

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

IN a large city of the East once lived a very rich merchant, who had a splendid house and large warehouses full of costly goods; a hundred guests sat down at his table every day.

His family consisted of three sons and three daughters. The sons were tall, well-grown young men, and the daughters were all very handsome, especially the youngest. So bright and happy was her face, and so winning were her ways, that, as a child, she had been the pet of the family, and every one had called her "Little Beauty." Now that she was a tall, grown-up girl, the name still clung to her, and this made her sisters very jealous.

The youngest daughter was not only better-looking than her sisters but better-tempered. The sisters were very vain of their wealth and position, gave themselves many airs, and declined to visit the daughters of other

merchants on the ground that only persons of quality were fit to speak to them. Every day they went to balls, plays and parties, and made fun of Little Beauty for preferring to spend her time in reading and other useful occupations. As their father was known to be so wealthy, the two elder sisters received many offers of marriage, but they always declared that they would accept no one below the rank of duke or earl. Beauty also had many offers, though she said less about them, and always told her lovers that she thought she was too young to marry and would rather spend some years longer with her father, whom she dearly loved.

Happy indeed was it for the merchant that he loved his sons and daughters better than his wealth; for he little thought, as he sat at the head of his plentifully supplied table, with his smiling guests around him, that several terrible misfortunes had happened, and that he was, in fact, no better than a ruined man. One of his largest ships, with a very costly cargo, was wrecked at sea, and only two of the sailors were saved, after clinging for days to the fragment of a mast; another equally valuable vessel was taken by pirates; and a

Directly he had plucked the rose the merchant saw a monster with a beast's head but of the shape of a man, who stood glaring at him in a threatening manner.



third fell into the hands of the enemy's fleet. By land he was equally unfortunate: his largest warehouse was burned, and robbers attacked and plundered a caravan conveying his goods across the desert. So, within a few months, he sank from the height of wealth to the depth of poverty and want.

Very different from their former splendid mansion was the quiet little country cottage to which the merchant and his family now removed. There were no pleasure-grounds, fountains, groves of trees, or ornamental waters. The once wealthy merchant, who had employed hundreds of servants, was now reduced to toil in the fields with his sons to gain a bare living; and they had to work early and late to procure even that. Hard as their lot seemed, the three sons manfully met the reverses of fortune, and both by word and deed did all in their power to help their father.

The two elder daughters were far different, for they spent all their time fretting over their losses, and their grumbling not only rendered privation doubly hard for themselves but embittered the lot of the merchant and his sons. They would not enjoy the plain fare the others ate with relish; they rose late, and spent the

days in idleness, too proud and lazy to devote themselves to any useful task, and despising their brothers for working hard.

While her two elder sisters sat crying and sobbing, Beauty would be fully employed in spinning or in seeing to the household affairs; and she always had a smile for her father and her brothers when they came in wearied from their work.

By working hard, morning, noon, and night, the merchant and his sons were fortunate to earn enough to keep them from want. In fact, in one respect the merchant was better off, for whereas, during the time of his prosperity, he had often been kept awake at night by anxious thoughts for the safety of his ships, his warehouses, and his stores of gold and silver, such thoughts now never entered his mind, and he slept soundly and peacefully till morning. Also his conscience was clear, for he had always been honourable in his dealings, and, though every one knew of his misfortunes, he was still respected by all whose respect was worth having.

After they had lived in this way for about a year a great change came over their quiet life. One day a messenger arrived at the

merchant's cottage with an important letter. It contained news that a ship, long given up as wrecked and lost, had safely anchored in a distant port, and the merchant was desired to go and take possession without the loss of a day.

You can fancy what a stir this made in the little household. The merchant's sons looked hopeful, and the two elder sisters, radiant with smiles, began at once to discuss plans for future pleasures. Beauty was glad too; but she was chiefly glad because she loved to see her father happy. The merchant was pleased at the prospect of regaining a portion of his wealth more for his children's sake than for his own, and he had a hundred projects for giving his daughters handsome presents on his return.

