

Welcome to Storytime with Dad. Today we will be reading Beauty and the Beast.

There once was a merchant who had three daughters and three sons. The youngest of them all was known as Beauty, and her sisters were jealous of her and treated her just as if she were their servant. They made her wash and cook while they went off to parties, but Beauty didn't mind. She was her father's favorite child. She loved him and he loved her, and that made up for everything. Many a young man came asking her to marry him, but she always said no, she loved her father too much to leave him.

One winter, the merchant fell on hard times. One by one his ships were lost at sea in terrible storms, and all of his wealth went with him. He had to sell their beautiful house and move into a much smaller one. The sons had to work in the fields and the daughters to take in washing. The older girls hated this so much that they lazed in bed till 10:00 every morning, knowing that Beauty would have gotten up at 4:00 to make sure the work was done. She did it willingly, it hurt her to see how distressed their father was and she would do anything to make him happy again.

Then, one day he received news that made him prance around the garden with joy, as if he were a young man again!

"My last ship has come home," he sang, waving a letter at them. "We're rich again!"

He saddled his horse at once and set off to the port to sort out his business affairs. His daughters ran alongside him as far as the village well.

"Bring me lots of silk gowns!" the oldest one said.

"Bring me a little monkey!" said the middle one.

"What about you Beauty?" the merchant laughed, full of high spirits.

"Oh," she said. "Bring me a rose father."

The sister is laughed at her and the merchant went on his way singing because the morning was bright and full of promise. But by the end of the day all is happiness had vanished away. The news he had been sent was false. Far from having a ship full of merchandise, he had nothing at all. His Last Ship had sunk. He was completely penniless.

He turned his horse for home, sad and weary though he was. It could be that he fell asleep at the reins. Who knows? Anyway, he lost his way.

There was a terrific snow storm, hail came lashing down, and thunder roared about him. He saw a mansion lit up in a flash of lightning, and he rode up toward the huge wrought iron gates.

"Perhaps I could shelter here," he said aloud, and instantly the great gates swung open. He rode in and the gate swung shut behind him. It was the same when he reached the mansion house. The door of the stable swung open, and he dismounted and let his horse trot in for shelter and food.

He climbed the steps of the mansion and was just about to pull the bell when the great studded door swung back. He stepped inside and it was closed behind him. There was no one to be seen, yet he had the sensation of eyes peering at him. A bright fire sprang up in the grate; unseen hands lifted his soaked overcoat from his shoulders, and his hat from his head, and his gloves from his hands. He looked around him and there was no one there. A comfortable chair was pulled up to the fire and he felt himself being guided toward it, and he sank down and fell asleep.

When he woke up a table had been placed at his side with tasty smelling food steaming in a silver bowl, and red wine glowing in the crystal goblet. There was still no sign of his host, but the merchant ate and drank thankfully. It was a long time since he'd eaten so well! When he had finished, the table was lifted away out of sight. The great clock chimed to 12 and one by one the candles were blown out, yet 1 remained as if to light his way upstairs. The merchant stood up yawning, and climbed up the stairs. A door opened and there was a bed freshly made with the covers turned back neatly. He knew it was meant for him and within seconds of climbing into it he was asleep.

The next morning it was as if the storm had never been. The sun streamed through the windows. The merchant found that new fine clothes had been put out for him and that his breakfast had been set out. He called for his host, but no one came. Yet *still* he had the sensation of being watched from some hidden place. He went outside to fetch his horse from the stable and saw a garden full of sweet smelling roses, even though it was still winter and snow laced the trees.

He thought at once about Beauty and he decided to pick a rose for her before he left. He put out his hand and plucked one. At once he heard the roar of a wild animal and dropped the rose in his terror. The bushes were clawed aside and there in front of him a hideous creature reared up on its hind legs, lashing out as he you were going to rip the merchant up into tiny shreds.

"How dare you pick my roses!" he snarled. "I have given you food and shelter willingly. How dare you steal my roses!"

The merchant flung himself on his knees, weak with fear.

"Forgive me! Please forgive me, my lord!" he begged.

"I am not 'my lord'. I am the Beast! You will die for this." The Beast dropped down on all fours and prowled around the merchant, bearing his teeth and growling.

