

# **The Tailor and the Princess**

## **A Fairy Tale**

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Once upon a time, in the land of Seth, a large and prosperous kingdom, ruled by a wise and benevolent king, there was a young man named Elric. Elric had an ordinary life as a tailor, living in the same small town where he was born. His life was simple, but it was anything from happy, for you see, the townspeople looked down upon him.

It wasn't that Elric was a simple man, fit to be the town fool. No, quite the contrary, he possessed a keen wit and sharp insight, which early on had set him apart from the crowd. He often would see things differently, looking at situations from a different vantage point, and most times would have ideas and opinions contrary to others. Like many people in the world, the villagers in this small and simple town were put off by anything which is too different, and it was for that reason why he was scorned.

Elric was also a quiet young man, happy to be entertained by his own thoughts many a time, not needing to be loud or boastful like some of the other men in the village. While his quiet grace should have been seen for the virtue it was, he instead was overlooked by the fair maidens in the town, who focused their attentions on the lads who'd spend their days lost in their own glory.

And finally, Elric was looked down upon because he was simply a tailor, working at a job not really befitting a man. True he did his job well, and occasionally one of his customers would complement him on his fine craftsmanship, but usually they would treat him with an uncomfortable silence, or an occasional snicker, which was not always behind his back.

Elric hadn't chosen that career, but had instead been thrust into it by forces of circumstance beyond his control. You see, his mother had run the tailor shop before him. She had no other children, so when she fell ill, overtaken by a strong and lingering disease, he'd had no choice but take up shop, in order to support them both. He'd stayed in that small town, looking after his mother, working at a job he didn't like, and suffering the loneliness forced upon him, by the townsfolk, who were not necessarily evil, but cruel in their own careless ways.

Gone were the dreams of Elric's youth, the dreams many a young lad has, of travel and adventure, of distant and exotic lands, of heroic battles, and of beautiful princesses to be rescued. While many boys discard those dreams as they grow older, content to the simple lives of their manhood, Elric still held on to them with desperation. He'd occasionally steal a moment here or there to reflect on those dreams, and what might have been.

Now don't you think that because he didn't choose his work, Elric didn't do a good job at it. No, instead he was one of the finest tailors those parts had ever seen. Perhaps it was that he knew he must do a good job, in order to keep him and his sick mother from poverty, but it was also the fact that Elric was the type of person who put their most into what ever they did, doing it with pride, no matter how thankless the task.

He was also aided by the single object in his possession worth any value. It was a single pair of shears, an old family heirloom, fashioned out of the purest silver. Besides being of the finest craftsmanship, there was something extra special about these shears, for it seemed as if they made the job of cutting fabric even easier than with a normal pair. Even when he'd first been learning to cut and stitch together fabric, using the shears had helped him do wonderful work. It wasn't exactly like the shears were cutting the cloth of their own accord, but holding them, he'd get a feeling of how the fabric should be worked upon. Using that to his advantage, Elric trained hard at his skill, and his workmanship became superb.

How his family had come upon such a treasure as those shears was beyond even his imagination, but sometimes as he was daydreaming, he'd get the notion that there was some magic forged amongst the silver. A silly thought, perhaps, but to Elric it was one of the few joys he had in his dreary life. The shears weren't a monstrosly-powerful sword, fit to slay dragons with, but he could imagine the simple magic they might contain. Magic that was strong enough to repel evil and rescue a maiden in danger, especially if wielded with purity of heart and good intentions. It wasn't often when he could indulge his fantasies though, as there was always work to be done. Instead the days passed by, adding slowly to his tired and dreary life.

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A few years passed, and after lingering in her weak state, Elric's mother was finally taken by the her long and hard illness. She passed quietly from this world late one night. While caring for her had been tough, Elric loved her dearly, and had never once thought of her as a burden. He was then left all alone, and his heart was filled with sadness.

It was at also about the same time that the wise and noble king who ruled those lands had come to realize that he was nearing the end of his reign. For he was old, nearing the end of his years. Sadly, he had no heirs to take his place, which left him worried for the state of his fine kingdom after he was gone.

