

The Princess

Lori Wick



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Cover by Emily Weigel Design

Cover photos © irAArt, KateChe, Margaret Jone Wollman / Shutterstock

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The Princess

Copyright © 1999 by Lori Wick

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-7638-1 (Hardcover)

ISBN 978-0-7369-7639-8 (eBook)

The Library of Congress has cataloged the edition as follows:

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wick, Lori.

The princess / Lori Wick

p. com.

ISBN 978-0-7369-1861-9

I. Title.

PS3573.I237P75 1999

813'.54—dc21

98-47195

CIP

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in China

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 / RDS-CD / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Henley, Wainwright
Pendaran

Pen in hand, Daria Parker bent over her personal journal, her eyes and mind intent. Unless she was very sleepy, she wrote in the leatherbound book every Saturday night. The entry for this day began:

OCTOBER 11, 1988

Is there any way to describe my joy, Father? I am thankful beyond words for what You have done. Long have we prayed for Shelby, and in Your great mercy, You have now reached down and made her Yours.

Daria sat back in her chair, her eyes on a distant spot out the window. The moon hung in the sky like a huge white ball, making it seem earlier than 10:15. Her husband, Josiah, was already asleep in the bed they had shared for 19 years, but the soft sound of his breathing was a comfort to her.

I knew that someday she would see the truth; I just didn't know when. Who would have thought You would use a poor test grade to make her see her need of You.

Daria set her pen down for a moment as she thought back to her own salvation seven years earlier. And not just hers, but Josiah's as well. Shelby had been ten at the time, and their son, Brice, six. Her marriage to Josiah had been a bit rocky in those days. Then one of Josiah's customers had invited them to his church. Daria balked, so Josiah began to attend on his own, and it wasn't long until she noticed a difference in him. They began going as a family, a life-changing experience for both them and their son—but not for their daughter. Now, seven years later, Shelby had seen the truth for herself. Daria picked up her pen.

We plan to go on a trip this summer, Lord, and I look forward to our time together as I never have before. I know Shelby will see things through new eyes and with a new heart. Thank You for the promises of Your Word and Your faithfulness to us. She's been such a wonderful daughter; Lord, and this step of faith in her life will only enhance that.

With a soft sigh, Daria sat back again. For a moment her mind ran to fanciful thoughts and suppositions about her 17-year-old, redheaded daughter. She knew it was normal for every mother to think that her children were the most talented and wonderful in the world, and she was no different, but a sudden thought occurred to her that was almost frightening, a moment of unsettledness that she couldn't define.

She's so special already, Lord, Daria prayed. She's obedient, warm, talented, intelligent, and so caring of others. Now she

has You, and I can't help but wonder if You might have something very remarkable and unfamiliar for our Shelby.

Daria shook her head. Clearly she was growing tired, and her imagination was playing tricks on her. She closed the book, set the pen aside, and turned off the desk lamp while telling herself not to let her mind run away. As she slipped beneath the covers and cuddled the pillow against her cheek, a slight smile managed to turn up the corners of her mouth, a smile she couldn't wipe away. It lingered until the moment she fell asleep.





Faraday, Wainwright
June 1994
The Palace

Toby Newbury walked into the palace with comfortable familiarity, knowing he would be welcome but not certain he would find the monarch available. He wasn't against talking to the queen alone, but the purpose of his visit made him hope he would find Pendaran's king and queen together.

"Mr. Newbury," a voice greeted with utmost respect. Toby turned to find Wallace headed his way. Wallace was the king and queen's house minister, a man of indistinguishable years who kept the east quadrant of the palace moving on well-oiled wheels.

"Hello, Wallace. May I go up?"

"Certainly, sir. I'll just ring through and let the queen know you're coming."

Now knowing the king was not available, Toby crossed the black-and-white-tiled foyer and started up the wide staircase that led to the second floor and the palace's private chambers. The queen, he knew, would be in

one of the salons, and because there was always someone hovering in the hallway nearby, finding her would be no effort. “Someone” turned out to be the queen herself. Having received the call, she was waiting just outside the double doors of her favorite salon. Dressed in a beautiful blue pantsuit that matched her eyes, she looked delighted to see him.

