

## Beauty and The Beast

by Tricia-Marie Ward

The door had been nailed shut for some reason. Belle looked up frightfully at Beast, "Hey must be the wind or something, right?" I could tell she was shivering to the bone. The castle was extra cold this time of year and humans, when I was one, happened to get cold faster than beasts did. I can see Cogsworth and Lumiere slither away in my peripheral to give us some privacy, a slight grimace on their face was apparent. She smiled tenderly at me and came closer for a hug to keep warm in my fur. My heart felt full and I was glad - this was what I always wanted. I wanted to be seen and I wanted to be loved for me. Belle was that person, she saw me amongst the disparity and monster I was and showed me tenderness. She saw me under this darkened night and grotesque feature, the sharpened claws that could tear her to ribbons - even beyond this monster-like stature. I felt her small and frail body envelop in me. This was the perfect time, this was the moment I've been waiting for. I leaned down and embraced her, resting my head on top of her head that I could easily crush in my jaws or within my claws.

"Belle?"

"Yes, Beast?" she said nuzzling into my chest. "Do you love me?" There was a pause, "Yes, I do love you."

She looked up at me with tears welling over in her eyes from the realization and saying it out loud.

I gently separated from her and knelt down as she gasped in delight, unable to contain her happiness. She even squealed a little bit - it was rather endearing. Sometimes we must do terrible things in the name of love. I felt her blood trickle down my claw as I plunged it deeply into her chest. Her insides were as warm as her words and loving. She coughed and desperately tried taking in air to breathe. She sounded like a sputtering car. Belle stuttered her words, "B-Beast...W-why." The life in her eyes began to fade ever so fast. Her blood was warm and as red as the scarf she wore when we first met. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest - it nearly rattled my ribcage.

"I love you Belle; thank you for loving me."

I pulled my claw out, holding her heart like the precious jewel it was. It could have been my imagination but her heart let out one last beat; I'm sure it was for me. Her blood pumped out of the atrium into my claw. She buckled at the knees and thudded against the ground. A pool of her blood and love for me seeping into the castle floor - filling in along the linework of the brick flooring.

Her body lay limp on the floor like a doll tossed aside after playtime. Her face still looked so damn beautiful even amongst the contortion of pain I put her through. Her eyes were glazed over - still a sweet cocoa to me. My eyes trailed down her body that I've seen adorned in every gown she owned and even with nothing at all. I felt myself begin to shrink down from the tall behemoth that I was. I looked down at my hands that

were claws that were curtained in my lover's blood and parts of her flesh. They took the shape of hands again and the blood still dripped.

I left the room with a door shutting behind me, alongside Belle and this life I didn't want to see again. The witch said if I can possess the heart of someone who loves me then I can have my old life back. Cogsworth and Lumiere appeared at the end of the hall who also returned to their human forms. They bowed in my direction. The mirrors that decorated the hallway reflected the old me and I smiled ear to ear.

"Welcome back, Master."