"I beg you to let me go. I only picked the rose for my daughter, and my sons and daughters will be watching for me. At least, let me say goodbye to them."

"Go back to your sons and daughters!" the Beast roared. "But within one month, you must return. Either you or one of your daughters must die. That is my bargain."

"I promise I'll come back," the merchant said, heavy with dread. Then he scrambled onto his horse and galloped home as if the wind was carrying him.

"I'm only with you for a short while," he told his sons and daughters. "I have come to say goodbye." And he told them the strange story of the mansion and the unseen servants, and the beautiful garden full of sweet roses in the snow. He gave Beauty her rose, and last of all he told them about the Beast and of the promise he had made.

"I must go back to him," he said. "And you will never see me again children. "

"Let me go instead!" Beauty said at once.

"Yes! Let her go!" the sisters said.

At the end of the month Beauty and her father both went to the Beast's mansion. The huge gates swung open for them, and they went in slowly, full of fear. Again, there was no one to be seen and yet they both had the feeling that unseen eyes were watching them.

"Leave me now," Beauty said.

"How could I leave you here?" her father asked.

"You must," said Beauty, and sadly her father said goodbye to her and went back home.

Beauty found that wonderful things had been prepared for her. Beautiful food, fine clothes, gorgeous jewels, yet she had no heart for any of them. She ate alone on her first evening, served by invisible hands. She felt eyes watching her and knew that the Beast was with her. She could smell him and the foul reek of his breath. She could hear the scratch of his claws on the tiles, and when she turned to look at him she nearly fainted with fear.

"Do you have everything you need, Beauty?" he asked her.

"Yes, thank you," she said wishing with all her heart that he would go away. She couldn't bring herself to look at him again.

"I won't trouble you," he said. "But I should like to see you every day. May I come when you are dining just to watch you eat?"

"You are the master," said Beauty. "I must do as you wish."

"No! I must do as *you* wish said the Beast. Will you please permit me, Beauty?"

So she said yes. And the next night when she was dining, she shuddered to hear the scrape of his claws on the ground and the rasp of his breathing behind her ear. At the end of the meal, he put his paw over her trembling hand.

"Beauty. Will you marry me?" he asked.

"No!" she screamed. She pushed him away and ran to her room where she flung herself on her bed and sobbed for hours. She was trapped with a beast. It was quite clear that he had no intention of killing her, but she might as well be dead, she thought. Every night he came to her at 9, and every night he asked her to marry him, and her answer was always the same. But whenever he spoke, there was such a deep sorrow in his voice that she began to pity him.

"I am the Beast and you are afraid of me," he said. "Forgive me."

"I'm not afraid of you, now," Beauty said. "But I can't marry you."

"No," he said sadly.

"But I can be your friend?" she told him. It was true to. She began to look forward to his coming every evening. She was bored and lonely when he wasn't there. In a strange way that she couldn't understand, Beauty grew to like the beast - but he was a beast. He killed the wild creatures in the woods around his mansion and would sometimes have their blood on his paws and around his mouth when he came to see her.

"Forgive me," he would say to her. "This is how I am."

One day, the Beast gave her a mirror as a present, but when she looked into it she did not see her own reflection. She saw her father lying in a bed in a poor room, and he looked old and sad and ill. Beauty ran to the beast and begged him to let her go home.

"You want to leave me, Beauty?" he said. And his voice was so full of sadness that she felt tears rising in her now.

"I don't want to leave you, not forever," she said. "But I want to go back to be with my father, too."

"Then go to him," said the Beast. "But come back to me in a week. I can't live without you, Beauty."

So Beauty looked into the mirror again, and said, "Father" and in that very instant she was back in the old house and standing at her father's bedside.

"Beauty!" he gasped. "I thought you were dead!"

He sat up and laughed with joy, he had been wasting away with sadness, but the sight of his favorite daughter was all he needed to make him well and happy again.

"Help me out of this bed," he told her. "I don't need it now."

His daughters and sons were working in the garden when they saw their father walking toward them on the arm of one beautiful stranger.

"Who's that fine lady?" the brothers marveled.

"That's no fine lady, that's Beauty!" The oldest sister snapped.

