THE PRINCESS BRIDE
S. Morgenstern's Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure
The 'good parts' version abridged by WILLIAM GOLDMAN
For Hiram Haydn

Abridged to Match the Audiobook
Audio Version Narrated by: Rob Reiner

Part 1
1941. Autumn. I'm a little cranky because my radio won't get the football games.

I lie back, listening to the soaps, and after a little I try finding Northwestern versus Notre Dame game, and my stupid radio will pick up every Chicago station except the one carrying the game. It was so frustrating I was lying there sweating and my stomach felt crazy and I was pounding the top of the radio to make it work right and that was how they discovered I was delirious with pneumonia.

Pneumonia today is not what it once was, especially when I had it. Ten days or so in the hospital and then home for the long recuperating period. I just was this lump going through a strength-gathering time, period. Which is how you have to think of me when I came upon The Princess Bride.

It was my first night home. Drained; still one sick cookie. My father came in, I thought to say good night. He sat on the end of my bed. "Chapter One. The Bride," he said. It was then only I kind of looked up and saw he was holding a book.

I said, "Huh? What? I didn't hear."
"Chapter One. The Bride." He held up the book then. "I'm reading it to you for relax."
"By S. Morgenstern. Great Florinese writer. The Princess Bride."
"Has it got any sports in it?"
"Sounds okay," I said, and I kind of closed my eyes. "I'll do my best to stay awake . . . but I'm awful sleepy, Daddy. . . ." Who can know when his world is going to change? Who can tell before it happens, that every prior experience, all the years, were a preparation for . . . nothing. Picture this now: an all-but-illiterate old man struggling with an enemy tongue, an all-but-exhausted young boy fighting against sleep. Who could suspect that in the morning a different child would wake?

Even a week later I was not aware of what had begun that night, the doors that were slamming shut while others slid into the clear. Perhaps I should have at least known something, but maybe not; who can sense revelation in the wind? What happened was just this: I got hooked on the story.

For the first time in my life, I became actively interested in a book. Me the sports fanatic, me the game freak, me the only ten-year-old in Illinois with a hate on for the alphabet wanted to know what happened next. I got hooked on the story. My whole life really began with my father reading me the Morgenstern and long before I was even married, I knew I was going to share it with my son. So when Jason was born I made a mental note to buy him a copy of The Princess Bride for his tenth birthday.

Flash forward:
Jason’s 10th birthday. Suppertime, Thursday. Jason was piling the mashed potatoes on his plate. "I really loved the book, Dad. It was great."
"What was your favorite part?"
"Chapter One. The Bride," Jason said.
"How about the climb up the Cliffs of Insanity?" I said. That's in Chapter Five.
"Oh, great," Jason said.
"And that description of Prince Humperdinck's Zoo of Death?" That's in the second chapter.
"Even greater," Jason said.
"What knocked me out about it," I said, "was that it's this very short little passage on the Zoo of Death but yet somehow you just know it's going to figure in later. Did you get that same feeling?"
"Umm-humm." Jason nodded. "Great."
By then I knew he hadn't read it. "He tried to read it," Helen cut in. "He did read the first chapter. Chapter Two was impossible for him, so when he'd made a sufficient and reasonable attempt, I told him to stop. Different people have different tastes. I told him you'd understand, Willy."

Of course I understood. I felt just so deserted though. How could he not like it? Then I went to the library, closed myself in, hunted out The Princess Bride. I flicked to the title page, and right there it was: S. Morgenstern’s classic of true love and adventure. You had to admire a guy who called his own new book a classic before it was published and anyone else had a chance to read it. I skimmed the first chapter, and it was pretty much exactly as I remembered. Then I turned to the second chapter, the one about Prince Humperdinck and the little kind of tantalizing description of the Zoo of Death.
And that's when I began to realize the problem.

Morgenstern wasn't writing any children's book; he was writing a kind of satiric history of his country and the decline of the monarchy in Western civilization. But my father only read me the action stuff, the good parts. He never bothered with the serious side at all.

