

Beauty and the Beast
By Charles Perrault

A long time ago, in a far away land, a merchant was returning home after a long journey. As night fell, he entered a deep forest. His head was full of thoughts of his six daughters. He had left home in summer, and now he was returning in deep winter. The most bitter sleet and snow came down, and his horse stumbled on a patch of ice. He heard wolves howling, and soon he realized that he was lost.

At last, he saw some sort of track. At the beginning it was rough and slippery, but soon it led him into an avenue of orange trees covered with flowers and fruit – but here there was no snow.

He saw a flight of stone steps. He went up them into a great castle. Inside he passed through several splendid rooms. Everywhere in the castle there was a deep silence. At last, he stopped in a small room where a fire was burning. He lay down on a couch and very soon fell into a sweet sleep.

He woke up feeling hungry. He was still alone, but a good dinner had been laid on a little table. He began to eat, hoping that he might soon have a chance to thank his kind host, whoever it might be – but no one appeared.

Then he went down into the garden, and though it was winter everywhere else, here the sun shone, and the birds sang, and the flowers bloomed, and the air was soft and sweet. The path had a hedge of roses on each side of it, and the merchant thought he had never seen or smelled such beautiful flowers. Then he remembered a promise he had made to his youngest daughter, who was so lovely that everyone knew her as Beauty. Before setting out on his journey, he had asked his daughters what presents they would like him to bring back for them. The five eldest wished for jewels and fine clothes, but Beauty asked only for a single rose. Now, as he stopped to pick a rose to take home to Beauty, he was startled by a strange noise behind him. Turning around, he saw a frightful ugly Beast, which seemed to be very angry and sad and said in a terrible voice, “Who said that you could pick my roses? Was it not enough that I let you say in my palace and was kind to you? This is the way you thank me, by stealing my flowers! You shall not go unpunished!”

The merchant was terrified by these furious words. He dropped the fatal rose, and throwing himself on his knees, cried, “Pardon me, noble sir. I am truly grateful to you for your kindness. I could not imagine that you would mind so much if I took such a little thing as a rose.”

The Beast was still furious, however, and cried, “Excuses and flattery will not save you from the death you deserve!”

“Alas!” Thought the merchant. “My daughter’s rose has put me in this terrible danger.”

He began to tell the Beast of his journey, not forgetting to mention how Beauty had asked him for a rose.

“I beg you to forgive me, for I meant no harm,” he pleaded.

The Beast thought for a moment, and then he said, in a less terrible voice, “I will forgive you on one condition – that is if you will give me one of your daughters.”

“Ah!” Cried the merchant. “What excuse could I invent to bring her here?”

“No excuse!” Answered the Beast. “She must come willingly. Go home. I give you a month to see if one of your daughters will save you. If none of them is willing to come to me, you must come back alone. Do not think that you can hide from me, for if you do not keep your word I will come and fetch you!”

The poor merchant, more dead than alive, went to the stable where his horse was ready for his journey. It carried him off so swiftly that in an instant he had lost sight of the palace, and he was still wrapped in gloomy thoughts when it stopped before the door of his house.

His daughters rushed to meet him. At first he told them nothing of the Beast, but as he gave Beauty her the rose he said sadly, "Here is what you asked me to bring you; you little know what it has cost."

Later that evening he told his family of his adventures from beginning to end, and then his daughters wept loudly. The girls were very angry with Beauty, and said to her that it was all her fault, and complained bitterly that they should have to suffer for her foolish wish.

Poor Beauty said to them, "Who could have guessed that asking for a rose in the middle of summer would cause so much misery? But as I made this mistake, it is only right that I should be the one to suffer for it. I will go back to the Beast with father."

When the fatal day came she said goodbye to her sisters and everything she loved. She mounted a horse together with her father, and it seemed to fly rather than gallop. They soon reached the avenue of orange trees, where statues were holding flaming torches, and when they got nearer to the palace, music sounded softly from the courtyard.

Her father led her to the little room where he had stayed, and there they found a splendid fire burning, and a delicious supper set out on the table.

After they had finished their meal they heard the Beast's footsteps approaching, and Beauty clung to her father. When the ugly Beast appeared she tried hard to hide her terror, and she nodded to him politely.

This clearly pleased the Beast. After looking at her he said, in a voice that might have struck fear into the boldest of hearts, "Good evening, old man. Good evening, Beauty."

The merchant was too terrified to reply, but Beauty answered sweetly, "Good evening, Beast."

