

"Why Iceland"

by Joseph Patrick Lee



"Frantic trips abroad have always been, for statesmen, a way of escape from domestic failures. We Frenchmen saw, in May 1968, DeGaulle, in the midst of a national collapse, fly surrealistically to Romania, in order to get the applause he was badly lacking at home."

That statement was made in 1972 by a French observer, Jean-Francois Revel of L'Express.

Perhaps, it explains the quasi-summit meeting between President Ronald Reagan of the United States and Mikhail Gorbachev of Soviet Russia, in Reykjavic, Iceland. Here is how I imagine it came about:

A worried looking Gorbachev is alone in his Moscow headquarters. He reaches for the red telephone which connects him to the Oval Office in the White House and punches the only button. The counterpart phone on Reagan's desk rings and the president answers, "It's your kopek. Start talking. President Reagan here."

Gorbachev: Ronald, this is Mikhail. I had to call you in this most direct way to cut through all that, excuse the expression, red tape. Things aren't going well here for me. How are you doing?

Reagan: Same here, Mick. The annual deficits, high interest, trade imbalances, unemployment, and the national debt, are giving the Democrats so much ammunition I'm overwhelmed. I'm running out of jokes and quips to counter their accusations. Jimmy Carter didn't do enough wrong during his four years in office for me to effectively counter criticisms of me by criticizing his administration. It's frustrating, believe you me.

Gorbachev: Ever since Chernobyl and all the aftermath I've been catching flak from members of the Politburo who dislike me and my efforts to get along with you and your constituents. They wear me down, some of them taking off their shoes and banging the conference table and chanting a crazy rhyme about atoms on the loose and long lines at the markets. Our economy is the pits and alcoholism is the only escape the people seem to have. Would you believe it, some of those drunks are drinking denatured alcohol they steal from the tank cars in the railroad yards. They go blind, which only compounds my problems but, I suppose, they are better off not being able to see what's happening in this country.

Reagan: It's an ill wind that blows no good, as they say in Ireland. I can empathize with you, Mick. I'm getting more hate mail and some of those radio talk show hosts are giving me a very bad time. Radio station KGO in San Francisco has a guy named Ray Taliaferro who spends four hours four nights a week ranting and raving about me and my cohorts. It's aggravating and worst of all, some of what he says is true. I only wish he would take longer romantic weekends. He is rapidly enhancing my racist attitudes. I find it difficult to come up with any of my well known wit and charm to counter his remarks. Why is it that most talk-show hosts are Democrats?

Gorbachev: I can't answer that, Ronnie. We don't have that kind of radio over here. Most of the criticism on the air waves comes from Western Europe and your Radio Free Europe stations. I would very much like to get away from it all for awhile, but I haven't got a good excuse right now. Have you got any ideas?

Reagan: Off hand, no. I have been taking too much time away from the Oval Office visiting my ranch on the Coast and that sort of stuff. I still get static and those reporters manage to find out some of what's going on and print all sorts of stories on the thinnest conjecture about me that add up to a grand total of disinformation and guesswork. If it weren't for me they wouldn't have anything important to write about. Maybe you and I should join forces to give them something really humungous to scribble on. Like a summit somewhere. Anywhere. Off the beaten path. Like Antarctica, if the facilities were available. Can you think of a good place that would capture the imagination of everyone and smokescreen our problems.

Gorbachev: I think we should meet someplace where the population isn't too large, where you and I could be safe from those terrorists. Some place where swarthy skins would stand out like coal in a snowdrift. Some place like Iceland. That's it, Iceland. Iceland would be safe. You have a military installation there. We would be safe there. What do you think?

Reagan: A capital (excuse the expression) idea. Let's do it. We can call it a mini-summit, quasi-arms conference, or whatever will fog it up a bit. I've never been to Iceland and I don't think you have, so it will add a bit of newness to the ideas. The newspeople will like it too. They'll get to buy cold weather gear on their expense accounts. Icelanders should like the shot in the arm for their economy. We'll keep our fingers crossed a volcano doesn't erupt while we are there.

