

Why Fairy Tales Aren't Just for Kids

"Children must hear nothing but the vital truth, so far as we can give it [to] them," G.K. Chesterton [wrote](#) over a century ago. "I say the vital truth: it is found mostly in fairy-tales..."

Recently, I watched two movies back-to-back: Kenneth Branagh's *Cinderella* (2015) and Jon Turteltaub's romantic comedy *While You Were Sleeping* (1995).

In the first, Branagh and writer Chris Weitz give us the traditional story of the orphaned girl mistreated and scorned by her stepmother and two stepsisters as she falls in love with the prince.

In *While You Were Sleeping*, Lucy (Sandra Bullock) is a lovelorn romantic and another orphan who has a crush on Peter (Peter Gallagher), the handsome stranger who daily passes through her token booth at the train station. She rescues him when he's pushed onto the track, knocked unconscious, and nearly killed by an oncoming train. When Lucy visits Peter as he lies in a coma in the hospital, his boisterous family mistakenly acclaims her as his fiancée. Lucy finds herself unable to break off this charade, then complicates matters even more by falling in love with Peter's brother, Jack (Bill Pullman). On the verge of marrying Peter, Lucy finally straightens out the misunderstanding. The film ends with Jack, accompanied by his family, proposing to her in the token booth.

These two movies, one based on a folk tale told centuries ago, the other less than 30 years old, are fairy tales with remarkable similarities. Both Cinderella and Lucy have lost their parents and have no siblings of their own. Both dream of

true love. Both are brave women who value truth, and both know the power of making amends: Cinderella forgives her stepmother for her bullying and demeaning behavior while Lucy asks forgiveness for misleading Peter and Jack's family.

"I have to tell you a secret that will see you through all the trials that life can offer," says Cinderella's dying mother to her. "Have courage and be kind." Lucy practices these same virtues.

Both films share one other thing in common: Neither contains one of those heavy-breathing bedroom scenes that mark—or in most cases, mark—so [many of today's films](#). Both movies are drenched in passion and love, but these are communicated with a glance, a word, a touch of the fingers, a laugh. *Cinderella* and *While You Were Sleeping* are lessons in true love.

"Kenneth Branagh's 'Cinderella' is the most surprising Hollywood movie of the year so far," [writes](#) Bishop Robert Barron. "I say this because the director manages to tell [sic] the familiar fairy tale without irony, hyper-feminist sub-plots, Marxist insinuations, deconstructionist cynicism, or arch condescension."

The same holds true for *While You Were Sleeping*. This modern fairy tale has no agenda other than to tell the story of a young woman, a princess of virtue and kindness, who meets her longed-for prince.

Bishop Barron's list of modern ills sums up a decades-long cultural and political attack on traditional male-female courtship and relationships, and on love, marriage, and family. The last 20 years alone have brought legalized gay marriage, assaults on traditional masculinity as toxic, the [labeling](#) of women as "birthing people," [falling marriage rates](#), radical [sex education](#) in many classrooms, and, most recently, the mainstreaming of transgenderism.

In this cultural sea change, fairy tales like *Cinderella* and

While You Were Sleeping have fallen into disfavor as well, deemed sexist by their detractors. Strong, independent women, we've heard for years, have no need of white knights. At the same time, however, many young women [wonder](#) where all the good men have gone. Here's one simple, though often ignored, answer to that question: No princess, no knight. Take away the tiara, and you take away the sword and steed.

Take away the fairy tale, and you take away magic and romance.

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