Beauty and the Beast

**Characters in Order of Appearance:**

NARRATOR

BEAUTY

MIDDLE SISTER

OLDEST SISTER

MERCHANT

SHIPYARD OWNER

FOREST 1 (nonspeaking part)

FOREST 2 (nonspeaking part)

BEAST

WOLF 1

WOLF 2

INVISIBLE SERVANT (nonspeaking part)

MAGIC MIRROR

**SCENE 1**

*[****Stage set:*** *A painted backdrop shows a large window, framed by curtains. It looks out on a city street lined with tall houses. In front of the window is a chair or bench decorated with a cushion. A fancy vase full of flowers sits on a small table.]*

*[On a small table within NARRATOR’s reach there should be a medium-sized can or metal bowl, a heavy stick or other object NARRATOR can use to make knocking sounds, and some coins. NARRATOR will remain in place throughout the play.]*

**NARRATOR:**

This play is Beauty and the Beast. It is a fairytale from France. Perhaps you heard of it? This one is brought to you by Stories to Grow By.

Our story starts in a mansion where a very rich merchant lived with his three lively daughters. When I say the merchant was a generous father, let’s just say he wasn’t afraid of dropping a few coins on his daughters.

*[BEAUTY enters, reading a book. A daisy is tucked behind her ear. She sniffs the flowers in the vase. Without taking her eyes from her book, she sits down and continues reading. OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER enter together from the other side of the stage. Both wear rings, bracelets and necklaces. They ignore BEAUTY, who continues to read. OLDEST SISTER is trying to pull a large ring off the hand of MIDDLE SISTER, who angrily yanks her hand away.]*

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

You can’t have that pearl ring! I said *I* wanted it! *(Holds her hand up in front of her and admires the ring.)*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(yanks it back)* I said I wanted it first!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

No, you didn’t. *(yanks it back again)* Now it’s mine!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(yanks it back again)*  Mine! *(turns away so MIDDLE SISTER can’t reach it)*

*(puts it on)* Well, *I* am wearing it to the ball tonight. I’ll hold my hand just like this… *(casually waves her hand with the ring on it)* just when the Duke’s son walks by…

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(Moves quickly away and toward BEAUTY. BEAUTY continues reading and gives no sign that she notices the squabble. MIDDLE SISTER and OLDEST SISTER pay no attention to BEAUTY.) I* was going to wear it tonight. It’s not fair!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(Keeps backing away from OLDEST SISTER and towards BEAUTY.)* Why didn’t Papa just give us more money? I could have at least bought the pearl bracelet.

*[OLDEST SISTER grabs again for the ring. MIDDLE SISTER steps quickly backward, bumping into BEAUTY and stepping on her toe. Both BEAUTY and MIDDLE SISTER jump in surprise. BEAUTY drops her book.]*

**BEAUTY:**

Ow! My foot!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(Rolls her eyes.)* Oh, Beauty! Who even knew you were here?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(Grabs the book from the floor and tosses it towards BEAUTY.)*  I don’t know why Papa lets you bury your face in a book all day long. What a waste of time!

**BEAUTY:**

*(Takes the book and smooths its pages.)* This book is amazing. It’s about…

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(Cuts BEAUTY off. Groans.)* Spare me, won’t you? Sister, you’re not a child anymore. Haven’t you looked in a mirror lately? We’re *ladies* *(twirls).*

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(twirls, then stops)* Ladies who look *good*.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(poses)* Ladies who shop.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(poses)* and…

**MIDDLE SISTER AND OLDEST SISTER** *(together):*

…who look good!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(Points to the daisy in BEAUTY’s hair.)* Ugh, Beauty, is that a real flower in your hair? A real, wilting, bugs-will-eat-holes-in-it flower?

**BEAUTY:**

*(laughs.)* It smells nice! I picked it up by the side of the road. It’s pretty, isn’t it?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(taking BEAUTY by the arm and walking with her, as an adult would in lecturing to a child) “*Pretty.” Let me explain the meaning of the word “pretty.” “Pretty” isn’t something that gets ripped and stepped on by rabbits and critters and for-goodness-sake-who-knows-what. *(shows the ring)* *This* is pretty. Am I clear?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(to OLDEST SISTER)* Let’s just hope it’s not too late for her. *(to BEAUTY)* Come shopping. Now. It’s not too late. We’ll buy a proper jewel for your hair. Then you’ll know *pretty*. *(Looks to OLDEST SISTER & OLDEST SISTER nods.)* I could use a new pair of ballroom shoes myself.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Who couldn’t?

**BEAUTY:**

But I like my daisy. And I’m at a good part - I want to finish the book.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(exasperated)* Beauty, what is the matter with you?Read books when you’re old and gray. Now’s the time for jeweled hair pins and silk dancing shoes…

**OLDEST SISTER:**

… and flouncy ball gowns with jeweled belts, and purses to match. Without those, no Duke’s son will ever look at you. Now’s the time to have a plan.

**OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER, together:**

Let’s go shopping!

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER exit arm in arm. BEAUTY exits slowly, still reading her book.]*

**NARRATOR:**

*(thoughtfully and a little sadly)* Beauty’s sisters have a point. A lot of people want to be rich. *(Picks up some coins.)* But money comes, and sometimes money goes. *(Drops the coins with a noisy clank into the container.)*

*[MERCHANT enters.]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(Paces. Rubs hands together. Rubs face. Mutters to himself)* What am I going to tell the girls?

*[BEAUTY* *enters, still reading. MERCHANT is facing away from BEAUTY and doesn’t see her enter.]*.

**BEAUTY:**

Tell us what, Papa? What’s the matter?

**MERCHANT:**

*(startled)* Oh, Beauty. *(turns to face BEAUTY, speaks in a calming voice)* Now, don’t worry. Everything’s fine. But we have certain problems. Certain particular kinds of problems. *(Breaks off as OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER are heard squabbling outside the room)*

**BEAUTY:**

*(concerned)* Father, are you ill?

**MERCHANT:**

No love, nothing like that. *(Turns aside, speaks quietly, as if to himself.)* Though I almost wish it were that*.* How can I tell them this?

**BEAUTY:**

Papa, what *is* it?

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER enter, wearing several necklaces and bracelets each, glaring at each other.]*

**MERCHANT:**

You may as well all know. My fortune is gone overnight. Vanished, kaput! We’re going to have to sell the house.

**OLDEST SISTER** and **MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(together, shouting)* Sell the house??!!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(Shocked, spreads arms to sides, looks up and around, as if at a high ceiling.)* My big, beautiful mansion? Father, that’s not possible!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(doubtfully, but with a little hope)* Maybe we can buy a bigger mansion?

**MERCHANT:**

*(sympathetically)* I’m sorry, dear. We can’t afford it. *(with determination)* Things have to change. We need to sell the coach and horses, the drawing-room furniture. *(Looks nervously at OLDEST SISTER AND MIDDLE SISTER.)* Your furs and jewelry….

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(clutching her ring)* Not my ring!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(to OLDEST SISTER, angrily)* It’s *my* ring.  *(to MERCHANT)* But now neither of us gets to keep it! And where are we going to live?

**NARRATOR:**

*(Cups hands around mouth like a megaphone; speaks to audience.)* Psssssst! Got a hint for you. *(imitates cow)* Moooooooo. *(Tucks hands into armpits, flaps arms like wings.)* Cock-a-doodle-doo!

**MERCHANT:**

Well… *(pauses)* Living in the city is so expensive.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(interrupts, with excitement)* I love that!

**MERCHANT:**

*(Ignores MIDDLE SISTER, speaks seriously.)* The countryside is much more affordable. I still have our country house. It’s just about the only thing left. We’ll move there, start a farm. *(enthusiastically)* It won’t be so bad. We’ll get our own milk and eggs.

**BEAUTY:**

It’ll be an adventure, Father.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(to BEAUTY)* Of course you like it. It’s got weeds and dirt. *I* call that kind of adventure a nightmare. There’s no way I’m planting milk and eggs.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

You don’t *plant* milk or eggs, silly! Eggs come from cows and milk comes from chickens.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

See? You’re already way ahead of the game. Knock yourself out. Me? I’m out of it. *(crosses her arms)*

**BEAUTY:**

Growing things isn’t so bad. We’ll do it together. It’ll be fun.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Your sense of *fun* stopped the minute you picked up a book and didn’t put it down. What do you know about fun? *(flounces to a seat)* We’re doomed! At least can I keep my ballgowns?

