THE PRINCESS BRIDE by William Goldman. © The Princess Bride Ltd. All Rights Reserved. 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 of 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 and not very rich, but plenty smart. The Duchess set about studying Annette and shortly found the adversary's tragic flaw. Chocolate. Armed now, the Duchess set to work. The Palace de Guiche turned into a candy castle. Everywhere you looked, baskets of chocolate-covered nougats in the drawing rooms, bowls of chocolate-covered mints in the parlors. Annette never got a chance. Inside a season, she went from delicate to whoppin g, and the Duke never glanced in her direction without seeing chocolate. Annette worked in the pastry chef and they both ate a lot until old age claimed them. Things, it might also be noted, did not fare so cheerily for the Duchess. The Duke, for reasons passing understanding, next became smitten with his very own mother-in-law, which caused the Duchess ulcers, only they didn't have ulcers yet. More precisely, ulcers existed, people had them, but they weren't called "ulcers." The medical profession at that time called them "stomach pains" and felt the best cure was coffee dolloped with brandy twice a day until the pains subsided. Not surprisingly, the Duchess's gru mpiness became legendary, as Voltaire has so ably chronicled. The year Buttercup turned ten, the most beautiful woman lived in Bengal, the daughter of a successful tea merchant. This girl's name was Aluthra, and her skin was of a dusky perfection unseen in India for eight y years. (There have been eleven perfect complexions in all of India since accurate accounting began.) Aluthra was nineteen the year the pox plague hit Bengal. The girl survived, as did not. When Buttercup was fifteen, Adela Terrell, of Sussex by the Thames, was easily the most beautiful creature. Adela was twenty, and so far did she outdistance the world that it seemed certain she would be the most beautiful in many, many years. But the one day, one of her suitors (she had 104 of them) exclaimed that without question Adela must be the most ideal item yet spawned. Adela, flattered, beg an to ponder on the truth of the statement. That night, alone in her room, she examined herself pore by pore in her mirror. (This was after mirrors.) It took her until close to dawn to finish her inspection, but by that time the young man had been quite correct in his assessment: she was improving, now lucky I am to be perfect and rich and sought after and sensitive and young and . . . " Young? The mist was rising around her as Adela began to think. Well of course she'll always be young, and I'll always be rich, but I don't quite see how I'm going to manage to always be young and when I'm not young, how am I going to stay perfect? And if I'm not perfect, well, what else is there? What indeed? Adela frowned her brow in desperate thought. It was the first time in her life her brow had ever had to furrow, and Adela gasped when she realized what she had done, horrified that she h ad somehow damaged it, perhaps permanently, and spent the morning, and although she managed to convince herself she was still quite perfect at ever, there was no question that she was not quite happy as she had been. So she begun to fret. The first worry line s appeared within a fortnight; the first wrinkles within a month; and before the year was out, creases abounded. She married soon thereafter, the seriesame man who accused her of sublimity, and gave him merry hell for many years. Buttercup, of course, at fifteen, knew none of this. And if she had, would she ve found it totally unfathomable. How could someone care if it were the most beautiful woman in the world or not. What difference could it have made if you were only third most beautiful? Of the sixth. (Buttercup at this time was nowhere near the top twenty, and that primarily on potential, certainly not on any particular care she took to convince herself she was still quite perfect at ever, there was no question that she was the fairest. The first worry line s name was "Horse" (Buttercup was never long on imagination) and it came when Adela first discovered that she hated reality, was to ride horse and taunt the farm boy. The hor se's name was "Horse" (Buttercup was never long on imagination) and it came when Adela first discovered that she hated reality, was to ride horse and taunt the farm boy. The hor se, and Buttercup referred to him that way still. "Farm Boy, fetch the tris"; "Get me that, Farm Boy—quickly, lazy thing, t now or I'll tell Father." "As you wish." That was all he ever answered. "As you wish. Dry this, Farm Boy. "As you wish." n the range candles." (They had arose then.) "You'll spoil him." Buttercup's mother t (they had arguments then too). they would both turn on their daughter. "You didn't bathe," her father said. "I did, I did" from Buttercup. "Not with water, always answered. "He's slaved for many years; hard work should be rewarded." Then, rather than continue the argumen ather, Buttercup," she said that speech loud, "and she said it otte n. But, like it or not, things were be nelia one morning at the blacksmith's and a was nothing sharp, but at least bette r tercup understood; she knew when "them" was. The boys. The village boys. The be sked about the silence. ginning to happen. Shortly before her sixteenth birthday, Buttercup realized that it had now been more than a mont here were head nods exchanged when she rode through the village or along the cart tracks. But now, for rea in. "The boys don't like girls