

The Death of a Knight

I was powerless as the love of my life drove a sword through my chest. Allow me to rewind. My story begins in a small town outside of Ferrara. When I was 14 my father arranged for me to be married to a wealthy, but much older man. Even if he had been an appropriate age, I was in love with somebody else. His name was Reginald. Our mothers were friends before our birth. We grew up together and had been inseparable for as long as I could remember. We have always loved each other and used to talk about spending our lives together while doing chores in the fields. When my father told me about the marriage he arranged, I fled. I could never marry another man. I knew the only way to escape this fate was to lie about my gender and become a knight. I changed my name from Matilda to Matthew and sought training. I excelled in all areas of training and became an official knight when I was only 16.

"Matthew Ackworth," the head knight Arthur Andrews called. I nervously approached him. I feared that my braid would fall out of the masterful tuck I had created years ago to hide my identity. If my gender was revealed I would be sentenced to death. I kneeled as Arthur knighted me and the pages applauded. I took my place next to the other new knights as Arthur called more names. "Reginald Baldwin," he said. I struggled to contain my shock. Reginald was here! He would recognize me in an instant. I quickly put on my new helmet that covered most of my face, showing only my eyes, mouth, and chin.

"Hello," Reginald said. "My name is Reginald. What's yours?"

"Matthew," I answered in my deepest, manliest voice. I resisted the urge to call him Reggie. Back home I was the only one to ever call him Reggie and it became a reflex to refer to him with that term of endearment. I had an uncomfortably formal chat with Reggie and watched the rest of the knighting ceremony. The next day I sat with Reggie and two of our new knight friends, Thomas and Richard, at breakfast.

"Being a knight is going to be so great!" Richard exclaimed.

"I know," Thomas replied, "I'm hoping it'll help me with the LADIES!" Our laughter was followed by an awkward silence. Thomas was a short, plump man with rather unflattering smells and generally grotesque features. Reggie was the opposite. "You must be great with ladies," Thomas said to Reggie, "I bet all the maidens love you."

"There has only been one girl I've wanted. I had her, but now she's gone." Reggie looked solemnly into the distance. Thomas was about to inquire further but Richard kicked him under the table and the conversation ended.

Over the next year I worked my way to the top of the knights. I spent my days alongside Arthur learning. I quickly gained his trust and it appeared that I would soon have his position. I probably would have been the head knight if my braid hadn't have fallen during our spar. He became suspicious and demanded that I remove my tight, silver breastplate and helmet. It was over. I had been caught. He ordered me to put my helmet back on and follow him to the place where the next best knight would kill me.

I stood perfectly still, tied to the wooden post and watched the knight approach me. My hair was in my eyes and I could not make out his face. He could not see mine through my helmet. By the time I saw it was Reggie it was too late. I was powerless as

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the love of my life drove a sword through my chest. The pain was unbearable but I did not scream. I uttered one one word in a soft whisper, "Reggie."

"Matilda?" He asked. He removed my helmet and brushed the golden brown hair out of my tear stained face. "Matilda!" he cried, realizing for the first time who I was. I could hear the despair in his voice. "You're going to be fine," he said. "Hold on, it's going to be ok."

"Reggie," I said again. I was weak. I could barely breathe. I used my final breath to say, "I love you," and died in his arms.