Before he started, he asked each in turn what special present she would like him to bring home when he had received the money for his cargo. The two elder sisters, who had counted on this very question, were at once ready with a long list of things they wanted, chiefly fine dresses and jewels; and their requests somewhat surprised and pained their father, for they seemed to think his whole

fortune had been restored instead of a single vessel.

He, however, promised that they should have what they wanted if he could possibly secure it. Beauty had not been thinking about herself at all, and when she heard what her sisters wanted decided that all the ship contained would not suffice to cover the cost.

"Well, Beauty," asked her father, "and what do you desire? What can I bring you, my child?"

"Nothing at all, thank you, father," she replied.

But when he seemed hurt at this she kissed him and flung her arms round his neck, saying:

"Yes, dear father, there is one thing I should love. We have no flowers in our little garden here, though I am sure it is very nice. Please bring me, if you can, a single red rose."

Beauty, indeed, had never cared for wealth, and only made this request so that she might not seem to be affronting her greedy sisters.

The sisters laughed at Beauty in secret for what they called her stupid choice; but did

not dare to say so openly, for fear of their brothers.

The merchant rode off on a horse he had borrowed from a friend, the three daughters standing at the door, waving their handkerchiefs, and crying "Good-bye!" But it was Beauty who got the last kiss.

The merchant's journey was not so prosperous as he had hoped. The cargo, indeed, had been saved, and the ship was safe in port; but a lawsuit had ensued, and there was so much to pay that the merchant set out for home not much richer than he had left it. On his return he met with a wonderful adventure, which was to have some strange results.

Night had fallen as he was riding through a thick wood, and he lost his way, though he fancied he could not be far from home. His weary horse still carried him on, and he looked anxiously round for some building where he could find shelter until morning; for the rain was beating down and the wolves howled in the darkness round about.

All at once he became aware of a long avenue of trees, at the end of which a light glimmered. This proved to be a lamp,

hung at the entrance to a large and splendid palace.

WELCOME, WEARY TRAVELLER

was written in Eastern characters over the heavy, massive gate of iron. This gate appeared to be closed; but at the traveller's approach, to his great amazement, it swung slowly back on its hinges, though no porter appeared to open it. The message over the gate emboldened the wayfarer to ride into the courtyard; and an inner door, also opening of itself, disclosed a large stable, with every convenience for fifty horses, but quite empty.

The merchant put up his weary horse, fed him on the oats and hay he saw ready to hand, and then went to try and find some one in the palace. In the vestibule was a fountain which sent up a sparkling jet from a marble basin, and gave a delicious air of coolness to all around. From this he went on through many large apartments, all splendidly furnished, but with no one in them—not even a servant to take care of the house. In one of the rooms a fire was burning, and here was a table containing some very tempting dishes, though there was only one plate and a single knife.

and fork. After waiting in doubt for some time, hoping the owner of the house would appear, the hungry merchant sat down and made a hearty meal, drinking his own health afterwards.

As it was now time to rest, the merchant went upstairs. On the upper floor were several bedrooms, with large beds and handsome furniture. In one the merchant determined to pass the night, rightly thinking that the welcome to travellers inscribed over the gateway must include a bed upon which to repose. Still, he was puzzled that with all the order and neatness visible throughout the palace, no living being appeared to whom he could speak. But he was too tired to think very much about it, and soon fell fast asleep.

When he awoke the next morning, greatly refreshed, he was amazed to see that a new suit of clothes had been placed ready for him to put on instead of his own, which were torn and travel-stained.

"Surely," he thought, "this place must belong to some kind fairy who has taken pity on my ill-luck."

He then went downstairs to the room where he had supped, and was pleased, though

not altogether surprised, to find the breakfast-table ready prepared, with everything he could wish to eat and drink.

Seeing that a door leading to a beautiful garden stood open, he put on his hat, hoping that he might meet his kind host and have an opportunity of thanking him.

