-sheet flyer for some pizza restaurant. Monique saw me grab it.

“Why did you grab that piece of paper, 33? Do you want pizza tonight?”

“Well, to be honest, I thought it was something else; I thought it was *Galax_ Galaxy*.” [another short story like this one that was printed on orange paper]

“You’ve lost your mind, Parkaar!”

I just shook my head and grinned.

Somehow we never lost our footing. Never hit a wobbly tread.

Krystal then asked to see a copy. Monique handed her one from her backpack.

“Is this like the other one?” Krystal asked.

“Kinda,” I said. “They’re all similarly dissimilar.” *Huh?*

“What?” Krystal asked, looking bewildered. *He’s nuts!*

Monique then chimed in to ease the confusion written all over Krystal’s face. “Yeah, they are all just harmless, though somewhat enigmatic, little short stories that lead to nowhere.” [*sic*]

“Nowhere?” Krystal asked, still looking puzzled.

“Depends on how you spell it, Krystal,” I said. “It’s usually best to lead that place off with a silent k.” *Silent k?*

“I’m totally confused,” Krystal confessed.

“The usual state of affairs around here,” Monique then said.

“Welcome aboard, Krystal,” I said while noticing a jogger in soccer-length purple socks.

“Who pays you guys?” Krystal then asked.

“Pay?” Monique rhetorically asked. “You’re picking at the plot, Krystal.”

“I’m sorry, Krystal, we just can’t answer such questions,” I said. “Well, not at this time and place.”

Soon the three of us were on the train. There was an awkward silence. After four minutes, I broke it.

“What’s your stop, Krystal?”

“Gallery Place,” she shyly announced.

“If the station were named Gallery Park, I think Parkaar would reach ecstastasis,” [sic] Monique then added. “Sometimes he just walks around saying ‘I don’t know what to say, and I say it all day ... in Gallery Park’. Yes, I know; it’s all very crazy.”

Krystal just sighed. “Oh?” Total bemusement had set in. Her train stop couldn’t come soon enough. *What a demented duo these two are.*

When the train arrived at Gallery Place, we said our rudimentary farewells. Krystal quickly disappeared down the platform. She turned, and was gone.

“Well, do you think she’s got ps-ps [psecret psociety] game, Parkaar?”

“50-50, Monique. Too soon to tell how she will tilt.”

As the train rolled into Fort Totten, I found myself looking down at the platform. When the train stopped, I looked at the nearest bench. There was a red piece of paper on it, perhaps the size of a half-sheet (8.5" x 5.5"). *Why do I keep seeing this particular paper size? Probably because that's my printed short story format.*

Then the train screeched into Silver Spring. The sun was bright, but not very warm. We walked past NOAA, down East-West Highway, turned on Newell, and then on Kennett.

When we turned onto 13th Street, we saw a lurid mural on the building across the street. *Frank (deceased Agent 107) would have liked to add something trenchant to that.*

And when we arrived at our green hotel door, we saw a red copy of *Agent 107: A Final Report* [the prior short story] thumbtacked below the numerals. *Krystal's work? / We're being played ... yet again.*