So it was after much deliberation, passing through many sleepless nights, and countless discussions with his most trusted advisors, that he reached a decision. The king then sent word throughout the land, that a giant tournament would soon be held. The message spread out from the castle, reaching even the furthest villages, that all men were invited to compete in a wide array of challenges. Theses competitions would be both physical of endurance, skill with weaponry and in hand-to-hand combat, but also involve matters of wit and honor. It was said that at the end of this fantastic competition, the king believed one man would rise above the rest, to claim his rightful place atop the thrown.

And so it was that word of the tournament came to even the remote village where Elric lived. Of course it set the town all a buzz with excited talk, how this and that young man were going to set off on the long journey to the castle, and how each one had sworn the crown would end up his.

Even busy at his work, Elric didn't miss this news, and once again his dreams were rekindled, if only for the briefest of moments. Then he realized that's all they'd ever be, just dreams, daydreams of a tired young man, who now felt much older than his years. Sadly, he knew in his heart that he could never hope to join the competition, for he was just an average man, not

strong enough to best his opponents, nor skilled with any tool, save for his shears.

It was days later, as he cried himself to sleep, alone in his now- empty house, that a single thought came to him before falling into slumber. Even if he could never hope to compete, just attending the tournament would be the experience of a lifetime. There was nothing left to hold him to the village anymore, and he could finally take one of those fantastic journeys he'd always dreamed about.

The next day he decided to try and seek passage with some of the townsfolk leaving towards the castle, but it seemed as if he might have been to late. Most of the eligible and able-bodied men of the town had already gathered their gear and set out on their travels.

There was only one man who had not yet set off, for he and his sons had wisely decided to stay an extra few days to finish planting their crops, making sure the stake of their future wasn't all resting on wild dreams, and even wilder chances. It was that man's farm which Elric then visited, on the faint hope that they might show him some small amount of kindness. Dressed in simple, yet well-made clothes, carrying his meager possessions with him, he came to their house, knocking softly on the door.

The boy who answered must have been a few years younger than him, but stood several inches taller, looking down upon him like the rest of the town had all his life.

"What do you want?" he asked, almost with a sneer.

"May I please speak with your father?" Elric replied with soft humility.

Lacking any grace whatsoever, the boy turned his head back into the house and bellowed "Dad, somebody wants to see you."

Coming slowly to the door, looking weary from the frantic planting shifts, the farmer's eyes narrowed as he saw Elric standing there. "What do you want, tailor?" he spat out.

"I've heard you and your boys are planning on going to the great tournament," Elric replied, and after a moments hesitation, he added "would you please take me with you?"

After a couple of seconds of silently studying him in disbelief, the man finally bust out laughing. "What, our fine tailor thinks he deserves to be our king?!"

"No sir, I just wanted to go and see the spectacle, enjoying the show. please take me with you... I can help with some of the provisions. I can work for the rest of my share"

"Our clothes are in good shape tailor, we have no need for your services. Perhaps you should stay in town and mend all the clothes of the women and children left behind."

"No please..." Elric pleaded. He could feel his face heating up, his eyes beginning to sting.

"It's late and I'm tired, so leave us to rest," the farmer answered, and with a rough shove the door was shut in Elric's face. He was left there standing on the porch, his dreams quickly stolen away from him once again.

He'd only been barely able to keep him and his mother from poverty, eking out a meager existence. There was no way he could afford to travel alone. Once more he was trapped in that hateful town.

Taking a short cut back to his house, he passed through a section of the nearby woods. In the past, he'd sometimes steal away there, on rare occasions when he was able to get away from his work. The peaceful solitude of the forest had always eased his troubled mind, but now even that held no comfort for him. Finally, slumping down on a fallen log, he buried his head in his hands and sobbed quietly.

A few minutes later, he was roused from his sorrows by a woman's voice, reaching softly out to him. "Why are you crying?" the voice asked.

Startled by the quiet outburst, Elric looked up and was shocked to see a red fox sitting only a few feet from him, gazing at him with intelligence and compassion in its eyes. Again the fox spoke to him, just as soft and caring as before. "Why are you crying, good sir?"

Elric was dumbstruck by the possibilities of what meeting up with an enchanted creature alone in the forest, nearing nightfall could mean. It took the fox a third asking of her question before Elric was finally prompted to speak. He answered her nervously at first, but as she gently prodded him he told her more. Soon, it all came pouring out of him, like water spilling out of the floodgates. Forgetting the absurd nature of his companion, and encouraged by being offered a sympathetic ear, he confided in her as if she was a long-lost friend. He told her everything, of his alienation from the rest of the townsfolk, his loneliness, the loss of all his dreams, including his last chance at freedom, of traveling to a better place.

