BEAUTY AND THE BEAST by Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve. In a country very far from this is to be seen a great city wherein trade flourishes abundantly. It numbered amongst its citizens a merchant, who succeeded in all his speculations, and upon whom Fortune, responding to his wishes, had always showered her fairest favours. But if he had immense wealth, he had also a great many children, his family consisting of six boys and six girls. None of them were settled in life: the boys were too young to think of it; the girls, too proud of their fortunes, upon which they had every reason to count, could not easily determine upon the choice they should make. Their vanity was flattered by the attentions of the handsomest young gentlemen. But a reverse of fortune which they did not at all expect, came to trouble their felicity. Their house took fire; the splendid furniture with which it was filled, the account books, the notes, gold, silver, and all the valuable stores which formed the merchant's principal wealth, were enveloped in this fatal conflagration, which was so violent that very few of the things could be saved. This first misfortune was but the forerunner of others. The father, with whom hitherto everything had prospered, lost at the same time, either by shipwreck or by pirates, all the ships he had at sea; his correspondents made him a bankrupt, his foreign agents were treacherous; in short, from the greatest opulence, he suddenly fell into the most abject poverty. He had nothing left but a small country house, situated in a lonely place, more than a hundred leagues from the city in which he usually resided. Impelled to seek a place of refuge from noise and tumult, he took his family to this retired spot, who were in despair at such a revolution. The daughters of this unfortunate merchant were especially horrified at the prospect of the life they should have to lead in this dull solitude. For some time they flattered themselves that, when their father's intention became known, their lovers, who had hitherto sued in vain, would be only too happy to find they were inclined to listen to them. They imagined that the many admirers of each would be all striving to obtain the preference. They thought if they wished only for a husband they would obtain one; but they did not remain very long in such a delightful illusion. They had lost their greatest attractions when, like a flash of lightning, their father's splendid fortune had disappeared, and their time for choosing had departed with it. Their crowd of admirers vanished at the moment of their downfall; their beauty was not sufficiently powerful to retain one of them. Their friends were not more generous than their lovers. From the hour they became poor, every one, without exception, ceased to know them. Some were even cruel enough to impute their misfortunes to their own acts. Those whom the father had most obliged were his most vehement calumniators: they reported that all his calamities were brought on by his own bad conduct, his prodigality, and the foolish extravagance of himself and his children. This wretched family, therefore, could not do better than depart from a city wherein everybody took a pleasure in insulting them in their misfortunes. Having no resource whatever, they shut themselves up in their country house, situated in the middle of an almost impenetrable forest, and which might well be considered the saddest abode in the world. What misery they had to endure in this frightful solitude! They were forced to do the hardest work. Not being able to have any one to wait upon them, this unfortunate merchant's sons were compelled to divide the servant's duties amongst them, as well as to exert themselves in every way that people must do who have to earn their livelihood in the country. The daughters, on their part, had sufficient employment. Like the poor peasant girls, they found themselves obliged to employ their delicate hands in all the labours of a rural life. Wearing nothing but woollen dresses, having nothing to gratify their vanity, existing upon what the land could give them, limited to common necessaries, but still retaining a refined and dainty taste, these girls incessantly regretted the city and its attractions. The recollection even of their younger days passed so rapidly in a round of mirth and pleasure was their greatest torment. The youngest girl, however, displayed greater perseverance and firmness in their common misfortune. She bore her lot cheerfully, and with a strength of mind much beyond her years: not but what, at first, she was truly melancholy. Alas! who would not have felt such misfortunes. But, after deploring her father's ruin, could she do better than resume her former gaiety, make up her mind to the position she was placed in, and forget a world which she and her family had found so ungrateful, and the friendship of which she was so fully persuaded was not to be relied upon in the time of adversity? Anxious to console herself and her brothers, by her amiable disposition and sprightliness, there was nothing she did not do to amuse them. The merchant had spared no cost in her education, nor in that of her sisters. At this sad period she derived all the advantage from it she desired. As she could play exceedingly well upon various instruments, and sing to them charmingly, she asked her sisters to follow her example, but her cheerfulness and patience only made them more miserable. These girls, who were so inconsolable in their ill fortune, thought their youngest sister showed a poor and mean spirit, and even silliness, to be so merry in the state it had pleased Providence to reduce them to. "How happy she is," said the eldest; "she was intended for such coarse occupations. With such