About two in the morning I called Hiram in Martha's Vineyard. Hiram Haydn's been my editor for a dozen years, and we've been through a lot together, but never any phone calls at two in the morning.

"Hey, Hiram," I began after about six rings. "Listen, you guys published a book just after World War I. Do you think it might be a good idea for me to abridge it and we'd republish it now? I'd just use the good parts. Look, I'll call you tomorrow about the specifics, okay?"

"Could you make it a little earlier in the business day, Bill?"
I laughed and we hung up. The abridgement got done, and you're about to hear it. The "good parts" version.

I know I don't expect this to change anybody else's life the way it altered mine. But take the title words "true love and high adventure" I believed that once. I thought my life was going to follow that path. Prayed that it would. Obviously it didn't, but I don't think there's high adventure left any more. Nobody takes out a sword nowadays and cries, "Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father; prepare to die!" Anyway, here's the "good parts" version. S. Morgenstern wrote it. And my father read it to me. And now I give it to you. What you do with it will be of more than passing interest to us all.
The Princess Bride
S. Morgenstern’s classic tale of
true love and high adventure
The “good parts” version by William Goldman

One
THE BRIDE

The year that Buttercup was born, the most beautiful woman in the world was a French scullery maid named Annette. Annette worked in Paris for the Duke and Duchess de Guiche, and it did not escape the Duke's notice that someone extraordinary was polishing the pewter. The Duke's notice did not escape the notice of the Duchess either, who was not very beautiful but plenty smart. The Duchess set about studying Annette and shortly found her adversary's tragic flaw.

Chocolate.

Armed now, the Duchess set to work. The Palace de Guiche turned into a candy castle. There were piles of chocolate-covered mints in the drawing rooms, baskets of chocolate-covered nougats in the parlors. Annette never had a chance. Inside a season, she went from delicate to whopping, and the Duke never glanced in her direction without sad bewilderment clouding his eyes.

Buttercup, at fifteen, knew none of this. She was not the most beautiful woman in the world, barely in the top twenty, and that primarily on potential, certainly not on any particular care she took of herself. She hated to wash her face, she loathed the area behind her ears, she was sick of combing her hair. What she liked to do was to ride her horse and taunt the farm boy. The horse's name was "Horse" (Buttercup was never long on imagination) and it came when she called it. And it did what she told it. The farm boy did what she told him too. Actually, he was more a young man now, but he had been a farm boy when, orphaned, he had come to work for her father, and Buttercup referred to him that way still. "Farm Boy, fetch me this"; "Get me that, Farm Boy quickly, lazy thing, trot now or I'll tell Father."
"As you wish."
That was all he ever answered. "As you wish."
He lived in a hovel out near the animals and, according to Buttercup's mother, he kept it clean. He even read when he had candles.

When Buttercup was almost seventeen, a man in a carriage came to town and watched as she rode for provisions. Other men had gone out of their way to catch sight of her; other men had even ridden twenty miles for the privilege, as this man had. The importance here is that this was the first rich man who had bothered to do so. And it was this man, whose name is lost to antiquity, who mentioned Buttercup to the Count. The land of Florin was set between where Sweden and Germany would eventually settle. (This was before Europe.) In theory, it was ruled
King Lotharon and his second wife, the Queen. But in fact, the King was barely hanging on, could only rarely tell day from night, and basically spent his time in muttering.

Prince Humperdinck actually ran things. If there had been a Europe, he would have been the most powerful man in it. Even as it was, nobody within a thousand miles wanted to mess with him.
The Count was Prince Humperdinck's only confidant. His last name was Rugen. The Countess was considerably younger than her husband. All of her clothes came from Paris (this was after Paris) and she had superb taste. (This was after taste, too, but only just. And since it was such a new thing, and since the Countess was the only lady in all Florin to possess it, is it any wonder she was the leading hostess of the land?) In sum, the Rugens were Couple of the Week in Florin, and had been for many years.