"Have you come willingly?" Asked the Beast.

Beauty answered bravely that she had come willingly to save her father.

"I am pleased with you," said the Beast. "As for you, old man," he added, turning to the merchant, "at sunrise tomorrow you will go."

Then turning to Beauty, he said, "Take your father into the next room and help him to choose presents for your sisters. Take everything they would wish for."

Then he left them saying, "Goodbye Beauty. Goodbye old man."

In the next room they found splendid dresses fit for a queen. When Beauty opened the cupboards she was quite dazzled by the gorgeous jewels that lay in heaps upon every shelf. After choosing a vast quantity, she opened the last chest, which was full of gold.

"I think, father," she said, "that gold will be more useful to you. We had better take out the other things again, and fill the trunks with gold." So they did this; and at last the trunks were so heavy that an elephant could not have carried them!

"The Beast was making fun of us," cried the merchant. "He pretended to give us these things, knowing that I could not carry them away."

“Let us wait and see,” answered Beauty.

At sunrise, they went down into the courtyard, where two horses were waiting; one loaded with the two trunks, the other for the merchant to ride. As soon as he climbed into the saddle, he went off at such a pace that Beauty lost sight of him in an instant. Then she began to cry and she went back to her room and fell into a deep sleep.

She dreamed that she was walking by a stream when a young prince came up to her and said, in a voice that went straight to her heart, “Ah, Beauty! You are not so unlucky as you suppose. Only try to find me, no matter how I may be disguised, as I love you dearly. Make me happy and you shall be happy. Be as true-hearted as you are beautiful, and we shall have nothing left to wish for.”

“What can I do, prince, to make you happy?” Said Beauty.

“Do not trust your eyes,” he answered, “and set me free from my misery.”

When Beauty awoke, she began to think about the charming prince she had seen in her dream.

“He said I could make him happy.” Said Beauty to herself. “It seems that this horrible Beast keeps him a prisoner. How can I set him free? I don’t understand it. After all, it was only a dream, so why should I worry about it?”

She got up to explore the castle, but she did not see anyone or hear any sound, and she began to find it rather dull.

Only that evening, after supper, she heard the Beast coming, and she trembled with fear at what it might do. But he only said, “Good evening, Beauty.”

She answered cheerfully and managed to hide her terror. He spoke politely to her for about an hour, and asked her all about her life with her family.

Then he said in a gruff voice, “Do you love me, Beauty? Will you marry me?”

“Oh! What shall I say?” Cried Beauty, for she was afraid to make the Beast angry by refusing.

“Say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ without fear,” he replied.

“Oh! No, Beast,” said Beauty, hastily.

“Since you will not, goodnight Beauty,” he said.

And she answered, “Goodnight, Beast,” very glad to find that he had not attacked her. After he was gone, she was very soon in bed asleep, and dreaming of her unknown prince. He came to her and said to her, “Ah, Beauty! Why are you so unkind to me? I fear I will be unhappy for many a long day still.”

The next morning, she decided to amuse herself in the garden, for the sun shone, and all the fountains were playing. When she was tired she went back to the palace, and found a new room full of rare birds, so tame that they flew to Beauty as soon as they saw her, and perched upon her shoulders and her head. Some of them were parrots and cockatoos that could talk, and they greeted Beauty by name.

“Pretty little creatures,” she said. “Oh how I wish that your cage was nearer to my room, that I could often hear you sing!” When she left, she opened a door and found that it led straight into her own room.

After supper, the Beast paid her his usual visit, and before he left he asked her as before, "Beauty, will you marry me?" And when she refused, he gave her a gruff, "Goodnight" and left her. The days passed, and every evening the Beast asked her the same question and she gave him the same answer.

Beauty felt that when she said, "No, Beast," he went away quite sad. But her happy dreams of the handsome young prince soon made her forget the poor Beast. Her prince always told her to let her heart guide her, and not her eyes, and many other equally baffling things which she could not understand.

At last, happy as she was, Beauty began to long for her family. One night, seeing her look very sad, the Beast asked her what was the matter. Beauty was no longer afraid of him. Now she knew that he was really gentle in spite of his ferocious looks and his dreadful voice. She answered that she was longing to see her home once more.

When he heard this, the Beast cried miserably, "Ah! Beauty, have you the heart to leave an unhappy Beast like me? Is it because you hate me that you want to escape?"

"No, dear Beast," answered Beauty softly. "I do not hate you, and I should be very sorry never to see you anymore, but I long to see my father again. Only let me go for two months, and I promise to come back to you and stay for the rest of my life."