**MERCHANT:**

I’m so sorry. We have to sell everything. Even life in the country costs money.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

We’ll never get rich husbands now! *(stamps foot)* It’s so unfair!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Wait! *(to MIDDLE SISTER)* I don’t know about you, but I am naturally gorgeous and charming. And the Duke’s son has practically proposed to me already. He won’t care if things have changed a bit for Papa. He probably won’t even find out about it. I’m staying right here and getting engaged.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Well…well… I can do that, too!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

That’s the spirit. You can be engaged to the shipyard owner’s son in no time. Then we’ll be rich forever. *(Takes off necklaces, bracelets and ring and gives them to a surprised MERCHANT.)* Here you are, Papa. I don’t need these. I’m staying right here and getting a husband who’ll buy me as many as I want! *(to MIDDLE SISTER)*  Are you with me?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Let’s go get rich husbands! *(Tries to link arms with OLDEST SISTER.)*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(Moves arm away, pulls MIDDLE SISTER’s necklace lightly, taunts.)*  Aren’t you forgetting something?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(sputters angrily)* Ohhh….Ohhh! *(takes off necklaces, gives them to MERCHANT)*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(taps MIDDLE SISTER’s bracelets)* What about these?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(sputters angrily)* Ohhh! *(Yanks off bracelets and throws them at MERCHANT.)*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Now let’s go nail the deal**.**

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Right behind you, sister.

*[MIDDLE SISTER nods in approval, offers arm to OLDEST SISTER. They link arms.]*

**OLDEST SISTER :**

*(waves to BEAUTY and MERCHANT)* Say hello to the cows and chickens!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

I am *never* living on that farm.

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER exit.]*

**SCENE 2**

*[****Stage set:*** *A painted backdrop shows a medium-sized window. It looks out onto a country scene, with a barn. In front of the window a small table is placed between two chairs. A mixing bowl, spoon and a small pile of books are on the table. A broom leans against the wall.]*

*[MIDDLE SISTER and OLDEST SISTER sprawl on the chairs.]*

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(miserably)* I *hate* living on this farm.

**NARRATOR:**

*(shrugs)* Turns out some people may actually need furs and jewelry to be popular. *(rattles container with coins)*  Guess money has its uses. *(pauses, thoughtfully)* Well, who knows why it happened? But quite some time passed, and no rich husbands came along to save Beauty’s sisters from the cows and chickens.

*[MERCHANT enters, carrying a bucket.]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(cheerfully)* Morning, girls. *(holds out the bucket proudly)* Fresh milk for breakfast.

**NARRATOR:**

Truth be told, Beauty and her father were having troubles of their own with the cows and chickens.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(peers into the bucket)* There’s not much in there. *(snottily)* Again.

**MERCHANT:**

I’m trying, darling, but I haven’t quite got the hang of milking yet. And the cow kicked over the bucket.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(rolls eyes)* Again. *(sighs heavily)* I wish you would stop trying to make friends with cows and start trying to Get….Our….Money….Back.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(Groans loudly, collapses dramatically back into her chair.)* I hate milk.

*(MERCHANT exits as BEAUTY enters with frying pan.)*

**BEAUTY:**

*(holds out pan cheerfully)* Fresh scrambled eggs for breakfast!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(peers into pan; sarcastically)* Mmmm, just the way I like them. Burned. And with so many delicious shells cooked right in.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(rolls eyes with exasperation)* Again.

**BEAUTY:**

*(looks into pan, angry, exasperated)*  It so unfair! Why is cooking so hard?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Oh, Puh-leeze. How hard can it possibly be? *Servants* cook!

**BEAUTY:**

It *is* hard. There’s so much to keep track of. I wish I’d learned before.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(stands, angrily lectures BEAUTY)* Now you see here, little missy. We lived in a mansion. We did not learn to *cook.*  Ladies do not cook. *Servants* cook.

**BEAUTY:**

Well, now we don’t have any servants.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Which is why Father should stop wasting his time milking cows and Get….Our…Money…Back.

**BEAUTY:**

And there’s so much to do here. That’s how I burnt the eggs. The fire was smoking. The coffee boiled over. The rooster flew in the window. I didn’t know what to do first.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Oooooohhhh! My nightmare has come true. I was born to dance and shop and wear flouncy dresses and marry the Duke’s son! And feathers belong on hats. Not chickens!

**MERCHANT:**

*(shouts from offstage)* Oh, no! Come back, Marguerite!

**NARRATOR:**

*(imitates cow)* Mooooooooooo.

**BEAUTY:**

Oh, the cow’s out again. *(shouts)* Father, wait, I’ll help!

**NARRATOR:**

*(excitedly, imitating chickens and cow)* Buc-buc-buc. Buc-buc-bedawk. Moooooo.Buc-buc-buc-bedawwket. Mooooooo.

**MERCHANT:**

*(shouting, from offstage)* No, no! I’ll get the cow! You round up the chickens!

*[BEAUTY exits, running.]*

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(falls back dramatically on her chair)* There is absolutely *nothing* to do here. I may *die* of boredom.

**BEAUTY:**

*(from offstage)* Here, chick chick chick chick chick chick! Here, chick, chick, chick!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(ignoring noise outside, to MIDDLE SISTER)* Totally. Time simply *crawls*.

**MERCHANT:**

*(from offstage, with exasperation)* Oh, now look, Marguerite. You’ve gotten your horns stuck in the fence again!

**NARRATOR:**

*(imitates cow)* Moooooooooo!

**BEAUTY:**

*(from offstage)* I’m coming, Father!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

I’m going to do my nails and then go back to bed.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(stands)* Sounds like a plan.I need to catch up on my beauty sleep.

[*MIDDLE SISTER and OLDEST SISTER and exit.]*

**NARRATOR:**

Her sisters got lots of sleep. But Beauty woke up at 4 o’clock every morning. She learned all the jobs that make a farm run. She pumped water, kept the fire glowing, washed clothes. She weeded and watered beans and onions and potatoes. She kept the chickens so happy that they never wandered outside the fence.

*[While NARRATOR speaks, BEAUTY enters with a flower in her hair, sweeping the floor with a broom. She sings and hums as she sweeps.]*

Her cooking got better, too.

*[While NARRATOR speaks, BEAUTY leans the broom against the stage wall next to the window. From the table, she picks up a spoon with one hand, dips it into the bowl and stirs. As she stirs, she picks up a book from the table with her other hand and begins to read.]*

Before long, Beauty’s burnt eggs became tasty omelets. The dinner table was filled with rich soups, crisp salads and tasty cakes. She got so good at her chores that she had plenty of time for her old favorite pastime – reading.

*[While NARRATOR speaks, MERCHANT enters with a basket full of small bundles wrapped in paper to resemble blocks of cheese. He proudly sets the basket down on the table.]*

Beauty’s father worked hard, too. He learned to milk Marguerite, and he studied cheesemaking. His dairy grew famous for the exquisite cheeses he sold at local markets. And he bought Marguerite some friends -- Iris, Dahlia, Tulipe, Rose and Geranium. *(imitates cow)* Mooooooo!

*[While NARRATOR speaks, MERCHANT proudly pats and rearranges his cheeses in the basket.]*

It was a happy time on the farm.

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER* *enter and collapse into the chairs.]*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

I *hate* living on this farm.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

If I never see a cow lay an egg again, it’ll be too soon!

**MERCHANT:**

*(sympathetically)* I’m so sorry it’s been such a struggle, girls. *(cheerfully)* But now the cheesemaking is going well and our egg production is up….

**BEAUTY:**

*(hopefully)* I’m putting some of Papa’s wonderful cheese into this omelet.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(Sits up straight in her chair, speaks angrily to MERCHANT.)*  Isn’t that just peachy? Beauty’s finally found something she’s good at, and it’s *cooking.*  How am I supposed to get a rich husband with a sister who acts like a servant? It makes our whole family look bad.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

And after all the trouble I took teaching her how to be a lady. There she is, reading a stupid book, just like always.

**OLDEST SISTER**

Why does Beauty even have a book? I gave up my satin dancing shoes. I probably lost any chance of hosting a real masked ball *forever*! And the little servant girl gets to keep her ratty old books?

**MERCHANT:**

*(sighs)* No, darling. We sold our books. Our whole fine library….

*[NARRATOR bangs stick, as if knocking.]*

Oh, there’s someone at the door.

