



The Beast's Real Name

Metaxia Tzimoulis

Retold Fairy Tales

Once upon a time, there lived a boy, who had lost his guitar in a castle, far far away.

“That’s what you get when you perform at the Beast’s castle”. His father raises his finger in his son’s face as if scolding a child, which he isn’t anymore. The boy, who has the most beautiful eyes in the land, tells his father.

“That’s ok, she can keep it. I have others”.

The father looks at his son. “You’re not afraid?”

The boy shook his head. “No, I am not. When I was there, I didn’t even see her. Maybe the Beast is a story, something that mothers and fathers tell their children when they’re bad”.

Then slowly, his father rolls up his shirt sleeve, and the boys eyes widen.

“No. The Beast is real. And if you don’t believe me look carefully at my scars. The Beast is always hungry and if I didn’t escape it...”

“She...”

The father glowers at his son, he doesn’t like to be interrupted and for a second he considers slapping the boy.

But the boy is not a boy anymore, but taller and stronger.

“IT is not human”. He leans closer, as an idea forms in his head. He clicks his fingers. “We’re going tomorrow, and I’ll prove that there is a Beast. The boy looks stunned at how happy his father looks. Eventually, he just shrugs.

“I’m going to sleep now.”

But in bed, in the dark, he knows he has lied. He is scared, but he didn’t see the Beast that night, rather he felt a presence. He digs his nails into his pillow at his father’s words. The Beast is not an IT, what he felt was...

“Human...” He says in the dark and believes it to be true.

The Beast, high up in her castle, curses her bad luck and spits into the fire. She takes the electric guitar in her hands, her claw-like hands tighten around it, and for a second she wants to smash it against the floor. No music. Silence. Forever. That’s how it was now. With a growl deep in her throat, the Beast sets the guitar against the wall and then crosses the room towards the window. She pushes the curtain back. Snow falls, heavy and white, against the dark sky, and the tree outside cast long shadows; hiding the castle in obscurity.

She turns her gaze back to the table, where a book lays open top of some other books, all heavy and leather bounded.

The Beast sneers and she remembers the Witch...

It began with a grand ball when the Beast was not Beast but Francesca, a Princess; renowned for her classic beauty... and for her cold heart.

"I don't want this!" Francesca glares at the servant girl in front of her. The girl starts to cry, the hairbrush she has in her hands falls to the side, as Francesca's hand meets her cheek. She looks at the girl, satisfied.

"Now, get out!"

That night, and as Francesca glides among the guests, she is aware that all eyes are on her, and that pleases her. Halfway into the room, she sees the servant girl staring at her, and she is mumbling something, which Francesca cannot hear. She opens her mouth to say something but the girl quickly retreats in the kitchen. Rage burns through Francesca's body and she makes a mental note to punish the girl later...

She shuts the book with finality and leaves it on the table. She never had any use for books. Now she has a library and so many books, which every night for some reason, she feels compelled to read. They are love stories.

"You are forever condemned to read other people's love stories" The Witch's voice echoes in the dark in front of her and for a moment, Beast thinks she can see the Witch's face in the fireplace, among the flames.

In her room, with the marble floors and high ceiling, Beast looks out the window to her most hated view: the dark forest and mountains beyond. A view that is full of possibilities. Without thinking, she places a hand over her chest and tries to listen. There is nothing.

"Now you know what it's like to have no heart" The Witch chuckles in the dark and Beast realizes she was never alone. Ever since the curse, the Witch is with her, hounding her.

What else did she say that night?

"No one will remember you after tonight. No one will care".

Beast sinks to the floor and lets the darkness settle.

"Look, there is light up there!" The boy points to the top window in the tower. He looks back at his father, who is struggling to see in the dark and snow. From somewhere in the west, wolves start to howl. The father shivers and pulls on the horse's reigns. They cross the large courtyard and approach the entrance to the castle. The boy steps down first and walks to the door. After a moment's hesitation, he turns to his father, his face clenched.

"The door is open" she whispers. His father starts to dismount.

"Wait". But the boy is already gone, the door stands ajar, pools of golden light spill out.

The boy stands in the dark corridor. His eyes slowly adjust to the darkness, and he sees a staircase. He lets in a sharp breath then starts to cough. From somewhere upstairs, a metallic scrape is heard, and the boy stops to listen.

"Hello, is someone there?" He then jumps, as if struck, when the door behind him closes. He can hear his

father's heavy fists against the door, before fading. The boy presses his ear against the hardwood, but he knows that he is alone now.

