

## THE BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

In a country far away from this one there is a great city in which flourishing commerce is abundant. It once counted among its citizens a merchant fortunate in his enterprises, over whom good fortune, at the whim of his desires, had always spread its finest favors. But if he had immense wealth, he also had a great many children. His family was composed of six boys and six girls. None of them was established. The boys were young enough not to be in any hurry. The girls, too proud of the great wealth on which they were used to counting, could not easily settle on the choice that they had to make, although their vanity was flattered by the assiduities of the most brilliant young men.

A reverse of fortune that they did not expect came to trouble the comfort of their life. Their house caught fire. The magnificent furniture that filled it, the books of tales, the banknotes, the gold, the silver and all the precious merchandise that composed the merchant's wealth were enveloped in that disastrous conflagration, which was so violent that very little was saved.

That first misfortune was only the forerunner of others. The father, for whom everything until then had prospered, also lost, whether by virtue of shipwreck or piracy, the ships that he had at sea. His correspondents rendered him bankrupt; his agents in foreign countries betrayed him; and in sum, from the greatest opulence, he suddenly fell into frightful poverty.

All that remained to him was a small country residence situated in a deserted location more than a hundred leagues from the city, which became his ordinary abode. Constrained to find a refuge far from the tumult and the noise, it was there that he took his family, in despair at such a revolution.

The unfortunate man's daughters, especially, only envisaged with horror the life that they were going to lead in that sad solitude. For some time, they flattered themselves that when their father's intention became known, the suitors that had sought their hand would be overjoyed that they had would soften their attitude. They all imagined that the honor of their preference would be eagerly sought. They even thought that they had only to wish it to obtain husbands.

They were not left in such a pleasant error for long. They had lost the finest of their attractions in seeing their father's brilliant fortune disappear like a flash of lightning, and for them, the season of choice had passed. The eager host of admirers disappeared at the moment of their disgrace. The power of their charms could not retain any of them.

Their friends were no more generous than their lovers. As soon as they were in poverty, all of them, without exception, ceased their acquaintance. One even pushed cruelty so far as to impute the disaster that had overtaken them to their own fault. Those to whom the father had been the most obliging were the most eager to calumniate him. They suggested that he had attracted his misfortunes by his bad conduct, his profusions, and the foolish expenditures that he had made and allowed his children to make.

In consequence, therefore, the unfortunate family was unable to make any other decision than to abandon a city where everyone made it a pleasure to insult their disgrace. Having no other resource, they confined themselves in their country house, situated in the middle of an almost impracticable forest, which might well have been the saddest abode on earth. How much chagrin they had to endure in that frightful solitude! It was necessary to resolve to labor at the most difficult tasks. Unable to have anyone to serve them, the sons of the unfortunate merchant shared the domestic chores and labors between them. All of them were endlessly occupied in what the countryside demands of those who want to extract their subsistence therefrom.

The daughters, for their part, had no lack of employment. Like peasants, they were obliged to make their delicate hands serve for all the functions of rural life. Only wearing woolen clothing, no longer having anything to satisfy their vanity, only able to live on what the local land could furnish, limited to simple necessity, but still having a taste for refinement and delicacy, the young women regretted the city and their charms incessantly. The memory of their early years, rapidly passed in the midst of laughter and games, was their greatest torture.

However, the youngest of them showed the most constancy and resolution in their common misfortune. She was seen to play her part generously, with a firmness far above her age. It was not that she had not given signs of veritable sadness at first—oh, who would not be sensible to such misfortunes?—but after having deplored her father’s misfortunes, could she do any better than to resume her original gaiety, embrace by choice the sole estate in which she found herself and forget a society in which she had her family had experienced ingratitude, on the amity of which she had been so completely convinced that it was necessary not to count in adversity?

Attentive to consoling her father and her brothers by the mildness of her character and the cheerfulness of her spirit, what did she not imagine in order to amuse them agreeably? The merchant had spared nothing for her education and that of her sisters. In those testing times she obtained all the advantage from it that she desired. Playing several musical instruments very well, which she accompanied with her voice, she invited her sisters to follow her example, but her cheerfulness and patience only made them sadder.

Those young women, whom such great disgrace rendered inconsolable, found in the conduct of their younger sister a pettiness of mind, a baseness of soul, and even the weakness of living gaily in the estate to which Heaven had reduced them.

“How happy she is!” said the eldest. “She is made for coarse occupations. With sentiments so base, what would she have been able to do in society?”

