

SHIELDING SHIELA AND COURAGEOUS COLLETTE

Some souls do not enter the storm in defiance of fear but because they refuse to stand by while fear does its damage to an unchallenged world—fear corrupts truth, suppresses conscience, and redefines justice into convenience. **Courageous Collette** was one of those souls.

Her courage began early—standing between a classmate and a bully, defending the quiet kid, and refusing to laugh at jokes that made others feel small. But courage, in its purest form, can be lonely. As she grew older, people began to step away. Not because they disliked her—but because she made them see things they weren't ready to face. She became “too intense,” “too much,” “too serious.” And soon, she stopped waiting for someone to stand beside her. She felt injustice like she felt a bruise below the skin—too deep, too sore, and too hard to overlook. So, she spoke. She stood. She showed up—again and again.

But even the boldest hearts can tire. Even the fiercest flames need shelter.

That's why she had **Shielding Sheila**.

Sheila wasn't the echo of Collette's courage—she was the strength that made it sustainable. She noticed the weight Collette carried, the weariness in her bones after long days of fighting battles others didn't even see. And without fuss or fanfare, Sheila stood beside her—not to lead, not to follow, but to *hold*.

When the world pushed back, Sheila didn't flinch. When Collette's voice cracked, Sheila didn't speak over her—she simply stood closer, shoulder to shoulder, so that no flame had to burn alone.

In school, she earned a reputation for standing up for others at a time when no one else would. Not because it was easy—but because her conscience permitted no alternative. One time, she stopped an entire morning assembly by asking why the new student could not speak when he had a stutter. Another time, she returned a prefect badge because leadership without fairness meant a badge was used as decoration. Courage, as admirable a quality as it is, comes with a weight. And the more powerful Collette's voice became, the more isolated her silence became after each stand. Collette had just stood up in class against a teacher who publicly humiliated a girl because she wore trousers rather than the prescribed skirt. This was the time Sheila appeared. It was at this moment she saw someone slide into the seat opposite her—a quiet girl with soft eyes and folded notes in her hands. She did not say anything to Collette as she placed the note on the table and slid it forward. Collette opened the note. “You weren't wrong. You were just early.” The words staggered her. They weren't grand. They weren't dramatic. But it felt like a hand on her back, steadying her.

Their friendship flourished in this state of delicate balance. Collette was the fire: passionate, outspoken—often burning with so much heat. Sheila was the shield: constant, grounding, and always absorbing and managing the heat together. They began to change the rhythm of the school. When Collette spoke out against a rule that punished students for being late without checking why they were late, Sheila organized a group to collect the stories of those who had been impacted. When a student was bullied online, Collette spoke openly about it in the assembly, while Sheila attended to ensure the victim felt safe, seen, and cared for. They were meant to be a team. They were not the same, because they allowed one another to be whole. Collette never felt like she had to tone down her light around

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Sheila and Sheila never felt unseen in the brightness of Collette's light. Where Collette led with fire, Sheila followed with grace and could intercept the flame from burning out or burning anyone else in the connection. Their impact rippled. Students who never spoke before began to speak and teachers who did not take concerns seriously began to listen. The whole school, in little pieces, began to shift. Years later, students still tell the story of the girl who lit the torch and the friend who whispered in the wind.

Sometimes, I think the strongest people do not need to be saved, they may just need reminders that they don't have to carry the world on their shoulders alone. That is what Sheila gave to Collette, not protection from the world, but the courage to keep facing it. And maybe this is the lesson they left with: that real heroism does not have to be loud. Sometimes it needs to be quiet. Sometimes it is soft. And sometimes, it does not wear a cape, it wears a backpack and a knowing smile, and has a presence that makes the strongest person believe they are not alone. Because behind every act of courage is someone who made you believe you could do it in the first place.