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PRESENT

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

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EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - DUSK

1760. A majestic ship is pitching in the middle of a raging ocean. The ink-dark sky is streaked with lightning. The waves toss the hail-beaten vessel.

EXT. SHIP/UPPER DECK - DUSK

The massive silhouette of the CAPTAIN stands out at the helm. He is hollering orders to his crew, but his voice is drowned by the howling of the storm and the creaking of the masts as they withstand the violent weather.

On deck, the crew is in full action. The camera dives through a hatch...

INT. SHIP/DECK - DUSK

The young and frail ELEONORE (16) is running through the ship's gangways. The rolling is so strong she has a hard time staying on her feet.

Three officers are goofing off below deck. One is very young and a bit less of a show-off, but the older two are really swaggering. The trio sees Eleonore and hurries toward her.

OFFICER #1

Lost lamb to port, my friends!

OFFICER #2

The poor thing looks terrified.
Let's rescue her!

All smiles, they deploy across the gangway and block Eleonore's way, overplaying the effect of the roll.

OFFICER #1

Gentlemen, let the lady pass!

They're having a good laugh, and as she tries to get past them, they prevent it.

OFFICER #2

Pardon us, but the ship is really
pitching!

Eleonore pulls her silk shawl tight around her neck.

ELEONORE

I beg of you...

The young woman's eyes fill with tears.

And then the sweet but firm voice of a woman is heard.

ISABELLE (O.S.)
Ah, there you are! I've been
looking for you for hours!

The officers spin around and discover the imposing silhouette of ISABELLE. Dressed in a magnificent red gown, the woman is wearing a little black veil that allows us a glimpse of her incredible beauty.

The vision moves forward as if floating, indifferent to the rolling of the ship. The dancing glimmer of the lanterns lights her sphinx-like smile under the veil. The boys step aside deferentially. Isabelle holds out a gloved hand to Eleonore.

ISABELLE (CONT'D)
Come along, hurry up!

ELEONORE
(hesitating)
Madam, I...

Isabelle grabs Eleonore's hand.

ISABELLE
I'm so eager for us to try on all
those dresses and corsets I have
in my cabin...

Eleonore lets herself be led away by this stranger. The officers watch them go, dumbfounded.

OFFICER #1
What did she say? What are they
going to do?

OFFICER #2
They're going to...get undressed
to...try on dresses...

The youngest of them swallows hard.

YOUNG OFFICER
(with a reedy voice)
And corsets...

Isabelle and Eleonore are walking away quickly.

ISABELLE
Are they looking at us?

Eleonore turns back. The officers are standing there stiff as fenceposts. The youngest is practically crimson.

ELEONORE
Yes. One of them is red as a
beet.

ISABELLE

Perfect! It's time for the coup de grace. Make the hem of your dress sway. Like this. With the roll of the ship, it's easy as can be!!

Eleonore smiles at her benefactress and begins to do as she does.

ELEONORE

I don't know how to thank you, Madam...

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - NIGHT

The lightning reflects off the sea, and lights the ship as it endures its rough passage.

INT. SHIP/GANGWAYS - NIGHT

The two women are walking deeper into the bowels of the ship.

ISABELLE

Are you certain? You really want to go down into the hold?

Eleonore nods her head, determined.

We hear the creaking wood and the dull blows of the swell against the hull. Eleonore is anxious, squeezing Isabelle's hand.

ISABELLE (CONT'D)

It's only the wind singing and the sea answering.

Eleonore smiles with thanks for the reassurance. And notices a strange pendant hanging around her benefactress's neck: a slightly fluorescent crystal vial.

INT. SHIP/HOLD - NIGHT

Isabelle and Eleonore reach the hold of the ship, vast as a church.

Coaches, furniture, and mountains of trunks are stored there for the passage, more or less lashed down. The entire cargo is standing in a few inches of water that the bed of the ship tosses in a movement of ebb and flow.

Eleonore makes her way through it all, searching for her belongings. Isabelle follows her, looking with concern

at the precariously piled stacks of trunks. Her hand grips her pendant as if it were a talisman.