low notions, what would she have done in the world?" Such remarks were unjust. This young person was much more fitted to shine in society than either of them. She was a perfectly beautiful young creature, her good temper rendered her adorable. A generous and tender heart was visible in all her words and actions. Quite as much alive to the reverses that had just overwhelmed her family as either of her sisters, by a strength of mind which is not common in her sex, she concealed her sorrow, and rose superior to her misfortunes. So much firmness was considered to be insensibility. But one can easily appeal from a judgment pronounced by jealousy. Every intelligent person, who saw her in her true light, was eager to give her the preference over her sisters. In the midst of her greatest splendour, although distinguished by her merit, she was so handsome that she was called "The Beauty." Known by this name only, what more was required to increase the jealousy and hatred of her sisters? Her charms, and the general esteem in which she was held, might have induced her to hope for a much more advantageous establishment than her sisters; but feeling only for her father's misfortunes, far from retarding his departure from a city in which she had enjoyed so much pleasure, she did all she could to expedite it. This young girl was as contented in their solitude as she had been in the midst of the world. To amuse herself in her hours of relaxation, she would dress her hair with flowers, and, like the shepherdesses of former times, forgetting in a rural life all that had most gratified her in the height of opulence, every day brought to her some new innocent pleasure. Two years had already passed, and the family began to be accustomed to a country life, when a hope of returning prosperity arrived to discompose their tranquillity. The father received news that one of his vessels, that he thought was lost, had safely arrived in port, richly laden. His informants added, they feared the factors would take advantage of his absence, and sell the cargo at a low price, and by this fraud make a great profit at his expense. He imparted these tidings to his children, who did not doubt for an instant but that they should soon be enabled to return from exile. The girls, much more impatient than the boys, thinking it was unnecessary to wait for more certain proof, were anxious to set out instantly, and to leave everything behind them. But the father, who was more prudent, begged them to moderate their delight. However important he was to his family at a time when the labours of the field could not be interrupted without great loss, he determined to leave his sons to get in the harvest, and that he would set out upon this long journey. His daughters, with the exception of the youngest, expected they would soon be restored to their former opulence. They fancied that, even if their father's property would not be considerable enough to settle them in the great metropolis, their native place, he would at least have sufficient for them to live in a less expensive city. They trusted they should find good society there, attract admirers, and profit by the first offer that might be made to them. Scarcely remembering the troubles they had undergone for the last two years, believing themselves to be already, as by a miracle, removed from poverty into the lap of plenty, they ventured (for retirement had not cured them of the taste for luxury and display) to overwhelm their father with foolish commissions. They requested him to make purchases of jewelry, attire, and head-dresses. Each endeavoured to outvie the other in her demands, so that the sum total of their father's supposed fortune would not have been sufficient to satisfy them. Beauty, who was not the slave of ambition, and who always acted with prudence, saw directly that if he executed her sisters' commissions, it would be useless for her to ask for anything. But the father, astonished at her silence, said, interrupting his insatiable daughters, "Well, Beauty, dost thou not desire anything? What shall I bring thee? what dost thou wish for? Speak freely." "My dear papa," replied the amiable girl, embracing him affectionately, "I wish for one thing more precious than all the ornaments my sisters have asked you for; I have limited my desires to it, and shall be only too happy if they can be fulfilled. It is the gratification of seeing you return in perfect health." This answer was so unmistakeably disinterested, that it covered the others with shame and confusion. They were so angry, that one of them, answering for the rest, said with bitterness, "This child gives herself great airs, and fancies that she will distinguish herself by these affected heroics. Surely nothing can be more ridiculous." But the father, touched by her expressions, could not help showing his delight at them; appreciating, too, the feeling which induced nothing for herself, he begged she would choose something; and to allay the ill-will that his other daughters had towards her, he observed to her that such indifference to dress was not natural at her age--that there was a time for every thing. "Very well, my dear father," said she, "since you desire me to make some request, I beg you will bring me a rose; I love that flower passionately, and since I have lived in this desert I have not had the pleasure of seeing one." This was as to obey her father, and at the same time to avoid putting him to any expense for her. At length the day arrived, that this good old man was compelled to leave his family. He travelled as fast as he could to the great city to which the prospect of a new fortune recalled him. But he did not meet with the benefits he had hoped for. His vessel had certainly arrived; but his