



THE SCARLET FLOWER

A folktale from Russia

A LONG TIME AGO, a sailor was beginning to make a long trip — his longest yet. This sailor had three daughters, and before he left, he asked them each what he should bring back for them as a gift. “I would like a golden crown,” his oldest said. “And I would like a crystal mirror,” said his middle daughter. “I don’t want much,” his youngest said. “Just a scarlet flower will be all.”

And so he set sail. He found the crown and the mirror right away, but nowhere could he find a scarlet flower. Desperate to bring her the gift she wanted, he searched high and low.

In his search, he came upon a forest. “Perfect!” he thought. “If ever there were a place to find a flower, it’s in a forest.” He looked and looked, but still he could not find a scarlet flower. He was very deep in the forest when he came to a clearing, where there sat a huge, wondrous palace.

The palace had a garden out front, in the middle of which sat just what he needed — a scarlet flower. But how to get in? He slipped in through a gap in the gate and quietly crept into the garden. He thought he had made it, but when he turned around, he found he was face to face with a horrible beast!

“What are you doing here? Get out!” roared the creature.

“I — I’m sorry!” stammered the sailor. “My daughter

wanted a scarlet flower. I wanted to give this to her.”

The beast was truly scary, but he saw that the man was only trying to please his child. “She may have the flower,” the beast agreed.

“Oh, thank you—”

“Not so fast. She may have the flower, but to keep it, she must come back here to live with me. Forever.”

The sailor made his way home, and told his daughter the bad news. “I’m afraid you’ll have to go there tomorrow.” The daughter packed up her things and, in the morning, kissed her sisters goodbye. As soon as the door had closed behind her, the oldest turned to the middle daughter. “Pah! Can you believe that? She gets to live in a palace, and we have to stay here in this hut.”

“It just makes me sick,” said the middle daughter.

The youngest daughter arrived at the palace late that night. She was surprised to find that she wasn’t being sent to the dungeon — a comfortable bedroom had been made up for her. “Not so bad,” she said to herself. “I might actually like it here.”

Over time, she learned the beast wasn’t scary at all — actually, he was sweet. He brought her food and drink whenever she requested it, and he made chitchat with her through the door. She found him bright and kind, but he would never show her his face — he was too embarrassed.

(Continued on next page.)

Time went on, and she became quite curious about her captor's appearance. One day, when he brought her dinner, she had to ask.

"Are you sure I can't see what you look like?" she asked sweetly.

"I'd rather not," he said, and began to move away from the door.

"Oh, come now," she proceeded. "If you look as kind as you act, I'm sure it's not that bad."

The beast sighed, and slowly, she saw the door tremble open, and a hideous beast stood in the doorway.

Though she didn't want to hurt his feelings, she couldn't help it — she gasped in horror.

"See? I told you!" he said and stormed off.

That night, she had a nightmare about her father being very ill. The next morning, she pleaded with the beast to let her go. "I am so sorry for the way I behaved last night," she said humbly. "I didn't mean to hurt you. But you must understand. I love my father, and I need to be by his side."

The beast couldn't say no to a love like that. "Go ahead, go," he said. "Just return in three days' time, when the clock strikes ten."

She raced through the woods and back to her village, where she found her father in bed. "He's getting better," said her oldest sister. "How did you know to come?"

"I had a dream," she said. "I can't stay long. I promised to return in three days."

"Don't worry," said her middle sister. "We'll make sure you get back in time."

But her sisters had other plans. Jealous of the youngest's wealth, they snuck around the house while she was sleeping and turned back all the clocks.

On what she thought was the third day, she kissed her father, now returning to health, and her sisters goodbye, and headed back to the palace. But when she got there, she found the beast lying stone still in the garden, the rose in his hand — she was too late! She threw herself over him and cried. "I'm so sorry, my dear, true friend," she sobbed. "I'll miss you so much. I ... I love you."

Suddenly, a soft wind blew through the garden. Under his chest, she could hear his heart beating. She scrambled away from him, and watched him transform into a handsome prince!

"But...but what happened?" she said.

"A long time ago, a witch cast a spell on me and my family," he explained as he approached her. "The only thing that could break it was true love."

She had loved him since he was a horrible beast, and they both knew that made their love truer than any other kind.

**THEY LIVED HAPPILY
EVER AFTER**

THINK ABOUT IT

Does this story remind you of any other stories you have heard before? Which one?

Name three things that are the same about it:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Name three things that are different:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