Suddenly, a pile of trunks collapses in the water, splashing Eleonore.

We hear the strident shriek of an animal. Eleonore opens a trunk pierced with air holes and removes a small monkey, MAKI, shaggy-looking and terrified.

ISABELLE

So there's the reason for this excursion!! A charming little stowaway!

Eleonore takes a bunch of raisins from her purse. The monkey grabs them and starts eating with gusto.

ELEONORE

I found him in the jungle. He was just a baby, half-dead under a banana leaf.

Snuggling up under her chin, the monkey takes her finger in his tiny hand.

Isabelle lifts her little veil and smiles at the monkey. It is impossible to guess her age. Her beauty is timeless.

ELEONORE (CONT'D)

He's my dearest friend. I couldn't leave him behind.

ISABELLE

Now that you have him, let's go warm ourselves before we catch out death.

The monkey stares at Isabelle with his big round eyes.

INT. SHIP/ELEONORE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Sitting at Eleonore's bedside, Isabelle is tucking in the silk and lace bedclothes. The young girl looks around with amusement as her monkey swings back and forth, exploring the cabin.

There is a knock at the door. A VALET, wigged and pinched-looking, carries in a platter of fresh fruits. He nods to Eleonore.

VALET

Miss...

ISABELLE

Thank you, Henry. You can put that on the table.

The valet is about to put the plateau down...when the monkey jumps onto his shoulders! The valet freezes, terrified.

VALET

Madam! We're being attacked by wild animals!

Isabelle and Eleonore burst out laughing.

ISABELLE

Whatever you do, Henry, keep calm. Beasts can smell when a man is afraid.

Bent over in a ridiculous stance, the valet holds his breath. The monkey grabs a bunch of grapes from the platter, then utters a strident call and goes off to join his mistress in the bed. Appalled, the valet hurries out of the cabin, muttering under his breath.

ISABELLE (CONT'D)

I'm done for. He'll be sulking for the whole rest of the crossing!

Eleonore throws her head back, laughing. The shawl she is still wearing slips and reveals a birthmark at the base of her neck. Noticing Isabelle's gaze, she frowns and pulls her shawl back up.

ELEONORE

I know, it's repulsive. I'm sorry.

ISABELLE

Sorry?

Isabelle delicately pulls the shawl aside to see Eleonore's throat.

ELEONORE

I feel like it's the only thing people see... The girls at boarding school all made fun of me. But the worst is the people who pity me. No one will ever love me. I'm hideous.

Her monkey snuggles up with her.

ISABELLE

When I look at you, I see a wild girl, a dreamer. If I were a young man, I'd fall in love with those big eyes and that nose that crinkles when you laugh. And that

mark wouldn't matter in the
least...

Eleonore blushes.

ELEONORE

I wish I could believe you.

Isabelle starts peeling an orange with a silver knife.

ISABELLE

So do! No mark, no strangeness
can be a barrier to love. I could
tell you a story about a young
girl who was loved by a monster,
and who loved him back.

(pause)

Would you like that?

ELEONORE

(immediately interested)

How monstrous was he?

ISABELLE

Terrifying! Ghastly! So monstrous
that he refused to let anyone
look at him.

(suddenly pensive)

He was the loneliest and most
singular creature you ever saw.

Captivated, Eleonore curls up in her bed, her monkey
coiled by her side. And then her gaze is drawn again to
Isabelle's pendant. Dancing lights from the jewel
reflect off the face of the narrator as she begins her
story.

ISABELLE (CONT'D)

Once upon a time, a storm that
was a hundred times—a thousand
times!—more powerful than this
one...

UNDER THE SEA - DAY

ISABELLE (OFF)

*...came crashing down on the
fleet of a wealthy merchant. The
flotilla and the treasures
brought back from faraway lands
were taken by the deep. Swallowed
up. Lost forevermore!*

In the silence of the depths, the camera moves up over
sharp reefs under a rain of gold coins... The camera
finally emerges on the surface of a raging sea.