“Hello, Toby,” she greeted, smiling as they embraced.

“Good morning, Erica.” His own smile was warm as he kissed her cheek. “Alone this morning, are you?” he wasted no time in asking.

“For another 15 minutes,” she said as she led the way to the plush yellow davenports that sat in a half circle and allowed a lovely view of the inner courtyard.

“Good.”

“Why is that good?” her eyes twinkled as she asked.

“I have something to tell both of you. Do you think Rafe will have time?”

“Yes. Unless something has come up, he’s free until this afternoon.”

“Good,” Toby repeated, but Erica fell silent, watching as her guest’s gaze went to the windows. She had learned from childhood when to ask questions and when to keep silent. Toby clearly had something on his mind, but it wouldn’t have been fair to ask him to explain it twice.

“Did you have a speaking engagement last night?” the queen, remembering suddenly, asked.

“As a matter of fact, I was at a banquet, but I didn’t address the group.”

“I’m surprised you’re here so early.”

“It wasn’t a late night. The dinner was right here in Faraday.” His voice had grown rather soft while speaking, his eyes moving back to the windows, and for this reason Erica fell silent again.

Without invitation the years fell away in her mind, back to the time she had met both Rafael Markham and Toby Newbury. Having grown up together, the two had been best friends for years. Not for a moment had

Rafe seen a future as Pendaran's king, but that was before meeting King Anton's daughter, Erica. His view of a place in the palace had changed a great deal after that introduction, and with Toby's encouragement, Rafe had courted Erica with an interest that turned her head. Very impressed with the young man who seemed ready to lay his life down on her behalf, King Anton and Queen Ketra, now King Regent and Queen Regent, had given the couple their blessing. In a month Rafe and Erica would celebrate their thirty-second wedding anniversary.

"Wallace told me you were here," the king said as he entered the room. "Hello, Toby."

"Good morning, Rafe."

Although he greeted his friend, the king made a beeline for his wife and bent to kiss her. "Hello, love," he said softly before turning back to Toby. The men shook hands but didn't exchange words. Rafe sat down and stared at Toby for a long moment. The other man looked back.

"I think you have something on your mind, Toby."

"You're right, I do, and since I hate beating about the bush, I'll come right to it. It's about our conversation two weeks ago concerning Nick."

Both men noticed the way Erica tensed, and Rafe, who had taken a seat on the davenport beside her, reached for her hand. "I've been praying about the situation, as I told you I would," Toby explained, "but then last night I met a young woman whom you need to know about."

Rafe sat forward. Knowing how he and Erica felt about the marriage of their son, his friend would not have come on a whim.

"What is her name?"

"Shelby Parker. I met her at a banquet honoring her father, who has been deaf since he was ten. Shelby interpreted his speech."

"So he doesn't speak?"

"Actually he does."

"Why did she interpret?"

“Protocol. Most of the room’s occupants were also deaf, so Mr. Parker signed his speech, and Shelby voiced for him. I met Shelby and her parents after we dismissed. I’ve never been so impressed with a family in my life.”

“How old is she, Toby?” This came from Erica.

“I didn’t ask. She looks young, but she’s out of school, so she must be in her early twenties.”

“What was it about her that so impressed you?” Rafe asked his friend.

“The first thing that catches your eye is her gracefulness. When she’s talking, signing, or even walking, she moves like a dancer. She’s tall and slim and extremely poised. Then after I met her, I noticed her relationship with her parents. The three of them adore each other. They laughed and shared secret smiles like the two of you. You can’t be with them and miss it.”

“And she’s a believer?” Erica tried to keep the tenseness from her voice, but even she could hear the slight wobble.

“Yes. Her father gave a brief testimony last night, and it included the salvation of his wife, son, and daughter.”

“Do you know for a fact that she’s not spoken for?” Rafe asked now.

“Positively? No. But I would be very surprised if there was any man in her life outside of her father.”

The king and queen looked at each other.

“I was just praying about it again this morning, Rafe,” Erica said in her soft, gentle manner. “I told God I knew He would show us, even if I didn’t know what that would look like.”

