Forever and Always (A Fairy Tale)

By Lynn Wallace

Once upon a time (which is when all stories happen), in a kingdom far, far away (which is where most of them take place), there lived a princess and a stable boy who were friends. They would play together in the courtyard of the castle, with all of his other friends, of course – because rescuing the princess from the goblin king was much more exciting if you actually had a princess to rescue. The princess was surprisingly tolerant of these rough games – she had no one else to play with anyway – provided that the hero did not soil her dress as he carried her down from the goblin’s cave at the top of the stable. And every evening when it came time for her to return to the castle, she and the stable boy would agree to play again together the next day, saying, “I will be with you, forever and always.”

One day, however, the childish games were interrupted when the princess fell ill. Immediately a healer mage was summoned from (yet another) far away kingdom. Soon after his arrival, the princess recovered, but she was still weak. The healer mage stayed on as an important caretaker for the sickly princess. Time passed and the children grew, but the princess remained frail and fragile. Not that this necessarily stopped the boy and his friends from sneaking into her room to visit and entertain her – after a while, the screams of the startled chambermaid became almost routine. And each night when it came time to part ways, the princess and the stable boy would promise to each other, “I will be with you, forever and always.”

Eventually, though, the princess grew so weak that she became sick and feverish, and one night she passed away. The entire kingdom was distraught. During her funeral, the tearful king spoke about his daughter, and recited the girl’s dying words (as told to him by the healer mage, of course, who had been there when she moved on) to her kingdom, “I will be with you, forever and ever.” There was not a dry eye anywhere in the land – except for the stable boy, whose tears had turned to a puzzled frown.

The night following her burial, the stable boy (and his friends, naturally) stole into the royal sepulcher and opened the princess’s coffin. There, resting among jars of burning oils, she appeared to be peacefully asleep. So much like sleep that the stable boy could almost see the rise and fall of her chest… of her breathing. In fact, she WAS breathing! The princess was still alive!

Quickly the stable boy lifted her up and carried her out of the tomb and into the clean night air. As the scent of the burial perfumes faded, the princess coughed, fluttered her eyes and woke up to find herself held very tightly in the arms of her childhood friend, surrounded by their playmate’s faces. When she could finally speak, she told her captive audience that although her body had not been able to move, she was still able to hear what was going on around her. “Everyone else said I was dead,” she said, looking at the stable boy, “How did you know I was still alive?”

Looking straight back at her, he replied, “You always told me, ‘I will be with you, forever and always,’ not ‘forever and ever.’ And if you didn’t say that, then you probably didn’t die, either.” Logical or not, it made the princess happy, so she bestowed a small kiss on the cheek of her rescuer.

Then the princess (in the arms of the stable boy and followed by the parade of other boys) went straight to the king and told him the story. The stable boy guessed that it was probably the healer mage and his constant “burning of sacred candles for the health of the princess” that had been poisoning her for the last several years. The guards were instantly summoned and the healer mage was apprehended while sneaking into the king’s chambers with “incense to ease his grief and sorrow.” The healer mage was arrested, judged, and sentenced to banishment within the hour, and has never been seen or heard from since.

Soon after the excitement had faded, the princess recovered fully. She and the stable boy discovered games that did not involve being rescued from a goblin king (or any of his other friends, for that matter). Eventually they married and ruled the kingdom together with wisdom and grace, and each night they whispered to one another before they fell asleep, “I will be with you, forever and always.”

And so, my friends, they lived happily ever after (which is how most stories end, anyway).