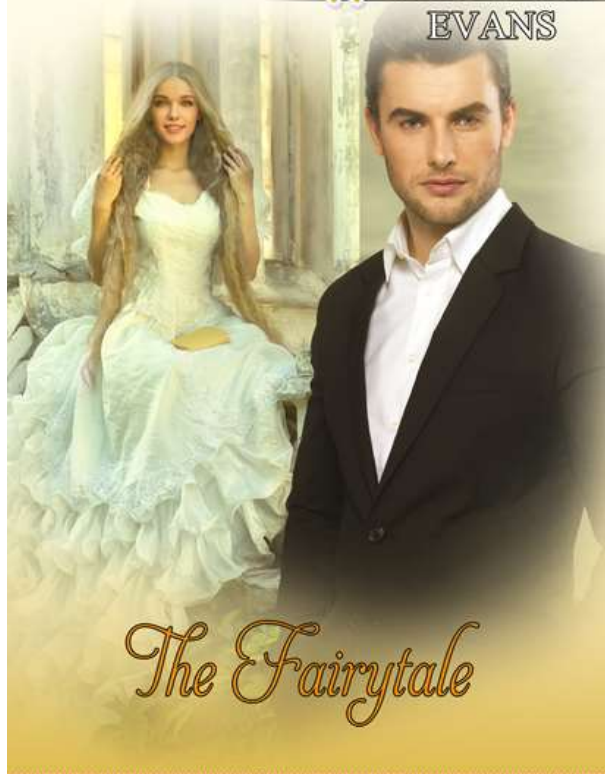




MARIANNE  
EVANS



*The Fairytale*

# The Fairytale

Marianne Evans

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### **The Fairytale**

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Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

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### Publishing History

First Pure Amore Edition, 2017

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-61116-935-5

**Published in the United States of America**

## *Dedication*

Once upon a time, I met a prince. We fell in love and we married. We shared good times and bad. Through it all we've loved one another and lifted each other up in prayer. So, to Steve Evans, my forever love and real-life happy ending, I dedicate the pages of *The Fairytale*. Thank you for making my dreams come true. I love you beyond measure.



## *What People are Saying*

Marianne Evans is the queen of Christian romance. ~ Nancee Marchinowski, Book Reviewer and Blogger, Perspectives by Nancee

Journey from pain and despair to faith and hope, and finally to deep and fulfilling love. ~ NYT Bestselling Author Ruth Ryan Langan on Siobhan's Beat

Opened it up this afternoon and didn't stop reading until the last page. ~ Denise F, Amazon Reader Review on IDA Award Winner, Maria's Angel

Devotion - Booksellers Best Award Winner and ACRA Heart of Excellence Award winner

Hearts Communion - Christian Small Publisher Book of the Year Award Winner and ACRA Heart of Excellence Award Winner.







*In Him all things were created: things in heaven  
and on earth, visible and invisible,  
whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;  
all things have been created through Him and for  
Him. ~Colossians 1:16*

# 1

Today was one of those days when Amy Monarch cursed the advent of twenty-four-hour television news. In mere seconds—the moment of time it took for a sweet, impressionable girl of five to look up and catch an image on the television screen—Amy’s day was upended.

Her chest pulled tight, and her pulse thumped and pushed as she locked a smile into place and joined Jackie Arnauld—one of her favorite guests at the Dupont Rescue and Recovery Center. The five-year-old initiated conversation by pointing at the small flat screen suspended in a corner of the facility’s main gathering room. Jackie sat at one of the

large, low-slung tables designed for kids, her coloring book and crayons now forgotten. "She's always so sparkly and pretty. I wonder what it would be like...to be a princess like her."

*Her* was Amelia Marguerite Louise DeLaGrande, the princess of Remeth. Amy's smile faltered as she studied the on-screen image of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman who commanded the podium at a press conference recently held in an opulent Parisian embassy. Centered on screen, Princess Amelia extolled the virtues of volunteer service and community activism that was part of the platform of her visit to the French capital earlier in the week.