Finishing with a sob, he looked at the fox through watery eyes. "I guess it was a silly idea in the first place..."

"Nonsense," she replied, her voice still as soft and caring. "If you were to lose your dreams, then life itself would have no meaning."

"But what does it matter? I'll never be able to get out of here... I'll never be able to make it to the tournament."

"You don't belong there" she answered, and a pang of resentment rushed through him. Was even she going to judge him like the rest of the townsfolk? She finished by adding "the men at the tournament, they all think themselves worthy of being king, for they are strong and brave and believe they are noble. They're doing it for all the wrong reasons though, there is no honor in their hearts."

As Elric stared at her, eyeing her with surprise, she finished. "You not only have honor in your heart, but bravery and nobility which most cannot see."

"So you believe I should try and enter the tournament?" he finally managed to breath out. The idea sounded strange to him, and he hardly dared hope that someone might have faith in him, even such a strange creature as was sitting before him.

"No, as I said that is not for you. Your goal is a larger one indeed."

Unsure of the fox's words, he waited for her to continue. "Your destiny lies in the dark tower, at the heart of the lost forest, many days journey from here. There the evil witch queen has imprisoned the king's only daughter all these long years."

"But the king has no children, everyone knows that," Elric blurted out, forgetting the special creature he was addressing. With a soft bat of her paw against his nose, the fox reminded him that being an enchanted animal, she just might have some knowledge not known to common men.

Slightly startled by her touch, Elric was silenced by humility, and decided he should trust the magical creature before him. With a slight smile at his compliance she continued. "Ah that might seem true, for the king himself does not even remember having a child. It was long ago when the evil queen stole her away in the middle of the night, placing a powerful spell on the castle, and indeed the entire kingdom. In the morning nobody was to remember the child, not even her parents, and shortly after, as the result of another of the witch's enchantments, the king's wife, our fair queen was to fall ill and die. Partially out of grieving, and partially out of the witch's magic, the king never remarried, and never had another child. So now the fate of the entire kingdom rests on finding the rightful heir... a task which falls upon you, with my help."

"But why me? I'm just a tailor, I'm not a strong man, or a brave man, nor am I skilled with any weapons. What chance do I have going against this witch queen?"

"You have strengths lying within you that you can only guess at, hidden all these years, but for surfacing within your dreams."

"But those are just dreams, nothing more..."

"Dreams are always more than they appear, and they carry their own magic. There are powers within your heart, powers stronger than any spells that might be cast against you."

And so it was, after much discussion, that the fox finally convinced Elric of his destiny. It was decided that they would set off together, into the heart of the woods, in search of the lost princess. That night, as they nestled beneath the trees to sleep, the fox curled against his chest, Elric's thoughts drifted erratically.

How could he, a simple tailor from a small town ever hope to save a princess against the unimaginable power of the evil queen of the witches? But the soft breathing of his strange, yet friendly companion helped to ease his mind. She was obviously a special and knowledgeable creature, born of magic, and she believed in him, something no one else had ever done. That single thought spurred him on, and he resolved to try his best at the task the fox had set before him. Those thoughts finally lulled him off to sleep, his dreams filled with fabulous visions of the strange and wondrous adventures he'd always dreamed about, now unfolding before him.

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He and the fox traveled together through the woods for over a fortnight, walking on foot the whole journey. It wasn't easy, but true to her words, Elric had been able to rise to the challenge. He'd thrown himself fully into the work of making the journey, and he was feeling good about it. He'd gotten over the stiffness in his legs after the first few days, and was actually beginning to enjoy himself a little. After all those years of dreaming, he was finally getting his

chance to travel, and see many strange and new things.

For the forest they were in was no ordinary woods, the further inward they traveled, the more enchanted it became. They saw several fantastic creatures on their journey. There were butterflies as big as a small child, deer with a single horn atop their heads, and turtles with two heads sticking out from their shells. There was even a peculiar type of moss clinging to the trees and rocks which gave off a soft and beautiful glow at night.