"Quick, quick, come" Buttercup's father stood in his farmhouse, staring out the window.
Buttercup came close and stood behind them, staring over them, and soon she was gasping too,
because the Count and Countess and all their pages and soldiers and servants and courtiers and champions and carriages were passing by the cart track at the front of the farm.
"What could they want to ask me about?" he said.
"Go see, go see," Buttercup's mother told him.
"You go. Please."
"We'll both go."
They both went.
"Cows," the Count said, when they reached his golden carriage. "I would like to talk about your cows."
"Yes. You see, I'm thinking of starting a little dairy of my own, and since your cows are known throughout the land as being Florin's finest, I thought I might pry your secrets from you."
Buttercup's father turned to his wife.
"What would you say my secret is, my dear?" he asked.
"Oh, there are so many," she said, she was no dummy, not when it came to the quality of their livestock.
"You two are childless, are you?" the Count asked then.
"No, sir," the mother answered.
"Then let me see her," the Count went on "perhaps she will be quicker with her answers than her parents."
"Buttercup," the father called, turning. "Come out please."
Buttercup moved into view, hurrying from the house to her parents. The Count left the carriage.
Gracefully, he moved to the ground and stood very still. He was a big man, with black hair and black eyes and great shoulders and a black cape and gloves.
"Curtsy, dear," Buttercup's mother whispered.
Buttercup did her best. And the Count could not stop looking at her. Understand now, she was barely rated in the top twenty; her hair was uncombed, unclean; her age was just seventeen, so there was still, in occasional places, the remains of baby fat. Nothing was really there but potential. But the Count still could not rip his eyes away.
"The Count would like to know the secrets behind our cows' greatness, is that not correct, sir?"
Buttercup's father said.
"Ask the farm boy; he tends them," Buttercup said.
"And is that the farm boy?" came a new voice from inside the carriage. Then the Countess's face was framed in the carriage doorway. Buttercup's father glanced back toward the lone figure peering around the corner of the house.

"It is."

Then she called out: "You!" and pointed at the farm boy. "Come here." Her fingers snapped on "here." The farm boy did as he was told. And when he was close, the Countess left the carriage. "Have you a name, farm boy?"

"Westley, Countess."

"Well, Westley, perhaps you can help us with our problem."

"We are all of us here passionately interested in the subject of cows. Why, do you suppose, Westley, that the cows of this particular farm are the finest in all Florin. What do you do to them?"

"I just feed them, Countess."

"Well then, there it is, the mystery is solved. Clearly, the magic is in Westley's feeding. Show me how you do it, would you, Westley?" So off they went to the cowshed. Throughout all this, the Count kept watching Buttercup.

"I'll help you," Buttercup called after Westley.

"Perhaps I'd best see just how he does it," the Count decided.

Strange things are happening," Buttercup's parents said, watching the Count, who was watching their daughter, who was watching the Countess. Who was watching Westley.

Buttercup went to her room. She lay on her bed. She closed her eyes. And the Countess was staring at Westley. Buttercup got up from bed. She took off her clothes. She washed a little. She got into her nightgown. She slipped between the sheets, snuggled down, closed her eyes. The Countess would not stop staring at Westley! Why?

The farm boy had eyes like the sea before a storm, but who cared about eyes? And he had pale blond hair, if you liked that sort of thing. And certainly he was muscular, but anybody would be muscular who slaved all day.

"Oh," Buttercup gasped. "Oh, oh dear."

Now the farm boy was staring back at the Countess...

Buttercup jumped out of bed and began to pace her room. How could he? Oh, it was all right if he looked at her, but he wasn't looking at her, he was looking at her. Flailing and thrashing, Buttercup wept and tossed and paced and wept some more, and there have been three great cases of jealousy since David of Galilee was first afflicted with the emotion when he could no longer stand the fact that his neighbor Saul's cactus outshone his own. Buttercup's case rated a close fourth on the all-time list.

She was outside his hovel before dawn. She knocked. He appeared, stood in the doorway. He waited. She looked at him. Then she looked away. He was too beautiful.

"I love you," Buttercup said. "I know this must come as something of a surprise, since all I've ever done is scorn you and degrade you and taunt you, but I have loved you for several hours now, and every second, more. Dearest Westley, I've never called you that before, have I? Westley, Westley, Westley, Westley, Westley darling Westley, sweet perfect Westley, whisper
that I have a chance to win your love." And with that, she dared the bravest thing she'd ever done: she looked right into his eyes.