"Cultural change begins with individual activism. Cultural change begins small and spreads to encompass the home, the neighborhood, the city, and before long, an entire country..."

The remainder of that hopeful sound-bite faded from Amy's notice as she knelt next to the child-sized chair Jackie occupied. She pushed a thick wave of brunette hair across her shoulder and focused intently on her companion. "No one's life is perfect, sweetheart. Not even hers. You can trust me on that."

Careful of being too vehement, the words

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crept in on a ripple of caution. Children were perceptive.

Jackie's chin trembled, and Amy's steadfast resolve shattered. Head hung, the child's large brown eyes glittered, cresting with tears. "Any life is better than mine. Especially hers." Sniffing, returning to her watch of the television, Jackie swiped her runny nose with the back of her hand. "She gets to go anywhere she wants in the whole world. She gets to meet the coolest people." Enthusiastically, Jackie delineated a list of A-list celebs. "She has diamonds. Gowns. And crowns. Oh, I'd love to have a crown like hers. Look at that one."

Amy followed the angle of Jackie's pointing finger. On TV spun a montage of the princess's arrival at a fundraising gala. Camera flashes exploded, transforming the ink-black night with strobes as she stepped from the confines of a black limousine. This time she wore a long, shimmering dress of gold that swept a fluid line against her figure. Framed by the Arc de Triomphe in the distance, her glamour enflamed the crowd to a frenzy; her smile dazzled. A delicate diamond tiara adorned the upswept curls of her hair. On screen, Princess Amelia paused to greet individual members of the military who lined an outside stairwell.

Amy's heart lurched; pain seeped into her spirit via cracks and crevices that threatened to give way.

Meanwhile, Jackie's tears dried while she lost herself in a luxurious world of royalty all over again. Amy bit down a futile curse, swallowing aggravation behind a steady smile and the tender glide of her fingertips against the abundance of Jackie's curly brown hair.

"Your life is going to be amazing." Amy did her best to assure. "You and your mom are working hard and moving forward. Together. You're going to be just fine. Keep pushing, OK? You're not a princess by title, but you're just as much a member of royalty as she is."

Jackie rested her head against Amy's shoulder for a few seconds, comforted, but obviously not entirely convinced. "Thank you, Miss Amy." The words were a heartfelt whisper. "You're the nicest. You're always so good to me and my mommy." In an instant, Jackie's tired posture evaporated. She straightened and focused intently while a final display of the "Princess in Paris" moved across the television screen.

Amy tasted the child's longing; catching its flavor, she experienced a sharp pierce to the heart. This small innocent and her mom

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were desperate, poised on the edge of a precipice teetering between hope and despair. Yet they soldiered on. That was true heroism.

The Dupont Rescue and Recovery Center worked many miracles in an effort to push matters toward hope and Christ-centered ministry. Founded by Queen Phillimina of Remeth, Dupont acted as a help center located at the heart of city's capital, Etiria, which formed the hub of a busy, tourist-driven business district. Within the sheltering walls of Dupont, people found sanctuary as they recovered from home or job loss, abuse, addiction, mental illness or any number of circumstances that led to indigence. The Isle of Remeth was so breathtaking, outsiders might easily believe every square meter of its lavish expanse was burnished by the gold-dust of luxury. Truth told a different story. Nestled within the cobalt waters of the Mediterranean not far from the coastline of France lived people who struggled to find even the most basic comforts. At Dupont, counselors worked with the displaced and disenfranchised, doing their best to help them beat overwhelming odds.

Amy had been a volunteer at Dupont for close to six months now, and no other work in her life had been as fulfilling. Turning twenty-five had set her on a precipice of her

own, igniting an unquenchable, unyielding fire to either serve people one-to-one, or surrender to a life lived from afar, with nothing of deepest meaning to show for that calling.

Despite a present bout of heartache for Jackie's circumstances, this moment affirmed Amy's decision and kept her focused on one all-important goal: Service. One-to-one service.

\*\*\*\*

What an incredible view.