They had no trouble with food. There was fruit plentiful in the trees all around them. The fox, like her un-enchanted cousins, was also skilled at hunting and she provided them with fresh rabbits daily. She was unlike the ordinary foxes however, in that she liked her meat cooked, instead of raw. She showed Elric how to start a fire simply by rubbing two sticks together in the right fashion. He took to the task of cleaning her catches, using his shears for the job. He took special care to wipe them down properly afterwards, so as to not tarnish them.

At night, the fox would always curl against him, keeping them both warm and comfortable. Her gentle presence and soft breathing was a welcome comfort on the nights which could get chilly, and when his thoughts sometimes would drift to dark possibilities.

During the day, she was a wonderful traveling companion, pleasantly chatting with him as if they'd always known one another. It finally dawned on him that unlike the people in the village, she saw him for who he truly was, and accepted him that way. In short she was a true friend. Most men would find the notion of having an enchanted fox for a friend more than a little odd. However, like her, Elric was vastly different from the ordinary, and gladly accepted her friendship, for who she was. He also felt his confidence growing from her support and companionship, and he was surprised at times to realize how well he was doing on the journey they'd undertaken.

All in all, Elric was having a wonderful time, he was living out his dreams, and traveling on a fantastic journey. He'd met an understanding and kind person to be his friend, and he felt himself growing from the experience. He was even beginning to enjoy the exercise from all the walking they were doing. Yes, he was happy, that is except for the times when the thoughts of their final destination would intrude upon his peace. The idea reaching of the dark tower and confronting the evil witch living there made him quite uneasy. His newfound confidence wasn't that strong.

He'd talked with the fox several times about his fears, and she was always reassuring. She'd tell him that he possessed the power to overcome what lay before him, and slowly, as he faced the challenges of each new day, he began to believe her. He pushed on through their journey, working to try and allay his fears, and to live up to the trust the fox had in him.

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In the middle of the enchanted forest, shut up in the highest room of the dark tower, the princess waited apprehensively in her small cell. Even there, her beauty still shone through, amongst her bleak surroundings. That night, the moon was high in the dark sky, letting its pale beams flow in through the single window to illuminate her room with ghostly light. She lay on the bed, trying to hold back her tears, but to no avail. She knew what was about to happen.

In the dead of the night, the bolts locking the door to the chamber were drawn back with a low scarping sound, rousing her from her sobs. Turning her head upwards, she saw the witch queen, a pale woman with cold beauty, entering her cell.

"Hush now child, why all the tears?" the witch asked, her voice cool and removed.

"Please, let me go. You've kept me like this for so long... I just want to see my father again." The princess forced the words out around her sobbing.

Crossing the floor to her bed, the queen reached out to touch her shoulder. The princess shied away, but the witch's grip became more insistent, and the princess yielded to her wishes. As if by a silent command, the princess fell into her arms as the pale queen sat on the bed next to her.

"There, there my dear. Your father doesn't even remember you, nobody does. You have nobody to look after you, except for me... and you know I want to keep you here for myself."

With that she pulled the girl's head to her chest, muffling her sobs, running her hand through her hair. Her actions were not much different than one might absently use to try and comfort an animal. Leaning down, she softly kissed the princess' cheek. Then, with the pale light of the moon glinting off her cold eyes, she moved her mouth down to the base of the girl's neck.

Touching the soft flesh there, the witch's kiss deepened, becoming more insistent. The girl's body quivered, becoming rigid, her arms clutching desperately against the evil queen. Her struggles useless against the pale lady's strong clutch, they quickly died down and her body became limp, as she passed into an unnatural sleep.

Finally, the witch ceased her unloving kiss. She withdrew her mouth from the princess' neck, leaving the tender flesh there marred by four small, bloody punctures. Getting up, briefly licking her lips, she let the girl's body fall back onto the bed. Turning, she then exited the room, locking the door behind her, once again sealing the princess up with her ghastly fate.

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At that same moment, Elric and the fox had reached the clearing in the center of the forest, and now stood outside the dark tower. Looking up at his destiny, the ominous structure standing in front of him, its obsidian stones absorbing nearly all of the moon's light, Elric again became unsure of himself.