partners, believing him to be dead, had taken possession of it, and all the cargo had been disposed of, instead of entering into the full and peaceable possession of that which belonged to him, he was compelled to encounter all sorts of chicanery in the pursuit of his rights. He overcame them, but after more than six months of trouble and expense, he was not any richer than he was before. Thus terminated this dream of riches. To add to his disagreeables, he was obliged, on the score of economy, to start homeward journey at the most inconvenient time of the year. He thought he should die with fatigue; but when he found himself within a few miles of his house (which he did not reckon upon leaving for such false hopes, and which Beauty had buried, or one might say, in sorrow) his strength returned to him. It would be some hours before he could cross the forest; it was late, but he wished to continue his journey. He was benighted, suffering from intense cold; he thought his last hour had come: no hut in his road, although the forest was filled with them. A tree, hollowed by age, was the best shelter he could find, and only too happy that. The night, in such a situation, appeared to him to be never-ending; furthermore, he was famished, frightened at the roaring of the wild beasts, that were constantly passing by him. Could he by instinct take shelter in tree, was led to a peace for an instant? His trouble and anxiety did not end with the night. He had no sooner the pleasure of seeing daylight than his distress was greater. The ground appeared so extraordinarily covered with snow, no road could be seen. It was only after great fa find-- no track was to be tigue and frequent falls, that he succeeded in discovering something like a path upon which he could keep his footing. Proceeding without knowing in which direction, he did him into the avenue of a beautiful castle, which hance led him on the aven ue of orange-trees, laden with flowers and fruit. Statues were seen here and there, regardless of order or symmetry--some were in the middle of the road, otherwise symmetr y--some were in the middle of the road, othe size of life, and had the colour of human beings, in different attitudes, and in various dresses, the greatest number representing warriors. Arriving at the so much from cold that he could not stop to examine them. An agate staircase, with balusters of gold, first presented its hased elf to his sight: he pa ated him. He needed food; but to whom could he apply? This large and magnificent edifice appeared to be inhabited only by stat red to ues. A profound sile , the rooms, the galleries were all open; no living thing appeared to be in this charming place. We wandering over this vast ary of dwelling, he stopp ng in appearing, he drew near the fireplace to warm himself; but no one came. Seated on a sofa near the fire, a sweet sleep closed ear th his eyelids, and l awoke him; he had been suffering from it for the last twenty-four hours. The exercise that he had ver since he had been in th taken e is palace incre ght repast would not have satisfied him; but the viands, magnificently dressed, invited him to eat thing. His first care was to utter in a lo of every quietly till it pleased his host to make himself known to him. As fatigue caused him to sleep before his repas t, so did the food produce the same effect, and his repose was longer and more p owerful; in fact, this second time he slept for at least four hours. Upon awaking, in the place of the first table he saw another of porphyry, upon which some ki nd hand had set out a collation con sisting o f cakes, preserved fruits, and liqueurs. This was likewise for his use. Profiting, therefore, by the kindness shown him, he partook of everything that suited his appetite, his taste, and his fancy. Finding at length no one to speak to, or to inform him whether this palace was inhabited by a man or by a God, fear began to take possession of him, for he was naturally timid. He resolved, therefore, to repass through all the apartments, and overwhelm with thanks the Genius to whom he was indebted for so much kindness, and in the most respectful manner solicit him to appear. All his attentions were useless: no appearance of servants, no result by which he could ascertain that the palace was inhabite d. Thinking seriously of what he should do, he began to fancy, for what reason he could not imagine, that some good spirit had made this mansion a present to him, with all the riches that it contained. This idea seemed like inspiration, and without further delay, making a new inspection of it, he took possession of all the treasures he could find. More than this, he settled in his own mind what should allow to each of his children, and selected the apartments which would particularly suit them, enjoying the delight beforehand which his journey would afford them. He entered the garden, where, in spite of the winter, the rarest flowers were exhaling hare of it he s the most delicious perfume in the mildest and purest air. Birds of all kinds blending their songs with the confused noise of the waters, made an agreeable harmony. The old man, in ecstasi e severity uch wonders, said to himself, "My daughters will not, think, find it very difficult to accustom themselves to this delicious abode. I cannot believe that they will regret, or that they will prefer the city to this mansion. Le es at s , in a transport of joy rather uncommon for him; "I shall increase my happiness in witnessing theirs: I will take possession at once." Upon entering this charming castle he had taken care, notwithstanding he was nearly perish t me set out directly," crie d he nd let him wend his way to a stable which he had observed in the fore-court. An alley, ornamented by palisades, formed by