Such comments were unjust. The young women would have been as able to shine as any of them. A perfect beauty ornamented her youth; an even humor rendered her adorable. Her heart, as generous as it was compassionate, was visible in everything. As sensible as her sisters to the revolution that had overwhelmed her family, by virtue of a strength of mind that is not ordinary in her sex, she was able to hide her dolor and rise above adversity. So much constancy passed for insensitivity, but a judgment born of jealousy is easily summoned.

Known by enlightened persons for what she was, everyone hastened to give her preference. In the midst of her greatest splendor, if her merit had caused her to stand out, her beauty had caused her to be given, in particular, the name of “the Beauty.”<sup>1</sup> Merely in being known by that name, what more was necessary to augment the jealousy and hatred of her sisters?

Her charms, and the general esteem she had acquired, should have enabled her to hope for an establishment more advantageous than her sisters, but, only touched by her father’s misfortunes, far from making any effort to delay his departure from a city in which she had had so much pleasure, she devoted all her care to hasten its execution. That daughter gave evidence in solitude of the same tranquility that she had had in the heart of society. To soothe her cares, in her hours of relaxation, she ornamented her head with flowers, and as with the shepherdesses of olden days, rustic life allowed her to forget what had been the most flattering in the midst of opulence, and procure her days of innocent pleasure.

Two years had already gone by, and the family was beginning to be accustomed to leading a rural life, when the hope of a return came to trouble their tranquility. The father received information that one of his ships, which he had thought to be lost, had just arrived in harbor richly laden. It was added that it was to be feared that his agents might abuse his absence, selling his cargo at a low price, and, by virtue of that fraud, profiting from his goods.

He communicated that news to his children, who did not doubt for a moment that they would soon be able to quit their exile. The daughters, in particular, more impatient than their brothers, believing that it was not necessary to wait for anything more positive, wanted to depart immediately and abandon everything. But the father, more prudent, begged them to moderate their enthusiasm. Necessary as he was

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<sup>1</sup> Many adaptations drop the definite article from this name, and preserving it every time the author employs it does lead to some awkward constructions, but it is notable that none of the characters in the story is named, even though that refusal creates difficulties in later scenes in which more than one character is defined as “the Queen,” “the fay,” etc. The policy is presumably intended to imply a kind of archetypal quality with regard to the central characters, so I have only dropped or varied the articles when the original text does.

to his family, especially at a time when rural labors could not be interrupted without considerable prejudice, he left the care of the harvest to his sons and made the decision to undertake such a long journey on his own.

All his daughters, with the exception of the youngest, no longer had any doubt that they would soon see themselves returned to their original opulence. They imagined that even if their father's wealth did not become considerable enough for them to return to the great city, their birthplace, it would nevertheless be sufficient to allow them to live in another town, less flourishing. They hoped to find good company there, to obtain suitors, and to take advantage of the first establishment that was proposed to them.

Already giving hardly any thought to the difficulties they had been enduring for two years, believing themselves to be already transported, as if by a miracle, from mediocre fortune to the bosom of a agreeable abundance, they dared—for solitude had not caused them to lose the taste for luxury and vanity—to heap their father with foolish commissions. He was charged with making purchases for them of jewels, clothes and hats. Envy of one another caused each of them to ask for more, and the entire product of the father's pretended fortune would not have been enough to satisfy them.

The Beauty, whom ambition had not tyrannized and who had only ever acted prudently, judged at a glance that if he fulfilled her sisters' commissions, her own would be futile. But the father, surprised by her silence, interrupted his insatiable daughters said to her: "And you, the Beauty, don't you desire anything? What shall I bring you? What do you want? Speak boldly."

"My dear Papa," the lovable daughter replied, embracing him tenderly, "I desire one thing more precious than all the apparel that my sisters are asking of you. I will limit my request to that, and will be only too happy to see it fulfilled. That is the joy of seeing you return in perfect health."

That response, marked so clearly with the stamp of disinterest, covered the others with shame and confusion. They were so angry that one of them, responding for them all, said with bitterness: "That girl is putting on airs, and imagines that she is distinguishing herself by that heroic affection. Assuredly, nothing is more ridiculous."

But the father, softened by his sentiments, could not help manifesting his joy, and, touched by the wish to which the youngest daughter had limited herself, wanted her to ask for something, and to soothe his other daughters' resentment of her, he told her that such an insensibility to adornment was not appropriate at her age, and that there was a time for everything.

"Well, my dear father," she said to him, "since you order me to do so, I beg you to bring me a rose. I love that flower passionately; since I have been in this solitude, I have not had the satisfaction of seeing a single one."

That was in order to obey him, while wanting at the same time that he should not go to any expense for her.

The day came, meanwhile, when it was necessary for the worthy old man to tear himself away from his numerous family. As promptly as he could, he went to the great city to which the appearance of a new fortune summoned him.