In the garden also everything was in first-rate order. The flower-beds were full of beautiful plants, the walks clean and hard, the grass-plots soft and smooth as velvet carpets.

At the end of one path stood a lovely arbour, shaded by a splendid rose tree in full bloom. This set the merchant thinking of his daughter Beauty's wish for a red rose; he selected the very best he could find and plucked it. A moment later came a tremendous roar, like that of an angry lion disturbed by a hunter. In terror, he fell on his knees and covered his face with his hands, dreading to look up, lest he should see some wild beast ready to spring upon him. Then he heard another great roar, and a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder: he rose and saw a monster with a beast's head but of the shape of a man, covered with fur. The creature stood glaring at him in a threatening manner, and then

said, in a terrible voice, "Ungrateful man! I saved your life by admitting you into my palace. I gave you rest and refreshment and clothes, and you requite my kindness by stealing the only thing I prize—my beautiful roses. For this you shall surely atone. Prepare for death!"

The merchant, in utter terror, again fell on his knees and begged for forgiveness, calling the Beast "my lord," and declaring that he meant no harm, but had only plucked the rose for his youngest daughter, whom he loved, and who had wished for one.

"I will spare no one who steals my roses," roared the Beast, "whatever excuse he makes."

The merchant again pleaded for his life, telling how his daughter, Beauty, had asked for nothing but a single rose, while her sisters had desired jewels and gay apparel. At last, by dint of entreaty, he prevailed.

"You shall have your life on one condition," replied the Beast. "You have told me this story of your daughters, but how am I to know that it is true? I will spare your life and allow you to go home only if you promise to bring one of them to suffer in your

stead. If she refuses to come, you must promise faithfully to be back yourself within three months. And don't call me 'my lord,' for I hate flattery; I am not a lord, but a Beast! Promise, or die! and choose quickly!"

The merchant, who was very tender-hearted, had not the least intention of letting one of his daughters die for his sake; but he thought it best to agree to the Beast's conditions, for he would at least have the satisfaction of seeing his family again. So he gave his promise and turned sorrowfully away.

"Go to the room you slept in," cried the Beast after him; "you may fill a chest with gold and jewels or whatsoever you like best to take home with you, but woe betide you if you are not back on the appointed day."

When he reached the room the merchant, reflecting that he must in any case die—for, being an upright and honourable man, he had no thought of breaking a promise made even to a Beast—decided that he might as well have the comfort of leaving his children well provided for, especially as there were heaps of gold pieces lying about. He accordingly filled the chest with gold and departed, leaving the

palace as sorrowful as he had been glad when he first beheld it.

When he reached his own house, his daughters warmly welcomed him, but were struck with the settled sadness in his face. In silence he gave the elder sisters the costly presents he had brought for them, and then sat down, evidently still very troubled. Beauty ran at once and threw her arms round his neck to comfort him.

“Ah, my dear Beauty, here is your red rose,” said the merchant; “but you little know the price your poor father has promised to pay for it.” And he told her everything that had occurred.

The elder sisters left off examining their presents and came up to listen. When they understood the cause of their father's sadness, they began to throw all the blame on poor Beauty. “If the affected little thing had only asked for presents like ours,” they declared, “this trouble would not have come, and our dear father would not be in danger of his life. She pretends to be so much better than other people, but though she will be the cause of her father's death she does not shed a single tear.”

“It would be quite useless to do so,” said Beauty quietly, “for my father will not die. As the Beast said he would accept one of the daughters, I am going to give myself up to him, and so prove my love for the best of fathers.”

The brothers would not hear of this and begged hard to be allowed to go and kill the monster. The father, however, was firm to his pledge, and knew that the Beast would not be put off. He had also secret hopes that Beauty's life would after all be spared; for the Beast's generosity had made him think that, as he had so far relented as to send him away with piles of gold, his intentions might not be so murderous as his words. He also hoped that the appearance of Beauty and her charming manners would produce an effect, as they had always done in her own home; and that the monster would not really care to take the life of so young and innocent a creature.

