



# Beauty and the Beast

*Madame Gabrielle de Villeneuve*

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**Beauty and the Beast** Madame Gabrielle de Villeneuve

A Traditional Fairy Tale

## Beauty and the Beast

By Madame Gabrielle de Villeneuve

Beauty and the Beast (French: La Belle et la Bete) is a traditional fairy tale written by French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve and published in 1740 in *La Jeune Americaine et les contes marins*. Her lengthy version was abridged, rewritten, and published by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1756 in *Magasin des enfants* to produce the version most commonly retold.

Variants of the tale are known across Europe. In France, for example, *Zemire et Azor* is an operatic version of the story, written by Marmontel and composed by Gretry in 1771, which had enormous success well into the 19th century; it is based on the second version of the tale. *Amour pour amour*, by Nivelles de la Chaussee, is a 1742 play based on Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's version.

A wealthy, widowed merchant lives in a mansion with his six children, three sons and three daughters. All his daughters are very beautiful, but the youngest, Beauty, is the most lovely, as well as kind, well-read and pure of heart; while the elder sisters, in contrast, are wicked, selfish, vain and spoiled, and secretly taunt and treat Beauty more like a servant than a sister. The merchant eventually loses all of his wealth in a tempest at sea. He and his children are consequently forced to live in a small farmhouse and work for their living. After some years of this, the merchant hears that one of the trade ships he had sent off has arrived back in port, having escaped the destruction of its compatriots. He returns to the city to discover whether it contains anything valuable. Before leaving, he asks his children if they wish for him to bring any gifts back for them. The sons ask for weaponry and horses to hunt with, whereas his oldest daughters ask for clothing, jewels and the finest dresses possible, thinking his wealth has returned. Beauty is satisfied with the promise of a rose, as none grow in their part of the country. The merchant, to his dismay, finds that his ship's cargo has been seized to pay his debts, leaving him without money to buy his children their presents.

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