*[MERCHANT exits]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(Puts spoon and book down on table.)* It’s not my book. It belongs to the lady who lives in that gray stone house over the hill. She always lends me books. The neighbors here are so nice…

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(interrupts)* The neighbors are nice? Nice? That woman is a witch. She’s always out walking with that huge, awful beast that chases me! Terrifying! It’s practically as big as a whole field.

**BEAUTY:**

Beast? I haven’t seen…

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(interrupting)* Oh, how could you miss the awful thing? It’s got *dozens* of mean little eyes that glare at you. And nasty sharp horns. And *hundreds* of feet!

**BEAUTY:**

*(laughs)*  That’s not a beast. That’s her flock of sheep! They wouldn’t hurt anyone…

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(interrupts)* They’re monsters. They chased us up the road yesterday. And that lady you like so much yelled and yelled when we threw sticks at the awful brutes!

**NARRATOR:**

Neighbors are always so pleased when you throw things at their pets. *(imitates sheep)* Baaaaaaaa!

*[MERCHANT enters, looking flustered. He’s carrying a letter.]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(stammers)* This letter….this letter….*(breaks off in confusion)*

**BEAUTY:**

*(Walks to MERCHANT, puts her hand on his arm.)* What is it, Papa? Are you all right?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(interrupts, mocking)* Oooooohhhh! He got a *letter!* Listen to *me!* I was nearly *killed* by a flock of sheep*!*

**MERCHANT:**

*(dazed)* It hardly seems real. But this letter says that the ship I’d given up for lost….It’s docked, with all its goods aboard. Our money…our money…

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(Pushes past BEAUTY and OLDEST SISTER; rushes to MERCHANT.)* What about our money!

**MERCHANT:**

After all this time! I can hardly believe it but …. *(cautiously)*  It seems we may not have lost everything after all!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(rushes to MERCHANT)*  Are you talking about *our* *money?*

**MERCHANT:**

Yes. I thought it was all gone -- Poof! – when this ship didn’t come in. *(shakes letter)* But now I read that the ship has arrived after all. With all its cargo! I can hardly believe it. \\

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(pumps fist)* We’re rich again!

**MERCHANT:**

I must go to the city right away to claim my property, settle this business.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(dancing)* Rich! Rich! Rich! Jewels and parties and fun!

**MERCHANT:**

Oh, darlings! I ’m so sorry for the hardships you’ve suffered. But now I’ll make it up to you. I can hardly believe it!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Parties and fun and *presents*!

**MERCHANT:**

Yes, anything you like, my dears. What shall I bring you from the city?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(haughtily)* I’ll have a magnificent jeweled necklace. Diamonds and pearls to nestle right here at my throat. It’ll set off my beauty perfectly.

**MERCHANT:**

Well, all right. Of course.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

I want gold. Now that we’re rich again, at least a hundred men will be vying for my hand. I’ll need a long gold chain to hold all the jewels they’ll give me!

**MERCHANT:**

All right, my darling. A gold chain it is, then. *(turns to BEAUTY)* And you, Beauty?

**BEAUTY:**

*(flustered)* Oh. I haven’t thought about it. You’ll have too much to do on your trip, Father. Just come back safe. You can bring me something later.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Oh, aren’t you the perfect little picture of virtue, buttering him up like that? *(sharply)* Ask for something!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(mocks BEAUTY)* Oh, Papa, there’s nothing you could bring me that I’d like more than having you home again! *(exasperated)* Can’t you even ask for a boring old book or something? You are the most annoying person ever

**BEAUTY:**

It’s a long trip, though. Books are heavy to carry….

**MERCHANT:**

*(interrupting)* Come, Beauty. I want to bring you something.

**BEAUTY:**

All right. Bring me…a rose! That’s what I’d like.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

A rose? This farm is *full* of raggedy old flowers. They’re hideous. And they make me sneeze!

**BEAUTY:**

But I haven’t seen a real red rose since we left the city. *(firmly)* Bring me a rose, Father. I miss the rosebush in our old garden.

**MERCHANT:**

A rose it is, then. Now I must be off.

*[ALL exit]*

**SCENE 3**

*[****Stage set:*** *A small table and two chairs. A notebook and pen are on the table.]*

*[SHIPYARD OWNER is seated at the table, scribbling numbers in the notebook.]*

**NARRATOR:**

It was a long trip to the city, but the Merchant traveled as fast as he could. It was late at night when he knocked on the shipyard owner’s door. *(NARRATOR imitates loud knocking.)*

**SHIPYARD OWNER:**

*(a little startled)* Come in!

*[MERCHANT enters, looking tired.]*

*(sounding shocked)* Oh! You!

**MERCHANT:**

I came as fast as I could when I got your letter. *(hands letter to SHIPYARD OWNER)*

**SHIPYARD OWNER:**

*(stammering a bit)* Um…yes…The ship….

**MERCHANT:**

*(interrupting)* Where are my things?

**SHIPYARD OWNER:**

Well, um, that’s rather hard to say.

**MERCHANT:**

What’s hard? *(shakes letter at SHIPYARD OWNER)* It’s right here in this letter.

**SHIPYARD OWNER:**

*(hesitates)* Well, you see….That was before news of the ship…um…got out. When it did, there was a regular run on this place. All the merchants you owed money to….The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker. Dressmakers – crowds of ‘em. They all came here, waving your unpaid bills at me. Those daughters of yours. *(shakes head)* The way they spent money…

**MERCHANT:**

*(interrupting)* All right. All right. You paid off my debts from the cargo. That’s fine. But it was valuable cargo. Much more than the amount of my debts, so…

**SHIPYARD OWNER:**

*(interrupting)*  Well, there were…uh…further complications.

**MERCHANT:**

What complications? Give me my things!

**SHIPYARD OWNER:**

Well, I, um, don’t have them. They’re no longer on the books here. Your, um, old business partners had information suggesting that you might be, um, dead.

**MERCHANT:**

Dead?!

**SHIPYARD OWNER:**

Yes, or, uh, moved to the Swiss Confederation. Something about cows and, uh, cheese. So they, um, claimed the rest of your things.

**MERCHANT:**

The Swiss Confederation! *(Grabs SHIPYARD OWNER by shirt, shakes him, roars with exasperation.)* Ooooooohh! You’ve robbed me! You’ve robbed my children! Give me my money!

**SHIPYARD OWNER:**

*(shakes self free)*  But I don’t have it! *(nervously)* And no one had seen you for such a long time! Maybe you could ask your partners to give the money back?

**MERCHANT:**

Ask?! I’ll demand it! I’ll break down their doors! I’ll have them in court!

*[MERCHANT stomps out, exits. NARRATOR makes a banging sound, like a door slamming.]*

**NARRATOR:**

The merchant knocked on doors half the night and for days after. But the servants who answered said their masters were out.

A week passed, and he was no nearer seeing his money again. Unwilling to disappoint his daughters, he took the last of his traveling money to the finest jeweler in the city. He bought a pearl and diamond necklace and a long gold chain.

He looked everywhere for a rose for his dear Beauty. But the season for roses was past, and bushes in the gardens had only thorns. With no money left to pay for an inn, he slept in the alley between two buildings. Finally, despairing, he began the long walk home.

**SCENE 4**

*[****Stage set:*** *At the sides of the stage FOREST 1 and FOREST 2hold up panels painted to show the trees of a dense wood. They begin slowly stepping left to right, then right to left, across the stage, mimicking how a dense wood looks to someone wandering through it.]*

*[MERCHANT enters, looks up and around in confusion, trudges slowly across the stage. Finally, MERCHANT sits down heavily on the ground. FOREST 1 and FOREST 2 stop moving.]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(groans)* I can barely follow the track in this huge wood. It’s so confusing. And I’m so tired. But the girls must be worried sick. I must go on. I’ll go on. *(Tries to scramble to his feet, gives up.)* I can’t go on.

I’ll sleep awhile. *(sits up straight suddenly)* There may be robbers here. *(Reaches into pocket, pulls out a bit of one of the gold chains, puts it quickly back, pats pocket.)* Still here. Thank goodness. *(sinks to ground again)*

**BEAST:**

*(Offstage, roars as if from far away)* Rraaahhrr! Rraaahhrr!

**MERCHANT:**

*(Sits up straight, startled.)* What was that? Robbers? No. Robbers don’t roar. They sneak up on you. Very quietly. *(Looks around suspiciously, sinks down again.).*

*[NARRATOR makes slight rustling or rattling noise.]*

What’s that? Sneaking? *(moans)* Ooooh… *(crawls partly behind FOREST 1 or FOREST 2)* No sense in waiting to hide until the robbers get here.