The Beast replied with a sigh, "I cannot refuse you anything you ask, even though it should cost me my life. You may go. But remember your promise and come back when the two months are over, or you may be sorry, for if you do not come in good time you will find your faithful Beast dead."

Then she went to bed, but could hardly sleep for joy. When at last she did begin to dream of her beloved prince she saw him stretched upon a grassy bank, sad and weary, and hardly like himself.

"What is the matter?" She cried.

He looked at her reproachfully, and said, "How can you ask me, cruel one?"

"Ah! Don't be so sad," cried Beauty. "I am only going to let my father know that I am safe and happy. I have promised my Beast that I shall come back. I would not cause him pain by breaking my word. He told me he would die if I did not keep my promise to him."

"What do you care for an ugly Beast?" Asked the prince.

"Oh," said Beauty, "It is not his fault that he is so ugly. He is a very kind beast."

Just then, she heard someone speaking not very far away. She got up and then she suddenly heard her father's voice. She rushed out and greeted him. She was home. Her sisters were quite astonished to see her, and there was no end to their questions about her life with the Beast.

Then Beauty asked her father what he thought could be the meaning of her strange dreams. After much thought, he answered, "You tell me yourself that The Beast, frightful as he is, loves you dearly and is kind and gentle to you. I think the prince means that you should do as the Beast wishes in spite of his ugliness."

But Beauty's thoughts were full of her handsome dream prince, and she could not imagine marrying the Beast.

When the two months were over, Beauty's sisters begged her not to return to the ugly beast, but to stay with her family. At first she could not refuse them, and she stayed on for a few days more. Then one night she had a different dream from usual. She saw not her prince, but the Beast. He was lying in a cave and he looked ill and in pain. Then Beauty remembered his words that he might die if she did not stay true to her word.

The next day, Beauty said goodbye to her father and all her sisters, and as soon as she was in bed she turned her ring around upon her finger, and said firmly, "I wish to go back to see my Beast again."

She fell asleep instantly, and only woke up to hear the clock saying, "Beauty, Beauty," twelve times in its musical voice, which told her at once that she was in the palace once more. Everything was just as before, and her birds were so glad to see her! Beauty thought she had never known such a long day, for she was so anxious to see the Beast again, that she felt as if suppertime would never come.

When it did come and no Beast appeared she was really frightened. She ran down into the garden to search for him. Up and down the paths and avenues ran poor Beauty, calling him in vain, for no one answered.

At last, quite tired, she stopped for a minute's rest, and saw that she was standing opposite a cave, and in it lay the Beast, asleep. Quite glad to have found him, she ran up and stroked his head, but to her horror, he did not move or open his eyes.

"Oh! He is dead, and it is all my fault," said Beauty, crying bitterly.

But then, looking at him again, she fancied he still breathed. She fetched some water from the nearest fountain and sprinkled it over his face. Slowly, he began to open his eyes.

"Ah Beauty," he said faintly, "now you see what happens when you do not keep your word."

"Oh! Beast," she cried. "I never knew how much I loved you until now, when I feared I was too late to save your life."

"Can you really love such an ugly creature as I am?" asked the Beast. "You only came just in time. I was dying because I thought you had forgotten your promise. Go back now and rest, I shall see you by and by."

Beauty went back to the palace, where supper was awaiting her; and afterward the Beast came in as usual, and asked about the time she had spent with her family, and if they had all been very glad to see her.

When at last the time came for him to go, and he asked, as he had so often asked before, "Beauty, will you marry me?" She answered softly, "Yes, dear Beast."

As she spoke a blaze of light sprang up before the windows of the palace; fireworks crackled and guns banged, and across the avenue of orange trees, in letters all made of fireflies, was written, "Long live the prince and his bride."

Beauty meant to ask the Beast what it all meant, but he had gone. In his place stood her long-loved prince! At the same moment, two ladies entered the room. Both were splendidly dressed, but one especially so. Her companion said, "Well, Queen, this is Beauty, who has had the courage to rescue your son from the terrible magic spell that turned him into a Beast. They love one another, and your consent to their marriage is all they need to make them perfectly happy."

"I agree with all my heart," cried the queen. Then she tenderly embraced Beauty and the prince.

"Now," said the fairy to Beauty, "I suppose you would like me to send for your father and sisters?"

She did so. The marriage was celebrated the very next day, and Beauty and the prince lived happily ever after.