EXT. RAGING SEA - DAY

A view of four ships driven onto enormous reefs. Gold coins and gemstones cascade from their smashed hulls... The image freezes and becomes a diorama - a painted model under glass.

INT. MERCHANT'S TOWNHOUSE/ENTRANCE - DAWN

A creditor points at the diorama sitting on top of a chest of drawers, and then a man in black carries it away. The ruined MERCHANT watches as the creditor's men empty his home. The old man sighs sadly. Sudden shrieking startles him.

ANNE (O.S.)

Put that down this instant or
I'll claw your eyes out!

Two more creditors, bent under the weight of a dressing table, walk through the room. They are followed by two young women of about twenty, ANNE and CLOTILDE, who are beating them with their fans. As the creditors hurry off with the dressing table, the girls dig in their heels in front of their father.

ANNE (CONT'D)

(stamping her feet)
Daddy dearest, do something!

CLOTILDE

Everything is lost, I want to
die.

THE MERCHANT

For pity's sake, Anne, cease to
call me "daddy dearest" in front
of these strangers. And Clotilde,
stop talking about dying.

ANNE

They're taking everything. Our
jewelry, our dresses. Our beds!
EVERYTHING!

Clotilde puts her hand to her breast very theatrically.

CLOTILDE

My heart, it has stopped beating!
Are you happy now? Adieu!

She lets herself fall like a rag doll. Used to her sister's histrionics, Anne catches her without even a glance.

ANNE

Can't you see, Daddy dearest?
It's a disaster. What shall
become of us?

The merchant shrugs, powerless. Then he looks around, suddenly concerned.

THE MERCHANT
Where's Belle?

He walks off. Clotilde stands up, exasperated.

CLOTILDE
Belle, Belle, Belle... She's the only one who matters!

EXT. MERCHANT'S TOWNHOUSE/COURTYARD - DAWN

ISABELLE (OFF)
Ruined in under a month, the merchant's family resigned itself to leaving everything behind...

In the courtyard, valets and chambermaids are loading the few belongings the family has left into a cart. MAXIME and JEAN-BAPTISTE, the merchant's elder sons, are helping—silently, expressionless.

ADELE, their old nursemaid, is holding TRISTAN, the youngest of the brothers, tightly in her arms.

ADELE
Look after your father.
(whispering)
And don't let Maxime squander the little money you have left.

Tristan holds out a sealed envelope.

TRISTAN
Could you give it to him?

ADELE
You didn't have time to say good-bye? But he's your best friend...

TRISTAN
His father doesn't want us to see each other anymore. He'll come tomorrow. You won't forget?

With an understanding expression, the nursemaid quickly slips the envelope into her apron. They are jostled by Anne and Clotilde, who run—hiding behind their fans—to take refuge in a carriage.

The merchant's two elder sons glare at the crowd of onlookers massed at the courtyard gates. Some of them appear to be enjoying the spectacle of the family's misfortune.

MAXIME

If anyone laughs, he gets my fist
in his nose.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

Don't pay any attention....

MAXIME

Come on! A last bit of action
before we disappear into the
boredom of the countryside!

JEAN-BAPTISTE

You'll have to get used to it,
old buddy. No more betting and
brawling for you.

INT. MERCHANT'S TOWNHOUSE/EMPTY ROOMS - DAWN

The merchant is walking through the empty rooms and long
hallways, calling out.

THE MERCHANT

Belle! Belle!

INT./EXT. MERCHANT'S TOWNHOUSE/SITTING ROOM & GARDEN -
DAWN

We discover Belle. The young girl of a pure and delicate
beauty is in the garden of the townhouse. She picks a
rose and comes back into the sitting room.

She turns toward the portrait of a woman set in a stone
frame. The young girl lays the rose below the painting
and speaks to the portrait.

BELLE

So... A new life is about to
begin, and I think I'm ready now.

The merchant comes into the sitting room. He looks
tenderly at his daughter and steps toward her, placing
his hands on her shoulders. She smiles.

BELLE (CONT'D)

I look less and less like her,
don't you find?