**BEAST:**

*(Offstage, faraway roar)* Rraaahhhrr! *(pause, melancholy groan)* Uhooooh.

**MERCHANT:**

*(sits up straight).* Oh! What roars and groans? Wild animals? Monsters? *(getting more tired as he speaks, half asleep)* Too tired to think. Must sleep. *(falls to ground as if asleep)*

*[WOLF 1 peers around one of the tree backdrops, eyes the MERCHANT, then scampers offstage. WOLF 2 peers quickly around the other tree backdrop, then backs slowly away.]*

**NARRATOR:**

He may be in for a long evening. Wonder if wolves roar and groan?

**WOLF 1**:

*(offstage, as if howling from a distance)* Aaaoooohh!

**NARRATOR:**

Oh, that’s right. Wolves howl. *(cheerfully)* And they don’t steal jewelry.  *(thoughtfully)* They do get hungry, though.

**WOLF 2:**

*(offstage, howling a little louder)* Aaaoooohh!

**MERCHANT:**

*(sits up suddenly)* What was that? *(looks overhead)* Oh. Just the wind. *(beings to sink back, sleepily)* All these trees.  *(begins to sink back, sleepily)* Nothing to worry about. Sleep now. *(falls back to sleeping position)*

**WOLF 1**:

*(a little closer)* Aaaoooohh!

**MERCHANT:**

*(sits up quickly)* Wolf!

**WOLF 2:**

*(closer, from other side of stage)* Aaaoooohh!

**MERCHANT:**

Wolves! *(staggering to his feet)* Oh! The girls. I can’t be eaten by wolves! Must get home.

*[FOREST 1 and FOREST 2 begin moving around stage, MERCHANT staggers first one way then another among the trees. WOLF 1 and WOLF 2 appear on the sides of the stage, howl toward MERCHANT. He staggers away from each howl.]*

**WOLF 1:**

Aaaaoooohh! *(howling the word “home”)* H-o-o-o-o-mmmme! Aaaoooohh!

**MERCHANT:**

*(gasping)* Home? What? Am I hearing things?

**WOLF 2:**

Aaaoooohh! *(howls word)* Bea-u-u-u-u-uty! Aaaoooohh!

**MERCHANT:**

*(growing more agitated)* My poor girls. My poor Beauty!

**WOLF 1:**

Aaaoooohh! *(howls word)* Ro-o-o-o-o-ses! Aaaoooohh!

**MERCHANT**:

And I’ve never found Beauty’s rose!

*[WOLF 1 and WOLF 2 come closer to MERCHANT, gradually chase him off the stage. Trees continue moving.]*

**WOLF 1:**

*(closer and louder) Aaaoooohh!*

**WOLF 2:**

*(closer and louder, from other side of stage)* Aaaoooohh!

**WOLF 1**:

*(closer and louder)* Aaaoooohh!

**WOLF 2:**

Aaaoooohh!

*[MERCHANT exits, running, toward back of stage. WOLF 1 and WOLF 2 follow a little way behind.]*

**BEAST:**

*(offstage, as if at a distance)* Rraaaahhrr! *(groans)* Uhooohh!

*[At the sound, WOLF 1 and WOLF 2 freeze and look up and around them, nervously. They run off, following MERCHANT.]*

**NARRATOR:**

Did *you* hear that? Hmm. *(pauses)* Well, whatever. *(shrugs)* Wolves, huh? Playful little things, aren't they?

**SCENE 5**

*[****Stage set:*** *At one side of the stage is a backdrop painted to show a hedge. Near front of stage is a movable backdrop painted to look like a large door. Behind the door, unseen at the beginning of the scene, is a backdrop showing a large fireplace with a fire burning. Just in front of it are two chairs and a table set with dishes, flowers and candles. Nearby are pillows on the floor or on a low bench.]*

*[MERCHANT enters, running, near front of stage, looking around and behind himself frantically. He stops in front of the door. WOLF 1 and WOLF 2 enter, sneakily, at front of stage, behind MERCHANT.]*

**WOLF 1:**

Aaaoooohh!

*[MERCHANT glances fearfully behind him, then makes a violent knocking motion at the DOOR. NARRATOR makes loud knocking sound.]*

**WOLF 2:** Aaaoooohh!

*[MERCHANT frantically raises his fist to knock again just as the door opens and floats aside and off stage, as if by itself. MERCHANT looks nervously after it. WOLF 1 and WOLF 2 glance toward each other, then exit on opposite sides of the stage. MERCHANT looks up and around, as if at a high-ceilinged room.]*

**NARRATOR:** Magic door. Nice fireplace. Maybe things are looking up?

**MERCHANT:**

*(calls out)* Is anybody here? Who opened that door? Whoever you are, come back!

**NARRATOR:**

Mmmmm. Delicious-smelling dinner, too.

**MERCHANT:**

*(stares at table)* I’m so hungry. *(walks away from the table, then turns and looks at it hungrily)* But they must be expecting a guest. *(shouts)* Please! Is anybody here? *(groans, sinks down onto cushions)* Fire’s nice anyway.

**NARRATOR:**

He fell into a sound sleep. You would too, if wolves had chased you half the night. Just about nothing could have waked him. But around dawn…

**BEAST:**

*(offstage)* Rraaahhrr!

*[MERCHANT wakes, sits up, rubs his eyes and looks around.]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(stands, sniffs air, looks toward table)* They can’t still be waiting for a guest. *(hesitates, then sits in chair)* I shouldn’t. Wait…I’ll pay them. *(puts hand in pocket, pulls out a necklace).*Oh, no money. I forgot. *(sighs)*  I’ll send a payment when I get home. *(eats hungrily)*

*[While the MERCHANT eats, INVISIBLE SERVANT enters behind him – arms sticking through a big piece of cardboard decorated as a wall. INVISBLE SERVANT stands at the side of the stage, holding out a scarf and hat.]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(rises from table, shouts toward ceiling)* Thank you! *(turns to exit)*

*[INVISIBLE SERVANT steps sideways to hold hat and scarf in front of MERCHANT’s face]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(jumps back)* Ohh!

*[INVISIBLE SERVANT shakes hat and scarf, offers them to MERCHANT.]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(Takes hat and scarf, mutters to himself.)* This is a *very* strange place.

*[MERCHANT walks slowly toward the front of the stage, putting on hat and scarf. As the MERCHANT walks, roses are pushed through holes on the backdrop that shows a hedge, as if they’re blooming.]*

Got chilly overnight. *(Pulls scarf closer around him, shouts to sky.)* Whoever you are, thank you again! I must hurry home. Poor Beauty. *(begins to hurry past the hedge)* I never found… *notices the roses, plucks one) …*her rose! Oh, this *is* a wonderful place….

*[BEAST enters, stalks angrily.]*

**BEAST:**

Thief! Thief! Is this how you repay hospitality? Why have you stolen my rose?

**MERCHANT:**

*(shocked)* Oh, sir! I am *so* grateful for the generosity I’ve found here. I never …

**BEAST:**

*(loudly and sternly)* Do not call me “Sir.” Call me “Beast.” For that is what I am.

**MERCHANT:**

Oh! Oh, Sir…errr, Sir Beast, I meant no harm. The rose seemed such a small thing. I took it only because my youngest daughter had asked for one.

**BEAST:**

*(strides toward the MERCHANT, threatening)* A small thing? I care for a single rose no less than I care for my mighty palace! *(gestures as if toward a high building)* Thief! The penalty for thievery is death!

**MERCHANT:**

*(Falls onto the ground, hands raised, begging.)* Oh, please, Sir… Beast! When I saw the rose, I thought only of my child, my Beauty. She so wanted one, and I found no roses for her in the city.

**BEAST:**

Thief!

**MERCHANT:**

*(throws self onto ground)* Please, won’t you spare my life! My daughters have no one but me to provide for them.

**BEAST:**

I will spare your life, thief.

**MERCHANT:**

*(lifts head, raises hands)* Oh, thank you a thousand times!

**BEAST:**

*(interrupting)* On one condition.

**NARRATOR:**

Uh-oh.

**BEAST:**

You have daughters.

**MERCHANT:**

*(hesitates)* Yes.

**BEAST:**

If one of them, of her own free will, will offer to come here and die in your place, then your life will be spared.

**MERCHANT:**

*(groans)* Uhooohh.

**BEAST:**

If not…

**MERCHANT:**

*(groans louder)* Uhooohh!

**BEAST:**

If not…*(pauses)*…then you must swear to return in one month’s time and pay the debt for thievery yourself.