As if sensing his doubts, the fox, who had been his constant companion for all those days, spoke softly "you have the power within you Elric, you must use it now." She gently nudged his hand with her muzzle, and with her reassuring touch he once again felt the stirrings of bravery within him.

Leading the way, Elric walked up to the door. The large entrance was made of a wood, but like the stone of the tower, it too soaked up the light falling upon it. He reached for the iron handle. It was cold to the touch, and his hand drew back momentarily. Then mustering the courage from deep inside him, he grabbed for it again, this time throwing open the door, and stepping into the dark hall beyond, the fox following close behind.

His eyes adjusting to the dark, he finally made out a faint light at the end of the corridor, and

began walking towards it. Reaching the end of the hallway, he came to an open room. Looking inside, it appeared to be some sort of a sitting room, ornately decorated with gold trimmings and gems along the black walls. Several torches burned along the walls, but the light in the room still felt cold and pale, not the friendly and comforting light which the fires should have been casting.

At the further end of the room stood a beautiful throne, carved out of stone, its hue a deep red. Sitting upon the throne, was the witch queen, dressed in a black, flowing robe, which contrasted her pale skin. Looking upon her, Elric was struck by her sheer beauty and elegance. She was by far the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. He didn't realize that her looks were that of frozen perfection, a twisted mask of real beauty, with none of the spirit or life which makes one truly beautiful.

Smiling coolly at him, she spoke, "so you are the one who has come for me?"

Lost in her steely gaze, Elric numbly replied "yes..." his words trailing off as he gazed upon her.

Widening her malevolent grin, her voice deepened, "then you are mine. Come forward, approach me."

His feet moved as if of their own volition, while his gaze stayed locked in hers. He was only vaguely aware that the fox had stopped, staying behind at the doorway, as if frozen there.

As he walked towards the witch, she held out her hand to him. Taking it he dimly noticed how cold her touch was. The peering depths of her eyes were so commanding though, and they clouded his thoughts. As he was standing there frozen in front of her, his will ebbing away, she brought her other hand up to run her fingers along the sensitive flesh of his neck. He shivered at her touch.

She almost had him, but as she smiled coldly at her intended victim, Elric felt some flicker of thought tugging at his consciousness, nagging him. He was going to be hers. At first that idea gave him a soothing, compelling comfort, but as his mind worked at it, he grew uneasy. Staring at her as she regarded him, her beauty enchanting him, his thoughts were conflicted. He wanted to give himself up to her, but something within him resisted.

Her pull on him was strong, but the stirrings in his mind pushed against it. He thought about how he'd been before, and then about his newfound freedom and determination. He'd been trapped by his life, and then had things change for him. He didn't want to be trapped like that again, or something even worse. He wasn't going to let himself wind up as another one of her possessions. He'd worked too hard to have it end up like that.

His mind struggled against the will of her gaze, until he finally managed to find his voice. "No, I don't want this" he forced out, and took a half step back, pulling against her grasp.

Her mouth opening in shock at his resistance, the pale queen grabbed him harder. That only served to further break her mental hold on him though, as he shuddered at her touch. As he fought to free himself from her grasp, Elric was reminded of his friend the fox who'd brought him on this journey. It was for her that he was here, and he could not let her down. She was always there, encouraging him to believe in himself, and had become his closest friend.



Realizing how much she cared for him awakened Elric to the fact that this lady, no matter how stunningly beautiful she might appear to be, did not, nor would not ever care for him.

The witch's spell broken, Elric's will returned fully to him. Gathering his wits about him he quickly remembered the pair of silver shears he'd carried with him all that time. They were hanging from his belt, ready to be used. Reaching down to grasp them, feeling their power, now for real and no longer imagined, he reacted with lightning speed.

Turning his gaze to confront the witch he exclaimed "no, you can't have me!" Then, bringing the shears up in a swooping arc, he forced them down, crashing into her chest. The strength of his blow, combined with the magic in the instrument and the force of his will behind it, pushed the shears into her dark heart. The pure metal of their blades pierced the center of her evilness.

Letting out a shriek, her eyes became wild, as Elric struck his blow. Within moments the power from the silver spread throughout her entire body, leaching the hideous mockery of life from her veins. He watched dumbstruck as her pale skin and cold features withered in a flash, drying up like old paper, crumbling in upon itself. Soon all that was left was a pile of ashes on the floor, with him holding the unscathed pair of shears in his trembling hands.