The sisters secretly exulted at Beauty's sad fate, for they had always been jealous of her, because she was the favourite of their father. But the brothers were really and truly grieved, and kissed their sister heartily when the three months had expired and the time had come for

her to set out with her father on their sorrowful journey.

The domain around the Beast's castle was very beautiful. Birds with splendid plumage flew about, singing merry songs as they built their nests in the thick trees. In spite of the sorrowful nature of their errand, the two travellers could not help feeling a little comforted by the beauty of the scene; and the nearer they came to the Beast's palace, the fresher became the verdure, and the thicker the throng of chirping birds.

In due time they reached the palace, which they found deserted, as on the merchant's first visit. The horse, without bidding, went into the same stable as before. In the spacious reception-hall they found a magnificent supper laid, with covers for two persons. There was every imaginable dainty on the table, but Beauty could hardly eat a mite for terror, while her father was overwhelmed with fear of what was to come. He had seen the terrible Beast, and knew what a large mouth and ugly fangs he had, and how, in every respect, he was just the sort of creature to frighten Beauty out of her wits, and he dreaded what might be the effect of the Beast's appearance.

When supper was over, a heavy tread sounded along the corridor; the door of the room was thrown open, and the Beast stalked in. And, oh! he was far, far uglier than Beauty imagined he possibly could be! And he had *such* a mouth, and two such ugly teeth came right over his lower jaw!

Beauty did her best to hide her fear. The creature walked right up to her, eyed her all over, and then asked in a gruff voice:

“Have you come here of your own free will?”

“Yes,” she faltered out.

The monster then said in a softened tone, “You are a good girl. I am much obliged to you.”

This mild behaviour somewhat raised the hopes of the merchant; but they were instantly damped by the Beast’s turning towards him, and gruffly commanding him to quit the castle and never return again under pain of death. Having given this order in a tone which showed he intended to be obeyed, the Beast retired with a bow and a good-night to Beauty, and a glance at her father which seemed to say, “Make haste off.”

“Ah, my dear Beauty,” said the merchant,

kissing his daughter tenderly, "I am half dead already at the thought of leaving you at the mercy of this dreadful Beast. You shall go back home and leave me here."

"No, indeed," said Beauty boldly, "I will never agree to that. You must go at once, or the Beast will certainly kill you."

At length the merchant departed, after kissing his daughter again a score of times, while she, poor girl, tried to raise his spirits by feigning a courage she was far from feeling. When he had gone, she took a candlestick and wandered along the corridor in search of her room: soon she came to a door on which was inscribed in large letters:

BEAUTY'S ROOM.

She timidly opened the door and found herself in a large room, beautifully furnished, with book-cases, sofas, pictures, and a guitar and other musical instruments.

"The Beast does not mean to eat me up at once," she thought, "or he would never have taken all this trouble."

So, a little comforted, she retired to rest, and, exhausted with her journey and her fears, quickly fell asleep.

Next morning she examined her room more closely. On the first leaf of an album was written her own name — BEAUTY ; and beneath it, in letters of gold, she read the following verse :—

“Beauteous lady, dry your tears ;
Here’s no cause for sighs or fears :
Command as freely as you may,
For you command and I obey.”

This was a very comforting verse indeed, but Beauty still felt very unhappy, very lonely, and very anxious to know what was to befall her.

“Ah!” sighed the poor girl, “if I might have a wish granted, it would be to see my poor father and what he is doing.”

She turned as she spoke and, to her great surprise, saw in a mirror opposite a picture of her home. The merchant, distracted with grief, was lying on a couch ; and her two sisters were at the window, looking listlessly out. ‘At this sight poor Beauty wept bitterly ; but after a time she regained her fortitude, and went down to the dining-hall. She wondered not a little to see the hall still quite empty. Not a person appeared to welcome her, but a dainty meal had been spread, as on the previous day. But at supper, as she was about to seat herself at table, the



Every evening at supper he would ask the old question, "Beauty, will you marry me?" And always she replied, in a very decided way, "No, Beast."