**MERCHANT:**

*(groans)* Uhooohh.

**BEAST:**

*(very loudly)* Swear!

**MERCHANT:**

*(scrambles to his feet, stammers)* I…I…sw…swear, Beast!

*[MERCHANT snatches up the rose and exits, running. BEAST watches him, then exits, trudging as if sad and tired.]*

**SCENE 6**

*[****Stage set:*** *A painted backdrop shows a medium-sized window. It looks out onto a country scene, with a barn. In front of the window a small table is placed between two chairs.]*

**NARRATOR:**

It’s a hard road home when you’ve just made a promise that could mean your death or bring harm to a beloved child. Still, the merchant walked as fast as he could. Didn’t want to waste one precious minute of the time he had left with his family. But his heart and his steps felt heavy. Very heavy.

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER enter, looking bored. They flop into the chairs.]*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

If Father doesn’t come back with our money soon, I may die of boredom in this place.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

I have *nothing* to wear. *(hits at her dress in disgust)* This awful neckline is totally out of style. When Father brings our money, I’m going shopping, like, immediately.

*[BEAUTY enters with the milking bucket, sets it down.]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(sighs)* I think the cows miss Papa, too. Marguerite and Geranium both kicked over their pails this morning, poor dears.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(scolds)* Don’t be silly, Beauty. Talking about cows like that. You’d think they were alive or something.

**NARRATOR:**

*(groans)* Uhooohh. *(imitates cow)* Moooooo!

*[MERCHANT enters as* NARRATOR *speaks. He carries a rose.]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(turns toward MERCHANT, with excitement)* Father!

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER jump up. BEAUTY, OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER run to MERCHANT. All hug. ]*

*[ALL talk at once.]*

**MERCHANT:**

Oh, my dears. It’s wonderful to see you.

**BEAUTY:**

I’ve been so worried for you.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

I thought you’d *never* get back!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

You’re back! We’re rich again!

*[Hubbub dies down. OLDEST SISTER pulls out chair and gestures to MERCHANT to sit. BEAUTY notices the rose in MERCHANT’s hand and takes it from him]*

**BEAUTY:**

And of course you remembered my rose. *(sniffs it)* Thank you. It’s beautful.

**MERCHANT:**

*(a little sadly)* No, I could never ever forget your rose, my dear. *(brightens, reaches into pocket, speaks cheerfully)* Now, don’t go thinking that I’ve forgotten you either, girls. *(pulls out necklace and chain)* Just see what I have here.

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER grab the jewelry, put it on.]*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Well, I should hope you didn’t forget us!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(Interrupting; holds out her gold chain, dances)* Party time! Party time!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(slaps at MIDDLE SISTER)* What is the *matter* with you? *(to MERCHANT)* Tell us everything, Father. How rich are we? When are we moving back to the city?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(still dancing)* Let’s go shopping!

**MERCHANT:**

*(rubs face, hesitates)* Girls, I’m…I’m so sorry. *(pauses)* Oh, I might as well just tell you.

**OLDES SISTER:**

*(very annoyed)* Tell us *what*?

**MERCHANT:**

There is no money. *(pauses)*  The money’s just gone. Vanished. Kaput. Again.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(shouts)* No money?! No money?! How could there be no money?!

**MERCHANT**

*(hesitates)* Well, we did owe quite a lot. And then…*(sighs)* It’s a long story…

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(accusing, to MERCHANT)* How could you do this to me?

**MERCHANT:**

Oh, my dears. It’s not what I intended. *(pauses) Nothing* that’s happened is what I intended. *(sighs)*

**BEAUTY:**

*(Walks to MERCHANT, takes his hand.)* Father, there’s something more, isn’t there? Please tell us.

**MERCHANT:**

*(stands, stammers)* Oh, my dears. I fear…I fear that I must leave you. Perhaps forever. The Beast… The Beast demanded…The Beast requires…*(gasps)* I’ll tell you soon. *(turns and exits, walking fast)*

*[BEAUTY, OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER hesitate, surprised. ALL talk at once.]*

**BEAUTY:**

Leave us? No, Father. Father!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(to BEAUTY)* I’m sure it’s all your fault! *(to MIDDLE SISTER, slapping at her)* Or yours!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

My fault! Why isn’t it your fault?

*[MERCHANT exits, followed by OLDEST SISTER, MIDDLE SISTER and BEAUTY, squabbling.]*

**NARRATOR:**

Well, the Beast had given him a month. But what with all the yelling and screaming, after a few days he gave in and told them the whole story. What happened next was predictable. Beauty’s sisters blamed everybody. The Beast, their father, and especially Beauty. There was even some talk of marching to the Beast’s palace and doing … *(shrugs)* something. Beauty, meanwhile…Well, you’ll see.

*[BEAUTY and MERCHANT enter, arguing.]*

**BEAUTY:**

Father! It was because of my rose!

**MERCHANT:**

It was because of the Beast! A monster with no pity or good sense! And my carelessness. *(Turns and shakes finger at BEAUTY.)* I’m returning to this animal’s palace alone. You are not coming with me!

**BEAUTY:**

Papa, what would happen to the farm and to my sisters if you were gone? Please…

**MERCHANT:**

Beauty! You don’t know how terrifying he is. To turn you over to *that*? To save an old man’s life? If I did, then *I’d* be the monster!

**BEAUTY:**

I owe everything I have to you, Father. And if I hadn’t asked for a rose, then none of this would have happened. *(pauses)* Who knows if he’s really the monster he seems? Maybe I can convince him…

**MERCHANT:**

*(interrupting)* You haven’t met him. I would never expose your kind heart to…

**BEAUTY:**

*(interrupting)* I *will* follow you. You can’t stop me!

*[BEAUTY and MERCHANT exit, still arguing.]*

**NARRATOR:**

Well, you know how family arguments can be. This one went on and on. Eventually, Beauty’s determination won out. Her father agreed that they would go together to the monster’s lair. *(pauses)* Not everyone was entirely unhappy.

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER enter.]*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Of course, it all happened because Beauty *insisted* that Papa bring her a rose, of all the stupid things.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Serves her right. If she’d asked for something sensible like nice jewelry, the way we did, Papa wouldn’t have gotten in trouble.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(Rubs hands together, gives MIDDLE SISTER a meaningful look.)* Of course, now Beauty’s in trouble. I wonder what Beasts do to stupid girls like our little sister? I wonder if they ever just … chew them up. *(Gestures, imitating a crocodile opening its jaws then snapping them shut; looks at MIDDLE SISTER. BOTH laugh.)*

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER exit arm in arm, laughing.]*

**SCENE 7**

*[****Stage set:*** *Near the front of the stage is a movable backdrop painted to show a large door. Behind the door, unseen at the beginning of the scene, is a backdrop showing a large fireplace with a fire burning. In front of it are two chairs and a table set with dishes, covered bowls, flowers and candles. A hand mirror is also on the table, but placed so that the audience doesn’t see it.]*

**NARRATOR:**

At the end of the month, Beauty and her father set out for the Beast’s palace.

**BEAST:**

*(offstage, roars, as if from a far distance)* Rraaahhrr!

*[BEAUTY and MERCHANT enter. BEAUTY looks up and around, as if marveling at a tall building]*

**NARRATOR:**

The palace towered above the tallest trees, and it was glorious. The windows glimmered in the last light of sunset. Stone walls stretched out of sight on all sides.

**MERCHANT:**

*(Takes BEAUTY’s hand, walks toward door.)* Come, Beauty.

*[As MERCHANT and BEAUTY approach, the door slides mysteriously away. BEAUTY jumps in surprise, looks at MERCHANT nervously. They enter the room. MERCHANT motions to BEAUTY to sit at the table. MERCHANT takes the other chair.]*

**MERCHANT:**

*(shrugs)* We might as well eat. *(smiles nervously)* Food’s good here.

**BEAUTY:**

I’m all right, Papa. *(smiles nervously, pretends to eat)*

**MERCHANT:**

Eat. *(buries face in his hands)* Oh, please. Please! There’s still time for you to change your mind!

**BEAUTY:**

I won’t leave you here, Father.

*[BEAST enters.]*

**BEAST:**

*(abruptly, almost roaring)* Is this your youngest daughter?

**MERCHANT:**

*(groans)* Yes. This is Beauty.

**BEAST:**

*(walks to BEAUTY)* Have you come of your own free will? Are you willing to stay with me?

**BEAUTY:**

*(nervously)* Yes.