rose-bushes in full bloom, led to it. He had never seen such lovely roses. Their perfume reminded him e Beauty a rose. He picked one, and was about to gathe r enough to make half-a-dozen bouquets, when a most frightful noise made him turn round. He was terribly alarmed upon perceiving at his side a horrible beast, which hat he had promised to giv pon his neck a kind of trunk, resembling an elephant's, and said, with a terrific voice, "Who gave thee permission to gather my roses? Is it not enough that I kindly allowed thee to remain in my palace. Instead of feelin , with an air of fury, laid u ling my flowers! Thy insolence shall not remain unpunished." The good man, already too much overpowered by the unexpected appearance of this monster, thought he should die of fright at these words, and g grateful, rash man, I find thee stea quickly throwing away the fatal rose. "Ah! my Lord," said he, prostrating himself before him, "have mercy on me! I am not ungrateful! Penetrated by all your kindness, I did not imagine that so slight a liberty could possibly have offended you." The monster very angrily replied, "Hold thy tongue, thou foolish talker. I care not for thy flattery, nor for the titles thou bestowest on me. I am not 'my Lord;' I am The Beast; and thou shalt not escape the death thou deservest." The merchant, dismayed at so cruel a sentence, and thinking that submission was the only means to preserve his life, said, in a truly affecting manner, that the rose he had dared to take was for one of his daughters, called Beauty. Then, whether death, or to induce his enemy to feel for him, he related to him all his misfortunes; he told him the object of his journey, and did not omit to dwell on the little he hoped to escape from ning she had asked for, while the present he was bound to give Beauty; add ding, that was the only riches s other daughters; and so came to the opportunity which had of fe red itself to satisfy the modest desire of Beauty, and his belief that he could have done so without of a king would hardly have sufficed to satisfy the wishes of his ult. The Beast considered for a moment, then, speaking in a mi lder tone , he said to him, "I will pardon thee, but upon condition that t any unpleasant consequences; asking pardon, moreover, for his involuntary fault. "Your Beast would hardly have sufficed to satisfy the wishes of his considered for a moment, then, speaking in a mi lder tone , he said to him, "I will pardon thee, but upon condition that thou wilt give me one of thy daughter s--I require some one to repair this fault." "Just Heaven!" replied the merchant; "how can I keep my word? Could I be so inhuman as to save my own life at the expense of one of my children's; ld I bring her here?" "There must be no pretext," interrupted the Beast. "I expect that whichever daughter you bring here she will come willingly, or I will not have either of them. Go; see if there be not one amongst them sufficiently co urageous, and loving th ee enough, to sacrifice herself to save thy life. Thou appear est to be an honest man. Give me thy word of honour to return in a month. If thou canst decide to bring one of them back with thee, she will remain he e. If thou canst not do so, promise me to return hither alone, after bidding them farewell for ever, for thou wilt belong to me. Do not fancy," continued the Monster, grinding his teeth, "that by merely agreeing to my proposition thou wilt be saved. I warn thee, if thou thinkest so to escape me, I will seek for thee, and destroy thee and thy race, although a hundred thousand men appear to defend thee." The good man, although quite convinced that he should not vainly put to the proof the devotion of his daughters, accepted, nevertheless, the Monster's proposition. He promised to return to him at the time named, and give himself up to his sad fate, without rendering it necessary for the Beast to seek for him. After this assurance he thought himself at liberty to retire and take leave of the Beast, whose presence was most distressing to him. The respite was but brief, yet he feared he might revoke it. He expressed his anxiety to depart; but the Beast told him he should not do so until the following day. "Thou wilt find," said he, "a horse ready at break of day. He will carry thee home quickly. Adieu--go to supper, and await my orders." The poor man, more dead than alive, returned to the saloon in which he had feasted so heartily. Before a large fire his supper, already laid, invited him to sit and enjoy it. The delicacy and richness of the dishes had no longer, however, any temptation for him, overwhelmed by his grief, he would not have seated himself at the table, but that he feared that the Beast was concealed somewhere, and observing him, and that he would excite his anger by any slight of his bounty. To avoid further disaster, he made a momentary truce with his grief, and, as well as his afflicted heart would permit, he tasted, in turn, the various dishes. At the end of the repast a great noise, as heard in the adjoining apartment, and he did not doubt that it was his formidable host. As he could manage to avoid his presence, he tried to recover from the alarm which this sudden noise had caused him. At the same moment, the Beast, who appeared, asked him abruptly if he had made a good supper. The good man replied, in a modest and timid tone, that he had, thanks to his attention, eaten heartily. "Promise me," replied the Monster, "to remember your word to me, and to keep it as a man of honour, in bringing me one of your daughters." The old man, who was not much entertained with this conversation, swore to him that he would fulfil what he had promised, and return in a month alone or with one of his daughters, if he should find one who loved him