He closed the door in her face.

Buttercup ran. She whirled and burst away and the tears came bitterly; she could not see, she stumbled, she slammed into a tree trunk, fell, rose, ran on. Back to her room she fled, back to her pillow. Safe behind the locked door, she drenched the world with tears. It was dusk when she heard footsteps outside her door. Then a knock.

"Whoever is that?" Buttercup yawned finally.

"Westley."

She went to her door, unlocked it, and said, in her fanciest tone, "I'm ever so glad you stopped by, I've been feeling just ever so slummy about the little joke I played on you this morning. Of course you knew I wasn't for a moment serious…"

"I've come to say good-by. I'm leaving."

"Leaving?" She held to the doorframe. "Now?"

"Yes."

"Because of what I said this morning?"

"Yes."

"I frightened you away, didn't I? I could kill my tongue."

"I'm going to America. To seek my fortune." (This was just after America but long after fortunes.)

"Do you love me, Westley? Is that it?"

He couldn't believe it. "Do I love you? I have stayed these years in my hovel because of you. I have made my body strong because I thought you might be pleased by a strong body. I have not known a moment in years when the sight of you did not send my heart careening against my rib cage."

"If you're teasing me, Westley, I'm just going to kill you."

"How can you even dream I might be teasing?"

"Well, you haven't once said you loved me."

"I've been saying it so long to you, you just wouldn't listen. Every time you said 'Farm Boy do this' you thought I was answering 'As you wish' but that's only because you were hearing wrong. 'I love you' was what it was, but you never heard, and you never heard."

"I hear you now, and I promise you this: I will never love anyone else. Only Westley. Until I die."

He nodded, took a step away. "I'll send for you soon. Believe me."

He reached out with his right hand. Buttercup found it very hard to breathe. She managed to raise her right hand to his.

They shook.

"Good-by," he said.

She made a little nod. He took a third step, not turning.

She watched him. He turned. And the words ripped out of her: "Without one kiss?"

They fell into each other's arms.

The first morning after Westley's departure, Buttercup thought she was entitled to do nothing more than sit around moping and feeling sorry for herself. She realized that Westley was out in
the world now, getting nearer and nearer to London, and what if a beautiful city girl caught his fancy while she was just back here moldering? She hurried downstairs to where her parents were. "What can I do to improve my personal appearance?"
"Start by bathing," her father said.
"And do something with your hair while you're at it," her mother said.
"That will do nicely for starters," Buttercup said. She shook her head. "Gracious, but it isn't easy being tidy." Undaunted, she set to work. Her hair was the color of autumn, and it had never been cut, so a thousand strokes took time, but she didn't mind, because Westley had never seen it clean like this and wouldn't he be surprised when she stepped off the boat in America. Her skin was the color of wintry cream, and she scrubbed her every inch well past glistening, and that wasn't much fun really, but wouldn't Westley be pleased with how clean she was as she stepped off the boat in America. And very quickly now, her potential began to be realized. Her love for Westley would not stop growing.

Which was why Westley's death hit her the way it did.

She came home from delivering the milk and her parents were wooden.
"Off the Carolina coast," her father whispered.
Her mother whispered, "Without warning. At night."
"What?" from Buttercup.
"Pirates," said her father.
"He's been taken prisoner then?" Buttercup managed.
"It was Roberts," her father said. "The Dread Pirate Roberts."
"Oh," Buttercup said. "The one who never leaves survivors."

She stayed there many days. At first her parents tried to lure her, but she would not have it. They took to leaving food outside her room, and she took bits and shreds, enough to stay alive. And when she at last came out, her eyes were dry. Her parents stared up from their silent breakfast at her. They both started to rise but she put a hand out, stopped them.
"I can care for myself, please," and she set about getting some food. They watched her closely.

