

WILLIAM GOLDMAN

Dear Reader,

Thank you for sending in and no, this is not the reunion scene, because of a certain roadblock named Kermit Shog.

As soon as bound books were ready, I got a call from my lawyer, Charley--(you may not remember, but Charley's the one I called from California to go down in the blizzard and buy The Princess Bride from the used-book dealer). Anyway, he usually begins with Talmudic humor, wisdom jokes, only this time he just says "Bill, I think you better get down here," and before I'm even allowed to say a 'why?' he adds, "Right away if you can."

Panicked, I zoom down, wondering who could have died, did I flunk my tax audit, what? His secretary lets me into his office and Charley says, "This is Mr. Shog, Bill."

And there he is, sitting in the corner, hands on his briefcase, looking exactly like an oily version of Peter Lorre. I really expected him to say, "Give me the Falcon, you must, or I'll be forced to keel you."

"Mr. Shog is a lawyer," Charley goes on. And this next was said underlined: "He represents the Morgenstern estate."

Who knew? Who could have dreamed such a thing existed, an estate of a man dead at least a million years that no one ever heard of over here anyway? "Perhaps you will give me the Falcon now," Mr. Shog said. That's not true. What he said was, "Perhaps you will like a few words with your client alone now," and Charley nodded and out he went and once he was gone I said, "Charley, my God, I never figured--" and he said, "Did Harcourt?" and I said, "Not that they ever mentioned" and he said, "Ooch," the grunting sound lawyers make when they know they've backed a loser. "What does he want?" I said. "A meeting with Mr. Jovanovich," Charley answered.

Now, William Jovanovich is a pretty busy fella, but it's amazing when you're confronted with a potential multibillion-dollar lawsuit how fast you can wedge in a meeting. We trooped over.

All the Harcourt Brass was there, I'm there, Charley; Mr. Shog, who would sweat in an igloo he's so swarthy, is streaming. Harcourt's lawyer started things: "We're terribly terribly sorry, Mr. Shog. It's an unforgivable oversight, and please accept our sincerest apologies." Mr. Shog said, "That's a beginning, since all you did was defame and ridicule the greatest modern master of Florinese prose who also

happened to be for many years a friend of my family." Then the business head of Harcourt said, "All right, how much do you want?"

Biiiiig mistake. "Money?" Mr. Shog cried. "You think this is petty blackmail that brings us together? Resurrection is the issue, sir. Morgenstern must be undefiled. You will publish the original version." And now a look at me. "In the unabridged form."

I said, "I'm done with it, I swear. True, there's just the reunion scene business we printed up, but there's not liable to be a rush on that, so it's all past as far as I'm concerned." But Mr. Shog wasn't done with me: "You, who dared to defame a master's characters are now going to put your words in their mouths? Nossir. No, I say." "It's just a little thing," I tried; "a couple pages only."

Then Mr. Jovanovich started talking softly. "Bill, I think we might skip sending out the reunion scene just now, don't you think?" I made a nod. Then he turned to Mr. Shog. "We'll print the unabridged. You're a man who is interested in immortality for his client, and there aren't as many of you around in publishing as there used to be. You're a gentleman, sir." "Thank you," from Mr. Shog; "I like to think I am, at least on occasion." For the first time, he smiled. We all smiled. Very buddy-buddy now. Then, an addendum from Mr. Shog: "Oh, yes. Your first printing of the unabridged will be 100,000 copies."

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So far, there are thirteen lawsuits, only eleven involving me directly. Charley promises nothing will come to court and that eventually Harcourt will publish the unabridged. But legal maneuvering takes time. The copyright on Morgenstern runs out in early '78, and all of you who wrote in are having your names put alphabetically on computer, so whichever happens first, the settlement or the year, you'll get your copy.

The last I was told, Kermit Shog was willing to come down on his first printing provided Harcourt agreed to publish the sequel to The Princess Bride, which hasn't been translated into English yet, much less published here. The title of the sequel is: Buttercup's Baby: S. Morgenstern's Glorious Examination of Courage Matched Against the Death of the Heart.

I'd never heard of it, naturally, but there's a Ph.D. candidate in Florinese Lit up at Columbia who's going through it now. I'm kind of interested in what he has to say.

--William Goldman

P.S.

I'm really sorry about this, but you know the story that ends, "disregard previous wire, letter follows?" Well, you've got to

disregard the business about the Morgenstern copyright running out in '78. That was a definite boo-boo but Mr. Shog, being Florinese, has trouble, naturally, with our numbering system. The copyright runs out in '87, not '78.

Worse, he died. Mr. Shog I mean. (Don't ask how could you tell. It was easy. One morning he just stopped sweating, so there it was.) What makes it worse is that the whole affair is now in the hands of his kid, named--wait for it--Mandrake Shog. Mandrake moves with all the verve and speed of a lizard flaked out on a riverbank.

The only good thing that's happened in this whole mess is I finally got a shot at reading Buttercup's Baby. Up at Columbia they feel it's definitely superior to The Princess Bride in satirical content. Personally, I don't have the emotional attachment to it, but it's a helluva story, no question.

Give it a look-see when you have a chance.

--August, 1978

P.P.S.

This is getting humiliating. Have you been reading in the papers about the trade problems America is having with Japan? Well, maddening as this may be, since it reflects on the reunion scene, we're also having trade problems with Florin, which, it turns out, is our leading supplier of Cadminium, which, it also turns out, NASA is panting for.

So all Florinese-American litigation, which includes the thirteen law suits, has officially been put on hold.

What this means is that the reunion scene, for now, is caught between our need for Cadminium and diplomatic relations between the two countries.

But at least the movie got made. Mandrake Shog was shown it, and word reached me he even smiled once or twice. Hope springs eternal.

--May, 1987

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