With the paralysis of the spell lifted and his fear abated, a jolt of excitement ran through him. The full understanding of what he'd just accomplished flooded over him. Pausing, Elric then turned to see the fox, who was also freed from the spell of the witch's influence, running up to him.

Dropping to his knees, he threw his arms around her, feeling her soft warmth and companionship.

"You did it. I knew you could" she said as he hugged her tightly.

"I know, thank you for believing in me" he answered softly, still a little shaken, but reveling in his triumph.

Their quiet moment was interrupted though, when she pulled away from the hug to look at him, her eyes wide. "We must check on the princess, and make sure she's alright."

Turning, she ran out of the room, with Elric close behind her. He followed her down another passageway to a set of stairs that spiraled up into the tower. Reaching the top of the stairway, he quickly undid the bolts and threw open the heavy door, rushing into the chamber to find the princess asleep on her bed.

Hesitating briefly, Elric then reached down to gently touch her arm, and managed to wake her. She came to with a jolt, as if trying to get away, but then seeing Elric there, a flash of understanding shown in her eyes, and she relaxed. "Who... who are you?" she questioned, her voice a little uncertain.

"My name is Elric, we've come to return you to your father."

"The queen? Is she..." she asked. The hesitation was evident in her voice, as if she dared not even hope for it to be true. A small shiver passed through her as she looked up at him.

"Yes, it's okay... she's gone," he answered, his voice kind and gentle. He reached out to softly touch her arm, trying to reassure her. Then looking at her, finally noticing her beauty, he pulled back, suddenly feeling awkward.

Just as quickly, she grasped his hand and held it in hers, looking at him with adoration, as well as a great relief. "Then I thank you Elric. Thank you for saving me from that evil witch." She paused, then added "but you said `we've come to save you,' are there others here besides you?"

"Oh yes, of course, I'd forgot. I was led here by my companion, an enchanted fox."

"An enchanted fox?" she asked, her voice suddenly sounding dubious.

"Yes, in fact she's right over there" he gestured, turning to look back at the doorway, but doing so he found only the empty hallway behind it. Moving from the princess' bed, he ran out to check for himself, but only the darkness lay there.

Coming back into the room, he met the princess' puzzled gaze. "She was just here a minute ago, I don't understand..." he mused, as she regarded him with curiosity.

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Elric was finally able to convince the princess that his story was true, and that he had been accompanied by the mysterious talking fox. Even so, after searching the entire tower, no trace of his strange friend could be found. Finally he let the princess persuade him that they should leave that place, as she wanted to get back to her father, whom she dearly missed.

"After all, if she is enchanted, then she should be able to find you again, whenever she wants to," she'd said, with a kind, but assertive determination. Elric finally had to agree with the princess, there was some logic to what she said. Also, as there was no trace of the evil queen left in the tower, he doubted that any lingering power of hers had been able to hurt the fox. He was bothered by the fox's vanishing, but he also realized that he owed it to his friend to see the princess home and fulfill the duty of his quest.

Coming to the witch's stable, they found an ornate carriage with two pure-white steeds hitched up to it. The princess knew of its magic, and said that using it they could make their way back to her father's castle by morning. Boarding it they were off, letting the horses guide their journey, as they seemed to know the way.

On the ride there, the princess soon fell asleep, while Elric stayed awake, his thoughts troubled. He should've been overjoyed upon accomplishing such a fantastic task, and rescuing the beautiful princess, but he was bothered by the disappearance of the fox. She'd been his close companion and friend for what now seemed like much longer than a couple of weeks. Why had she left him so suddenly, what had happened to her? Finally, he passed into an uneasy sleep.

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In the morning, true to the princess' word, they'd reached the castle, which was a bustle with the giant tournament going on. As their carriage drew up to the gates though, all who saw it stopped what they were doing, seeing its splendid design, and sensing something very special

about it.

The horses took them up through the crowds, which parted in front of them, all the way up to the king's thrown. The princess, upon seeing her father, became overjoyed and leapt from the carriage into his arms. As soon as the old king saw her, the remnants of the witch's spell were broken, and the memories of his daughter came flooding back to him. He joyously accepted her into his embrace.

