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Once Upon a Time . . .



. . . a dashing young prince fell in love with a maiden. And, quite some time after the maiden fell in love with the prince, they were married.

Now Maiden was not a foolish girl, but she was very ignorant about the world of men, marriage, and what makes a home lovely. When observing other marriages in her teenage years, she had decided that she would respect her husband always and always—no matter what. (Just as if she were making the decision to never, ever wear orange shoes and thus lived her life never wearing orange shoes.)

In those first months of marriage, smiles and love and hugs were abundant. Prince and Maiden snuggled on blankets under starlit skies, walked hand in hand wherever they went, and lived for the weekends when they could be together day in and day out.

Days were rosy, and the young bride informed her mother, “Prince and I are so much alike. The only thing we disagree on is peanut butter.”

Then one day God smiled a special little smile, and the young couple was thrilled to discover that Maiden was carrying their little baby.

Days still passed with snuggles under starlit skies, long walks hand in hand, and glowing faces. But something had changed. Maiden, though still in love with Prince, was very, very sick with this pregnancy. Other things changed too. Clean laundry sometimes piled up on a chair in the corner of the room. It was not attractive for Prince to have to dig through the pile for socks or to wash the dirty dishes in the evening if Maiden had not done them.

Another thing that really bothered Prince was Maiden’s tears. Her eyes, which had always looked at him with so much love, would now

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sometimes look at him with not so much happiness, and they would fill with tears.

This was uncomfortable for Prince, so he added a thin layer of metal over his armor in hopes that the tears would not penetrate.

Time passed, and the most beautiful baby girl was born to the two lovers. The once very sick Maiden was now well, and she and Prince spent many hours holding and adoring their baby while dreaming about their future.

When the baby was a couple of weeks old, Prince told Maiden to go through everything they owned. What didn't fit into the trailer he had built, they must get rid of. Maiden happily complied, for this was part of their dream, and when Baby was ten weeks old, they set out for western Oregon—away from Ohio, and away from their cozy home filled with memories of their young love.

About halfway into their sojourn, Prince found out that his job had fallen through. But he took charge and decided they would live in his sister's empty house on the Idaho-Oregon border until they knew what step to take next. Maiden was happy with the idea.

Prince and Maiden found new adventures to enjoy together, for he had grown up in this area and it was familiar territory to him. The happy couple was surprised to soon discover—very soon, in fact—that Maiden was carrying baby Number 2. Once again, she was sick. While she lay sick on the couch, Maiden began to long for the friends she had left behind in Ohio and the lovely times they used to have together.

Although Prince and Maiden still savored many happy times together among those weeks, the tears appeared again. And Prince? He added another layer of metal to his armor. After all, Maiden had joyfully joined him on the journey, and it was not *his* fault the job had fallen through.

Maiden forgot that Prince had first been attracted to her smile, and her tears fell much too often. Prince added layers of metal to his armor again and again. He loved Maiden very much, but those tears did things to him that he did not like.

Oh, the tears and the layers of metal! Maiden became wrapped up in the sadness of missing her friends and her mother and the effort of taking care of Baby. She was so wrapped up in herself that she didn't realize her tears

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were making trouble in Paradise. In fact, that was the reason Prince started spending longer days and more evenings with his two brothers.

After four months of living in Idaho, Prince announced they would move again—to Montana, where they could find a church, friends, and a doctor for Maiden. Maiden, though thrilled, was too sick to pack her own stuff. So she lay helplessly on the couch while Prince's sister and his brother's girlfriend packed box after box.

In Montana, Prince and Maiden were still in love with each other—and also with the endless skies, the wheat fields, and the beautiful view of the mountains.

But trouble lurked in Paradise. Even though Maiden had made the decision to always respect Prince, she was sure that almost everything that went wrong was Prince's fault. And Prince, who was trying his best to learn how to be a husband, was sure the troubles were Maiden's fault.

But in spite of lurking trouble, life was happy, with times of laughter and much love. There was still time for blankets in sunny clover fields, time for laughter while riding in the grain truck (in spite of Maiden's sickness), and time to delight in little Baby, who was growing fast.

Then Little Prince was born with complications, resulting in an extended hospital stay and a weak Maiden. Oh, how Little Prince cried! He cried day and night, and no doctor or massage or pill would make him stop. Prince and Maiden, although still in love, could hardly spend any time in uninterrupted conversation. Maiden's tears fell more and more with all the pressure of Baby Number 1 still being a baby and Little Prince's continuous wails. She missed the closeness and endless snuggles with Prince.