Rafe smiled, his hand still holding his wife’s. “The Council dismissed early this morning, so Nicky and I had a few minutes to talk. I felt a burden to tell him again how proud we are of his decision to go through with this and to trust us. He told me that he knew it wouldn’t be easy but that God had been working on his heart. He has been asking for even greater trust, and he knows he’ll never need it more than when he marries again.”

For some minutes the three fell silent, their thoughts going to Prince

Nikolai, Rafe and Erica's only child. Nikolai's first wife had been a shy French woman. Her name was Yvette DuBois, and the prince had adored her. Still quite young, the two had met while Yvette's family was visiting Pendaran. They corresponded for more than a year before Nikolai, accompanied by his parents, went to France to ask for her hand in marriage. She was two years older than he was, but that never mattered to the enamored couple. With the blessing of both families, they married in 1989, when Nikolai was 20 and Yvette was 22. Then without warning, Yvette died of a heart attack two years later, leaving Nikolai a widower. For Nikolai the loss was huge. Pendaran's traditions were not worshiped, but they were honored and held in high regard. With a view to the beloved royal-family line, the heir to the throne was expected to be married by the time he or she was 26. Nikolai more than met this requirement until his wife was taken from him. Had the death been closer to his twenty-sixth birthday, the time would have been extended in accordance to his grief, but the Council, comprised of men who shared equal power and were required to come to unanimous agreement on every decision, decided that for Nikolai the tradition would be upheld. If effort was made and no wife could be found, the time would be extended, but as it stood, Pendaran's prince now had just over 18 months to marry again.

For a time courtship and remarriage were unthinkable to the still-grieving prince, but recently he'd come to his parents with a surprising request. It was for this reason they had asked Toby to pray, never dreaming that he would meet someone he found suitable to be the prince's next wife.

"Is there anything more I can do?" Toby asked.

"Did your meeting with them go well? Were you well received?" Rafe questioned right back.

"Very much so. Mrs. Parker heard me speak about two years ago, and Mr. Parker has read one of my books. He said he enjoyed it. They were very gracious and kind."

Rafe looked at Erica, whose brow was furrowed in thought.

“Do you have any suggestions, Rica?”

“Only that we find out a little more before anything is said. I certainly have no desire to invade the privacy of this family, but neither do I want us to approach Shelby, upset her world, and then say, ‘I’m sorry, we’ve just found out you’re unsuitable for our son.’”

Rafe nodded. “A point well taken. Is there any way to do this subtly, Toby?”

“Yes, I believe there is. I think they would welcome a visit from me, and I can do so without deceit, because I genuinely liked them and would enjoy seeing them again. Beyond that, I can ask my man, Tyke, to make a few gentle inquiries. He’ll be very discreet. As Erica said, we need to respect the family’s privacy. It wouldn’t be fair to either Nick or Shelby to rush in and make a mess of things.”

“Nick or Shelby,” Erica said softly. “It has a nice ring to it, but I’m afraid to hope.”

“Not afraid to trust, however,” her husband said firmly, his eyes on his spouse.

“No,” Erica agreed. “Not that.” Her eyes swung to her husband’s childhood friend. “Do go and see them, Toby, would you? And then come back and tell us if you think we should pursue this.”

“I’ll do it. Just as soon as I can, I’ll visit their home.”

Nothing more was said on the subject, but each one had it in mind. Erica went to freshen up for lunch as the men walked to the dining room, but before joining them downstairs, she took a pen and marked her calendar, using specific wording about Toby’s visit. She almost immediately regretted the action, knowing it might make her anxious until he had news. She made herself turn away from the page.

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Erica’s mind was suddenly on Jesus’ words from a verse in Matthew 6. *A question you would*

do well to remember, Erica, she said to herself. With a prayer to carry out the thought, she went downstairs to join the men.



The king only glanced at the small photo provided for him before reading down through the school transcripts of Shelby Leigh Parker, his brows rising at the excellent grades. Toby's man, Tyke, had certainly been thorough and fast. It had been just 11 days since Toby had come to see him. A part of Rafe's mind rebelled at the whole idea of checking up on her, but his son's face came to mind and he pressed on.