sufficiently to follow him on the conditions he must propose to her. "I warn thee again," said the Beast, "to take care not to deceive her as to the sacrifice which thou must exact from her, or the danger she will incur. Paint to her my face such as it is. Let her know what she is about to do: above all, let her be firm in her resolution. There will be no time for reflection when thou shalt have brought her hither. There must be no drawing back: thou wilt be equally lost, without obtaining for her the liberty to return." The merchant, who was overcome at this discourse, reiterated his promise to conform to all that was prescribed to him. The Monster, satisfied with his answer, ordered him to retire to rest, and not to rise till he should see the sun, and he would pay thee a visit." The good man, for fear of prolonging a conversation already too painful to him, made a profound reverence to the Beast, who told him again not to be anxious respecting the road by which he should return; as at the honest man. If thou failest in thy word, he should find a golden bell. "Thou wilt breakfast before setting out," said he again; "and thou mayest take a rose with thee for Beauty. The horse which shall bear thee will be ready in the court-yard. I reckon on seeing thee again in a month, if thou art an time appointed the same horse which ich he would mount the next morning would be found at his gate, and would suffice for his daughter and himself. However little disposition the old man felt for sleep, he dared not disobey the orders he had received. Obliged to lie down, he did not rise till the sun began to illum ine the chamber. His breakfast was soon despatched, and he then descended into the garden to gather the rose which the Beast had ordered him to take to Beauty. How many tears this flower caused him to shed. But the fear of drawing on himself new disasters made him consider strain his feelings, and he went, without further delay, in search of the horse which had been promised him. He found on the saddle a light but warm cloak. As soon as the horse felt him on his back, he set off with incredible speed. The merchant, who in a moment lost sight of this fatal palace, experienced as great a sensation of joy as he had on the previous evening felt in perceiving it, with this difference, that the delight of leaving it was embittered by the cruel reflection necessity of returning to it. "To what have I pledged myself?" said he, whilst urser carried him with a velocity and a lightness which is only known in fairy land. "Would it not be better that I should become at once the victim of this monster who thirsts for the blood of my family? By a promise I have made, as unnatural as it is indiscreet, I have pnged my life. Is it possible that I could think of extending my days at the expense of those of my daughters? Can I have the barbarity to lead one to him, to see him, no doubt, devour her before my eyes?" But all at once, interrupting himself, he cried, "Miserable wretch that I am, what have I to fear? If I could find it in my heart to silence the voice of nature, would it depend on me to commit this cowardly act? She must know her fate and consent to it. I see no chance that she will be inclined to sacrifice herself for an inhuman father, and I ought not to make such a proposition to her. It is unjust. But even if the affection which they all entertain for me should induce one to devote herself, would not a single glance at the Beast destroy her constancy, and I could not complain. Ah! too imperious Beast," exclaimed he, "thou hast done this expressly! By putting an impossible condition to the means thou offerest me to escape thy fury, and obtain the pardon of a trifling fault, thou hast added insult to injury! But," continued he, "I cannot bear to think of it. I hesitate no longer; and I would rather expose myself without turning away from thy rage, than attempt a useless mode of escape, which my paternal love trembles to employ. Let me retrace," said he, "the road to this frightful palace, and without deigning to purchase so dearly the remnant of a life which can never be but miserable--without waiting for the month which is accorded me to expire,--return and terminate this day my miserable existence!" At these words he endeavoured to retrace his steps, but he found it impossible to turn the bridle of his horse. Allowing himself, therefore, against his will, to be carried forward, he resolved at least to propose nothing to his daughters. Already he saw his house in the distance, and strengthening himself more and more in his resolution, "I will not speak to them," he said, "of the danger which threatens me: I shall have the pleasure of embracing them once more; I shall give them my last advice; I will beg them to live on good terms with their brothers, whom I shall also implore not to abandon them." In the midst of this reverie, he reached his door. His own horse, which had found its way home previous evening, had alarmed his family. His sons, dispersed in the forest, had sought him in every direction; and his daughters, in their impatience to hear some tidings of him, were at the door, in order to obtain the earliest intelligence. As he was mounted on a magnificent steed, and wrapt in a rich cloak, they could not recognise him, but took him at first for a messenger sent by him, and the rose which they perceived attached to the pummel of the saddle made their hearts leap for joy. But their delight was soon changed into anxiety. All hastened to inquire the cause of his trouble; they recognised him, and thought only of evincing their satisfaction at seeing him return in good health. But the sadness depicted in his face, and his eyes filled with tears, which he vainly endeavoured to restrain, changed their joy