"Just look at her, done up like a queen," the middle sister said. "Who does she think she is?"

But Beauty was glad to give them her jewels and her silk gown. "I don't need them," she told them. "All I need is to see my father well and happy."

"Promise me you won't ever go away again," he asked her.

"I can't promise that father. The Beast wants me to go back in a week."

“But you don't have to!” her oldest brother said. “We will... ‘take care’ of that Beast for you.”

When he said that, Beauty went pale and her eyes brimmed with tears. They all looked at her strangely.

“Wow,” said her father. “What’s this? I do believe you've grown fond of the Beast!”

Beauty turned away and couldn't speak for the odd sadness that filled her heart. All the same, they begged her to stay with them. Her father was well and strong, but he said he would take to his bed immediately if she was to leave him again. Beauty had taken up her tasks around the house and in the field so willingly that her sisters were determined to make her stay so they wouldn't have to do work anymore. On the day she was due to leave, they squeezed onion juice into their eyes to make themselves cry.

“Don't go! Please don't go, Beauty!” and Beauty was moved by their tears. She felt as if her heart were being torn in two, so she stayed, but every night she dreamed of the Beast. Nearly a week later, she picked up her mirror and instead of her reflection she saw him. His eyes were closed and he was slumped on the ground too weak to move. She gave a cry of horror.

“Beast!” she sobbed. “Don't die!” and instantly she was running through the great, wrought iron gates of the mansion, running through the gardens, running through the sweet-smelling rose bower and into the wild part where the Beast liked to hunt.

“Beast!” she called. “Where are you? Oh, where are you, Beast?”

At last, she saw him stretched out in the long grass. His eyes were closed and he was as still as death. She ran to him and cradled his head in her arms. “Don't die. Please don't die!” she sobbed. “I love you, Beast.”

And when she said that, the Beast opened his eyes. His rough coat fell away from him and he stood up, young and strong: a man.

“Beauty, I was under a spell,” he said. “And you have broken it with your love. Will you marry me?”

And Beauty said *yes*.

They had a magnificent wedding and the merchant and his sons were given homes on the grounds of the mansion. The sisters were turned into statues and placed in the rose garden, and there they stayed until they were truly sorry, and *that* was a long, long time.

But Beauty and her prince lived happily until the end of their days the end.



Goodness gracious, this story is packed full of a lot of stuff! It’s an old French fairy tale from 1740, but may, in fact, be as old as 4,000 years. I don’t want to get into all of the details of the story, we could have hours of discussion about it, but I do want to focus on what we might learn from the major themes.

You may have picked up on one: not to judge a book by its cover. We are never told why the Beast is a beast, but we learn through the story that there is more to him than what our eyes can see. Beauty, being forced to spend time with the Beast, learns that there is something, or someone, inside of that tough exterior who is deserving of love. It seems that everyone, even the Beast, thinks that he is nothing more than a monster. He even says at one point “This is who I am.” But it doesn’t matter what the Beast thinks of himself, what matters is what’s actually inside of him.

Sometimes it can be hard to see that we’re important and valuable. We may feel like we’re not worth anything, and others may beat up on us making us feel that way. But, inside all of us is a person worthy of love. That’s what we learn from this story – even if you don’t feel like you are.

You are loved, and you deserve love.

Taking this theme a little further, we can see that people who look like monsters to us, can be turned back into beautiful people if we show them love. That’s my challenge to you. Show someone who is difficult to love, love.

Loving someone is not always easy, but love is a choice, not a feeling, and powerful force. We can love someone even if we don’t like them. Choosing to love just means that we’re willing to put the needs of someone else above our own. That we are willing to sacrifice our own needs because we choose to see someone else as valuable.

When we do this, they can transform into someone new. Someone who also *looks* like they deserve love from the outside. And in return, they’ll show this love to someone else. This is how we can transform the world into a wonderful place. It starts you and me. It won’t be easy, it will be very hard. But it is possible, only if we accept that as a challenge.

I hope you liked the story, please drop me a review and email feedback to: hello@storytimewithdad.com. Or tweet me @DadStorytime

Thanks for listening! We'll see you next time.

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Narrated by: Grant Dryden