

Erin Spofford

e.spofford.writer@gmail.com

## **I Am Karma's Gun**

by Erin Spofford

Beyond the cracked sidewalk, and the telephone pole with layers of flyers in a rainbow of colors, and the patch of dry brown grass there stood a ten-foot high concrete block wall, caked with dozens of coats of paint. There was a small shrine at the foot of it, with burnt out candles and dead flowers and a few soggy teddy bears. One word of graffiti filled the wall, red letters on a gold background: Rejoice!

“Rejoice? For what? This cosmic fuck up?” Rainbow barked. A strange thing to look at the site of your death shrine. Especially after being reincarnated as a German Shepard. Which wouldn't be a bad thing, but Rainbow was quite sure she wasn't meant to retain all of the memories from her previous life. She remembered her childhood. Her last known address. Her father's recipe for shrimp mofongo. Her first can of Rusto. She remembered ridiculous things that no dog should know how to do, like how to read the word “Rejoice” graffitied on the wall.

A chill ran through Rainbow's fur and she shook herself from head to tail to release it. Despite trying to suppress them, memories of her death flooded her senses. She felt the cool wood of the telephone pole against her back. The hot, black metal of the car that pinned her to the pole. Her murderer's face flashed through her mind. His uniform. His nametag: Odin. Smells

of pizza and oil-rich exhaust. She heard his slurs. His hope for her death. The high-pitch buzz of his car's aftermarket tailpipe as he sped away, leaving her severed and dying, on the sidewalk.

Rainbow fought the sudden urge to bite and thrash the teddy bears until the stuffing was exposed. A car horn startled her, and she tucked her tail between her legs and cowered. *I hate this. I don't know how to be a dog. Why is this happening to me?* she thought, then smiled and wagged her tail at the idea of dogs thinking to themselves.

A scent, familiar and visceral, drifted on the breeze. *Pizza*. She followed her nose around the corner, leaving her neglected shrine behind. She let her incredible nose guide her through an alley and into a neighborhood. Parked in a driveway, a small, white car with a Carmine's Pizza car topper idled. The driver waited at the front door. *That's the same pizza smell. But the car's not right. And this guy is just a kid. Definitely not the man who killed me. Maybe if I follow—*

A low growl behind Rainbow raised her hackles. She turned to face the threat. From the alley, a large cur, lips raised, teeth bared, drool dangling from the corners of his mouth, walked toward her. His muscles tight, ready to chase.

"Hey, look, I don't want any trouble," Rainbow barked. She tried to make herself seem as non-threatening as possible. The cur pressed on. "Can't you understand me?" she asked. He pounced and was at a full sprint in two strides. Rainbow yelped. Her paws struggled to find purchase on the smooth asphalt.

The cur threw his weight into her as his vicious jaws bit her ear. Rainbow howled and yipped and pulled away, adding to the damage done to her. She ran toward the pizza kid. "Help me, please," she barked. "Help!"

The pizza kid paid no mind to her pleas as he got back into his car. "Wait, come back," she barked and ran toward him. Blood from her ear made her fur thick. She felt her equilibrium

shift out of balance, causing her to stumble. Her body slid on the street's surface. The reverse lights of the car glowed bright as it reversed out of the driveway. As the tire rolled toward her, the cur nipped at her hind and she let out a high-pitched yelp.

The car stopped, and the pizza kid jumped out. He saw the cur hunched over Rainbow and let out a yell. The cur looked at the kid, unfazed. Rainbow found her footing. *You know what? Fuck you.* She leapt at the cur, biting into his neck until she tasted blood. He yipped and pulled away then ran back toward the alley. The pizza kid gave chase to ensure he didn't return.

Rainbow limped and collapsed near the rear tire. The familiar pizza smell emanated from the open driver side door. *If I lay here, the kid will take pity on me. And then, maybe, just maybe, I can find him. This is why I'm here. It can't be coincidence. The universe wants me to get revenge.* Laying on her side, she let her head rest against the warm road. Her eyes closed.