The next page he turned to listed school activities. He was again impressed with her diligence and hard work. A copy of an article from her church newsletter, followed by a brief testimony about a Bible study that Shelby was involved in with several other women, was very informative. Clearly she was learning, and while the king was struck with the content of what she wrote, he was also struck with the way she expressed herself. The two other pages were miscellaneous facts, all of which he found quite interesting. In time, Rafe put the papers aside and glanced down to where Erica slept beside him in their bed. This young woman, Shelby Parker, was impressive—there was no question about that—but how did they proceed?

Rafe found himself staring across the dark room for some time before finally reaching to turn off the light and settle down on his own pillow. He hoped Toby's visit to see the Parker family would provide some answers.



Henley

"This cake is delicious," Toby told Daria Parker just a month after he'd

first called on Rafe and Erica. He had called them to ask if he could visit as soon as Tyke had gathered the information. As he'd expected, they were as gracious and warm as he had remembered. "It's Josiah's favorite," Daria informed him, signing with courtesy for her husband as she spoke to their guest. "He has good taste."

Toby watched Josiah smile before Shelby's father asked in his quiet way, "Do you live far from here, Mr. Newbury?"

"About 40 minutes. I was looking for an excuse to come and visit all of you again, and then I realized I had to deliver something just a few miles up the road."

"Why did you want to see us again?" Daria asked, a smile lighting her face.

"I was very impressed last month," Toby said honestly.

The family surrounding him smiled at the compliment but didn't comment further. Suddenly Toby wondered if this might not be a bit awkward.

"Are you working on a book right now, Mr. Newbury?"

This question came from the one person he wanted most to speak with, and Toby not only felt rescued but was glad of an excuse to talk directly to her.

"I am, actually. It's an in-depth study guide to the book of Genesis. I'm almost finished with it."

Shelby questioned him more about the process, his publisher, and how swiftly he would start another book when the current one was complete.

Toby was more than happy to tell her everything she wanted to know, and by the time he left an hour later, he was more convinced than ever that this was the woman for Nikolai.

"Why exactly, Toby?" Rafe questioned him when they spoke on the phone that evening.

"At the risk of your thinking *I'm* falling for her, Rafe, I can't say it any other way than to tell you she's perfect. Her parents have certainly done

their homework. I still didn't meet their son—he's at school right now—but the four of us never ran out of things to talk about and Shelby was as gracious and intelligent as I remembered. If I had wished to marry and God had blessed me with children, I would desire my own son to meet such a girl."

"All right, Toby. Thank you for everything you've done. I believe I'll write a letter to Mr. Parker. Do you think it will be well received?"

"Absolutely. I can't say he won't be surprised, but from what I know of him, he's a very levelheaded man."

"Can you supply me with an address?"

"Yes, I have it right here."

Rafe hung up the phone just minutes later. He sat at the massive desk in his study and stared across at the book-filled shelves that surrounded him. The fading daylight was at his back, and for long moments he simply prayed. He thanked God for the wonderful son He had seen fit to give them. It had not been easy, but Nikolai had been worth every moment of heartache. He asked God to give him the words he needed and picked up his pen.



Henley

Daria studied her husband's surprised face as he stood with the letter in his hand.

"Are you all right?" she felt a need to ask.

"I think so," he answered, immediately handing her a piece of fine stationery. The envelope had dropped to the floor. He had been home from work only a few minutes—he had a barbershop downtown—and had not had a chance until that moment to look at the post. The letter from King Rafe was not exactly shocking, but it was a surprise.

“Josiah, why would the king want to meet with you?”

“I haven’t any idea, but did you notice? He would prefer our meeting be kept between the two of us.”

“Should you have told me?” Daria asked.

“You must not have finished the letter,” he said. “He says at the end that he’ll understand my need to discuss it with my wife, but to please keep the letter confined to the two of us.”

For a moment they sat without moving. Daria read the letter completely before handing it back to Josiah.

“So you’re going to meet him.” Daria’s reply was a statement, not a question.

“Certainly. I’m going to reply right now.”

Josiah did just that, a bit rattled by it all. He forgot he hadn’t told the king he would have his wife along until after he walked back to town to mail the note.

No matter, he thought as he went up the stone steps and into his house. I have to have her with me, and that’s all there is to it.