Gorbachev: I gather we are in agreement. Iceland it is, then. I suggest you make the arrangements with Iceland and then we can announce it simultaneously. At your high noon, say, day after tomorrow. It may be the only thing we can agree on. In any case the meeting in Iceland will get both of us out of town. Just between you and me, let's call this gambit Operation Obfuscation. We can mention that in our memoirs, but not now. Those nosey newsmen will read too much into the name and add to our problems and need to explain.

Reagan: Okay, Mick, we are in agreement. Maybe we can find some other item to agree on, but let's not get carried away. Both of us must keep the people guessing and hoping. It's the only way to go. Arividerci, hasta manana, aloha and all that sort of thing.

Gorbachev: that sounds like double talk to me, Ronnie. I trust you will keep it at a minimum in Iceland. So long, buddy. I'll look forward to seeing you. Bye bye.

So it goes. Like DeGaulle, like Ronnie and Mick. When the heat gets too much, find another, cooler place, another idea and bask in the mystique of closed meetings. Hope the hoi poloi will buy all the pop corn. And for the sake of a place in history, keep a stiff upper lip and don't bend the truth too much. You might wind up with lot's of egg on your face.

The Iceland meeting was held as scheduled. General confusion came out of the meetings at every level, particularly, at the highest. Mick went home with one story. Ronnie came home with another. The only item which was clearly delineated for disagreement was Star Wars, or Strategic Defense Initiative, a sci-fi idea which Reagan had dreamed up with the help of Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb. It is Reagan's one-upmanship on John Kennedy's bold statement, "Within this decade, we shall put a man on the moon."

"Secrets"

Do you know the secret
Or have you but a clue
Do you hear them laugh at me
They don't laugh at you

Do I have a funny walk
Or do I act the clown
Am I mean or sharp of tongue
What is it that they've found

I ask you as a friend
Take a mighty look at me
For the hardest glass to see through
Is the looking glass you see

R.C. Carlisle

"The Chase"

Before the end of an adrenalin pump,
the lion lunges—reaching toward a primordial image.
His limbs sinewed, the muscles defined;
determined claws dig in the earth.

The beast launches his frame to a low, midair flight,
lands recoiled,
and pushes off again.

His rythmn has no meter,
his timing is dynamic;
king of the jungle, yet subject to his instincts.

The prey is near.
The moment of attack is on edge.
To the predator's primal perception,
all eternity is frozen on ice.
The prey glances back at its pursuer;
both sets of eyes lock for a millisecond
To the pursued, the longest instant of its life—
the instant before death
To the pursuer,
the anticipation of a hunger about be gratified.

The prey telegraphs its acceptance of its fate;
The cat's eyes perceive this as consent;
With fly-like agility and an explosion of speed....
the lion pounces on his victim....
maiming it with one slash of its claw.
In the flesh of its kill,
the lion buries his teeth,
then shakes his head for a bigger bite.
For in the jungle,
even a snack must be earned.

Scott Wyland



"Overnight at North Lake"

fish jumped in the lake all day
their small forms dancing in light
circles remaining where they flew...
making watery smooth sounds:
sleek fish falling
rising again and falling
curling around submerged logs
all clear to me in a Daii scene
changing time.

Doug Marchant

"Nothing There"

She'd been hit with hard times awhile back
Not knowing if she'd make it or not
Trying to hold something that wasn't there.

Now she is away from the small towns
The slow crowds and the places she once knew
Everything seems to get better.

She tries to remember everyone she's seen
Everything that was and everything that will be
Sometimes it's hard I know.

Renada Anderson

"5 Second Meditation"

Centered by silences
along this familiar road,
I barely notice
the still pond
the spotted pony reflected;
bright spots catching all light
throwing it across to me:
pinpoints of rainbows
growing smaller
in my rear view mirror.

Claudia O'Driscoll

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