Beast came in and humbly requested permission "to stay and see her eat."

Beauty, who somehow now did not feel nearly so much afraid of him and was utterly tired of being alone, replied, "Yes, if you wish to do so."

All the while she was eating the Beast sat by, looking at her very respectfully but with great admiration. He soon began to talk, and astonished her by his wit and the extent of his knowledge on various subjects. At last he leaned over the table and, peering intently at her face, asked suddenly:

"Do you think me so very, very ugly?"

Beauty was obliged to reply, "Yes, shockingly ugly!" but, fearing to hurt his feelings, added that he could not help his looks.

This did not seem to console the poor Beast much, for he sighed deeply. After sitting a while in silence, he seemed to collect all his courage for one grand effort and asked Beauty—to her great astonishment—"Will you marry me?"

"No, Beast," she replied at once in a very decided way; whereupon her suitor gave a great sigh which nearly blew out the candles, and retired, looking very doleful.

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For some little time Beauty's life was a very quiet one. She roamed about the palace and through the gardens just as she pleased, invisible attendants bringing her whatever she wished for. Each evening the Beast would come to supper, and try to entertain her as best he could; and he was so well-informed and talked so sensibly that Beauty began to like him. Still, his hideous form shocked her each time she looked at him; and whenever her host, after doing his utmost to be agreeable all the evening, repeated his question, "Will you marry me, Beauty?" she always gave a very decided refusal in the unmistakable words, "No, Beast."

Then the Beast would give one of his tremendous sighs and retire; but the next evening he was always there again, and when he asked the old question, "Beauty, will you marry me?" she always replied, "No, Beast."

But soon Beauty began to be home-sick; the more so, as her magic mirror, which she never failed to consult each day, showed that her father was pining for her very much. His sons had gone to fight their country's battles, and his two eldest daughters had got married and were constantly quarrelling with

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their husbands. So, you see, the merchant was rather dull and lonely.

At last Beauty summoned up courage to beg the Beast to let her go home and see her father. He was at first much alarmed at the proposal, fearing she might forget to come back again; but at last he consented, after exacting a promise that she would not be away long.

He spoke very kindly to her on the matter, and indeed always treated her with great kindness and courtesy, though she had so frequently refused to marry him.

“To-morrow morning,” said the Beast, “you will find yourself at your father’s house. But pray, pray do not forget me in my loneliness. When you are ready to come back, you have only to lay the ring I here give you on your dressing-table before you lie down at night.”

Beauty took the ring, and the Beast bade her a sorrowful farewell.

Beauty retired to rest; and, sure enough, when she awoke in the morning, she was in her old bed at her father’s house. By the glimmering light of dawn, she could see that nothing in the room had changed. It was all kept, by her father’s directions, just as she had

left it. But one thing surprised and pleased her greatly, for which she could not in any way account. By the bed-side lay a large chest full of beautiful apparel and costly jewels.

You may fancy how glad her father was to see her. But the envious sisters, who were there on a visit, were not at all pleased. When they saw the chest they at once declared that the presents must have been intended by the Beast for them; whereupon the box disappeared, as a gentle hint that they were mistaken.

On the failure of this selfish scheme, they resolved, as they termed it, "to serve her out" by making her stay too long, hoping the Beast would be very angry, and punish her accordingly. The days passed happily away; and the sisters behaved with such false kindness that Beauty was prevailed upon to stay—first one excuse was made to prevent her going, and then another. This day a friend was coming who would be disappointed if he did not find her; the next they themselves could not make up their minds to part with their darling sister. So the days glided by, and Beauty prolonged her visit, first for one week, and then two weeks, longer than she had intended to stay.

But what was the Beast doing all this while? He was very, very lonely in his palace, vainly waiting the return of his beloved Beauty. Every evening, at sunset, he would lie on the grass in his garden, thinking of her till his very heart ached with longing.