Faraday

The restaurant where Josiah had been invited to meet the king was small but not what anyone would call crowded. The dining facilities included private rooms. Josiah was ushered into one of them, where he met Pendaran’s king. He immediately explained his hearing loss and his need to have Daria interpret for him. That woman was in the car, sick with nerves and feeling like an interloper.

She need not have worried. The queen was along, and both Rafe and

Erica were delighted that Josiah had brought his wife. She was summoned from the car and in short order met the queen and king herself.

“It’s so gracious of you to come,” Erica wasted no time in saying.

“We feel quite honored,” Daria said sincerely as the two shook hands.

“Please sit down,” the king bade them and waited for everyone to get comfortable at the small, square table.

“Erica has asked a huge favor of me,” he began almost as soon as they were seated. “She’s asked that I not keep you in suspense, so even before we eat, I’d like to tell you why I wanted to meet with you.”

Both Josiah and Daria nodded, relaxing in the warmth of the king’s manner and words.

“Toby Newbury is a close friend of mine,” Rafe continued. “I would never want you to think he was spying on your family, but he was very impressed with all of you, and most especially with your daughter, Shelby. She’s the reason I wanted to meet with you.”

Rafe took a breath and plunged on. “If you have no objections, I would like to speak with Shelby about marrying our son, Nikolai.”

Daria felt the blood drain from her face but was incapable of speech or movement. Josiah was in much the same shape. Daria had signed the words for him, but had it not been for the shock on her face, he would have been certain he’d misunderstood.

“It sounds so crude and unfeeling,” Erica inserted softly. “We hope and pray that you’re not offended. We’re quite eager to do right by everyone, but we know it’s all so unusual.”

“May I ask you a question?” Daria said, finally finding her voice.

“Please do.” Rafe’s low answer and sincere gaze told her of his own eagerness to please.

“Why Shelby? Of course, we think she’s wonderful, but she’s never talked of meeting either of you.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t explain from the beginning,” Rafe began. “Recently

Nikolai has come to us for help in finding a second wife. We asked Toby to be praying with us about it, and then he met your family at a dinner some weeks ago. He came to us the next morning and said he was very impressed with Shelby.

“I will admit that we have made some discreet inquiries, and although we haven’t had the privilege of meeting Shelby in person, we are also very impressed with your daughter.”

“So much so that you wish her to become the princess?” Josiah questioned.

“Not against your wishes, or hers,” Rafe swiftly assured him. “We had no desire to upset your family or Shelby’s world by rushing in and making a mess of this, and if we’ve done so already, we are deeply sorry. But both Erica and I feel a great peace about this. If you have no objections and believe she will hear us out, we would like to go to her with the question. If you feel she won’t be the slightest bit interested, then we won’t bother her with this at all.”

“I assume we’re speaking of a marriage of convenience?” Daria asked.

“I’m sure it will start out that way. I hope and pray it will become more.”

There was no reason to ask why they couldn’t hold off on the marriage until they had “more.” You couldn’t live in Pendaran and not be aware of the tradition.

Looking at their surprised faces, Erica rushed to reassure them. “We’ll certainly understand if you don’t have an answer for us right now.”

Josiah and Daria looked at one another. Shelby’s father took a moment to read his wife’s face before saying, “As a matter of fact, I don’t have any objections to your speaking with Shelby. I can promise you that she’ll have dozens of questions, and Daria and I would like to be there when you meet with her, but I feel honored that you would consider our daughter suitable for the prince.”

It was now Rafe and Erica’s turn to be at a loss.

“Please don’t misunderstand us,” Daria went on. “We’re not saying Shelby will agree, and as you might expect, we would never pressure her to do so, but our daughter is a very clearheaded young woman. If she believes she can serve God and her country in this way, she’ll agree.”

“And you would support her?” the king asked of Josiah.

“Yes. As long as we were certain that she had given the matter enough thought and that she would be safe and cared for at the palace.”

They eventually ate lunch, but both the Parkers and the king and queen parted with a feeling of unreality. Erica thought how she would have reacted if someone had come to her with such an offer. She had feared the Parkers might run for the hills; the fact that they hadn’t was the most amazing thing to the queen.

The Parkers were just as overwhelmed. Driving home they tried to decide if they had dreamed the entire episode.