

Anna
Grade 12
Southwest Branch Genre: Original Fiction

Title: The Literary Princess

Princess Amelia loved books. She loved adventures and tragedies, romances and poetry, comedies and thrillers. There wasn't a single book she didn't love, and three rooms in the castle had been converted into her personal library. She treated books like a starving man treats food: precious and

priceless, of which there is never enough. "Books are magic in paper and ink," she would say. But her parents did not share this opinion.

"Amelia," they said, "You must stop paying so much attention to books!

You are nearly eighteen and must be married soon." But Amelia would just sigh and turn another page, until her parents were at their wits end. By the time Amelia was of marriageable age, tales of her passion for books had reached far and wide, and kings, princes, and dukes began sending her heaps of stories, each secretly hoping to win her favor by them. Amelia graciously accepted all the gifts, but made no promises.

It happened one day, as she sat amongst her leather-bound treasures, happy as a frog among the lily pads, that a squire entered with yet another gift of books from some far-off dignitary. The princess thanked him politely, and, noting the way he gazed longingly at the shelves around him, asked "Do you like to read?" The young man shook his head sadly. "Nay, m'lady," he

said, "I don't know how." Amelia's brow puckered. "'Don't know

how?'" she repeated, "Whatever do you mean?" The squire shrugged.

"My parents were poor, your highness. We couldn't afford books." Amelia was very puzzled by this. As previously stated, she was a princess, and lived a very sheltered life. She knew that poor folk existed, of course, but it had never occurred to her that there were people in the world who didn't know how to read. "Well, then," she said after a moment. "If you'd like to

learn, I shall teach you. Come back tomorrow."

The very next day, the squire, who's name was Malcolm, returned to the library for his first lesson. He was, understandably, embarrassed at being taught by a girl his same age, but this he soon forgot and made quick progress. The secret lessons went on for weeks, and as Malcolm's skill in reading grew, so did a love between the two young souls. This quickly became an unbreakable bond, and Amelia felt that she could never truly love another man. But one dark day, her hopes were dashed against the rock of her parent's will. "This simply must stop!" they ordered her. "We've

gotten so many books from so many suitors that the castle is beginning to look like a bookseller's! The knights can't practice jousting because the poems are taking up the tilting yard, the milkmaids are sitting on stacks of books instead of stools, and the throne room is so full of stories that we can't even see the thrones! You must pick your favorite gift, and the man who sent it is the one you will marry!" Poor Amelia begged for a few days to consider the matter, then retreated to her library to nurse her sorrows amidst piles of ancient texts.

Next morning, Malcolm arrived for his lesson, bringing with him an old book of sonnets. He read one of these aloud to the princess, with many a halting

pronunciation and momentary pause, but smiling all the while. When he finished, he found the princess looking thoughtful. "Why did you purchase that book?" she asked. "Surely you could hardly afford it." Malcolm blushed. "I care nothing for cost," he said valiantly, "I only wished

to make you happy." Amelia suddenly leapt up and snatched the book from his hands, then dashed down the hallway with Malcolm close at her heels. Seconds later she burst into the royal apartment, where her parents were just finishing breakfast. They looked up in surprise when their daughter threw

open the door and rushed up to them, breathless and smiling, accompanied by a red-faced and very confused squire. "I've chosen my favorite gift,"

Amelia announced, "It was given to me by a man who bought it with the sweat of his brow and the goodness of his heart, not by a duke with thousands of books at his fingertips. He," she said, pointing at Malcolm, "is the man

I will marry. And I love him very much indeed." The king and queen gaped and sputtered and swore, but in the end even they had to admit that Malcom's gift was the only one given out of pure intentions and not out of ambition.

So the princess and the squire were married, and lived many happy years together, building libraries and schools across the kingdom. In fact, they still live there to this day, and you can go to see them if you'd like. I suggest looking in the castle library first, as that is where they spend most of their time; among dusty volumes and old poems, quietly and serenely enjoying that magical pastime we know as reading.