

“True Love”
Open Door MCC
Rev. Miller Hoffman

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Before we do much else with *The Princess Bride*, we'll need to talk about a few basic things. The first is “Every Single Word.” This is a Tumblr thingy (I don't know what Tumblr is; I probably need Aaron or Jacob to explain it to me. Anyway,) it's a Tumblr thingy that lists every single word spoken by a person of color in any given film. Every Single Word in *Titanic*, for example, is 54 seconds. Every Single Word in the entire Harry Potter series, 8 films totaling more than 1200 minutes: five minutes and 40 seconds. Half the time it takes to boil an egg. Every Single Word in *The Princess Bride* is zero. The closest the movie comes to having a black person is the farm boy in the first five minutes, who has to do everything around the farm and be bossed around by Buttercup without any payment, as far as we know, or so much as a thank-you. Think about it.

Secondly is the Bechdel-Wallace test. This is supposed to give a sense of whether girls and women are valued in the movie. It asks 1) Is there more than one (named) girl or woman in the movie? 2) Do they talk to each other 2a) about something other than a man? It's a pretty low bar, folks, and only about half of the superhero movies pass it. Hear that, Aaron and Jacob? Here's a whole new level at which to watch the upcoming Han Solo standalone Star Wars film. FYI, *The Princess Bride* fails this test so badly that I am pretty sure that, no matter who she's talking to, every single word that comes out of any woman's mouth in the movie is about a man.

Not that there's anything wrong with talking about men. Not that there's anything wrong with women loving men. That's not what I'm getting at or what anyone is getting at. It's just that men and boys in the movie are talking about honor, and duty, Very Important Things and average things and boring things, talking about how long they practiced sword fighting, and the difference between fighting one person or a bunch at once, or what their plans are for the kingdom. And the only thing that any single woman or girl in this movie ever talks about, almost without exception, is about Buttercup having a boyfriend. Ugh. That's all I'm saying.

Don't get me wrong, I really like this movie, and Vernessa's laughter this week as we watched it together was music to my ears. It's a super sweet, super funny movie. It's a super white, super heteronormative, compulsory heterosexuality, hegemonic femininity, male-centric, super sweet, super funny movie.

And it's all about true love.

So what does true love mean in this context?

Let's not spend any more time talking about what is not true love in the film. For example, let's not talk at all about how the man in black tosses Buttercup around at first like a beach ball or kills Vizzini by cheating, or how the king's stinking son is using Buttercup like a plastic chess piece in a beat-up joint checkers-chess toy box with half the pieces missing, or how Buttercup doesn't consent to the marriage but still thinks she's married. We won't even mention those things.

What is true love?

What if we let go of the criticism, let go of what's missing, let go of what's awful and violent, and just pull out the pure, lovely, true... love?

Then we'll end up with a little boy whose grandfather spends the day telling him a story, skipping the parts he wants to skip, comforting him when it gets upsetting, promising to come back and tell it all over again tomorrow.

How many of you are parents who read the same book to your kids a dozen times, and that was just the first night? Or visited someone at home who was sick, or went to the hospital with them, or dropped off food that was ready to eat after a quick bake for 40 minutes in a 375 oven? Or overlooked something grouchy someone did in favor of staying in relationship? (Corrine does that sometimes. Just saying.) Or instead of asking for birthday presents, you asked for people to donate to a dog rescue and a cancer research lemonade stand?

Then we'll end up with a magician's wife telling Miracle Max to have faith in himself when he didn't trust himself not to fail. How many of you have cheered on someone when they were discouraged? Comforted someone when things didn't work out the way they hoped? Sat with someone while they cried or complained or were afraid and anxious – even without unsolicited problem-solving or making unwanted suggestions? (I'm picking up what I'm putting down, believe me.)

Then we'll end up with Westley, Buttercup, Inigo, and Fezzik, a small band of friends who planned together and fought together, who almost died and mostly died, who were attacked and dismissed and abused because of who they are and who they love and what they look like and for no good reason at all, who understood each other's ultimate suffering and sought each other out and protected each other with their words and their actions.

How many of you have almost died or mostly died to protect someone? Used your words and your actions to protect someone? Understood someone's ultimate suffering and sought them out?

That is happening in response to white supremacist rallies in Charlottesville this weekend.

That is happening in response to Lil' Duval's and Charlamagne the Great's jokes about killing trans women on The Breakfast Club.

AJ and I had a long, heated conversation this week about why a lot of people choose not to buy food from Chick Fil A, even though it's a pretty delicious sandwich. Some folks feel that way about other stores, like Wal Mart or Hobby Lobby or Cracker Barrel. And it's connected to why people will go out of their way to visit small, local bookshops and restaurants and clothes stores.

It's why so many of us stayed late last month to work with the SURJ trainers.

All it takes is opening a newspaper or logging into FaceBook to know why this is true love, why it's so important, why it's so desperately needed.

True love isn't just the kissing parts, right? It isn't just getting married and riding off into the sunset, even in the story.

True love is taking care of For Otis' Sake. It's supporting Alex's Lemonade Stand. It's sending supplies to Standing Rock. True love is paying attention to things like Every Single Word, paying attention to

who gets cast as The Ancient One in Doctor Strange or as Major in Ghost in the Shell.

True love is personal and intimate. It's private. It's about who we share our hearts and our homes with.

And true love is huge. Big enough for all of us, bigger than anything we can imagine.

And yet we need to imagine quite a lot. We need to imagine doing what is inconceivable, over and over again, right? (You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.) Imagine surviving the fire swamp, even though no one ever has, and living there quite comfortably. Imagine that Miracle Max's chocolate-coated pill will work, even though it would take a miracle. Imagine that true love will come for us, even if it's been killed by the Dread Pirate Roberts. Imagining that a wheel barrow and a holocaust cloak are among our assets in the first place... You get the picture.

Imagine the possible. Imagine the impossible. Imagine a love that is as true as you are. Imagine a love more true than you even hope to be. And together let's make that fantasy real.

As you wish.

Peace.