THE MERCHANT

As soon as we've found a bigger
house, we'll come back for it. I
promise you.

BELLE

Do you think she would have liked
living in the country?

THE MERCHANT
She would have loved it!

BELLE
I'm going to love it, too, I know
I am.

Touched, the merchant kisses Belle's forehead.

THE MERCHANT
We're a courageous family. We'll
stick together, just like we've
always done.

Forgetting their misfortune for a few moments, they hold each other close to admire one last time the beloved face in the portrait.

EXT. ROAD/FOREST - DAY

The two horse-drawn vehicles are leaving the city on a road that leads into the forest.

Belle is travelling with Tristan in the cart where their belongings are loaded. Anne and Clotilde are in the carriage driven by their father. Maxime and Jean-Baptiste follow on their horses.

JEAN-BAPTISTE
(looking into the
distance)
Dethroned, comma, pierced by
arrows, comma, the young prince
left the battlefield to take
refuge in the woods....

MAXIME
Your new novel?

JEAN-BAPTISTE
Better, my dear brother! This one
will be my masterpiece.

EXT. ROAD/COTTAGE - DAY

As the road emerges from the forest, the convoy draws to a halt...

Belle leaps from the cart. Tucked in the hollow of a valley, we discover a cottage in a bucolic setting, with orchards and an immense vegetable garden. Their new home.

Belle smiles, happy... Fade to black.

INT. COTTAGE/SISTERS' ROOM - DAY

Clotilde is stretched out on her bed, dressed in a lace nightdress that contrasts with the simplicity of the room. She fans herself, panting.

CLOTILDE

I have a fever.

Anne, seated at a rustic dressing table, leans toward a mirror flecked with spots.

ANNE

I have a wrinkle!

A horsefly buzzes around her.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Ah! There's no end to these bugs!!

(whirling her arms about)

Buzz buzz buzz!!

With a cruel smile, she finally crushes the horsefly with her brush.

CLOTILDE

Six months in this hellhole already. We're going to die here, all alone, shriveled up, stung and devoured by beasts...

She lets herself fall backward melodramatically onto her bed.

And then we hear Belle calling to her sisters.

BELLE (O.S.)

ANITAAAAA! CLOTILDAAAAA!

ANNE

And now her! Just what we needed! Her happiness disgusts me. I want to drown her in the well.

Clotilde starts punching her pillow.

CLOTILDE

I would bury her alive in that cursed vegetable plot.

Belle starts hammering on the door.

BELLE (O.S.)

A-NI-TA CLO-TIL-DA! A-NI-TA CLO-TIL-DA!

Weary, Anne opens the door for Belle, radiant in her peasant dress.

ANNE
We've told you already not to disturb us before lunch.

BELLE
I know! But come on, quick! To the garden!

Racing into the room, Belle grabs Clotilde's hand, pulling her out of bed.

CLOTILDE
No doubt about it, I shall get heat stroke...

EXT. COTTAGE/GARDEN - DAY

Out behind the cottage, beyond several rows of drying sheets, Anne and Clotilde discover a small white tent.

Tristan, smiling proudly, is standing in front of it. He bows to his sisters and opens one of the tent flaps to let them in.

INT. TENT - DAY

The inside of the tent looks like a candy box. Belle has covered the benches with pastel fabrics and satin ribbons, set out a pink tea service, strewn sweet pea blossoms everywhere.

Stunned, Anne and Clotilde inspect the boudoir.

TRISTAN
You'll be able to enjoy the fresh air...

BELLE
Protected from the sun!

Anne is absent-mindedly pinching and lifting the skin of her face.

BELLE (CONT'D)
And we've put in citronella candles to keep the insects away in the evening.

Overcome with emotion, Clotilde steps out of the tent.

CLOTILDE
I have a gnat in my eye.

Anne throws herself at Belle and wraps her arms around her.

ANNE

My little treasure! What would we
do without you?!

EXT. COTTAGE/GARDEN - DAY

Outside the tent, Clotilde is drying her tears when voices and agitation draw her attention. She sees her father and two older brothers galloping toward the cottage waving their arms...