"Damn, you got fucked up, girl," the kid said. He stroked her side, gentle and calm. "You don't have a collar, so, I'm not sure what to do with you." Rainbow tried to speak, to give a sign that he needed to take her with him, but all she managed was a slight head raise and a soft whimper. The pizza kid was right, she hurt bad. As the pain of wounds took hold, her hope became less about getting revenge and more about getting medical attention. The kid surprised her when he lifted her and put her in the backseat of his car. The heavy smell of cigarettes and hot pizza didn't help her state.

At some point on the way to the animal shelter, she passed out. The kid carried her limp, but breathing, into the facility. She awoke to nurses taking her to an examination room. The cold, metal table felt good against her overheated body. She heard the kid say, "If you don't find a chip and no one comes to claim her, call me. I'll take her." The nurse put a plastic mask over her snout. Rainbow slept.

Dreams filled her sleep. Dreams of her past life. Of times when she was human. When she confronted her parents. When she posted that video on YouTube. The backlash. The death threats. The man who killed her. His hate-filled eyes, remorseless, savage.

She woke up alone in a cage, groggy, but feeling much better. A bandage covered what remained of her ear. The bite on her hind stitched together, with the area around the wound shaved bare. A cone around her neck restricted her vision and movement but not her greatest sense: her nose.

The stench of feces and urine was profound. Like a worst-case scenario gas station bathroom. Beyond that was a pungent, masculine odor, full of threat and aggression. Rainbow tilted her head and caught the scent of a female, powerful and confident, dominant, in the cage next to her. She rose to her feet, shaky and off-balance, and moved to the chain link door that shut her in.

“Hey,” she barked. “Can you understand me?” She waited. A young pit bull across from her noticed she was awake. In a thick, phlegmy, guttural accent he barked, “Bitch. Bitch. Bitch.” Other curs joined in the chorus. “Bitch. Bitch. Bitch. Bitch.”

*I can understand them? I guess the language of assholes is universal.* Rainbow did her best to ignore the taunts and surveyed her surroundings. The gate was locked by a simple mechanism. *If only I had thumbs. And a voice. Some way to communicate. I just need someone to treat me like a human being.* A wave of dizziness dropped her to the concrete. Staying low, she inched her way to the water bowl. The cone made it difficult but not impossible for her to drink.

A human voice entered the room. “She may still feel the effects of the anesthesia, but she should be fine by tomorrow morning.” Rainbow scented two people. A female that smelled of cheap shampoo and hand sanitizer. The other was male and reeked of pizza. Rainbow’s head

lollered to the side. The pair stood before her cage. Rainbow laid on her side and closed her eyes. Half-aware, she felt herself lifted. “It’s okay, girl,” the pizza kid whispered. “We’re just going for a short ride. We’ll be home soon.” In the car, the kid listened to a speech. It was filled with references to the “coming war against foreign invasion” and “our great race” and “protecting purity.” He nearly recited it word for word, making only the occasional verbal stumble. *Great, I’ve just been adopted by a neo-Nazi.*

When the ride ended, she was lifted again. The kid slid her body onto a soft pile of clothing among the boxes in the garage. He pulled an old coat over the top, creating a cave that emanated the sweetness of old ladies who frequently powdered themselves—a light rose motif that played ironically well in the deep recesses of Rainbow’s ancestral brain. The pizza kid lifted her head to help her lap water from a hubcap. He broke bits of pepperoni and crust into bite-sized pieces and left them where her tongue could reach them. Much later, she heard him practicing his orations like songs. Like monks chanting in the distance, they were a comfort.

Rainbow stashed the red and gold Rust-Oleum spray paint cans into her backpack. She admired her first, official, straight letter blockbuster. The piece was huge, and it filled the whole wall. But it wasn’t obnoxious. Nope. Simple and elegant, just like her. And she picked the perfect word, too: Rejoice! She stepped back to get an even better view of the scale and bumped into a telephone covered in a rainbow of flyers. A buzz, like a million wasps, filled the air behind her. She turned to face it. Sunlight seared her open eyes. She ran. Her paws tore at the grass. The ball flew across the field and into the street. She snatched it off the road, victorious. Close, loud squeals of rubber startled her. Rainbow is swallowed by darkness. She’s not falling, but she’s not tethered to anything either, just dormant. Asleep.