Suddenly, much to Maiden's anxiety, she observed another younger maiden with evil intentions trying to enchant Prince with her charms. Now Prince truly loved his own Maiden very much and couldn't see the traps Warring Maiden cleverly laid for him. Prince thought his Maiden was making mountains out of molehills, and this caused Maiden to shed more tears, leading to more layers of metal on Prince's armor.

This went on for quite some time, among which were many happy moments, because after a couple of months Little Prince traded endless wails for grins. Baby Number 1 was also growing up, and her smiles and conversations delighted Prince and Maiden.

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But Warring Maiden kept on trying to charm Prince, and Prince's Maiden kept on fighting for her marriage. More tears fell and more layers of metal strengthened Prince's armor. All the while, because Maiden had once made the decision to always respect her husband, she was sure her misery was all his fault.

Then Prince started his own business venture. Prince and Maiden moved again to be closer to work and church and friends. To Maiden's relief, their new home was almost an hour away from Warring Maiden.

But her relief was short-lived, for Warring Maiden was not about to give up. More tears fell, more layers of metal were added, and pride showed its face. Prince began to realize that maybe Maiden was right about Warring Maiden's intentions, but after a couple of years and the discomfort of Maiden's tears, his layers of metal had turned to tempered steel.

The only form of appeal the ignorant Maiden knew was tears. And although tears are not wrong in themselves, they only attract an unmarried Prince, definitely not a married Prince when there is trouble in Paradise.

Prince was working very hard at starting his business, and often Maiden felt lonely and overwhelmed. From marriage books and other sources, she became convinced that if Prince really loved her, he would not work on Saturdays. If he truly loved her, he would help her wash dishes in the evenings and more often take care of their little children so she could have time alone. Such attention from Prince sounded attractive to Maiden, since Baby Number 3 had joined their little home before Baby Number 1 was quite three years old.

Around this time, Prince had several talks with Maiden about her Facebook account. He saw it was only making the struggles in her heart worse. He wished she would close her account, but he left it up to Maiden to decide. She was very afraid that if she closed her account, she would be isolated from her friends, many of whom were on Facebook, and that she would become a hermit. With three little children, it took a lot of extra effort to go and see her friends in person. But Maiden wanted to please her Prince, so she closed her Facebook account.

One day a friend, knowing about Maiden's struggles with Prince working so hard and how overwhelmed she felt, gave Maiden a book to encourage her in her marriage.

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Maiden was not even a page into the book when she realized that her friend had given her one of the greatest gifts she could have given. Also, Maiden had not read even a page until her heart was convicted that she had failed to honor her husband in spite of her long-ago decision to respect him always.

Maiden did not tell Prince about the book for a long time. But little by little as she read the book, her eyes were opened to the fact that even though Prince might be wrong at times, she had been oh, so wrong too. She discovered that choosing to respect her husband was not a once-in-a-lifetime decision such as the decision not to wear orange shoes. Oh, no! Choosing to respect Prince was a continual choice, second by second and thought by thought.

As Maiden read the book, she started to slowly change and to also read her Bible more faithfully. When Warring Maiden tried making war in Paradise, Maiden refused to cry and instead practiced unfailing kindness to her husband. Although she made many mistakes, she began to see progress in her heart and in her actions.

Instead of hiding her armor in the closet, ready to pull out when Warring Maiden appeared, Maiden sought to make herself more and more lovely every day and every night for Prince. She let gentleness soften her face as she looked at him, and she gave him special smiles. Often—very often—she prayed. Her tears still fell, but God was the One who saw them most, not Prince, because God tenderly wipes tears and replaces them with His peace. She realized that her tears in the presence of her husband had only compelled him to add more layers to his armor.

A long time afterward, Prince told Maiden that God showed him the wrongness of allowing Warring Maiden to interfere in his marriage to Maiden. Because of pride and the thickness of his armor, he did not immediately admit this to Maiden. But as his own Maiden became more and more lovely in spite of her occasional tears, he ran far away from Warring Maiden.

Prince decided they should move again, because he had started a sideline business of raising beef cattle and needed a place with corrals.

The “new” house was nice—it was just not as lovely as their previous house. But Maiden refused to dwell on that fact, and because of the changes