

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Once upon a time, a long while ago, there was a Beast.

He was a Great Beast, and lived in a Great Castle that stood in the middle of a Great Park, and everybody in the country had great fear for the Beast. In fact everything about the Beast was great; his roar was great and terrific and could be heard for miles around the park, and when he roared the people trembled.

Nobody ever saw the Beast, which was not strange, for the Beast never came out of his Park, and no one, I can assure you, ever ventured on to his estate.

But matters were not allowed to remain like this for ever, for something very wonderful happened to the Beast and to somebody else, and if that something had not happened this story would never have been written.

About two miles and three quarters from the Castle gates there lived a rich merchant and his three daughters. The two older girls were ugly disagreeable things, and although they had all they could wish for to make them happy they were always grumbling. But the youngest daughter, whose name was Beauty, was very pretty, and her nature was happy and good, her presence was sunshine, and she was the joy of her father's heart.

Well, one day the two elder sisters really had something to grumble, because a telegram arrived to say that the merchant was no longer a rich merchant: he had lost all his money.

So the horses and carriages had to be sold, and everything that was of value was gone, the servants were sent away, and the merchant and his daughters had to do their own work.

Dear me, it was shocking, the way those two sisters grumbled. But Beauty, oh dear no, she was all smiles, for her heart was as sunny as ever, as she rolled up the sleeves of her print frock, and cooked the dinner, and scrubbed the floors, and made herself useful, here, there, and everywhere.

Things had been going on like this for about three months, when one fine morning another telegram came to say that somebody who owed the merchant a great deal of money was ready to pay the debt, and all the merchant had to do was to go to the city and get it.

Of course, everybody was delighted at this good news, and the merchant didn't waste any time, but started off to the city at once.

"Remember to bring me something back," said the eldest daughter as he was leaving.

"What shall it be?" asked the merchant.

"A white satin dress trimmed with lace and pearls," said his eldest daughter.

"And you must bring me something too, please, father," said the second daughter.

"And what do you want?" asked the merchant.

"A purse full of gold so that I can buy what I want myself," said the second daughter.

"I will try to do what you both ask," he said, "and what shall I bring for my Beauty?"

"I will wait a little for my dresses and things," replied the smiling Beauty, as she helped her father on with his cloak, "but I should like you to bring me home a rose, a lovely red rose, if you can."

So her father kissed her, and promised he would bring her the rose, and went on his way full of hopes.

When the merchant arrived at the city, to his dismay he found that the man who owed him the money was still unable to pay him, because the man had been disappointed himself at the last moment.

So the unhappy father had to return home without the white satin dress trimmed with lace and pearls, and without the bag of money, and he dreaded meeting his two daughters, for he knew they would be terribly angry.

Now on his way home from the station to his house he had to pass by part of the wall that surrounded the Great Park where the Great Beast lived in his Great Castle. As he passed by a corner of the wall he saw a lovely red rose hanging just over the top, and just within his reach if he stood on his toes.

"At least I can take my Beauty what she asked for," he said to himself, and, without so much as giving a thought to the wrong he was doing, he stood on his toes and plucked the rose.

He was sorry he did it.

Of a sudden there was a roar, such a roar that the very ground shook, and as to the poor merchant he shook like a leaf.

Suddenly, a gate in the wall opened, and out rushed the Beast.

Yes, the Beast! He seized the merchant by the scruff of his neck, and dragged him into the Park, and shut the gate after him.

"Don't you know it's a sin to steal?" roared the Beast. "How dare you steal my roses? I am going to kill you."

"Oh, mercy, Mr. Beast," cried the unhappy man, flinging himself on his knees before the monster.

"I'm going to kill you," roared the Beast still more loudly. "It's taken years to grow this sort of rose, and—and I'm going to kill you. Unless," he added after a pause, "you send me one of your daughters here instead."

"All right," said the merchant and got on his feet again.

"She must be here to-morrow by breakfast time, and I eat breakfast early," said the Beast, as he let the merchant out of the gate. "If she is not here, I shall come for you, and don't you forget it."

It was not likely that he would forget it. In fact he could think of nothing else. He hurried home and told his dreadful news, and received a dreadful scolding from his two elder daughters, who were angry at not getting their presents.

"And it is Beauty's fault that you got into this trouble," they said. "Beauty and her stupid rose. Beauty has to get you out of the trouble." Beauty said little, but smiled on, with sunshine in her heart, and trust in her loving nature, and cooked the dinner.

Early next morning when the dawn was breaking she left her father's house, leaving a little note behind her begging him not to worry. She said she was going to the Beast's castle.

When she came to the gate in the wall she knocked upon it three times and it opened as if by magic, for no one was there to open it. She stepped into the garden of red roses, and in the distance across the Park she saw the Castle. She thought she had never seen anything so beautiful. It was built of mother-of-pearl, and the red and yellow gleams of the rising sun shined upon its glistening walls and lit them up with a thousand radiant lights.

Beauty marveled at the loveliness and walked on. When she arrived at this beautiful Castle, the huge gates opened again as if by magic because she could not see anyone, nor living thing of any sort.