The buzz of an aftermarket tailpipe approaching woke Rainbow from her slumber. The car pulled into the driveway, causing the garage door to vibrate. An acrid exhaust stink hit her sensitive nostrils moments later. On instinct, Rainbow's hackles bristled. *He's here.* Her murderer pounded on the front door. The kid responded with a yell. "Hold your fucking nuts, asshole. I'm coming."

Rainbow gingerly got to her feet. Her lower half ached from the attack and the cone on her neck was really starting to piss her off. She hobbled a few steps, then fell back onto the pile of clothes. *Nope. Surprise attack ain't happening.* The garage contained many things but none of them would help her get revenge. The only item of interest was a box a Rust-Oleum spray paint cans. *If I had thumbs, I would use that Rusto to throw up some tags. What I really need is a gun. Why aren't there guns for dogs? If I ever become human again, I'm inventing dog guns. I—*

The door from the house opened and into the garage walked the kid and Odin, still wearing his Carmine's Pizza uniform. Besides the smell of pizza, Odin, reeked of dank marijuana and whiskey. He, eyes fierce, hard, full of disdain, looked at her. "You weren't kidding. She did get her ass kicked. Why'd you keep this bitch? Cuz' I would've told the vet to gas her."

The pizza kid smirked. "Man, I saved her, and I can tell she knows it. I'm gonna train her. Get her a Feldgendarmerie collar. She's gonna be my own personal Kettenhunde." Odin laughed and crouched in front of Rainbow; his legs spread. Her nose picked up his groin funk. Odin reached out his hand. She growled, low and quiet. "Oh shit, Odin, she don't like you," said the kid.

The closer he got, the more her lips curled up. “Don’t you fucking touch me,” she growled. His scent filled her mouth with saliva. The instinct to protect herself overwhelmed her. She resisted the animal urge to attack, but her control was tenuous. *I’ve got to bide my time.*

Odin, hand still extended, smiled. “I don’t need her to like me.” His face soured, eyes shining with violence. “Bitch just needs to fear me.” He lashed out, striking her cone. The plastic pushed against her amputated ear. Rainbow yowled in agony. “Yeah, you fucking slut, don’t you ever growl at me again. I’ll cut your throat and sell you to the slits in Chinatown.” His meaty fist slapped the cone again. The pain of her wounds receded, replaced by a feral lust for blood. Rainbow snapped at him but only found air.

“Enough, man, she just had surgery,” said the kid as he put his hand on Odin’s shoulder. “Come on, let’s go party.” Odin shook the kid’s hand off and stood. He kicked the cardboard boxes next to Rainbow and barked at her. She coiled herself, poised to strike if he came near again. She glanced at the kid expecting to see sympathy but only saw a pair of bloodshot eyes and a half-grin. “We’ll have plenty of time to teach her respect after she’s healed.” The two men left the garage discussing names for her. Rainbow, her pain returning with interest, pushed herself as far back in her rose scented cave as she could and plotted.

Soon a routine of feedings, walks, and obedience training kept her occupied. Being a dog isn’t that demanding an occupation and Rainbow was grateful for the lack of human responsibilities while healing. She smelled and heard her murderer one other time, but he stayed inside the house and out of the garage. She heard him and the kid doing cocaine while listening to a QAnon podcast. She knew that they were doing it because she pressed the cone to the door and listened. She hoped to get some insight, anything, that would help her get revenge. Instead

she got an earful of conspiracy theories and the occasional loud snort, pause, and a shouted, “Holy fuck, I love coke!”

This went on for several hours. Eventually, they convinced themselves that they had concocted a bulletproof plan to kill a senator that’s been pissing them off. Something about a bomb hidden in a stack of pizza boxes. *What fucking toys these two are, especially that Odin prick. How the hell did he get away with my murder?*

Rainbow returned to her bed. The cone comes off in a few days. She heard the kid making an appointment with the veterinarian this morning. Her time would come. She just needed patience. *This is why I’m here. The universe wants me to succeed.*

The next morning the kid removed the cone. Rainbow, thankful for the relief, ran in circles and barked with gratitude. This one simple gesture endeared him to her. She almost felt that beneath the hate for his fellow man he might just be good people.