He did not find the advantages there for which he might have hoped. His ship really had arrived, but his associates, who believed him to be dead, had taken possession of it, and all the effects had been dispersed. Thus, far from entering into the full and peaceful possession of that which ought to belong to him, in order to sustain his rights, it was necessary to endure all imaginable chicanery.

He overcame the difficulties, but after more than six months of trouble and expense, he was no richer than before. His debtors had become insolvent, and he was scarcely reimbursed for his expenses. That was where his chimerical wealth terminated. To complete his displeasure, in order not to hasten his ruination, he was obliged to depart in the most inconvenient season and in the most frightful weather.

Exposed on his route to all the insults of the air, he nearly perished of fatigue, but when he found himself a few leagues from his house, from which he had not expected to emerge to run after such foolish hopes, which the Beauty had rightly scorned, he recovered his strength.

It would take several more hours to traverse the forest, and it was late, but he wanted to continue his journey. Surprised by the night, however, penetrated by the sharpest cold, and, so to speak, buried beneath the snow along with his horse, not knowing in the end in which direction to go, he thought he was

reaching his final hour. There was no hut on his route, although the forest was filled with them. A tree hollowed out by rot was all the shelter that he could find, glad of being able to hide himself within it.

That tree, in protecting him from the cold, saved his life; and the horse, perceiving another hollow lair not far from its master, was led to take shelter there by instinct.

In that condition the night appeared to him to be extremely long; furthermore, persecuted by hunger, frightened by the howling of wild beasts that incessantly passed close by, how could he remain tranquil for an instant?

His difficulties and anxieties did not end with the night. He no sooner had the pleasure of seeing the daylight than his embarrassment was great. On seeing the ground extraordinarily covered with snow, what route could he take? No footpath presented itself to his eyes. It was only after long fatigue and frequent falls that he was able to find a path of sorts long which he could walk more easily.

While advancing without knowing where, hazard drew his steps into the avenue of a very fine château, which the snow appeared to have respected. It was composed of four rows of extremely tall orange-trees laden with flowers and fruits. Statues could be seen there, placed without order or symmetry, some in the road and others between the trees, all made of an unknown substance. They were of human size and color, in different attitudes and in various attire; the greater number of them represented warriors.

Having arrived at the first courtyard, he saw there, once again, a large number of other statues. The cold that he was suffering did not permit him to pay close attention to them.

A staircase of agate with a banister of sculpted gold was the first thing offered to his sight. He went through several magnificently furnished rooms. A mild warmth that he breathed in enabled him to recover from his fatigue. He had need of some nourishment, but to whom could he address himself? The vast and magnificent edifice only appeared to be inhabited by statues. A profound silence reigned there, and yet it did not give the impression of an old palace that had been abandoned. The halls, the rooms and the galleries were all open, but no living being appeared in such a charming place.

Wearily of moving through the apartments of the vast dwelling, he stopped in a drawing room in which a large fire had been lit. Presuming that it had been prepared for someone who would not take long to appear, he approached the fireplace in order to warm himself; but no one came.

Sitting while he waited on a sofa placed by the fireside, a gentle slumber closed his eyelids, and rendered him incapable of seeing whether anyone might come in to surprise him.

Fatigue had caused his repose; hunger interrupted it. For more than twenty-four hours it had been tormenting him; even the exercise he had had since entering the palace had augmented his needs further. When he awoke, he was agreeably surprised on opening his eyes to see a table, delicately served. A light repast could not content him, and the sumptuously prepared dishes invited him to eat everything.

His first concern was to thank aloud those to whom he owed so much benefit, and he resolved thereafter to wait tranquilly until it pleased his hosts to make themselves known.

As fatigue had put him to sleep before the meal, nourishment produced the same effect, and rendered his repose longer and more peaceful, with the result that he slept that second time for at least four hours.

When he awoke, instead of the first table, he saw another, made of porphyry, on which a benevolent hand had set out a collation composed of cakes, dried fruits and liqueur wines; again, it was for him to make use of it. So, profiting from the generosity that was being testified to him, he ate everything that could flatter his appetite, his taste and his delicacy.

Meanwhile, seeing no one to whom to speak and to tell him whether the palace was the abode of a man or a god, fear took possession of his senses, for he was naturally fearful. He made the decision to go back through all the apartments, heaping blessings there upon the genius to whom he owed so many benefits, and by means of respectful appeals he solicited him to show himself. All his urgent requests were futile. No domestic staff appeared, no retinue that allowed him to know that the palace was inhabited.

