

Beauty and the Beast

Charles Lamb

Table of Contents

<u>Beauty and the Beast</u>	1
<u>Charles Lamb</u>	1

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A MECHANT, who by generous pains
Prospered in honourable gains,
Could boast, his wealth and fame to share,
Three manly sons, three DAUGHTERS fair
With these he felt supremely blest.
His latest-born surpass'd the rest
She was so gentle, good and kind,
So fair in feature, form and mind,
So, constant too in filial duty,
The neighbours call'd her LITTLE BEAUTY !
And when fair childhood's days were run,
That title still she wore and won
Lovelier as older still she grew,
Improved in grace and goodness too.

Her elder Sisters, gay and vain,
View'd her with envy and disdain,
Toss'd up their heads with haughty air;
Dress, Fashion, Pleasure, all their care.

'Twas thus, improving and improv'd;
Loving, and worthy to be lov'd,
Sprightly, yet grave, each circling day
Saw BEAUTY innocently gay.
Thus smooth the May-like moments past;
Blest times ! but soon by clouds o'ercast !

Sudden as winds that madd'ning sweep
The foaming surface of the deep,
Vast treasures, trusted to the wave,
Were buried in the billowy grave !
Our Merchant, late of boundless store,
Saw Famine hastening to his door.

With willing hand and ready grace,
Mild BEAUTY takes the Servant's place;
Rose with the sun to household cares,
And morn's repast with zeal prepares,
The wholesome meal, the cheerful fire:
What cannot filial love inspire ?
And when the task of day was done,
Suspended till the rising sun,
Music and song the hours employ'd,
As more deserv'd, the more enjoy'd;
Till Industry, with Pastime join'd,
Refresh'd the body and the mind;
And when the groupe retir'd to rest,
Father and Brothers BEAUTY blest.

What's Life, still changing ev'ry hour ?
'Tis all the seasons in a day !
The smile, the tear, the sun, the shower
'Tis now December, now 'tis May !
At morn we hail some envied queen
At eve she sinks some cottage guest ;
Yet, if contentment gilds the scene,
Contentment makes the cottage blest.
Who more than I this truth can feel ?
I feel it, yet am charmed to find,
While thus I turn the spinning-wheel,
The station humbles not the mind.
Ah, no ! in days of youth and health,
Nature will smile, tho' Fortune frown
Be this my song, CONTENT IS WEALTH,
And duty ev'ry toil shall crown.

Not so the Sisters ; as before
'Twas rich and idle, now 'twas *poor*.
In shabby finery array'd,
They still affected a parade,
While both insulted gentle BEAUTY
Unwearied in the housewife's duty;
They mock'd her robe of modest brown,
And view'd her with a taunting frown
Yet scarce could hold their rage to see
The blithe effects of Industry.

In this retreat a year had past,
When happier tidings came at last,
And in the Merchant's smile appear'd
Prospects that all the Cotters cheer'd
A letter came ; its purport good
Part of his ventures brav'd the flood:

"With speed," said he, "I must to town,
"And what, my girls, must I bring down ?"
The envious Sisters, all confusion,
Commissions gave in wild profusion
Caps, hats, and bonnets, bracelets, broaches,
To cram the pockets of the coaches,
With laces, linens, to complete
The order, and to fill the seat.
Such wants and wishes now appear'd,
To make them larger BEAUTY fear'd;
Yet lest her silence might produce
From jealous Sisters more abuse,
Considerately good, she chose,
The emblem of herself, a ROSE.

The good Man on his journey went,
His thoughts on generous BEAUTY bent.
"If Heav'n," he said, and breath'd a prayer,
"If Heav'n that tender child should spare,
"Whate'er my lot, I must be bless'd,
"I must be rich :"
he wept the rest.
Timely such feelings ! Fortune still,
Unkind and niggard, crost his will;
Of all his hopes, alas, the gains
Were far o'erbalanc'd by the pains;
For after a long tedious round,
He had to measure back his ground.

A short day's travel from his Cot,
New misadventures were his lot
Dark grew the air, the wind blew high,
And spoke the gathering tempest nigh
Hail, snow, and night-fog, join'd their force,
Bewildering rider and his horse.
Dismay'd, perplex'd, the road they crost,
And in the dubious maze were lost,
When glimmering through the vapours drear,
A taper shew'd a dwelling near.

Beauty and the Beast

And guess our Merchant's glad surprise
When a rich palace seem'd to rise
As on he mov'd ! The knee he bent,
Thankful to Heaven; then nearer went.
But, O ! how much his wonder grew,
When nothing living met his view :

Entering a splendid hall, he found,
With every luxury around,
A blazing fire, a plenteous board,
A costly cellaret, well stor'd,
All open'd wide, as if to say,
"Stranger, refresh thee on thy way !"