**BEAST:**

*(to BEAUTY)* You’ll come to no harm here. *(to MERCHANT)* You are an honest man. But once you leave this place tomorrow, you must never return to my palace again.

**MERCHANT:**

*(gasps, groans) Uhooohh.*

*[BEAST turns quickly, exits.]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(reaches for MERCHANT’s hand)* I’ll be all right, Papa.

*[BEAUTY and MERCHANT stand up and exit slowly, arm in arm.]*

**NARRATOR:**

That night neither Beauty nor her father slept very well. As for the Beast. Well, who knows if he ever slept at all.

The next evening, with her father long gone, Beauty sat down to supper at 8 o’clock, as the Beast had asked. He would come to see her, he said, each evening after her meal.

*[BEAUTY enters. She sits in a chair, looks into the dishes, lifts the cover of one and sniffs. She puts the cover back and looks into the fireplace.]*

The food smelled delicious. Roast chicken and a beautiful onion soup. But Beauty was too worried and frightened to feel hungry.

*[BEAUTY sinks back and puts her hands over her face.]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(softly, to herself)* I wish I could run away.

*[BEAST enters. BEAUTY gasps, sits straight up.]*

**BEAST:**

Are you afraid of me?

**BEAUTY:**

*(Hesitates, then looks up at him.)* Yes.

**BEAST:**

Do you fear me because I’m ugly?

**BEAUTY:**

*(Quickly and angrily)* No! I fear you because you said you would kill my father for stealing a rose. A single rose!

**BEAST:**

*(a little sadly)* No harm will come to you here, Beauty. *(bows slightly)* You are the one and only ruler of this house. If you want anything, name it and it is yours.

*[BEAUTY looks into the fire without speaking.]*

I will leave you now. But tell me, Do you think that I’m ugly?

**BEAUTY:**

Yes. *(hesitates)* Very ugly.

**BEAST:**

*(gives a small, quiet laugh)* Your father has an honest daughter. Tell me, Beauty, Do you think that you could love me, ugly as I am? Will you marry me?

**BEAUTY:**

*(pauses, then speaks firmly)* No.

**BEAST:**

Then good night, Beauty.

*[BEAST exits. BEAUTY stays seated, turned away from the audience, looking into the fire as NARRATOR speaks.]*

**NARRATOR:**

Beauty’s days soon fell into a pattern. Mornings and afternoons, she explored the palace and its acres of gardens. Ever alone, she saw no one. But no sooner did she reach out to open a door than it whisked aside, opened by unseen hands. One afternoon she browsed in Beast’s library, where bookshelves stretched upward nearly out of sight. Feeling cold, she wished for a warmer fire. And poof! In a second, the fireplace was roaring.

Every evening at 8 o’clock she sat down to dinner. And when her meal was finished, the Beast arrived and they talked. Sometimes they chatted comfortably about a book Beauty found in the library or an interesting flower she saw in the garden. Other times conversation was harder, with many silences. Each night, before going, the Beast asked, Do you think I am ugly? Could you love me? Will you marry me? And Beauty’s answers were always the same.

One evening, Beauty noticed something unusual on the table.

*(BEAUTY turns back to the table, notices the hand mirror and picks it up. She looks into it curiously, then jumps in surprise and looks behind her.)*

**BEAUTY:**

Geranium! Geranium?

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(jokingly)* Made you look!

*(BEAUTY, gasps, drops mirror onto the table in shock, but keeps looking straight at it.)*

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(kindly)* You miss those cows, don’t you?

**BEAUTY:**

Yes. *(pauses)* But *you’re* *talking*!

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

C’mon. You’re in a house where doors open by themselves. Baked fish and parsley potatoes hop right into dishes. Fires *never* go out. What’s one talking mirror?

**BEAUTY:**

*(doubtfully)* I guess.

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(proudly)* I reflect on things. And then I like to talk about it. *(as if telling a secret)* Thought for the day – Don’t believe everything you see.

*[BEAST enters.]*

**BEAST:**

Good evening, Beauty.

**BEAUTY:**

*(a bit startled)* Oh…Good evening, Beast.

**BEAST:**

You’ve found the mirror.

**BEAUTY:**

Yes. Where did it come from?

**BEAST:**

It was a gift. Of a kind. *(pauses)* It’s very old.

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(interrupting, annoyed)* Hey!

**NARRATOR:**

*(Rolls eyes, nods toward MAGIC MIRROR.) Sensitive*. *(pauses)* Anyway, for Beauty and Beast it was one of those evenings when conversation didn’t come easily. Soon the Beast was asking....

**BEAST:**

*(as if finishing NARRATOR’s thought)* Do you think I’m ugly?

**BEAUTY:**

*(hesitates)* Yes, Beast. I do. *(pauses)* Very ugly.

**BEAST:**

*(sighs)* Then good night, Beauty. Sleep well.

*(BEAST exits. BEAUTY turns to look into the fire.)*

**NARRATOR:**

Beauty took to carrying the mirror with her on walks. It was nice to have company, even if it was just a hunk of polished glass…

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(interrupting, annoyed)* Hey!

**NARRATOR:**

*(Sighs) Talking* hunk of polished glass. *(rolls eyes)* Anyway…No matter how far Beauty roamed about the palace, there was always more to see. One day she found a garden with climbing roses, tall trees, and a rope swing hung from a high bough. Beauty went back there often.

Once she opened a room that looked ready for a masked ball. Torches flamed. *(gestures as if showing off a grand, high room)* A harpsichord played. There were masks everywhere. Some of the masks had horns and fangs and rough fur and reminded her of Beast. Those made her laugh.

Beauty tried on the mask of an owl, with a cruel beak. She looked in the mirror and gasped. Behind her stood a tiger wearing the mask of a handsome young man. The mirror said…

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(as if finishing the NARRATOR’s thought)* That’s probably just your imagination.

*[BEAUTY turns back to the table. BEAST enters.]*

**NARRATOR:**

That evening Beauty and Beast had one of their long talks. Beauty told a funny story about a cow that got stuck on a fence climbing over it to eat daisies. Beast told about getting his tail caught in a magic door.

Stars shone bright through the windows long before Beast was ready to ask his usual questions.

**BEAST:**

Do you find me very ugly, Beauty?

**BEAUTY:**

I’m afraid that I do find you ugly. *(pauses)* But your palace is wonderful.

**BEAST:**

Then could you….?

**BEAUTY:**

*(interrupting)* I cannot ever marry you.

*[BEAUTY turns back toward the fire. BEAST exits.]*

**NARRATOR:**

Sometimes disturbing things happened.

Once, at midnight, Beauty woke to a violent roar outside her window. In a hallway one morning, she heard a low groan from inside a room. But the door didn’t open for her, and she couldn’t turn the knob.

One night she dreamed that a deer ran past her with Beast chasing it. Another day, a large vase of flowers was knocked over and broken in the library, and there was a puddle on the floor that looked like blood.

*(BEAUTY turns back toward the table.)*

That night after Beauty finished eating, she waited for Beast as usual. But for the first time many minutes ticked by and no Beast appeared. Once, Beauty thought, she would have been happy if Beast had come late and shortened their nightly talk. Now, she counted the minutes and worried that he might not arrive.

**BEAUTY:**

*(to self, agitated)* Where can he be?

*[BEAUTY stands, paces. BEAST enters. ]*

*(relieved)* It’s the first time you’ve been late.

**BEAST**:

*(gruffly)* Remember that I’m a wild beast. *(looks away from BEAUTY)* Tell me, Am I as ugly as you remembered?

**BEAUTY:**

I’m sorry, Beast. I do find you ugly.

**BEAST:**

And could you love me?

**BEAUTY:**

*(sadly)* No.

**BEAST:**

*(sharply)* Then good night, Beauty.

*[BEAST turns abruptly and stalks out. BEAUTY sits in a chair and looks toward the fire.]*

**NARRATOR:**

The next night the Beast came promptly after dinner but soon was ready to say goodnight.

**BEAST:**

*(intensely)* Tell me, Beauty. Do you find me horribly ugly?

**BEAUTY:**

I wish you wouldn’t ask that. Handsome faces can hide ugly hearts. And I prefer you, just the way you are, to any man with an ugly heart. No matter how handsome he is.

**BEAST:**

*(quickly, intensely)* You prefer me? You prefer me?Well, then, I ask again. Will you release me from my prison? Can you love me? Would you marry me?

**BEAUTY:**

*(Hesitates, puts her hands over her face.)* No, Beast. I’m sorry. *(firmly)* No.

