Beauty and the Beast

*• Based on the fairytale by the French author Madame de Beaumont (17th Century)*

There was once a merchant who had three daughters, one more beautiful than the next. One day, the father went on a business trip and said that he wanted to bring back a gift for each daughter. The eldest asked for a fine piano; the middle daughter asked for a satin dress, and the youngest, asked for nothing at all. As the father insisted, Bela said: “Bring me the most beautiful rose you find along the way.”

The business trip did not go as well as the merchant had hoped, and on his way home he found himself exhausted and with nowhere to sleep. In the middle of the forest, he spied a castle not far off, and went to knock on the door. He knocked and knocked, but no-one answered, so he pushed the door open and was met by a butler, who served him a marvelous meal and showed him to a luxurious guest room where he could pass the night. Besides the butler, he saw nobody else in the castle. As he left the next morning, he stopped to pick a rose from the beautiful gardens, but no sooner had he plucked the flower than he was accosted by the most horrendous beast, who snarled:

– Ah! In return for my hospitality, you come to rob me of my sustenance, for don’t you know that I feed on roses alone?

– I’m so sorry, I didn’t know that”—said the Merchant—“I simply wanted to take a rose home for my daughter. Let me return it to you without delay”.

– No. Take the flower, but as payment you shall bring me the first creature you see upon your return home.

As he had no choice in the matter, the Merchant set off home with the flower and the condition imposed upon it.

However, when he arrived, rather than being met by his little dog, as he had expected, he was welcomed by his daughter, Bela. He handed her the rose and explained why he did so with such a heavy heart. She said:

– Do not worry, dear father. I will go to him, and everything will work out fine.

The next day, they went back to the castle, in whose garden they repeated the events of the previous day. But when the girl picked the rose and the Beast appeared before her, she found him gentle and tame, and stroked his mane. When the time came for him to depart, the merchant bid his daughter a teary farewell, but Bela was perfectly calm.

After some time, Bela very much wanted to see her father again, so the Beast sent for the old merchant, who came immediately. He spent some days with them at the castle and soon realized how affectionate they were toward one another. When the time came for the merchant to leave, he asked the Beast to return his daughter to him. The Beast replied that the old man could visit her anytime he wished, and could take away with him any treasure he wanted, save the girl, who was to stay on at the castle as his companion.

After more time had passed, the Beast called the girl and said to her:

– Your eldest sister has married.

– How do you know?

– Would you like to see her?

– Yes, I would.

The Beast took her to a charmed room and showed her a mirror in which she could see her sister, arms linked with her groom. Bela meekly asked the Beast to allow her to go home, and the Beast said:

– If I let you go now, you will never come back.

The girl replied that she would never be so ungrateful and promised to return after three days.

The Beast agreed, but added:

– If you do not come back on the morning of the fourth day, you will find me dead. Wear this ring and do not remove it, for if you do, you will forget me.

Bela went to visit her family, and told her sisters everything that had transpired in her absence. She told them how happy she was. The sisters were envious of the affection and joy their youngest sibling seemed to be feeling, and hid the ring from her on the night of the third day. Stripped of her ring, Bela forgot all about the Beast.

And as the girl’s memory of him began to fade, so too did the Beast.

The newly married sister ended up telling her husband about what they had done to their sister, and he, an honest man, made her give back the ring. No sooner was the ring replaced on her finger than Bela’s memory came flooding back. She left the house immediately and rushed to the Beast’s castle, a half a day late. She looked for him in every room until she finally found him lying half-dead in the garden. In her anxiety, however, Bela took the Beast for dead, and, in her grief, knelt down beside him and kissed him. With this, the Beast was suddenly transformed into a handsome prince. He had been under a spell all along, which Bela’s kiss, a sincere expression of her love, had now broken, and he took her as his wife.