The Merchant to the fire drew near,
Deeming the owner would appear,
And pardon one who, drench'd in rain,
Unask'd, had ventured to remain.
The court-yard clock had number'd seven,
When first he came ; but when eleven
Struck on his ear as mute he sate,
It sounded like the knell of Fate.
And yet so hungry was he grown,
He pick'd a capon to the bone
And as choice wines before him stood,
He needs must taste if they were good
So much he felt his spirits cheer'd
The more he drank, the less he fear'd.
Now bolder grown, he pac'd along,
(Still hoping he might do no wrong),
When, entering at a gilded door,
High rais'd upon a sumptuous floor,
A sofa shew'd all Persia's pride
And each magnificence beside:
So down at once the Merchant lay,
Tir'd with the wonders of the day.
But had it been a rushy bed,
Tuck'd in the corner of a shed,
With no less joy had it been press'd
The good man pray'd and sank to rest.

Nor woke he till the noon of day;
And as he thus enchanted lay,
"Now for my storm-sopp'd clothes," he cries:
When lo ! a suit complete he spies;

"Yes, 'tis all fairy-work, no doubt,
By gentle Pity brought about !"
Tenfold, when risen, amazement grew;
For bursting on his gazing view,
" Instead of snow, he saw fair bowers
In all the pride of summer flowers.
Entering again the hall, behold,
Serv'd up in silver, pearl, and gold,
A breakfast, form'd of all things rare,
As if Queen Mab herself were there.

As now he past, with spirits gay,
A shower of ROSES strew'd the way,
E'en to his hand the branches bent:
"One of these boughs I go content !
"BEAUTY, dear BEAUTY thy request
"If I may bear away, I'm blest."

The Merchant pull'd, the branches broke !
A hideous growling while he spoke,
Assail'd his startled ears; and then
A frightful BEAST, as from a den,
Rushing to view, exclaim'd, "Ingrate !
"That stolen branch has seal'd thy fate.
"All that my castle own'd was thine,
"My food, my fire, my bed, my wine:
'Thou robb'st my Rose-trees in return,
"For this, base Plunderer, thou shalt mourn !"
"My Lord, I swear upon my knees,
"I did not mean to harm your trees
"But a lov'd Daughter, fair as spring,
"Intreated me a ROSE to bring;
"O didst thou know, my Lord, the maid !"

"I am no Lord," BEAST angry said,
"And so no flattery ! but know,
"If, on your oath before you go,
"Within three wasted Moons, you here
"Cause that lov'd Daughter to appear,
"And visit BEAST a volunteer
"To suffer for thee, thou mayest live :
"Speak not ! do this ! and I forgive."
Mute and depress'd the Merchant fled,
Unhappy traveller, evil sped

BEAUTY was first her sire to meet,
Springing impatient froth her seat
Her Brothers next assembled round
Her straying Sisters soon were found.
While yet the Father fondly press'd
The Child of Duty to his Breast,
Accept these Roses, ill-starr'd Maid !
" For thee thy Father's life is paid."
The Merchant told the tale of BEAST
And loud lamentings, when he ceas'd
From both the jealous Sisters broke,
As thus with taunting rage they spoke:
'And so thou kill'st thy Father, Miss,
"Proud sinful creature, heard'st thou this ?
"We only wish'd a few new clothes "
BEAUTY, forsooth, must have her ROSE !
"Yet harden'd Wretch, her eyes are dry,
"Tho' for her Pride our Sire must die !"

Die ! not for worlds !" exclaim'd the Maid;
"BEAST kindly will take me instead:
"And O, a thousand deaths I'd prove
"To show my father how I love
The Brothers cried, "Let *us away*,
"We'll perish, or the Monster slay."

"Vain hope, my gen'rous Sons, his power
"Can troops of men and horse devour;
"Your offer, BEAUTY, moves my soul;
"But no man can his fate controul:
"Mine was the fault; you Love, are free;
"And mine the punishment shall be."

BEAUTY was firm ! the Sire caress'd
Again his Darling to his breast
With blended love and awe survey'd,
And each good Brother blest the Maid !
Three months elaps'd, her Father's heart
Heav'd high, as she prepar'd to part;
The Sisters try'd a tear to force,
While BEAUTY smil'd as she took horse;
Yet smil'd thro' many a generous tear,
To find the parting moment near !
And just as evening' shades came on,
The splendid Palace court they won.
BEAUTY, now lost in wonder all,
Gain'd with her sire the spacious hall;

Beauty and the Beast

Where, of the costliest viands made,
Behold, a sumptuous table laid !
The Merchant, sickening at the sight,
Sat down with looks of dire affright,
But nothing touch'd; tho' BEAUTY prest,
And strove to lull his fears to rest.