**BEAST:**

*(groans)* Uhooohh.

**BEAUTY:**

I know what I feel and you know that I *am* honest. I will always care very much for you as a friend. I wish that I could marry you! But I *can’t* love you. Please, won’t you just accept this?

**BEAST:**

*(gives short, bitter laugh)* There’s a saying. Giving friendship to someone who wants love is like giving bread to someone dying of thirst. I should be thankful for the bread, I know. *(pauses)* But I die of thirst, Beauty. Good night.

*[BEAST exits.]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(stands and starts pacing)* What am I doing? I can’t promise him more. But maybe I promised him too much? And I have to keep my promise to stay in the palace or risk my poor father’s life. But now Beast will *never* stop asking. *(angrily)* Why won’t he stop asking?

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(Clears throat to get BEAUTY’s attention.).* If you were dying of thirst, would you stop asking for water? *(pauses)* Just a question.

**BEAST:**

*(offstage, at a distance)* Rraaahhrr! Uhooohh.

*[BEAUTY snatches up MAGIC MIRROR.]*

**BEAUTY:**

Then he’ll only get angrier and angrier. And I don’t even blame him!

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

Or perhaps he’ll die. *(pauses)* Of thirst.

**BEAUTY:**

No, no. He won’t die.

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(sarcastically)* Oh, so *you’re* the magic mirror of prophecy now, are you?

**BEAUTY:**

*(with determination)* He won’t die. He can’t die. *(more gently)* But he does love me. If he didn’t, he would never have gone on asking for so long. And it makes him so unhappy. He called it a prison.

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

Maybe there’s a key.

*(BEAUTY puts MAGIC MIRROR back on the table.)*

**BEAUTY:**

But I’m in prison, too. I can’t say “yes.” But if he goes on hearing “no” forever, he’ll grow angrier. And then what becomes of me? He’s a wild beast. Who knows what he might do?

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

Yes, who knows?

**BEAUTY:**

He might grow angry enough to kill me! And then what would my poor father do? And I’ve been so wrapped up in my own doings that I haven’t given Father a thought. What is he doing now?

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(in a singsong voice)* Hellllooooo. *Real* magic mirror of prophecy here. Take a look.

*[BEAUTY snatches the mirror, looks into it.]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(gasps)* Father! *(to MAGIC MIRROR)* He looks so tired and sad and ill. Is this the truth?

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

He worries about you. It’s been a long time **s**ince you were stolen away.

**BEAUTY:**

I’ve lost all track of time! I must go home and tell him everything that’s happened! How can I do that?

*(BEAUTY sits down and turns toward the fire.)*

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

I believe you know what you can do.

**NARRATOR:**

The next night, when Beast rose to leave after dinner, Beauty spoke first.

**BEAUTY:**

Beast, I have something to ask.

**BEAST:**

*(laughs)* No, Beauty, I do not find you ugly. And I do love you.

**BEAUTY:**

*(laughs a little)* No, not that! *(sadly)* Last night the mirror showed me Father.

**BEAST:**

Yes?

**BEAUTY:**

And he looked so old! Old and sick with sadness and worry. I have to see him and tell him that I’m all right.

**BEAST:**

And you’re telling me that you must leave me now, to go to him.

**BEAUTY:**

Not forever. Not even for very long. I’ll return to you because I’ve promised. And because you’re my friend and I’m grateful for everything you’ve given to me. Please, Beast.

**BEAST:**

*(very seriously)* Beauty, hear me. I would rather die – die -- than see you worried and unhappy. Of course you may go

**BEAUTY:**

*(interrupting)* Thank you, Beast.

**BEAST:**

*(interrupting)* But you must promise me something. You know my feelings. I can’t bear to be without you for long. Promise that you will stay for only one week. If you overstay your promise, then I believe that I will die.

**BEAUTY:**

I promise.

**BEAST:**

Take this ring…

**BEAUTY:**

*(shocked)* Oh, no, please…

**BEAST:**

*(interrupting, laughs)* Don’t worry. It’s a *traveling* ring. It implies no promise except your return. The ring and the mirror together will have you on your father’s farm in the morning. Keep them close and safe. And they’ll bring you back again.

**BEAUTY:**

*(skeptically)* The mirror? Really?

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(interrupting, annoyed)* Hey! I’ll have you know that I’m *quite* versatile. *(mutters to self)* Old hunk of polished glass. Hmmmph.

**BEAST:**

Before you sleep tonight, lay the ring in the center of the mirror, think about the farm, and in the morning you’ll be there.

*[BEAST and BEAUTY exit.]*

**SCENE 8**

*[****Stage set:*** *A painted backdrop shows a medium-sized window. It looks out onto a country scene, with a barn. In front of the window a small table is placed between two chairs.]*

*[MERCHANT is seated, a bit slumped, reading.]*

**NARRATOR:**

Fearing he might never see Beauty again, her father had grown old in a few months’ time. Every day, he cursed the Beast who stole her.

*[BEAUTY enters, carrying a small bag.]*

**BEAUTY:**

Papa!

*[MERCHANT jumps up, runs to BEAUTY, who drops her bag and runs to him.* *MERCHANT and BEAUTY hug.]*

**MERCHANT:**

Am I dreaming? *(grabs BEAUTY by the arms)* You’re real. You’ve escaped from the monster! I was sure you were dead!

**BEAUTY:**

I’m here, Father! And I’m so happy to see you. But I haven’t run away. The Beast was happy to let me come when he heard that you were sad and ill from missing me.

**MERCHANT:**

As if that monster would do me a good turn! There’s some trick. You must run away! You’re not safe there.

**BEAUTY:**

But I do feel safe there.

**MERCHANT:**

It’s a trick, to get you to trust him. And then…

**BEAUTY:**

It’s not a trick. I’m sure. He is the Beast. I know that. But he’s kind, too, and he has such sad eyes. That’s why I can only stay a week on this visit. He’ll be lonely if I stay away longer. He said he may even die if I do.

**MERCHANT:**

*(angrily)* And why shouldn’t he? He vowed that I should die for stealing a rose! Why should he suffer less, when he’s stolen my Beauty?

**BEAUTY:**

Father, you don’t understand. I know him better now. I’d be happy if I could make him forget his ugliness.

**MERCHANT:**

*(sighs)* It’s you who don’t understand. But I ‘m an old man. And I’m sure you won’t listen.

**NARRATOR:**

Another one of those family arguments. Fathers. Daughters. Sometimes they just can’t agree. But Beauty’s father loved her, so he let things stand, although he worried. He was just glad to have her home again, if only for a little while.

**MERCHANT:**

Come along then. We’ll walk around the farm. You haven’t said hello to the cows and chickens yet. They’ll be getting jealous. Geranium will be so excited to see you.

*[MERCHANT and BEAUTY exit.]*

**NARRATOR:**

All in all, life on the farm had been pretty good. The cows and chickens were thriving. And the cheese business didn’t stink. In fact, Beauty’s father was planning to branch out into vineyards, since a lot of people like a little wine with their cheese. Best of all, her sisters had snagged husbands. And that was working out….more or less the way you’d expect.

*[OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER enter, fling themselves into chairs.]*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Did you *see* your husband when Father introduced him to Beauty out in the cow barn? I believe he thinks she’s *cute*.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(angrily)* Take that back! He does not think she’s cute. *(pauses)* What I saw…What I saw…

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(snaps)* What did you see?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

I saw *your* husband waving to Beauty and smiling at her from way across the pasture. And then he *ran* over to meet her.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(angrily)* Did not! He never runs. He’s afraid he’ll mess up his hair.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Did so run.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Did not! *(pauses)* Oh, who am I kidding? He did run. They both think she’s cute. Everybody always does. Even that Beast must think she’s cute. Or else why wouldn’t he have torn her to pieces already? With his razorlike claws and his knifelike teeth? Honestly.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

I *know*. Why doesn’t anything ever work out for us? *(pauses, sighs)* Well, I guess she’ll be gone in a week…

**OLDEST SISTER:**

She was gone before…

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

…and now she’s back. I hate it when she’s back.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Exactly. This time, we have to make sure that when she’s gone she staysgone.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

How?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

No idea. *(Notices bag BEAUTY dropped, picks it up and returns to chair.)* But this is her bag. We can at least snoop. *(pulls MAGIC MIRROR from bag) Ooohh …*Nice antique mirror.