Nothing seemed abnormal on the way to the vet, well, besides her cone being put back on. *Gotta keep up appearances.* They arrived at the same animal shelter that helped her with her fight injuries. It wasn’t until she heard the kid say, “Got an appointment for my dog to be spayed,” that she realized why they were truly there.

“Spayed!” Rainbow barked. “Are you serious? Who the fuck do you think you are to make decisions for my body?” The kid and the nurses tried to calm her to no avail. They came at her with catch poles, double teamed her, and snagged her by the neck. In seconds, they muzzled her and injected her with a sedative, knocking her unconscious.

Back in the garage, Rainbow ached from the four-inch suture along the natural seam of her stomach. A midline spay she heard the nurses call it. The kid was supposed to give her pain medication, but he’s been taking it himself. To make matters worse, she was back in the cone.

*This is utter dog shit.* Although she was loath to admit it, two positive things had come of this violation of her rights: the kid was much kinder to her and she was finally allowed inside the house itself.

For the past week, while the kid was at work, she's been exploring and trying to form a plan. The small two-bedroom, one bath home may as well be a museum to hate. Posters of Nazi and White Supremist propaganda, mounted and framed, lined the hallway to the bedrooms.

The second bedroom had a variety of display cabinets and shadowboxes filled with Nazi accouterments. A life-size cutout of Hitler saluting was set in one corner. *Why do white people love Hitler so much?* On a shelf in a standing glass case, a cluster of grenades were set. *Shit, I wish those were still live.*

Below the grenades she saw a knife and its leather scabbard displayed. On the handle, a small red and white diamond shaped logo with a swastika in the center. The blade itself had the words "Blut und Ehre" engraved on it. The polished edge looked sharp. Dangerous. She pushed her head against the display case door and the magnetic push locks clicked open.

She carried the knife by the handle, the blade bumping against the cone. As she passed the kitchen, the oven caught her eye. *I could easily turn that thing on. Maybe start a fire.* She walked into the garage and stashed the knife in the box of spray paint cans. Her surgical wound begged her to not be so physically active and rest. An urge she was glad to follow. She curled up on the couch, happy to finally be rid of that pile of clothes as a bed.

Rainbow dreamt. After the barbaric surgery, each time she did, her dreams strayed further from those of a human. When she'd wake up, she'd be met with overwhelming canine desires and it was taking her longer and longer to remember her cosmic purpose. Karma rewards the focused and she was losing hers.

She hadn't intended for the day she stashed the knife to be the day she would get her revenge. She had hoped she would have a better plan but the bastards who run the universe do what they want and like any corporeal creature, she was obliged to obey.

The front door opened. Rainbow jolted awake. The kid and Odin walked in carrying two twenty-four packs of Natty Ice, two large pizzas, and a Coleman cooler. Their voices were louder than necessary and delivered in rapid bursts. *Great, they're already coked up. I'm outta here.* Rainbow struggled to move off the couch and the kid came to her aid. Odin opened the cooler and took out a Ziploc bag of cocaine. He dropped it on the coffee table with a subtle thump. "Fuck that whiny bitch, let's party!" Odin said.

"She's still recovering. She needs my help," said the kid. *I don't need your help, asshole. I also didn't need my momma shit fucked with.* Rainbow brushed Odin's leg as she passed in front of him. He gave her a solid punt in the stomach. She yipped in pain and crawl-walked a few steps before collapsing. "Watch it, man. You're gonna fuck my dog up!" the kid said. He pushed Odin aside and examined her. "Nice going. You fucking tore her stitches." The kid looked at Odin, "You're paying for this shit."

"Like fuck, I am," Odin said. He plopped down on the couch and opened the bag of cocaine. He pinched a little between his fingers and snorted it like an aristocrat taking snuff. The kid stayed silent. "Give her a lick of this. That'll fix her right up." Odin laughed and stood. "I'm gonna reheat these pies." He lifted the pizzas and a case of beer and carried them to the kitchen. He set them on the counter and turned the oven on. He cracked open a beer and chugged it. The kid stepped in the doorway. "Want one?" Odin asked.