Paused in the midst of a pickup basketball game with a group of kids from the Dupont Rescue and Recovery Center, Patrick Sawyer propped the round-ball against his hip and surrendered to a moment of rest so he could polish some sweat from his brow and savor his surroundings.

The terrain of Etiria never failed to capture his attention and seduce a piece of his soul. The city was picturesque, perched upon a steep hilltop that overlooked the sea. Rows of ancient stone buildings lined narrow, angling roadways. Now, at the dawning of spring, window boxes overflowed shutter-framed archways with all kinds of colorful flowers—some fat and ornate, some delicate and small. Each bloom seemed to perfume the air with sweet spice. A sky of deep blue

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crowned an ocean shore that danced and flashed, and Patrick closed his eyes to saturate himself with the warmth of the sun and—

“Hey, Patrick, are you going to stand there gawking all day, or do you want to get back to teaching these kids a thing or two about getting creamed at basketball?” Cameron Lakey, Patrick’s host and close friend, brushed by and gave him a shove.

As expected, the kids and volunteers faced off over the mild insult; a chorus of hoots and a round of mild trash talk ensued in a mix of French and chopped English. Although three years removed from the French classes he had taken at NYU, the native language of Remeth returned to Patrick with surprising ease. “Armand, stop holding back. If you see an opening, charge for the basket and push on through,” he called out.

The game resumed in earnest, and Patrick enjoyed the exercise, working up another healthy sweat as sneakers squeaked, and grunts, groans and play-calls cut the humid air. He lobbed a pass to Armand, determined to keep the youngster in practice with the concept of exerting forward pressure.

Right on cue, Armand filled the pocket

and angled for the ball. That's when Patrick realized Armand was on a direct collision course with a little girl who had emerged from inside the center along with one of the staff volunteers. Armand didn't see them, and Patrick had no chance to give warning.

A body slam, a thump and shouts of surprise led to chaos.

The youngster squealed as Armand crashed into her. The volunteer, a petite brunette with cat-like reflexes, grabbed her charge and rolled onto the pavement, bearing the brunt of impact while her body protected the little girl.

Patrick dashed forward. Armand was sprawled backward, startled but unharmed. The doe-eyed child looked at Patrick with moist eyes and a trembling chin as she clung to her escort. The volunteer seemed to have taken on the worst of the unexpected tangle; he noticed the way a nasty set of abrasions had already formed along her left forearm and elbow.

"I'm so sorry. Are you OK?" Patrick offered a hand to assist her to her feet. When she accepted the gesture, he absorbed the finite tremble of her fingertips. Shocked, he determined; she had been caught quite off guard. "You're starting to bleed a bit. Please, let me help you get those cuts and gravel



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burns cleaned.”

“No trouble. I’m quite all right. Thank you.”

There was something almost regal—yet so gentle—in her tone, something graceful about the way she unscrambled from the fall and helped the child to her feet before allowing Patrick to do the same for her. He kept hold of her uninjured arm while she flexed her wrist, elbow and fingers. All seemed well, thank goodness. Patrick double-checked Armand and wrapped a comforting arm around the stunned boy’s shoulders.

“We were headed for the swing set,” the female volunteer continued. “I thought we had enough room to pass by.”

“I’m afraid that’s my fault. I had just given Armand here a few pointers about charging for the basket. He learned his lesson well.” After a quick ruffle of Armand’s hair, Patrick retrieved the basketball and handed it off to Armand who already seemed set to rejoin the game. Patrick refocused on his colleague. “I’m Patrick Sawyer.”

“I’m Amy Monarch, and I’m pleased to meet you.” She gave a wry chuckle. “Well, let’s say I’m as pleased as I can be under the circumstances.”

“True enough.”

She caught sight of building blood

droplets, blossoming red marks and a series of small, splotchy bruises that continued to grow. The injuries clinched it for Patrick. No way could he watch her suffer needlessly. "I'm new here, so I don't know the lay of the land very well, but if you lead me to the first aid kit, I'd like to help you get bandaged. It's the least I can do after causing this mess."

