

Cocked and Locked

Etgar Kerrett

HE'S STANDING in the middle of the street, about sixty feet from me, with his kaffiyah covering his face, gesturing at me teasingly to come closer: "Baratroober homo," he shouts at me in a heavy Arabic accent.

"What's ub, Mr. Baratroober? Your redhead sergeant fuck you too hard ub the ass yesterday? Can't run no more?" He opens his fly and pulls out his dick: "What's up, baratroober? My dick not good enough for you? It wasn't good enough for your sister? Wasn't good enough for your mama? It was good enough for your friend Abutbul. How your friend Abutbul? Feel better, boor guy? I saw how they had to bring in a heliobter to take him, how he run after me. A half street he runs after me like a beast and in the end? Boom, his head exblode like a watermelon."

I bring my Gallil up to my shoulder, put him right between the crosshairs.

"Shoot already, homo," he shouts, opens his shirt and laughs. "Shoot right here," he points to his heart. I release the safety catch and hold my breath. He waits for me for a minute or so, hands on his hips, indifferent. His heart,

deep under his skin and flesh, sits right between the crosshairs.

"You'll never shoot, you coward. Maybe if you shoot, that redhead sergeant won't fuck your ass?"

I lower the rifle from my shoulder and he makes a dismissive gesture. "Yallah, I go now Homo. See you tomorrow. When your shift here? Ten to two? I be here."

He's already going toward one of the side streets, but suddenly he stops and smiles: "Tell Abutbul hi from Hannas. Huh? Tell him very sorry for the brick."

I quickly lift the Gallil to my shoulder and put him between the crosshairs, the shirt is already buttoned, but his heart is still mine. And then something crashes into me. I fall to the dirt and suddenly see Eli, the sergeant, over me. "Tell me, Kramer, are you crazy?" he screams. "What are you doing standing here with your cheek to your rifle like some cowboy? You think this is the Wild West where you can shoot anyone you feel like?"

"Come on, Eli, I wasn't going to shoot him, I just wanted to give him a scare," I say and shift my eyes away from his gaze.

"You want to scare him?" he screams and shakes me by the ammo belt. "Go tell him ghost stories. What are you doing pointing a loaded gun at him, and with the safety off?" He gives me one across the face.

"Look like the redhead isn't going to fuck your ass today, homo," I hear the Arab shout. "Right on, Redhead, fuck him one for me."

"You have to learn to ignore them," says Eli, breathing heavily, and gets off me. "You hear, Kramer?" he lowers

his voice to a threatening whisper. "You have to learn to cool it. Because if I see you doing something like that one more time, I will personally make sure they court-martial you."

That evening someone calls from the hospital and says that the operation wasn't so successful, and that it seems Jackie is going to be a vegetable.

"The main thing is that we learn to ignore them," I say to Eli. "If we go on that way, in the end we'll ignore them completely, like Jackie."

"What's your problem, Kramer?" Eli suddenly gets up. "You think I don't care about Abutbul. He was my friend exactly like he was yours. You think I don't feel like taking the jeep and going from house to house and dragging them out and giving every one of them a bullet between the eyes? But if I do that, I'll be just like them. You don't get that, you don't get anything." And suddenly I get it, get it much better than he does.

He's standing in the middle of the street about sixty feet from me, with the kaffiyah covering his face.

"Good morning, homo," he shouts at me. "Excellent morning," I whisper back.

"How's Abutbul, homo?" he shouts. "You tell him hi from Hannas?" I take off the ammo belt and let it fall to the ground, then I take off my helmet.

"What's up, homo," he shouts at me. "That redhead fuck your brains out?" I tear open my emergency bandage and wrap it around my face, leaving only the eyes exposed. I take the rifle. Cock it. Make sure the safety's on. I hold it by the barrel with both hands, whirl it a few times over my head and let go suddenly. The rifle flies

into the air, slides a little along the ground, and stops about halfway between us. Now I'm exactly like him. Now I have a chance of winning too.

"That's for you, animal," I shout at him. He looks confused for a minute, and then starts running toward the rifle. He runs toward the rifle and I run toward him. He runs faster than me, and he'll get to the rifle before I do. But I'll win. Because now I'm exactly like him. And with the rifle in his hand he'll be just like me. His mother and sister will sleep with Jews. His friends will lie in the hospital like vegetables, and he'll stand across from me like a homo with a rifle in his hand and won't be able to do a thing. How could I lose?

He picks up the Gallil when I'm less than ten feet from him, releases the safety, kneels and aims, and pulls the trigger. And then he figures out what I figured out in my last month in this hell: that this gun is worth shit. Seven and a half pounds of worthless metal. You can't do a thing with it. It's just plain against the rules. I reach him before he can get up and give him a kick in the face. When he falls to the ground I grab him by the hair and pull off the kaffiyah. I see his face in front of me, and I grab that face and smash it wildly against an electric pole. Once, twice, three times. We'll see which redhead's going to fuck his ass now.

Translated by Michael Gluzman and Naomi Seidman