

WHILE I'AM AWAY

A young Prince, on a motoring holiday in Scotland, decided to drive alone through an ancient forest rich in legend. Unaccustomed to electric cars, he had failed to check it was fully charged. The car came to a halt in the deepest part of the forest. There was no signal on his mobile so he decided to climb a hill he'd passed earlier in the hope of getting a network there.

It took him about half an hour to reach the top of the hill but even from this elevation there was no network. He could see above the forest and scanned the landscape for any sign of habitation. There were some buildings but far away beyond the forest. He was about to return to his car when he saw a flash of light.

Looking closely, he discovered the sun's rays were being reflected from the window of a castle which had previously been hidden in the forest. Like any decent Prince, he realised that in a castle in an enchanted forest there must be a beautiful Princess needing rescue. The least he could do was investigate. Anyway, there might be a phone there to call for help. He found an overgrown path that led to the castle.

The castle door was unlocked but there was no sign of activity. Legend suggested any Princess would be in the turret so the Prince went there directly and found her sleeping. He knew his duty so without hesitation he kissed her. The Princess woke immediately and she and the Prince fell in love at first sight.

"My love," she said, "I was told one day my Prince would come and now in the spring of 2024 you are here."

"2023," the Prince corrected.

"Oh, no," she sobbed, "I love you so much but you've come a year too early. I can't give myself to you yet. You must leave and come back next year."

They parted in tears. The Prince returned to his car and was rescued by several of his servants who had come looking for him.

The following spring the Prince travelled back to his destiny. His love for the Princess had grown during their separation and he was convinced they would be together forever. He detoured to a nearby town to buy flowers. Wandering down the High Street, he was stopped in his tracks by the sight of a woman with a baby coming towards him. Stunned, he recognised the Princess and she burst into tears when she saw him.

"Oh my Prince," she cried, "why didn't we take our chance of love. If we had stayed together this would never have happened."

Sobbing, she told him some months after they had parted she had been raped in her sleep by a close friend of her family and became pregnant. Her family had insisted that she married the father of the child.

So, no happy ending here. The moral: seize the day, second chances are rare.