In point of fact, she had never looked as well. She had entered her room as just an impossibly lovely girl. The woman who emerged was a trifle thinner, a great deal wiser, and an ocean sadder. This one understood the nature of pain, and beneath the glory of her features, there was character, and a sure knowledge of suffering.

She was eighteen. She was the most beautiful woman in a hundred years. She didn't seem to care.

"You're all right?" her mother asked.
"Yes," Buttercup replied. There was a very long pause. "But I will never love again."
She never did.

Two
THE GROOM
Prince Humperdinck was shaped like a barrel. His chest was a great barrel chest, his thighs mighty barrel thighs. He was not tall but he weighed close to 250 pounds, brick hard. He walked like a crab, side to side, and probably if he had wanted to be a ballet dancer, he would have been doomed to a miserable life of endless frustration. But he didn't want to be a ballet dancer. He wasn't in that much of a hurry to be king either. Even war, at which he excelled, took second place in his affections.

Hunting was his love.

In the beginning, he traversed the world for opposition. But travel consumed time, ships and horses being what they were, and the time away from Florin was worrying. There always had to be a male heir to the throne, and as long as his father was alive, there was no problem. But someday his father would die and then the Prince would be the king and he would have to select a queen to supply an heir for the day of his own death. So to avoid the problem of absence, Prince Humperdinck built the Zoo of Death.

It was underground. The Prince picked the spot himself, in the quietest, remotest corner of the castle grounds. And he decreed there were to be five levels, all with the proper needs for his individual enemies. On the first level, he put enemies of speed: wild dogs, cheetahs, hummingbirds. On the second level belonged the enemies of strength: anacondas and rhinos and crocodiles of over twenty feet. The third level was for poisoners: spitting cobras, jumping spiders, death bats galore. The fourth level was the kingdom of the most dangerous, the enemies of fear: the shrieking tarantula (the only spider capable of sound), the blood eagle (the only bird that thrived on human flesh), plus, in its own black pool, the sucking squid. The fifth level was empty.

The Prince constructed it in the hopes of someday finding something worthy, something as dangerous and fierce and powerful as he was.

He was ringing down the curtain on an orangutan when the business of the King's health made its ultimate intrusion. It was midafternoon, and the Prince had been grappling with the giant beast since morning, and finally, after all these hours, the hairy thing was weakening. Count Rugen's voice interrupted.

"There is news," the Count said. From battle, the Prince replied. "Cannot it wait?"
"For how long?" asked the Count.
C R A C K
The orangutan fell like a rag doll. "Now, what is all this," the Prince replied, stepping past the dead beast, mounting the ladder out of the pit.
"Your father has had his annual physical," the Count said. "I have the report."
"And?"
"Your father is dying."
"Drat!" said the Prince. "That means I shall have to get married."

Three
THE COURTSHP
"I want someone who is so beautiful that when you see her you say, 'Wow, that Humperdinck must be some kind of fella to have a wife like that.' Search the country, search the world, just find her!"
Count Rugen could only smile. "She is already found," he said.
It was dawn when the two horsemen reined in at the hilltop. Count Rugen rode a splendid black horse, large, perfect, powerful. The Prince rode one of his whites.

"She delivers milk in the mornings," Count Rugen said.
"And she is truly-without-question-no-posibility-of-error beautiful?"
"She was something of a mess when I saw her," the Count admitted. "But the potential was overwhelming."
"A milkmaid." The Prince ran the words across his rough tongue. "I don't know that I could wed one of them even under the best of conditions. People might snicker that she was the best I could do."
"True," the Count admitted. "If you prefer, we can ride back to Florin City without waiting."
"We've come this far," the Prince said. "We might as well wait…" His voice quite simply died.
"I'll take her," he managed, finally, as Buttercup rode slowly by below them.
"No one will snicker, I think," the Count said.
"I must court her now," said the Prince. "Leave us alone for a minute." He rode the white expertly down the hill. Buttercup had never seen such a giant beast. Or such a rider.
"I am your Prince and you will marry me," Humperdinck said.
Buttercup whispered, "I am your servant and I refuse."
"I am your Prince and you cannot refuse."
"I am your loyal servant and I just did."
"Refusal means death."
"Kill me then."
"I am your Prince and I'm not that bad. How could you rather be dead than married to me?"
"Because," Buttercup said, "marriage involves love, and that is not a pastime at which I excel. I tried once, and it went badly, and I am sworn never to love another."
"Love?" said Prince Humperdinck. "Who mentioned love? Not me, I can tell you. Look: there must always be a male heir to the throne of Florin.. Once my father dies, there won't be an heir, just a king. When that happens, I'll marry and have children until there is a son. So you can either marry me and be the richest and most powerful woman in a thousand miles and give turkeys away at Christmas and provide me a son, or you can die in terrible pain in the very near future. Make up your own mind."
"I'll never love you."
"I wouldn't want it if I had it."
"Then by all means let us marry."
Five
THE ANNOUNCEMENT
The great square of Florin City was filled as never before, awaiting the introduction of Prince Humperdinck's bride-to-be, Princess Buttercup of Hammersmith.