Just as she spoke, a hideous noise
Announc'd the growling monster's voice,
And now BEAST suddenly stalk'd forth,
While BEAUTY well-nigh sank to earth:
Scarce could she conquer her alarms,
Tho' folded in a father's arms.
Grim BEAST first question'd fierce, if she
Had hither journied WILLINGLY ?
"Yes," BEAUTY cried in trembling tone:
'That's kind," said BEAST, and thus went on
"Good Merchant, at to-morrow's dawn,
"I charge and warn you to BE GONE !
"And further, on life's penalty,
"Dare not again to visit me.
"BEAUTY, farewell !" He now withdrew,
As she return'd the dread adieu.

Each then their separate pillow prest,
And slumber clos'd their eyes in rest.
As zephyr light, from magic sleep,
Soon as the sun began to peep,
Sprang BEAUTY; and now took her way
To where her anguish'd father lay.
But envious time stole swiftly on
"Begone, lov'd Father ! ah ! begone !
"The early dew now gems the thorn,
"The sun-beams gain upon the morn.
"Haste, Father, haste ! Heaven guards the good !"
In wonder rapt the Merchant stood;
And while dread fears his thoughts employ,
A child so generous still was joy.
"My father's safe !" she cried, "blest heaven !
"The rest is light, this bounty given."

She now survey'd th' enchanting scene,
Sweet gardens of eternal green
Mirrors and chandeliers of glass,
And diamonds bright which those surpass;

Beauty and the Beast

All these her admiration gain'd
But how was her attention chain'd
When she, in GOLDEN LETTERS trac'd,
High o'er an arch of emeralds plac'd,

"BEAUTY'S APARTMENT ! Enter blest !

"This, but an earnest of the rest !"

The fair one was rejoic'd to find,
BEAST studied less her eye, than mind.
But, wishing still a nearer view,
Forth from the shelves a book she drew,
In whose first page, in lines of gold,
She might heart-easing words behold:
"Welcome BEAUTY, banish fear !
"You are Queen, and Mistress here:
"Speak your wishes, speak your will,
"Swift obedience meets them still."

"Alas !" said she, with heartfelt sighs,
The daughter rushing to her eyes,
"There's nothing I so much desire,
"As to behold my tender sire."

BEAUTY had scarce her wish express'd
When it was granted by the BEAST:
A wond'rous mirror to her eye,
Brought all her cottage family.
Here her good Brothers at their toil,
For still they dress'd the grateful soil
And there with pity she perceiv'd
How much for her the Merchant griev'd;
How much her Sisters felt delight
To know her banish'd from their sight,
Altho' with voice and looks of guile,
Their bosoms full of joy the while,
They labour'd hard to force a tear,
And imitate a grief sincere..

At noon's repast, she heard a sound
Breathing unseen sweet music round;
But when the evening board was spread
The voice of BEAST recall'd her dread:
"May I observe you sup ?" he said;
"Ah ! tremble not ; your will is law
"One question answer'd, I withdraw.
"Am I not hideous to your eyes ?"

Beauty and the Beast

"Your temper's sweet," she mild replies.
"Yes, but I'm ugly, have no sense :"
"That's better far than vain pretence "
"Try to be happy, and at ease,"
Sigh'd BEAST, "as I will try to please."
"Your outward form is scarcely seen
"Since I arriv'd, so kind you've been."

One quarter of the rolling year,
No other living creature near,
BEAUTY with BEAST had past serene,
Save some sad hours that stole between.
That she her Father's life had sav'd,
Upon her heart of hearts was grav'd:
While yet she view'd the BEAST with dread,
This was the balm that conscience shed.
But now a second solace grew,
Whose cause e'en conscience scarcely knew.
Here, on a Monster's mercy cast,
Yet, when her first dire fears were past,
She found that Monster, timid, mild,
Led like the lion by the child.
Custom and kindness banish'd fear;
BEAUTY oft wish'd that BEAST were near.

Nine was the chosen hour that BEAST
Constant attended BEAUTY'S feast,
Yet ne'er presumed to touch the food,
Sat humble, or submissive stood,
Or, audience crav'd, respectful spoke,
Nor aim'd at wit or ribbald joke,
But oftener bent the raptur'd ear
Or ravish'd eye, to see or hear.
And if th' appointed hour past by,
'Twas mark'd by Beauty with a sigh.

"Swear not to leave me !" sigh'd the BEAST;
"I swear " for now her fears were ceas'd,
"And willingly swear, so now and then
"I might my Father see again
"One little WEEK he's now alone."
"Granted !" quoth BEAST: "your will be done !
"Your RING upon the table lay
At night, you're there at peep of day:
"But, oh, remember, or I die !"

He gaz'd, and went without reply.