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(mutters)* Who you calling an antique?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(to MIDDLE SISTER)* What did you say?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Nothing. *(pauses)* What else is in there? *(Grabs bag and reaches inside, pulls out ring.)* Ooooohh. I see little sis has finally learned about shopping. *(Jams ring onto her finger, admires it)* And look! She bought me a present*.*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Or the Beast did. *(looks at ring on MIDDLE SISTER’S FINGER)* Huh. For a guy with tusks, a tail and matted fur all over his back, he has good taste in jewelry. *(Holds up mirror to look at herself, preens, talks in singsong voice.)* Mirror mirror in my hand, who’s the fairest in the land?

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(yells, sputters)* Not you! You….you….you…you…warthog!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(screams, throws mirror on table, puts hands over eyes)* It talks!

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

*(peers at mirror)* And it makes you look like a warthog! *(laughs)*

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(yells)* Wait’ll you see what I do to you, ring thief!

*[BEAUTY enters.]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(Sees MAGIC MIRROR on table, snatches it up.)* Oh, thank goodness! I thought I’d lost you! *(Looks suspiciously from OLDEST SISTER to MIDDLE SISTER.)* What are you doing?

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(yells)* That one’s stealing your ring!

**BEAUTY:**

What? *(grabs for ring)* Give me that. I have to have it!

*[MIDDLE SISTER quickly pulls off ring and gives it to BEAUTY.]*

*(quietly to MAGIC MIRROR)* I’m so sorry I left you.

*[BEAUTY walks toward exit.]*

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(to BEAUTY, quietly)* You ought to be. How would you get back? What would Beast say?

**BEAUTY:**

*(a little worried)* I know. Are you all right?

**MAGIC MIRROR**

*(to BEAUTY, laughs)* I made your sister look like Beast!

*[MAGIC MIRROR and BEAUTY laugh, exit.]*

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

What was *that*? She’s a *witch!*

**OLDEST SISTER:**

She’s definitely got a magic guardian. Or a magic screaming tattletale at least. And from now on, she’ll never let it out of her sight.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

But I want her to go away. Forever. What are we going to *do*?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Not sure….There was one thing that horrible little mirror said, though...

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

It called me a thief!

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(sarcastically)* And? …No, listen. The mirror asked her, “How would you get back? What would Beast say?”

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

What would he say?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

How should I know? But Beauty seemed worried about it. So I’m wondering -- What might happen if she got back *late*?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

You want her to stay *longer*?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

I might. If staying longer would make the Beast angry. What if it did? What if it made him so mad that he…Oh, I don’t know … chewed her right up? *(mimics crocodile’s jaws with hands)*

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Ooooh. *(dreamily)* That would be nice*.* But how do we make her stay?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Well, we can’t lock her in a chest or the chicken coop. That rotten little mirror would scream till they heard it in Paris. But there is one trick we’ve never played on Beauty.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Are you sure? What?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

We’ve never tried being nice to her.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Of course not. Why would we do that?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

Because she likes nice.

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

That’s what I said. Why would we do that?

**OLDEST SISTER:**

You’re not getting it. Suppose that we were really really nice to her. Apologized for all the toads we put in her bed and the pins we stuck in her shoes. Cooked her favorite meals. Brought her bug-eaten old flowers. Told her we were sorry we’d spent so many years not getting along. Do you think maybe we could trick her into staying a little too long? An extra day or two? Maybe even a week?

**MIDDLE SISTER:**

Ooooohhh. Now I get it. Be nice to her. Really really nice. I can do that.

**OLDEST SISTER:**

*(looks skeptically at MIDDLE SISTER)* Hope so. Anyway, it’s worth a try. He’s a monster, after all. If we’re lucky, we might just kill her with kindness.

*(OLDEST SISTER and MIDDLE SISTER exit, arm in arm.)*

**NARRATOR:**

I know. I know. Why would Beauty want to hang around with those two? But remember she’s never had a sister who was nice to her before. Not even a little bit. So I’m sorry to tell you that the plan worked.

Beauty and her sisters picked flowers. They did each other’s hair. They read aloud from Beauty’s favorite books. And when the week was up, her sisters cried so hard that Beauty promised to stay an extra day or two. What can I tell you? She was so excited to have two pleasant sisters that she forgot everything else.

*[BEAUTY enters, carrying her bag.]*

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

Let me out of this bag! Let me out of this bag right now!

**BEAUTY:**

All right, all right. *(pulls MAGIC MIRROR from bag)* You were scaring the chickens. Making that wolf face and those howling noises!

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

Chickens can never take a joke. But this is serious. We’ve stayed too long!

**BEAUTY:**

Just a day. And I’m having more fun with my sisters than I ever had in my life. It’s not fair to make me give that up.

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

There’s someone who won’t be having fun.

**BEAUTY:**

And right now it’s the chickens, thanks to you.

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

You know who I mean.

**BEAUTY:**

Of course I do. It’s Beast. And I will go home to him. Very soon. But…

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(interrupting)* Remember how worried you were about your father? Afraid he might die of grief if you didn’t come?

**BEAUTY:**

Of course.

**MAGIC MIRROR**:

And why was that, exactly?

**BEAUTY:**

Because he loves me. And…Oh…

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

Even a beast can die of thirst.

**BEAUTY:**

I knew that I’d keep my promise to return. I didn’t think about…

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(interrupting, as if finishing BEAUTY”s sentence)* …how it might feel to someone who *didn’t* know you meant to keep your promise?

**BEAUTY:**

Right. I ignored his feelings. And he’s been so kind to me always.

**MAGIC MIRROR:**

*(sarcastically)* Meanwhile, your lovely sisters….Thought for the day: Don’t believe everything you see.

**BEAUTY:**

*(confused at first)* Oh….Oh…You mean they tricked me? *(groans)* How could I be so stupid? I’ll run and tell Father I must go now. But that I’ll come again soon.

*[BEAUTY exits, running.]*

**SCENE 9**

*[On both sides of the stage FOREST 1 and FOREST 2 hold up panels painted to show the trees of a dense forest.]*

**NARRATOR:**

Beauty laid the ring in the center of the mirror and thought about what she wanted most. Before she knew it, she found herself in the deep woods surrounding Beasts’s palace.

*[BEAUTY enters near the front of the stage, looking around in confusion. BEAUTY begins to walk, first one way, then another among the trees, searching and calling. FOREST 1 and FOREST 2 move back and forth across the stage to mimic how a forest looks to someone walking through it.]*

**BEAUTY:**

*(walks, stopping to call out)* Where are you? Where are you?

Beast, I’ve come home! I didn’t forget my promise!

*[BEAST staggers into the scene from the back of the stage and falls to the ground. BEAUTY stops, startled, then runs to him.]*

**BEAUTY:**

My dear Beast, please don’t die!

**BEAST:**

*(gasps, as if ill)* You didn’t come back when you’d promised. I was sure it meant I’d lost you …

**BEAUTY:**

No! No! I always meant to come back!

**BEAST:**

*(gasps, coughs)* Why should you come back to such a monster?

**BEAUTY:**

I’m the monster! I never thought how you’d feel if I was late returning!

**BEAST:**

I lost hope. *(gasps, groans)*

**BEAUTY:**

Oh, I’ve killed you! I’ve killed you!

**BEAST:**

Beauty, you’re so kind. *(gasps)* And I’m so ugly, and I’ve tormented you for months with questions I had no right to ask.

**BEAUTY:**

My dear dear Beast.

**BEAST:**

My dear Beauty. Thank you for your generosity.

**BEAUTY:**

I didn’t come back to be generous. I came because I couldn’t imagine not coming. Because I couldn’t bear to lose you. Because I love you.

**BEAST:**

*(gasps)* Beauty! *(Stands, staggers toward back of stage. Walks behind a forest backdrop to remove Beast mask.)*

**BEAUTY:**

What’s wrong?

*[BEAST returns as prince. BEAUTY stands, watches him, confused.]*

Beast? Is it you? What’s happened?

**BEAST:**

*(returns as prince)* A magician enchanted me when I was a boy. Doomed me to stay an ugly beast forever unless a woman freely chose to love me, just as I was. So I’ll ask you one more time, Beauty. Since you love me as your Beast, will you marry me as your prince?

**BEAUTY:**

*(takes Beast’s arm)* My Beast has proven himself to be kind, fair and generous many times over. Why should I expect less of him as a prince? My prince, my beloved Beast, of course I’ll marry you.

*[BEAST and BEAUTY exit.]*

**NARRATOR:**

*(sighs)* Now, some might call this part of the story “the happy ending.” But I’m a little unhappy when any story ends, so I think I’ll just call it “the beginning.”