At noontime, Prince Humperdinck appeared at the balcony of his father's castle and raised his arms.

"In three months, our country celebrates its five hundredth anniversary. To celebrate that celebration, I shall, on that sundown, take for my wife the Princess Buttercup of Hammersmith. You do not know her yet. But you will meet her now," and he made a sweeping gesture and the balcony doors swung open and Buttercup moved out beside him on the balcony.

And the crowd, quite literally, gasped. The twenty-one-year-old Princess far surpassed the eighteen-year-old mourner. Her figure faults were gone, the too bony elbow having fleshted out nicely; the opposite pudgy wrist could not have been trimmer. Prince Humperdinck took her hand and held it high and the crowd cheered. "That's enough, mustn't risk overexposure," the Prince said, and he started back in toward the castle.

"They have waited, some of them, so long," Buttercup answered. "I would like to walk among them." And with that she left the balcony, reappeared a moment later on the great steps of the castle and, quite alone, walked open-armed down into the crowd. Most of the people there would never forget that day. None of them, of course, had ever been so close to perfection, and the great majority adored her instantly. There were, to be sure, some who, while admitting she was pleasing enough, were withholding judgment as to her quality as a queen. And, of course, there were some more who were frankly jealous. Very few of them hated her. And only three of them were planning to murder her.

Buttercup, naturally, knew none of this. She was smiling, and when people wanted to touch her gown, well, let them, and when they wanted to brush their skin against hers, well, let them do that too. She had studied hard to do things royally, and she wanted very much to succeed, so she kept her posture erect and her smile gentle, and that her death was so close would have only made her laugh, if someone had told her. But in the farthest corner of the Great Square in the highest building in the land deep in the deepest shadow the man in black stood waiting.

His boots were black and leather. His pants were black and his shirt. His mask was black, blacker than raven. But blackest of all were his flashing eyes. Flashing and cruel and deadly . . .
Buttercup was more than a little weary after her triumph. The touching of the crowds had exhausted her, so she rested a bit, and then, toward midafternoon, she changed into her riding clothes and went to fetch Horse. She still loved to ride, and every afternoon, weather permitting or not, she rode alone for several hours in the wild land beyond the castle.

Dusk was closing in when Buttercup crested the hill. She was perhaps half an hour from the castle, and her daily ride was three-quarters done. Suddenly she reined Horse, for standing in the dimness beyond was the strangest trio she had ever seen. The man in front was dark, Sicilian perhaps, with the gentlest face, almost angelic. He had one leg too short, and the makings of a humpback, but he moved forward toward her with surprising speed and nimbleness. The other two remained rooted. The second, also dark, probably Spanish, was as erect and slender as the blade of steel that was attached to his side. The third man, mustachioed, perhaps a Turk, was easily the biggest human being she had ever ever seen.

"We are but poor circus performers," the Sicilian explained. "It is dark and we are lost. We were told there was a village nearby that might enjoy our skills."
"You were misinformed," Buttercup told him. "There is no one, not for many miles."
"Then there will be no one to hear you scream," the Sicilian said, and he jumped with frightening agility toward her face.
That was all that Buttercup remembered. His hands expertly touched places on her neck, and unconsciousness came.