Wondering profoundly about what he ought to do, the thought occurred to him that, for reasons he could not penetrate, some Intelligence was making him a present of the dwelling, with all the riches with which it was filled.

That thought appeared to him to be an inspiration, and without delay, making a further review, he took possession of all those treasures. More than that, in his thoughts, he regulated the share that he destined for each of his children, and marked the separate lodgings that might be suitable for them, congratulating himself on the joy that such a journey would cause them. He went down into the garden where, in spite of the winter, he saw, as in the middle of spring, the rarest of flowers exhaling a charming odor. A mild and temperate air was respired there. Birds of every species were mingling their songs with the confused sound of fountains, forming an admirable harmony.

Ecstatic at so many marvels, the old man said to himself: *My daughters will have little difficulty, I think, in becoming accustomed to this delightful abode. I cannot believe that they will regret the city, or that they would desire it in preference to this abode.*

In an uncommon transport of joy, he exclaimed: "Let's go, let's leave immediately. I know in advance the felicity of seeing theirs; let's not delay the enjoyment of it."

When entering the château so cheerfully, he had taken care, in spite of the great cold by which he was penetrated, to unsaddle his horse and take it to a stable that he had noticed in the first courtyard. A pathway furnished with palisades formed by arbors of rose-bushes led to it. He had never seen such beautiful roses. Their odor reminded him that he had promised one to the Beauty.

He picked one of them, and was about to continue to make six bouquets, but a terrible noise caused him to turn his head. His fear was great when he perceived a horrible Beast by his side, which, with a furious expression, placed on his neck a kind of trunk similar to that of an elephant and said to him, in a terrible voice:

"Who gave you the liberty to pick my roses? Was it not enough that I have tolerated you in my palace with so much generosity? Far from being grateful for that, brazen individual, I find you stealing my flowers. Your insolence will not remain unpunished."

The fellow, already utterly terrified by the unexpected presence of the monster, thought he would die of fright at that speech and, promptly throwing away the fatal rose, he prostrated himself on the ground. "Oh, Monseigneur," he cried, "Have pity on me. I do not lack gratitude. Penetrated by your generosity, I did not imagine that such a little thing could be capable of offending you."

The Monster, extremely angry, replied to him: "Shut up, accursed orator; I don't care about your flatteries, nor the titles you give me; I'm not a Monseigneur, I'm the Beast, and you shall not avoid the death that you deserve."

The merchant, consternated by such a cruel sentence, believing that the policy of submission was the only one that could protect him from death, told it with a veritably touching expression that the rose that he had dared to take was for one of his daughters, called the Beauty. Then, because he hoped either to delay his doom or to touch his enemy with compassion, he told it the story of his misfortunes, and the reason for his journey. He did not forget the little present that he had promised to make the Beauty, adding that the thing to which she had restricted herself, while the riches of a king would hardly have been sufficient to fulfill the desires of his other daughters, had given birth when the opportunity presented itself to the desire to satisfy it, which he had thought himself able to do without consequence, and that, in any case, he begged pardon for that involuntary fault.

The Beast meditated for a moment. Then, resuming speaking in a less furious tone, it spoke as follows: "I'm willing to pardon you, but only on condition that you give me one of your daughters. I need someone to repair that fault."

"Just Heaven, what are you asking of me?" said the merchant. "How can I give you my word? If I were inhuman enough to want to ransom my life at the expense of that of one of my children, of what pretext would I make use for making her come here?"

"No pretext is necessary," the Beast interrupted. "I want whichever of your daughters that you bring to come here voluntarily, or I don't want one at all. See if there is one among them courageous enough to be willing to risk herself in order to save your life. You have the appearance of being an honest man; give me your word to return here in one month, if you can persuade one of them to come with you; she will remain in this place and you will return home. If you cannot, promise me to return here alone after having said goodbye to them forever, for you will be mine."

“Do not think,” the monster continued, clicking its teeth, “of accepting my proposal in order to run away. I warn you that if you think in that fashion, I will come to find you, and I will destroy you, along with your family, even if a hundred thousand men present themselves to defend you.”

The fellow, although fully convinced that he would attempt the amity of his daughters in vain, nevertheless accepted the monster’s proposition. He promised him to return, at the appointed time, to surrender himself to his sad destiny, without the necessity of coming in search of him.

After making that assurance, he thought he might be able to withdraw and take his leave of the Beast, the presence of which could only afflict him. The mercy he had obtained was slight, but he feared that even that might be revoked. He made his desire to depart known to it, but the Beast replied that he could only depart the following day.

“You will find,” it said to him, “a horse ready at daybreak. It will take you home in a short time. Go to supper, and await my orders. Adieu.”