

MELINA KAMERIC

Translated from the Bosnian by Jennifer H. Zoble

RED LACE LINGERIE

I'm running late. Again. And this time I don't even have a good excuse.

As if anyone cares how much I've had to prepare. I hardly slept last night. I still need to get dressed, made up. There are a million little things to finish. Today I must look perfect, just perfect. Today he arrives. I've had to choose the right clothes, makeup, perfume. Match my purse and shoes. Because I haven't seen him for two months.

Helloooo...two months...without him. Without sex. Of course I'm running late. I'm beside myself.

Mom protests a little. She says the Dutch have always been stupid. But that has nothing to do with it. I know what she really thinks. He's not one of ours. He's not circumcised. As if I care. She shouldn't, either. When he visits, he brings cigars. And food. She doesn't mind that he's not circumcised then. Last time he brought Dad pipe tobacco and bourbon. Instant VIP status. Dad even quit saying that Dutch medical schools aren't worth a fart and probably gave him a mail-order degree in virology.

To me, the only important thing is that he's coming. His convoy should get here around eleven. If it's permitted to pass through all the checkpoints.

Chanel No. 5 or Anaïs Anaïs? Ah...I'm late, I'm late... He brought me the Chanel last time. That means he likes it... Chanel...I'm late...I suppose I'll have to take a shortcut. I hope I make it in time.

He believes in the connection of our souls. So he says. I believe him. I think we found each other in a world of loss. Completely unnatural circumstances...

And the sex is unbelievable.

I'm at the door. I take one more look in the mirror. Perfect. Perfect. I know he'll smell like sweat. That masculine sweat. And he'll be tired and grimy. But I should look perfect. He deserves it. Late...

In front of the building, my neighbor has already lit our communal war-time oven and started baking bread. The oven smolders, and the vestibule fills with thick smoke that tastes of plastic. Now I'm going to stink from the fucking plastic in her burning trash.

“Good morning!”

“Good morning!... agh... hgh...,” she replies, coughing and choking from the cancerous plastic fumes.

Outside it’s a sunny day. One of those idyllic days. With only two or three clouds against a blue background. Perfect visibility. I look at my watch. Very late. I definitely need to take a shortcut.

I walk alongside the building. I run into another neighbor. He’s carrying a canister of water.

“Good morning, neighbor!”

“Good morning!” I hurry along.

“Feel free to cut across the intersection. Just came from getting water. Not a shot since last night. Guess the son of a bitch got tired.”

“Thanks!”

I’m at the corner of the building. I look. Listen. No one around. Just need to make the first two steps. And then I’m apparently safe...protected by trash bins. Just need to keep my head down a little. And again two steps through open space and in ten minutes I’ll be at work.

I take a deep breath. The first big step.

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I hear a bullet pierce the air. *Zing!* Another quick step. Motherfucker. I have to get to work. And I suppose he can’t hit me now. I’m behind a trash bin. Bent into a squatting position. Through the air above me travel sweetly curved pieces of metal, 7.62 caliber.

The bullets clip a few of the other bins. But mostly they fly over us, me and the bin. Spraying the walls of the building.

I turn my head and look back down the street. My neighbor has stopped and lowered his canister. We watch each other, he and I. Slowly and wordlessly he gestures for me to stay down. As if he’s afraid his voice would betray his location. I am crouched behind a dirty and dented trash bin, while four floors of Austro-Hungarian architecture keep that jackass on the hill hidden from view. Hilarious.

I check my watch. Damn... so late. Dangerously late.

My lover is coming to me. His convoy is clearing the checkpoints, and I’m hiding behind a trash bin.

Little by little I begin to move. I think it’s about ten meters more. Ten fucking meters and then I can go behind the building... Slow...ever so slowly I move forward. And then a shot whizzes over me, so close I can smell the

burning metal. I fall on my knees in fear. And of course I tear my stockings. La Perla. I bought them the last time I went to Trieste before the war. Fuck this war and this sniper...and this trash bin.

He shoots and shoots. At first one shot at a time, then a burst of gunfire. He's toying with me. He doesn't care that I'm late. That my lover's coming. And that now I'm wearing torn La Perla fishnets. Damn him! If only he knew how horny I am, how much I want to make love to my Dutch humanitarian. Damn him, sitting on that hill and fucking around.

I've been kneeling here for ten minutes. Now I'm definitely late for work. And if this idiot keeps this up, I'll be late for when the convoy gets here. If he gets any closer I'll scream that he's a sick motherfucker for fucking up my day.

A shot. Another shot. Now he's attacking a tree, there to the right. Just a little ways down the road. I close my eyes. A whistle, then the sound of shots ripping into leafy flesh. Like the crack of a whip. One, two, three...and on and on. Like a whipping. Motherfucker, won't his trigger finger go numb? Or his bullets run out?

100 Twenty minutes. Asshole! The worst is that he knows I'm squatting here. And he couldn't care less. He's waiting for me to peep out. So he can shoot me. Jerk.

I just want to get to my office. I want SEX. He's arriving in less than an hour. Seriously, I'll take sex anywhere. On pallets in the warehouse, if necessary. I just want to make love to my man! I want his hands all over me. I want him hard and deep inside me. Over and over. To make up for these two months...

And then suddenly I feel a hot kiss on the right side of my stomach. No, not a kiss, you horny bitch. A bullet. A fucking ricochet. And heat. I know it's not just a scratch. I know for sure it's not a scratch. Slowly I look. Everything is hotter and hotter. And on my white shirt is growing a big red stain.

I'm leaning on the bin, I think. I'm not sure if I'm in pain. Or if there's only heat. Trying not to think about it. Maybe he'll pull me out in time. Maybe he won't. I start to laugh. It may end up that my red lace and garters impress only the doctors and nurses at hospital reception. And maybe that pair of dark men in blue coats at the mortuary. Hahahaha. In a few days the whole city will know.

I picture my body on a cold metal table, in torn La Perla stockings and red lace lingerie, and all I know is that it won't be my lover who takes them off.