She awoke to the lapping of water. She was wrapped in a blanket and the giant Turk was putting her in the bottom of a boat.
"I think you should kill her now," the Turk said.
"The less you think, the happier I'll be," the Sicilian answered.
"She must be found dead on the Guilder frontier or we will not be paid the remainder of our fee. Is that clear enough for you?"
"I just feel better when I know what's going on, that's all," the Turk mumbled. "People are always thinking I'm so stupid because I'm big and strong and sometimes drool a little when I get excited."
"The reason people think you're so stupid," the Sicilian said, "is because you are so stupid. It has nothing to do with your drooling."
"Watch your heads," the Spaniard cautioned, and then the boat was moving. "The people of Florin will not take her death well, I shouldn't think. She has become beloved."
"There will be war," the Sicilian agreed. "We have been paid to start it. It's a fine line of work to be expert in. If we do this perfectly, there will be a continual demand for our services."
"Well I don't like it all that much," the Spaniard said. "Frankly, I wish you had refused."
"The offer was too high."
"I don't like killing a girl," the Spaniard said.
"God does it all the time; if it doesn't bother Him, don't let it worry you."
The Spaniard said, "Let's just tell her we're taking her away for ransom."
The Turk agreed. "She's so beautiful and she'd go all crazy if she knew."
"She knows already," the Sicilian said. "She's been awake for every word of this."
"How can you be sure?" the Spaniard asked.

Then he stared ahead. "There!" The Sicilian pointed. "The Cliffs of Insanity." And there they were. Rising straight and sheer from the water, a thousand feet into the night. They provided the most direct route between Florin and Guilder, but no one ever used them, sailing instead the long way, many miles around. Not that the Cliffs were impossible to scale; two men were known to have climbed them in the last century alone.

"Sail straight for the steepest part," the Sicilian commanded. The Spaniard said, "I was." Buttercup did not understand. Going up the Cliffs could hardly be done she thought; and no one had ever mentioned secret passages through them. Yet here they were, sailing closer and closer to the mighty rocks, now surely less than a quarter-mile away. For the first time the Sicilian allowed himself a smile. "All is well. We are miles ahead of anybody and safe, safe, safe." "No one could be following us yet?" the Spaniard asked. "No one," the Sicilian assured him. "It would be inconceivable."

"Absolutely inconceivable?" "Absolutely, totally, and, in all other ways, inconceivable," the Sicilian reassured him. "Why do you ask?"

"No reason," the Spaniard replied. "It's only that I just happened to look back and something's there."

They all whirled. Something was indeed there. Less than a mile behind them across the moonlight was another sailing boat, with a giant sail that billowed black in the night, and a single man at the tiller.

A man in black.

The Spaniard looked at the Sicilian. "It must just be some local fisherman out for a pleasure cruise alone at night through shark-infested waters."

"He's gaining on us," the Turk said. "That is also inconceivable," the Sicilian said. "Before I stole this boat we're in, I made many inquiries as to what was the fastest ship on all of Florin Channel and everyone agreed it was this one."

"You're right," the Turk agreed, staring back. "He isn't gaining on us. He's just getting closer, that's all."

The Cliffs of Insanity were very close now. Then the humpback bounded forward, and as the ship reached the cliff face, he jumped up and suddenly there was a rope in his hand. Buttercup stared in silent astonishment. The rope, thick and strong, seemed to travel all the way up the Cliffs. As she watched, the Sicilian pulled at the rope again and again and it held firm. It was attached to something at the top a giant rock, a towering tree, something.
"Fast now," the Sicilian ordered. "If he is following us, which of course is not within the realm of human experience, but if he is, we've got to reach the top and cut the rope off before he can climb up after us." And then everyone got busy. The Spaniard took a rope, tied Buttercup's hands and feet. The Turk raised a great leg and stomped down at the center of the boat, which gave way immediately and began to sink. Then the Turk went to the rope and took it in his hands.