One evening, as Beauty sat with her father at their evening meal, a likeness of the Beast suddenly appeared before her, like a figure in a magic lantern. He was very pale, and looked dreadfully thin and woeful. Directly Beauty saw the vision she was touched with remorse and regretted that she had broken her word. The mournful eyes of the poor Beast, as they turned towards her, seemed to wear a look of reproach, and she remembered how kindly he had always treated her and what pains he had taken to gratify her slightest wish. This cut her to the heart; and that night, without saying a word to any one, she laid the ring on the table when she went to bed.

When she awoke she was again in the Beast's palace; but no Beast appeared to welcome her. She had dressed herself very carefully, hoping to please him, but hour after hour went by and he did not appear, until at

last she became dreadfully alarmed. She ran into the courtyard thinking he might be there awaiting her coming; but he was not to be seen. Then she hurried up the great staircase, and looked into room after room; all were empty and silent, and the longer she searched the more she sorrowed, for the thought came to her that perhaps the poor Beast was dead.

Then she went into the garden, calling his name, and at length found poor Beast stretched out on the grass-plot close to the fountain, to all appearance dead. His eyes were closed, and he did not seem even to breathe.

Beauty had never known till now how fond she was of the Beast, and the prospect of losing him altogether was more than she could bear. She tried every effort to bring him back to life, kneeling beside him, and moistening his temples with water. Then she called him every endearing name she could think of, and at last, in very despair, brought a large bowl of water and emptied it over his prostrate form. At this the Beast opened his eyes, a gleam of joy shot across his face, and he gasped :

“Have you come back at last, Beauty? I have waited long for you and despaired of

ever seeing you again. But now I have looked on you once more, I can die quite happily."

"No! no!" cried Beauty; "my own dear Beast, you must not die. You have been very kind to me—much kinder than I deserve—and you are so good that I do not care for your looks; and indeed—indeed—I—I would be your wife if you were twenty times as ugly!"

And she flung her arms round the Beast's neck, and kissed his great hairy cheek.

At this a great crash was heard. The palace was suddenly lit up from basement to roof, hundreds of most glorious lamps—blue, and yellow, and green, and red—gleaming like wondrous jewels. Then came a burst of music, delicious voices and instruments in harmony, and the whole scene was one of rejoicing and festivity. For a moment Beauty stood bewildered at the sudden change of scene; then a gentle, grateful pressure of her hand recalled her to herself, and she beheld, with astonishment, that the Beast had been transformed into a graceful and handsome young Prince, who was gazing upon her with mingled love and admiration.

Bowing low, the Prince said, "Thank you,

Beauty," and began to say all sorts of sweet and tender things.

But Beauty was too startled at first to realize what had happened and interrupted him by exclaiming :

"But where is Beast? I do not know you. I want my Beast, my lovely Beast!"

The Prince answered her with eyes beaming with gratitude and affection.

"I am he, dear Beauty. A wicked fairy had laid me under a spell, and transformed me into the shape of a hideous beast, which I was to retain until a beautiful girl should consent, of her own free will, to marry me. You have done so: your goodness of heart and your gratitude made you overlook my ugliness; and in consenting to become the wife of the Beast you have restored an unfortunate Prince to his own shape and to happiness."

Beauty, still greatly surprised, but radiant with happiness, let the Prince lead her back to his palace and summon her father.

Great was the astonishment of the two sisters when they heard that Beauty, whom they had laughed at and despised, was to marry a Prince; but all their astonishment did not alter the fact. Beauty was far too good

and kind a girl 'to remember how shabbily they had treated her, and gave them a warm welcome at the wedding; but as they made themselves anything but agreeable, and still made spiteful remarks, a fairy who was present decreed that they should be turned into statues and stand at the door of Beauty's palace, so that they might find their punishment in beholding her happiness. Only when they repented would they become women again. For all we know they are there still, for they were certainly *very* disagreeable people.