In the great hall was the breakfast table laid for two. It was a nice breakfast with steaming hot dishes, and jams, honey, and hot rolls, and brightly polished silver, and sweet flowers.

Then the Beast appeared suddenly from behind a curtain. Oh, he was an awful Beast, and Beauty's heart beat fast! He seemed polite at least.

He handed Beauty a chair, and when she had sat down said: "I bid you welcome. Would you like tea or coffee?"

"Tea please," answered Beauty.

"Then pour it out," he said, "and I'll take tea too, please. Eggs, do you like eggs hard or soft?"

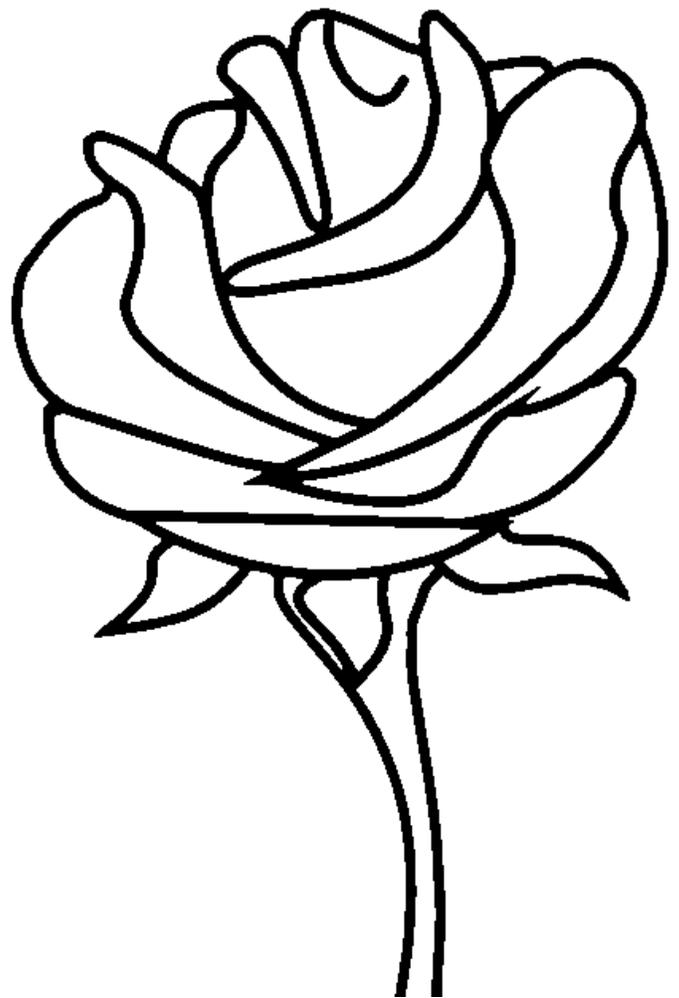
"I always cook mine three minutes and a half," replied Beauty.

"Half a minute too much, I think. But you shall have just what you like."

And so she had; not only at the breakfast table but in everything. She had only to express a wish and it was immediately gratified. She had ponies to ride, and dogs and cats, and pet birds, and the most beautiful dresses ever worn by real princesses.

And if she was not away from her father she would really have been happy.

The Beast was most kind and attentive to her, and told her that he loved her, and three times a day he asked her to marry him,



but Beauty shook her head and said, oh no, she couldn't.

Well, Beauty had been at the great Castle some time when she began to want to go home and see her father. She begged the Beast to let her go.

"Very good," he said with a great sigh, "you may go home to-day, but promise me that you will be back early to-morrow morning. If you do not come back early I am sure I shall die for I love you so dearly."

So Beauty promised and went home, and she took presents for her father and her sisters. When the sisters heard of all the wonderful things at the great Castle, they were jealous, and made up their minds hurt Beauty and the Beast.

So they mixed something in Beauty's supper that made her sleep nearly all the next day. So, she did not keep her promise. It was evening when she arrived at the gate in the wall, instead of early morning.

But she knocked three times and the gate opened by magic. She went through the garden and hurried to the Castle that shined like fire in the light of the setting sun. The huge gates opened by magic, and the doors opened by magic, and she stood in the great hall, but there was no Beast there. She searched in all the rooms but he was not there. With fear in her heart she ran into the gardens, and there she found him at last. He was lying stretched out on the grass, and she thought he was dead.

"Oh, dear darling Beast," she cried, as she threw herself on her knees beside him, and raised his ugly head, "dear Beast, do not die, for I love you with all my heart, and will marry you tomorrow."

And she kissed him.

All of a sudden he sprang to his feet, but he was no longer the Beast, no longer a hideous monster, but a beautiful prince most beautifully dressed.

"Dearest," he said, "a wicked fairy turned me into this brute form until a day should come when a good girl like you should tell me that she loved me. And you will marry me tomorrow."

"Oh, yes," answered Beauty, "but the wicked fairy could not change your nature. I would have married you if you had remained just as you were."

And so they married and lived happy ever afterward, and they took care of Beauty's father until the end of his days.