"It's not your fault at all, and that's very kind. Thank you."

For an instant, he fell into eyes of rich brown. There were appealing layers of softness to this woman, a sense of vulnerability but inherent grace. He snapped to when she smiled and led the way inside.

All the same, an unbidden thought flowed through him at once. *What an attractive woman...*

\*\*\*\*

This, Amy thought, was most unusual.

No question she was in pain. Disinfecting swabs burned just like they should. As expected, the palm of her hand throbbed while Patrick cleansed her wounds beneath a wash of warm water, patted her skin dry, then settled a gauze pad into place using narrow strips of white medical tape.

The tenderness of his touch, the way he ministered to her, both soothed and enlivened. Therein rested the unusual.

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Distract, Amy thought. Distract and divert. She cleared her throat, attempting to dismiss a deep-seeded quiver as he cupped her hand in his and pressed a cool, moist washcloth against her forearm. “So...umm...you’re an American.”

“The accent is kind of a giveaway, huh?”

He glanced up, a grin dawning like daybreak. Not so helpful to the distract-and-divert strategy, but completely beautiful just the same. A tumble of dark brown hair crested his brow, drawing her focus to the damp waves that curved against his temples and along the collar of his polo shirt. Amy continued to stare, grateful he didn’t seem to notice her rapt appraisal. Perhaps she had fallen victim to some form of damsel-in-distress infatuation...?

“Where are you from in the States?”

“I’m New York City born and raised.”

“Oh, New York is amazing.”

“Have you been?”

He was visibly eager—drawn to the topic. Amy’s breath hitched. She battled against an instinct to back away fast—and cringe. “I visited New York a while ago. It’s such an amazing city. I loved it.”

Deliberately he stopped, and looked into her eyes. “Want to know what I love? I love the way you protected that little girl. Your

tuck and roll maneuver seemed instinctive.”

Amy’s pulse took off as his fingertips glanced against her wrist and he held her hand, seeming to double-check his bandaging skills. *Find a proper breath, for heaven’s sake...*

“That’s Jackie. I’ve known her for several weeks now, and, yes, my actions were instinctive. She’s had a lot to deal with. I didn’t want to see her hurting any more than she already is, so I tried to block the fall.”

“Better you than her, huh?”

“Absolutely.” Sparks of admiration telegraphed from his eyes and stirred a delightful tickle in her chest. “So, how did you find your way to Remeth?”

“I’m here for a visit with some friends of mine from college. I spent a couple months here years ago as part of a study abroad program when I was in college.”

“That’s wonderful. Welcome back.”

“Thanks. I do love it here.” He polished off a successful session of medical care by restashing supplies then he leaned against the counter of the small kitchenette where they stood. “But that’s only part of it.”

“Oh?”

“I’ve come back to Remeth because I’m trying to find myself...and the road ahead.”

Amy rested a hand against his arm and came upon warm skin, sinew, well-honed

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physical strength. "I know the feeling. That's part of why I'm working at Dupont."

His focus went intent. "Really?"

"I've been trying so hard to go still, to listen to the prompts God gives me, but I'm afraid I'm missing the mark. Until now. Until here. I love seeing the results of the work that's being done. It's like witnessing a miracle, and I get to be part of it in some small way. Take Jackie for example. She's only got her mother, and they look out for one another. A two-person fortress. I love seeing them together, and watching them make progress. The support we give can really change lives."

"That's the kind of idealism I want to rediscover." He disposed of extra tape and a few used cotton swabs. "That's why my friend Cam enlisted me to volunteer. It's been a rough year to begin with, then some strange form of quarter-life crisis hit me when I turned twenty-five a few weeks ago—"

"Wait. What? Twenty-five?" She didn't mean to interrupt, and she definitely wanted to know more about him, and the battles he had evidently faced, but an arrow-strike hit home with the accuracy of a bulls-eye.

"Yes, why?"

"I went through the exact same type of twenty-five year-old wake-up call, only it