

## Beauty and the Beast

### Story

Once upon a time a very rich merchant lived with his three daughters. All three were beautiful, but the eldest two were proud and arrogant. The youngest daughter, whom everyone called Beauty, was kind and gentle. While many people admired the wealth of the sisters, it was Beauty they loved.

One day, as the merchant traveled home, he was caught in a fearsome storm. Seeking shelter, the merchant ran into an old castle. He was surprised to find a warm fire crackling inside. Then he watched, amazed, as a chair and table pulled themselves up in front of him, and all kinds of foods appeared on the table. The merchant sat down and ate, thankful for the kindness of whoever owned the castle. When the storm had passed, the merchant saddled his horse and prepared to leave.

As he was leaving, he remembered asking his daughters what they wanted as gifts when he returned. The eldest two had asked for dresses and jewels and riches of all sorts, but Beauty had asked simply for a rose. Seeing the castle's rose garden, he cut a red rose from the bush. Suddenly, the merchant heard a loud roaring. "How dare you!" yelled a ferocious beast, running straight at the merchant. "I offered you food and shelter and you repay me by stealing a rose!"

"I'm . . . I'm sorry," stammered the merchant. "It's just that my youngest daughter asked for one, and I got caught in the storm, and—"

"So the rose is for your daughter," growled the beast. "Well, you must bring her back. In exchange for your life, she will remain here forever." The merchant started protesting, but the beast would not yield. Either the merchant would die, or Beauty would live with the beast forever.

The merchant could not think of his daughter spending the rest of her life with this hideous creature, so he asked permission to say goodbye to his family.

When he got home, his daughters knew something was wrong. He explained the situation, and the older daughters started blaming Beauty. "If only you hadn't asked for that rose," they exclaimed, "Father would still be here and we would still be rich. Now, he's going to die, and we're going to have no money at all!"

Beauty knew that it was her wish that had caused all the trouble, and she refused to let her father die. Even though her father swore he would rather die than let her return to the castle, Beauty went anyway. Her father's life was more valuable to her than her own happiness. Beauty arrived at the castle, and the beast showed her around. There were beautiful dresses in the closet and jewels for her to wear. There was an enormous library full of books for her to read. Everything, it seemed, that could make Beauty happy was there in the castle.

Over time, Beauty learned to talk to the beast. He was rough and coarse, but he was intelligent. Soon, Beauty had taught the beast proper manners and etiquette.

One night, the beast asked Beauty if she were happy. She said that she was, but she missed her family. The beast gave Beauty a gift that night. He told her that she was free and could go home. "I will always be your friend," said Beauty, giving the beast a goodbye kiss on the cheek as she left.

When Beauty got home, her father was overjoyed to see her. Her sisters pretended to be happy, but in reality, they were upset. When Beauty was gone, the sisters had been the most beautiful women in

the village. Now that Beauty was back, the sisters feared that their many admirers would favor Beauty. Soon Beauty began to feel that something was missing, but she didn't know what it was. She had her family, her friends, riches, and all sorts of material things. After a while, Beauty realized that she missed the beast. She missed talking to him, discussing books with him, and she worried about how he was without her around. Finally, Beauty decided to go back to the castle and visit the beast.

When she got to the castle, Beauty couldn't find the beast anywhere. After a long search, she found him next to a dried up stream. The beast appeared to be sleeping, but he didn't wake when Beauty spoke to him. Beauty tried her best to wake him up, but the beast wouldn't stir. He had been so sad when Beauty left that he stopped eating and sleeping; the beast had been in love with Beauty from the day she arrived in the castle. He loved her so much that he wanted her to be happy, even if it meant letting her go. After Beauty left, the beast had decided that if Beauty didn't love him, he didn't care about anything. One day, he wandered to the stream, lay down, and prepared to die.

As she saw the beast lying there, motionless, Beauty knew that she loved the beast, too. Despite his frightening appearance, he was a beautiful creature. Beauty started crying as she realized that the beast was dying. "Please, Beast," she said. "I love you. Don't die."

Slowly the beast stood up. However, he was no longer a beast, but a handsome young man. "Beauty, don't you recognize me?"

"A long time ago, an old hag came to my door. I turned her away because she was so ugly. She asked for shelter again, and again I refused. Then, the old hag turned into a beautiful fairy. As punishment

for judging her only by her appearance, the fairy turned me into a beast. Only when someone loved me for who I was could I be changed back into a prince.

"Beauty," he said, "you were the one who changed me back."