

The Soul Beneath the Armor

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Long ago, there was a kingdom where a princess and a loyal knight fell deeply in love. However, their love was cut short when a war between enemy territories threatened the kingdom.

The war spread rapidly and reached the capital, where the knight gave his all to protect his beloved. The knight managed to defeat the enemy, but it was too late. Both the princess and the knight were gravely wounded, and just before they and the kingdom breathed their last, they made a promise:

"My beloved Princess Elara, I am sorry I was unable to protect you," said the knight as he held the princess in his arms.

"It is alright, Sir Alaric," the princess replied, her eyes filled with melancholy. *"Sooner or later, this was bound to happen. My only regret is not being able to spend the rest of my life by your side."*

"I promise I will find you in our next life! And in this new life, we can finally have the romance that was stolen from us! Just wait for me, and I will find you no matter how long it takes or where you are," the knight promised.

Princess Elara didn't reply with words, but with a warm smile that meant nothing less than, *"I eagerly await your arrival."*

Suddenly, the sound of clashing swords and people praying for an end to the war vanished, replaced by the rumble of traffic in a bustling modern city.

Princess Elara, now simply Elena, was fighting off sleep one Monday morning on her way to high school.

As she walked, she ran into her best friend, Sophie. *"Good morning, Elena!"* Sophie said with a big smile.

Elena took a few seconds to reply. *"Oh! Good morning, Sophie."*

"What's wrong?" Sophie asked. *"You seem to be daydreaming again."*

"Sorry, it's just that lately I've felt like something's missing..." Elena replied with a sigh.

Elena felt like a part of her soul was lost, but how could she explain to her friend that her heart was still waiting for her knight in shining armor without sounding crazy?

Upon arriving at school, they hurried into the classroom and settled into their desks to begin class. However, Elena noticed something different: a girl who was clearly new. The teacher stood up from her desk and, before starting the lesson, invited the girl to introduce herself to the class.

"Good morning, my name is Alessa. It's a pleasure to meet you all. I hope we get along!" the girl introduced herself in a vibrant, warm, and even somewhat familiar tone of voice.

As Alessa was about to return to her seat, Elena's eyes met hers, and for the first time, she saw that spark in her eyes, that glimmer she had been searching for, a spark that resonated deep within Elena's heart. The class continued as usual, but that day Elena couldn't stop thinking about the charming new girl.

Classes ended, and Elena and Sophie were ready to leave. *"Ugh, I completely forgot. I promised to help someone with an assignment. I don't think we can walk together today. I'm so sorry!"* Sophie said, tired and embarrassed by her oversight.

"Don't worry, I'll see you tomorrow," Elena replied, thinking that some time alone would do her good to clear her mind of so many thoughts.

Elena said goodbye to Sophie and started walking, but after a few moments, she ran into Alessa, who was outside the school as if she were waiting for someone.

Elena walked past her and tried to ignore her. *"Hello... you're Alessa, right?"* But trying was impossible; the words just tumbled out of her mouth. *"Hi! yes, that's me"* Alessa replied with a smile. *"Are you waiting for someone?"* Elena asked curiously. *Alessa waited a moment and glanced around. "I was waiting for you, Princess,"* she replied kindly, her smile even warmer than before.

Elena was stunned by this response, and before she could say anything, Alessa interrupted her. *"Would you like me to walk you home?"*

Elena's mind went blank; she didn't know what to say. However, she nodded slowly, a little embarrassed by what was happening.

Elena and Alessa walked in silence until they reached Elena's house. *"Well, thank you so much for walking me home. See you later,"* Elena said, heading quickly toward the front door. But Alessa took her hand to stop her before she could go inside. *"Aren't you going to ask me why I called you Princess? Or can't you recognize the knight who was by your side for so many years?"* Alessa said, still holding her hand, eagerly awaiting Elena's answer.

Elena couldn't believe it. How could that girl know about the knight Elena dreamed about every night? *"I just thought you were being nice. Besides, it's impossible that the knight*

I've been waiting for is... a girl," Elena said as she quickly let go of Alessa's hand and went inside her house.

Alessa stared at the door Elena had slammed in her face, trying to process what had just happened. Alessa knew Elena would probably act strangely at first because of how different Alessa looked now, but she never imagined she'd be rejected so quickly. Alessa continued walking home, but she couldn't stop thinking about how the soulmate she'd searched for so long had rejected her without even giving her a chance.

Elena slumped against the closed door of her room, her breath ragged, Alessa's voice echoing in her head.

"It can't be," she whispered to herself, covering her face with her hands. All her life, her heart had held a special place for that ghost from long ago, the one she had once fallen in love with. She had idealized Sir Alaric as a man with broad shoulders and a deep voice, a man who had protected her in the past and who would seek her out in the present. She never expected that the one who would call her princess again wouldn't be the knight she had imagined, but a girl whose smile alone had brightened her day and made her feel safe once more.

Elena got up from the floor and saw her reflection in a mirror in her room. Had the universe made a mistake? Or was she the one being blind? The warmth she had felt when Alessa took her hand wasn't a lie; it was the same spark from her dreams. But accepting Alessa meant letting go of the mental image she had built up over the years. It meant accepting that the love of her life didn't fit the molds that society, and even she herself, had imposed on her.

Elena wasn't afraid of Alessa, but of what she felt for her.

The next day at school, Elena couldn't go on any longer, and as soon as she saw Sophie, she asked to talk.

"Sophie, I need help. Yesterday... something happened with Alessa. She knows about my dreams. She's the knight I've dreamed about for so long," Elena confessed, her voice trembling. *"But that can't be. I was expecting a knight in shining armor. I was expecting a man, Sophie. It's impossible that this knight is a girl!"* Elena continued, even more nervous than before.

Sophie stared at her friend for a few moments, calmly considering what to say.

"Elena, you've spent years dreaming about armor, but you never stopped to think about who was wearing it," Sophie said gently. *"Souls don't have genders, labels, or uniforms."*

What you fell in love with wasn't a sword or a deep voice; you fell in love with someone who swore to search for you across time, even if that's impossible."

"But... what would that mean for me?" Elena asked, on the verge of tears, *"What will become of me if she accepts these feelings?"*

"What will happen is that you will be free," Sophie replied with a smile. *"It will mean that the love of your life will have fulfilled the promise she made to you in your dreams. Will you let go of someone who is probably your soulmate just because she looks different than she did before?"*

Elena spent the rest of the day thinking about her conversation with Sophie and her feelings for Alessa.

When class ended, she saw her. Alessa was in the same place as yesterday, but this time her posture wasn't upright; her shoulders were slumped, staring at the ground with a sadness that Elena immediately recognized. It was the same loneliness they had both felt before dying in that tower.

Elena ran quickly toward her. *"Alessa!"* she shouted with all her might.

Alessa looked up, surprised. Elena stopped in front of her, catching her breath. *"Forgive me... I went blind searching for a ghost and didn't realize that reality was so much better. I don't care if you're not wearing a cape or if you're not who I imagined. Your soul is the only one I recognize in this world."* Elena said, looking into Alessa's eyes.

Alessa smiled, and for a moment everything else faded; it was just the two of them.

"I promised I'd find you, didn't I?" Alessa whispered with a smile as she took Elena's hand.

And this time... Elena didn't let go.

The knight hadn't returned to rescue her from a war, but to teach her that the bravest love is the one that dares to be true to its essence, no matter what form fate decides to give it.

They walked together, two souls united, ready to write a story that, at last, wouldn't have to end in goodbye.