"Load me," the Turk said. The Spaniard lifted Buttercup and draped her body around the Turk's shoulders. Then he tied himself to the Turk's waist. Then the Sicilian hopped, clung to the Turk's neck. With that the Turk began to climb. It was at least a thousand feet and he was carrying the three, but he was not worried. When it came to power, nothing worried him. When it came to reading, he got knots in the middle of his stomach, and when it came to writing, he broke out in a cold sweat. But strength had never been his enemy. There had never, not in a thousand years, been arms to match Fezzik's. (For that was his name.) The arms were not only gargantuan and totally obedient and surprisingly quick, but they were also, and this is why he never worried, tireless.

And so, even with the Sicilian on his neck and the Princess around his shoulders and the Spaniard at his waist, Fezzik did not feel in the least bit put upon. He was actually quite happy, because it was only when he was requested to use his might that he felt he wasn't a bother to everybody.

The man in black was still there, sailing like lightning toward the Cliffs. He could not have been more than a quarter-mile from them now.
"Faster!" the Sicilian commanded.
"He's left his boat behind," the Spaniard said. "He's jumped onto our rope. He's starting up after us."
"I can feel him," Fezzik said. "His body weight on the rope."
"He'll never catch up!" the Sicilian cried. "Inconceivable!"
"You keep using that word!" the Spaniard snapped. "I don't think it means what you think it does."
"How fast is he at climbing?" Fezzik said.
The Sicilian gathered his courage again and looked down. The man in black seemed almost to be flying. Already he had cut their lead a hundred feet. Perhaps more.
"I thought you were supposed to be so strong!" the Sicilian shouted. "I thought you were this great mighty thing and yet he gains."
"I'm carrying three people," Fezzik explained. "He has only himself and..."
"Fly, Fezzik!" the Sicilian screamed. Fezzik flew. He cleared his mind of everything but ropes and arms and fingers, and his arms pulled and his fingers gripped and the rope held taut and... "He's over halfway," the Spaniard said.
"Halfway to doom is where he is," the Sicilian said. "We're fifty feet from safety, and once we're there and I untie the rope..." He allowed himself to laugh.
Forty feet.
Fezzik pulled.
Twenty.
Ten.
It was over. Fezzik had done it. They had reached the top of the Cliffs, and first the Sicilian jumped off and then the Turk removed the Princess, and as the Spaniard untied himself, he looked back over the Cliffs.

The man in black was no more than three hundred feet away. The Sicilian had untied the rope from its knots around an oak. The rope seemed almost alive, the greatest of all water serpents heading at last for home. It whipped across the cliff tops, spiraled into the moonlit Channel. The Sicilian was roaring now, and he kept at it until the Spaniard said, "He did it."

"Did what?" The humpback came scurrying to the cliff edge. "Released the rope in time," the Spaniard said. "See?" He pointed down. The man in black was hanging in space, clinging to the sheer rock face, seven hundred feet above the water. "He can't hold on much longer," the Sicilian said. "He has to fall soon."

It was at that moment that the man in black began to climb. Not quickly, of course. And not without great effort. But still, there was no doubt that he was, in spite of the sheerness of the Cliffs, heading in an upward direction.

"Inconceivable!" the Sicilian cried. The Spaniard whirled on him. "Stop saying that word."

The Sicilian advanced on the Spaniard now, his wild eyes glittering at the insubordination. "A more logical explanation would be that he is simply an ordinary sailor who dabbles in mountain climbing as a hobby who happens to have the same general final destination as we do. In any case, we cannot take the risk of his seeing us with the Princess, and therefore one of you must kill him."

"Shall I do it?" the Turk wondered. The Sicilian shook his head. "No, Fezzik," he said finally. "I need your strength to carry the girl. Pick her up now and let us hurry along." He turned to the Spaniard. "We'll be heading directly for the frontier of Guilder. Catch up as quickly as you can once he's dead." The Spaniard nodded. The Sicilian hobbled away. The Turk hoisted the Princess, began following the humpback.

The Spaniard waved. "Farewell, Fezzik."

"Farewell, Inigo," the Turk replied. And then he was gone, and the Spaniard was alone.