

Metilda by Russel Sacks

In a hushed giggle, Metilda said to me, "You have to die in battle at least once."

Breaking into laughter, she added, "Take courage!"

Then she rested her head on my shoulder, her warmth penetrating, her tenderness comforting.

Metilda's words imprinted themselves, a black on white text in my mind's eye.

"Such dark humour," I thought.

Then she sat up and kissed me tenderly sensually. She was silent but held me in her view.

As teenagers, we had often argued and fought. I relied on my strength. Metilda used her cunning, her wiles- and her judo skills.

We studied together and later served alongside each other in the armed forces. We had both been enrolled at The Royal Military Academy after elementary school. Our parents wished us to be independent. Besides the usual subjects, we were taught martial arts and the traits of obedience, cooperation and courage. After graduation, we joined the army with officer rank.

Metilda's acumen, her judgement were those of a much older person. It was as if she had lived a hundred lives. She thought outside the box. Her physical strength too, was way beyond that which one would expect of her stature. She mastered not only battlefield tactics and strategy but also invisible nuances of warfare like courage, ferocity, loyalty and dignity.

Two events stand out in my memory: On her fifteenth birthday, she swam across the English Channel from Dover to Calais in under twenty hours. The other, which indelibly blemished her records, was a conviction for grievous bodily harm.

A teacher had attempted to rape her younger sister. Metilda lured him to a hotel. She and her sister beat him continuously for two days. They broke nearly every bone in his body.

She was sentenced to five years in custody. However, after having served only three months, surreptitious powers intervened by offering her a pardon if she agreed to serve a further five years in the military. "Her loyalty, her sense of duty and her ferocity in the protection of the vulnerable should be rewarded," these powers had pronounced.

I was proud of her.

I recalled again the meaning of her name - Mighty in Battle.

We celebrated her new lease of life with tea and buttered toast. She munched.

It smelt of heaven.

The sound of her crunching was music.

Written by Russel Sacks in 2024

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