Not sure exactly what to do, Elric stayed in the carriage, while the crowds looked on expectantly. Finally the king called him out to stand nervously before him.

"My daughter tells me of your bravery, how you saved her from the evil witch's grasp."

Elric, who was awestruck at speaking with the king, only nodded silently. The king continued. "Now that my daughter has been returned to me, she is the rightful heir to the throne. There is no need to continue to the contests of the tournament." Pausing, the king added, "of course she should have someone to help her rule the kingdom." Both the king and the princess then smiled at him.

"What... no you don't mean?" Elric managed to stutter out.

"If my daughter chooses a husband, than he will share the throne with her."

The princess added "and I choose you Elric... if you'll have me." She reached out to take his hand in hers.

His mind flooding with disbelief, at a momentary loss for words, Elric hesitated several moments before finally replying. "But I can't be king, I'm just a tailor, I don't know how to do such things... I don't deserve it."

Smiling at that, the king clapped his hand firmly on Elric's shoulder. "But you are worthy my dear boy, don't you see it? You've shown the courage to do what it takes to rescue my daughter, you've shown purity of heart, and you have the final thing that I was hoping for, humility." The king then added, "I was worried that with the tournament, even those most eligible would expect the right to be king to be theirs, without really earning it. My daughter's told me briefly about you, you have enough belief in yourself to accomplish the task, while not consumed with false pride. You'll make a wonderful and just leader, with my daughter's help of course."

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And so that is how it was that Elric the tailor came to marry the beautiful princess and then went on with her at his side to become one of the wisest and fairest rulers the land of Seth had ever seen.

Of course at the time he was so overwhelmed by everything, for it was decided that they would be married that very day, so the two of them were kept busy until well after dark. First there were the hectic plans, then the wedding, followed by the largest feast the castle had ever seen, attended by everyone who'd been at the tournament.

It wasn't until late at night when Elric was finally able to slip away from the festivities and retire to their bedroom. Still confused by the turn of events, his mind also kept on coming back to his friend the fox, and wondering where she'd gone off to. As she'd become his first true friend, she'd meant a lot to him. He also wondered how he and the princess were going to get along. She was very beautiful, and he felt very lucky indeed, but part of him worried that they wouldn't be able to become as close friends as he had with the fox, perhaps that luck wouldn't hold out for him the second time.

His thoughts were finally interrupted by his bride entering the room. "There you are, I've been looking for you all over the place" she greeted him.

"I guess I was just tired of the party." He paused then added, "I'm not used to this," smiling weakly at her.

Coming to sit beside him on the bed, she reached out to touch his shoulder, "what's wrong, you're thinking of your friend the fox again aren't you?"

"Yes, but how did you know? She was a very close friend of mine, and I miss her deeply. I wish she was here to see this." Then realizing what a fool he was being, talking like that to his new wife, he quickly added "I'm sorry, it's silly isn't it?"

"No of course not dear, she meant a lot to you. I can tell, but you're also worried about taking the throne aren't you?"

"Of course I am. I may have managed to rescue you from the witch, but I don't know the first thing about being a king... I'm just a tailor."

"No, not just a tailor, not with what you did for me, not with these," she said as she removed the shears he'd kept with him, attached to his belt.

"My shears?" he asked, his face showing his confusion.

"They're not just any shears, they're from a great magician long ago, who knew of what would happen. In preparation for it, he created a magic weapon, but in disguise, so only the worthy could use it. You are descended from him, and as predicted you wielded them with the power in your heart, vanquishing your evil foe."

"But how did you know what happened?" Even as he asked her, he felt the slightest glimmering of understanding twinkling in his mind.

"I knew you'd come Elric, and these past weeks I've gotten to know more about you, helped you to learn about yourself..."

"What do you mean?" He managed to put the pieces together one by one, as she leaned against him, pushing him back onto the bed, pressing gently against him. It was then when he recognized the familiar sound of her soft breathing, and the warmth of her presence.

"I'm glad it was you who was chosen to come for me. I knew it almost from the moment I first met you in the woods."

"But how...?" he asked, still disbelieving, but his soul soaring.

"You're not the only one with magic in their history you know..." was her reply. She delivered it with a playful grin, which he was quick to kiss away.

The End

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