He finds Beast sitting in front of the large fireplace in the stone sitting room; her red hair thick and tangled, like a lion's mane, is all he sees at first, and then slowly the Beast turns and the boy holds his breath. Beast is wearing a mask, a mask white as chalk with red markings on it.

"You can come closer and take look at the Beast" the voice, low and gurgled, taunts from behind the mask. He does and what he sees is not a mask, but Beast's face or what is left of it, and the red markings are scratches, red and deep. Beast then stands up and the boy sees the fingernails which are razor sharp and dirty, but despite her appalling state, the gown she has on is deep green satin.

"I remember you" Beast hisses. "Why have you come back?"

It is a question with a growl. The boy is scared now, and he takes a step back, his leg muscles are ready to run.

"I forgot something here".

A smile crosses Beast's face or what the boy thinks is a smile.

"Oh yes, your guitar" she scoffs and then pats her hands together in glee. "Let's play a game. I've hidden it and you have to find it in one of the 200 rooms in the castle. However..." she raises one claw in his face. "There is one rule. Stay out of my tower".

He nods, his eyes never leaving Beast's.

"Good. Once you have found it, you go".

Beast then leaves him to it, and she turns her attention back to the flames which burn her eyes, but she doesn't care.

The Witch whispers in her ear. "He will never love you. No one loves a Beast".

On the first day at the castle, the boy finds Beast in the vast library, reading or pretending to read. He stands in front of her, his hands on his waist, covered in dust. For a second he thinks he sees Beast laughing behind her book.

"I haven't found it. Please... help me"

Beast sets the book down and raises her hands up.

"I wish I could, but you see I have these claws".

He takes that as a threat and decides to change the subject. He turns about the room.

"Are all of these yours? Have you read them?"

"Yes," Beast rolls her eyes behind her thick mane. "All of them".

On the second day, he finds himself in the garden, thinking of Beast's smile.

“What are you doing?” Beast is beside him.

He then hands her the red rose. “Here”

Beast looks at the gift for a moment, and then she retreats back into the shadows and safety of the castle. She spits at the sun for its zeal. The boy is left standing with the rose in his hand, wondering what possessed him to give Beast a rose in the first place.

Beast is in her tower when he finds her again. Anger and another feeling she cannot quite name yet makes her grab the edge of the table. She tips it over as if it was made of air. The boy stands where he is.

“I thought I told you not to come up here!”

“What’s your name?” he asks, and steps closer.

She looks at him, confused. “Beast”

He moves closer and for a second she craves his warmth.

“No, your real name, before they named you Beast”.

She bites her cracked lips and tastes blood. “My name is Beast. I am Beast”.

She then raises her claws to his face, but still, he doesn’t move, but only looks at her.

“Stop looking at me like that! Get out of my sight!”

On the fourth day, she finds him in the kitchen; the scars on his cheek are still red but clean.

“Tonight is dinner at 7. Join me”. She leaves before he has a chance to refuse.

At dinner, Beast raises her glass of wine to her lips and pushes her plate aside.

“Are you not hungry?” The boy sets his place a little closer to her. Now he can see her eyes.

“No, I wouldn’t want you to lose your appetite”. She attempts to laugh at her own joke but it falls short.

“It is such a big table. Don’t you ever get lonely?”

From somewhere in the dark corners, she hears the Witch cackle.

“No. I am used to it” Silence falls in the dining room, and Beast finds herself looking at the boy and the boy looks at her right back. Her features harden.

“Haven’t you found your damn guitar yet?”

“Do you have to swear?”

“I am good at it?”

“And growl?”

“I am good at that too”.

He points to his cheek. “And scratch?”

She falls silent. When she speaks again it comes out with a cough. “I am sorry. I really must control my

temper”.

She then pushes her chair back and walks out of the dining room, as the Witch’s jeering follows her down the hall to her room.

Later, in the dark, the Witch won’t leave her, and by the time dawn approaches the Beast is so desperate and crazed, that she claws at her face. Blood soaks the pillowcase and Beast coughs out a dark liquid.

The next morning, the boy finds Beast pale and withdrawn, in the dining room. Without love, the Witch said in the dark, death will surely come. Beast sighs lost in thought.

“What’s wrong?”

“You have to leave”.

The boy looks hurt. “But I thought we were friends. You gave me your library”.

“Beast doesn’t have any friends”.

“Tell me your name,” he asks again and reaches out for her hands. Beast doesn’t look at him.

“Beast,” she says, and he walks out.

The boy takes of riding as the Beast howls into the night. She starts to cough again and falls to the floor.

“I love you” he whispers to the wind and hopes that it carries back to her. Then he continues on his journey...

Years later, the boy meets a girl.

“What’s your name?”

“Francesca”.

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