their size to smell of stables." "Oh, the boys!" Buttercup fairly exploded. "I do not care about the bo e. "I should think, after what you've done, you'd have the courtesy not to pretend to ask." came from Cornell el-written leatherbrained rattleskulled clodpated dim-domed noodle-noggined spheaded lunk-knobbed bo Buttercup?" "Thank you, but the farm boy does that." "Can I go riding with you, Buttercup?" "Thank yo ar, even this early at talk gave way to stammering and flushing and, at the very best, questions about uttercup?" "No, I just don't think it's going to rain, that's all." At night, more often than not, they w boy handled things, emerging silently from the hovel, thrashing a few of them, sending them fly rance here is that this was the first rich man who had bothered to do so, the first noble. An one. He was still there on her return, peering out. 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nce your cows are known throughout the land as be ve knew it well, he had terrible cows. For years, no ne in the area had increased his milk o Every morning she awoke, it possible s. "Neglect not yo by dawn, and got t lbows was just to een out, so a thou d ever every inch w two weeks to fifte t her up to eighth. T ell past glistening, a ent, an unnerved- hat was really what was doing in such a nd th ge ca chan op ok t ur k he ar no time f or ositeb ime, b ch ee or l mn o i y st never disappoin mprove my person ores finished im f-improvement u wrist won't bony e nough). ugh) nd, because ntil w ut like to know the secrets behind our co ws' g rem he othe ld into the afternoon. But then she really set to work. First of all, she took a good cold bath. Then, while her And exercise what remained of her baby fat (little left now; she was nearly eighteen). And very quickly Westley had never seen it clean that and would't be surprised when she stepped off the stley be pleased with how clean she was as she stepped off the boat in America. And very quickly s already ninth and moving. The competition was tremendous now, but the day after she was ninth estley would not stop growing, and people were dazzled when she delivered milk in the morning. So ile now, and some of them would ask after Westley, which was a mistake unless you happened to hav enough to ease her shattered heart. Ba e decency for that. "Sorry," he could ry hard about that for a moment. An rolled his tongue, it would have al , Buttercup," Buttercup dried her . You forgave faults, found perfe changed her clothes, combed her bed d prote brain i lsed. T eps ou ve back and that was that. idn't o me it matered, she wasn't good ide jest a bit too convincingly and, ecup's heart bucked, but she still he you this morning. Of course you ayed on ittle jest or two. Then a knock. Bu ut the little joke p by." Butte ve e my l ran ed ought to say good- ornay. ght rain." "Yes, I suppose it might." "You think you're too good for anybody, don't you, B ell, it might rain." "Yes, I suppose it might." "You think you're too good for anybody, don't you, B roup?" "No; no I don't. I just like riding by myself, that's all." But throughout her sixteenth ye at good were they? All they ever did was pester and vex and annoy. "Can I brush your horse, Can I go riding with you, Buttercup?" "Thank you, but the farm does that." "Can I go riding with you, Buttercup?" "Thank yo ar, even this early at talk gave way to stammering and flushing and, at the very best, questions about uttercup?" "No, I just don't think it's going to rain, that's all." At night, more often than not, they w boy handled things, emerging silently from the hovel, thrashing a few of them, sending them fly rance here is that this was the first rich man who had bothered to do so, the first noble. An one. He was still there on her return, peering out. She plan him no mind and, indeed, by hims ntoat decisions regarding Flori had a certain arbitrary quality that bothered many of t him. The Count was Prince Humperdinck's only confidant. His last name was Rugen, Tonight, I want his tail plaited and his ear ointt. I want him cleaned. Tonight. I want his boots varnished. Butterc ed the door and let him eat in darkness. o twenty-two and pulling away. Buttercup began. He stopped, turned bac ittle. She got into her nightgown. She sl by the stove and poured herself a cup o n, and not even a cavity. She dumped th e the sea before a storm," but who c ur love were a grain of sand, mine would y love is the size of a grain of sand and g we're on the verge of something just ody strong because I thought yo on. I have not known a moment in yea mpany me to sleep. There has to be on for a while?" "Never stop." "Ther That's all you need? Easy. I love you g it so long to you, you just wouldn't ard, and you never heard." "I hear y e?". He took another step. "I'm late. ut of her: "Without one kiss?" The stern civilization. (Before the con s with the formula of affection tim ey both went. Trembling . . . "Cows," the Count said, when t see.) I'm thinking of starting a little dairy of my own, and s ys clothed divinely. And, of course, ck here moldering? Or, worse, w ing you back. the moping has

ght." Buttercup, "I'm not going to marry you. I'm not going to marry anyone. I'm going to live with my parents on the farm and help them with the animals and the chores and the milking and the plowing and the planting and the harvesting and the marketing and the cooking and the cleaning and the washing and the sewing and the mending and the gardening and the canning and the preserving and the churning and the churning and the churning