

Pitfalls of a war game

by Carina Kalb

Iris chose the black pieces for herself and put the white ones in front of Brendan. It would have been more suiting to have only black pieces on the board. Draw by draw they countered. Nobody would retreat, but Iris felt the suppressed aggression in his way of playing. The duel went on. Strike after strike. Crossing swords.

"You're not usually the defender", Brendan whispered and looked up at Iris through long lashes.

"What can one do, if one is so indiscreetly accused of murder, my dear?"

"Is there a discrete way of accusing somebody of murder?"

"Oh, we both know any of us could. After all, we're both quite accomplished liars."

"Manipulation was always your favourite field of study, if I recall that correctly."

"Well, at least I don't talk about the pot calling the kettle black."

"Please, it's not like you know anything about my work."

"I know more than you think. For example I know that you must already have a buyer for that little medal you snatched. Prototype. A collector, I guess."

"You kept an eye on me."

"Comes without saying, love"

"Checkmate, my sweet."

"Hm, excellent indeed."

"You've let me win."

"Might as well."

There stares crossed, like metal hitting metal. Iris lay back in her chair, while Brendan leaned forwards. His elbows on his thighs. Iris could hear lightning strike and somehow it sounded like bombs detonating all around them. She could tell exactly how silly this was. It reminded her of a time when she had purely relied on instinct to keep herself alive. Her right hand rubbed absentmindedly along the nasty scars that covered her left upper arm. A scatter-projectile had been aimed straight to the heart. Anything and everything Iris could do was to try and turn away, but she had not been fast enough. People say you don't remember; that was not true. Maybe it had just been an unfortunate incident that Iris had looked right down to where the bullet broke the skin, tore through flesh and muscles and send a spray of red droplets dancing. The military psychologist said she might be traumatized. Iris always knew there would be beauty in destruction, even in her own. The atmosphere cracked as Brendan stood. "What are you going to do now?", Iris inquired, slightly intrigued. As he walked over she felt her wrists itch. The Shakespearean romance of danger. Hands on both sides of her head, he leaned in. She could feel his breath on her lips. Though it was Brendan who was taken by surprise as Iris leaned up to kiss him. It did not feel the same. Something filthy turned pure. As if somebody had scrubbed it with bleach and then had realised that it hadn't been white in the first place. There had been a time when she might have loved him. Perhaps.