Rainbow heard the two men arguing in the kitchen. She winced as she got to her feet. Drops of blood spattered on the carpet as she walked to the coffee table. She half-flopped onto it

and used her cone to knock the open Ziploc bag on the floor. White powder puffed out, piling into a snowy mound in front of the couch. *Fix me right up.* Rainbow snorted, licked, and ate as much cocaine as she could.

Odin came into the living room. He saw her face covered in white. His eyes grew wide with shock then shifted to anger. He bolted toward her and tried to kick her. She was ready and easily evaded him. “Fuck you!” Rainbow said, not barked, said. Her voice was harsh and thick like a throat-punched Russian.

Odin stopped. He backed away; drug fueled confusion contorting his face. The kid ran out of the kitchen holding a beer. “What’s going on out here?” he asked. He saw Rainbow. “Did you give my dog coke? What the hell is wrong with you?” The kid pushed him hard from behind, crushing the beer can, splashing alcohol across Odin’s back. Odin spun, fast, grabbed the kid by the shoulders, lifted him into the air, and threw him against the wall. The kid hit the floor and moaned. Odin stomped hard on the kid’s head. The kid shook it off and grabbed Odin’s leg, biting it.

Rainbow ran into the garage. *I feel amazing!* She hooked the cone on the corner of a shelf and ripped the plastic oppressor off her neck. She went to the box of spray paint cans to get the knife. But then, a new idea came to her. She dragged the entire box into the house. Odin held the kid in a poorly performed choke hold. The kid slapped and kicked, trying to break free. Neither man noticed Rainbow make her way into the kitchen. Once there, she bit the oven door handle and pulled it down. A wave of heat hit her. *Thanks for preheating it for me.* She put a spray paint can onto the open door. Her whiskers sizzled when they touched the hot metal. She came too close and burned her cheek, her jaw, her neck. Three cans on, she slammed the door shut and then dug around in the nearly empty box for the knife.

In the living room, Odin stood over the kid, who lay slumped face down on the couch. “You ain’t the first bitch I’ve murdered,” Odin said with pride. He licked his hand and dipped it into the white powder on the carpet. He put his fingers into his mouth. Odin, despite his state, felt a sharp flash of pain across the back of his leg. He twisted around to see Rainbow, knife jutting out of the side of her mouth, blood on the blade. Odin took a step and collapsed, blood spilling from his Achilles tendon. Rainbow dropped the knife and barked out a laugh as she ran into the kitchen; torn stitches leaving a trail of blood. Picking up the knife, he held it by the blade in his mouth and crawled after her on all fours, like a dog. “I’m gonna kill you, demon,” he said.

Rainbow entered the kitchen and ran in circles in front of the oven. *Holy shit, I feel so alive! I love coke!* Odin screamed through clenched teeth and dove at her. In mid leap he pulled the knife from his mouth. Rainbow dodged to the side, putting him between her and the oven. Odin stabbed the knife into the linoleum tile. He pulled the dagger free and opened his mouth to speak. Rainbow’s jaws closed around his throat before any words could escape. She lapped at his hot blood. The knife pierced her gut, inches from her stitches. Odin snarled and dragged it toward him, opening her up along the natural seam of her stomach. Rainbow, unable to stand, dropped to the floor. Odin held a hand to his throat as he leaned against the oven. “What the hell are you?” he said, his voice ragged and wet. Rainbow looked him in the eyes and said, “I am karma’s gun. Rejoice!” As she spoke, her voice got harsher, less human. “Rejoice!” she said, even harsher still. Odin’s face filled with recognition and went white as the cocaine coursing through both their nervous systems. “Rejoice!” she barked. A sudden hiss from inside the oven followed by a loud bang slammed the oven door open, striking Odin on the head. He tried to move away but the second, then the third, spray can exploded, and, no longer contained by the door, sent fire and metal shrapnel throughout the kitchen. Rainbow watched Odin get shredded

by the blast. She was in too much shock to notice if she was hit by any. He flopped on the floor near her. Close enough to lick. She lay her head down and watched the life drain out of Odin's eyes. Smoke and flames consumed the kitchen, spreading its fiery hate down the hallway of racist propaganda. *Burn, bitch, burn.* Satisfied on a primal level, she closed her own eyes and waited to die; waited to be reincarnated. *I hope, this time, the bastards get it right.*