

## Beauty and the Beast: Act the Second

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The world of imagination has captivated readers for centuries, from the fables of Aesop to Tolkien's Middle Earth. The Realm of Fairytales has long been a vehicle for the author to offer his adherents counsel in the great Romance of life. Who can read *The Fellowship of the Ring* and not hear the horn of Gondor sounding desperately through the forest? And who can read *The Chronicles of Narnia* and not feel the rush of excitement as Aslan roars into battle? While this story can claim no similarity to these Fantastic giants, it does have one thing in common: the domain of Fairyland.

Once upon a time, in a place where the abnormal was ordinary and the extraordinary was normal; where goblins and witches, fairies and wizards roamed; and where princes and princesses proliferated like peasants (though their fathers' royal domains will most probably never be ascertained); there lived a particularly beautiful one of these abundant princesses. She was the pride of her father and the desired of all of the profuse princes of the land. There was one however that had captivated her from the first. He had appeared suddenly from nowhere (for those things happen fairly often in this land, and so produce no surprise) and had, after a few months, made the acquaintance of the princess. The prince had a large castle at the north of fairyland and his riches soon became a byword and later a proverb. Taken all together, the prince was a grand match for this most beautiful of princesses.

It will suffice to say that the prince did indeed court the young woman, proving himself to be a most chivalrous and dignified man, and also companionable. Many months found them talking to each other on the shore of a shimmering lake. The prince deemed the moment had come. He took her hand, and asked the question that the princess had been expecting.

“Dear Princess,” he said, ever so gracefully, “will you marry me?”

She answered, “Yes, with all my heart.” She placed her hand on his and reached up and kissed him on the cheek.

Then something very strange happened. You may think that it would not be very strange in this world of impossibilities, but at any rate it was the last thing the princess expected. The handsome prince, before the princesses’ astonished eyes, changed into a stocky young farmer, with calloused hands and a grizzly beard and the happiest smile on his sun burnt face.

“You have freed me!” he cried “A witch cast a spell on me, making me a rich prince, although at the time, I thought myself fortunate. And in the beginning it was incredible, but after a while, it became boring and I found I had no meaning in my life. A very wise man once said that it is no good to gain the whole world and lose your soul. I had found that this was exactly my situation. The only way to break the spell was for a fair maiden to come and kiss me. I told myself that this would not be too hard. But when I saw you, I fell in love with you, and I was always afraid that you would reject me, when you saw me as I really am. I cannot offer you much in the world, but I can offer you my love, and promise you happiness. Choose for yourself.”

The farmer and the princess were married the following day. And contrary to the popular belief of her suitors, father, and the other princesses, she lived happily ever after.

By Thomas Daniels