At early noon, she rang to rise
The Maid beholds with glad surprise,
Summons her Father to her side,
Who, kneeling and embracing, cried,
With rapture and devotion wild,
"O bless'd be Heaven, and blest my Child "
BEAUTY the Father now address'd,
And straight to see her Sisters press'd.
They both were married, and both prov'd
Neither was happy or belov'd.
And when she told them she was blest
With days of ease, and nights of rest;
To hide the malice of the soul,
Into the garden sly they stole,
And there in floods of tears they vent
Their hate, and feel its punishment.
"If," said the eldest, "you agree
We'll make that wench more curs'd than we !
I have a plot, my sister dear
"More than her WEEK let's keep her here.
"No more with MONSTER shall she sup,
"Who, in his rage, shall eat her up."

And now such art they both employ'd
While BEAUTY wept, yet was e'erjoy'd;
And when the stated hour was come,
"Ah ! can you quit so soon your home ?"
Eager they question'd tore their hair
And look'd the Pictures of Despair.
BEAUTY, tho' blushing at delay,
Promis'd another week to stay.

Meantime, altho' she err'd from love,
Her conscious heart could ill approve
"Thy vow was giv'n, thy vow was broke !"
Thus Conscience to her bosom spoke.
Thoughts such as these assail'd her breast,

And a sad vision broke her rest !
The palace—garden was the place
Which her imaginations trace:
There, on a lawn, as if to die,
She saw poor BEAST extended lie,
Reproaching, with his latest breath,
BEAUTY'S ingratitude in death.

Roused from her sleep, the contrite Maid
The RING upon her toilet laid,
And *Conscience* gave a sound repose.
Balmy her rest; and when she rose,
The palace of poor BEAST she found,
Groves, gardens, arbours' blooming round.
The morning shone in summer's pride,
BEAUTY for fairer evening sigh'd
Sigh'd for the object once so fear'd,
By worth, by kindness, now endear'd.
But when had pass'd the wonted hour,
And no wish'd footstep pass'd the door;
When yet another hour lagg'd on,
Then to the wide canal she ran:
"For there in vision," said the fair,
"Was stretch'd the object of my care
And there, alas I he now was found
Extended on the flowery ground.
"Ah ! fond and faithful BEAST," she cried,
"Hast thou for me perfidious died ?
"O ! could'st thou hear my fervid prayer,
" 'Twould ease the anguish of despair."

BEAST open'd now his long—closed eyes,
And saw the fair with glad surprise.
"In my last moments you are sent;
"You pity, and I die content."
"Thou shalt not die," rejoin'd the maid
"O rather live to hate, upbraid
"But no ! my grievous fault forgive !
"I feel I can't without thee live."
BEAUTY had scarce pronounc'd the word,
When magic sounds of sweet accord,
The music of celestial spheres,
As if from seraph harps she hears !
Amaz'd she stood, new wonders grew;
For BEAST now vanish'd from her view;
And, lo ! a PRINCE, with every grace
Of figure, fashion, feature, face,
In whom all charms of Nature meet,
Was kneeling at fair BEAUTY'S feet.

Beauty and the Beast

"But where is BEAST ?" still BEAUTY cried:
"Behold him here," the PRINCE replied.
"Orasmyn, lady, is my name,
"In Persia not unknown to fame;
"Till this re-humanising hour,
"The victim of a Fairy's pow'r ;
Till a deliverer could be found,
"Who, while the accursed spell still bound,
"Could first *endure*, tho' with alarm,
"And break at last by *love* the charm !"

BEAUTY delighted, gave her hand,
And bade the PRINCE her fate command;
The PRINCE now led through rooms of state,
Where BEAUTY'S family await,
In bridal vestments all array'd,
By some superior power convey'd.
BEAUTY," pronounc'd a heavenly voice,
"Now take from me your princely choice.
"VIRTUE, to every good beside
"While wit and beauty were denied,
"Fix'd your pure heart ; for which, unseen,
"I led your steps and now a QUEEN,
"Seated on Persia's glittering throne,
" 'Tis mine and Virtue's task to crown

"But as for you, ye Sisters vain,
" Still first and last in Envy's train,
"Before fair BEAUTY'S Palace-gate,
"Such Justice has decreed your fate,
"Transformed to statues you must dwell,
"Curs'd with the single power, to feel
Unless by penitence and prayer
But this will ask long years of care,
"Of promise and performance too,
"A change of mind from false to true
"A change I scarce can hope from you."

Instant the Power stretch'd for her wand,
Her sceptre of supreme command,
When lo ! at her resistless call,
Gay crowds came thronging through the hall,
The blissful hour to celebrate
When Persia's Prince resumed his state
At once the dome with music rang,

Beauty and the Beast

And virgins danc'd, and minstrels sang;
It was the JUBILEE of YOUTH,
Led on by Virtue and by Truth;
The pride of Persia fill'd the scene,
To hail ORASMYN and his QUEEN !

THE END.