INT. COTTAGE/KITCHEN - DAY

The merchant is surrounded by his children, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

THE MERCHANT

It was your mother's favorite
ship. I think it's a sign!

MAXIME

It was spotted drifting near the
shore and it was towed back to
port!

THE MERCHANT

My children, I think we are
saved!

The kitchen erupts with joy.

ANNE

Clotilde, pack the bags! No...we
can just burn everything!

CLOTILDE

The blood is flowing again all
through my body. I'm coming back
to life. I am reborn!

ANNE

Daddy dearest, we can't go back
to town in this condition. We
need new dresses, perfume...

(to Clotilde)

What else?

Everyone laughs, talking at the same time.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

(to himself)

...and after defeating the last
of his enemies, the young prince
returned to his land, acclaimed
by his people. The end.

The merchant suddenly notices Belle, apart from the others, silent and solemn.

INT. TENT - DUSK

The merchant comes into the "boudoir." Anne and Clotilde are wielding a feather pen, drawing up an extravagant list of things they need to go back the city.

ANNE
...garnet-colored make-up, face powder... We haven't finished our list, daddy dearest, come back later.

The merchant glances at their list.

THE MERCHANT
How much is all of this going to cost me?

ANNE
(exultant)
A fortune.

Clotilde taps the list with his finger.

CLOTILDE
Add smelling salts. For my nerves. You never know.

THE MERCHANT
We've lost Belle again...

ANNE
She ran outside making that sad puppy face of hers.
(to Clotilde)
Amber or violet flowers?

They turn their attention back to their inventory. The merchant leaves them, sighing.

EXT. COTTAGE/VEGETABLE PLOT - DUSK

As the sun is setting, the merchant goes to join Belle in her vegetable plot. Somewhat agitated, she is picking a few of the vegetables she planted.

THE MERCHANT
What are you doing?

She breaks the stem of an enormous pumpkin and puts it in his arms without a word. Then she starts pulling up some carrots. Her father tries to follow her without dropping the pumpkin.

THE MERCHANT (CONT'D)
Are you pouting?

BELLE

(without turning)

Obviously! If a girl is sad, people say she's pouting, and if she's too happy, they say she's crazy!

THE MERCHANT

But...how are we supposed to understand? Everyone is happy except you!

BELLE

I thought we were going to stay here forever...

THE MERCHANT

We came to stay here to hide our misfortune. Our lives are not here.

The merchant frowns.

THE MERCHANT (CONT'D)

Tell me, you wouldn't happen to have a beau? A handsome and hardy boy from the area?

Belle turns around, outraged.

BELLE

A beau? How dreadful! You know as well as I do what will happen. Maxime will go back to those hoodlums he calls his "friends." Anne and Clotilde will go out every evening to find themselves husbands. And you will be busy night and day with your business.

THE MERCHANT

Belle, sooner or later, we are all destined to go our separate ways. Even you will grow up, and you'll want to move away. It doesn't mean we no longer love each other. It just means that you'll have become an adult.

They are interrupted by Anne and Clotilde. Anne is waving their list of "necessities" under her father's nose.

ANNE

And don't forget a thing, Daddy dearest. Clotilde wouldn't be able to bear it.

The merchant turns back to Belle.

THE MERCHANT

And what shall I get for you?

Belle looks all around. The orange-colored sky casts a gentle light on the garden.

Belle's eyes stop at a neglected corner of the plot.

BELLE

I'd just like one rose. I've never managed to grow any here.

Anne and Clotilde roll their eyes.

EXT. PORT - DAY

The merchant's ship is moored in the port. Clouds of seagulls circle around its broken masts. The strident calls of the big birds echo the shouting of the sailors emptying the wreck. Men dressed in black are taking scrupulous note of every detail of the cargo being unloaded.

INT. OFFICE OF MARITIME AFFAIRS - DAY

The merchant is watching the proceedings through the window. He shakes his head, overcome. Behind him, Maxime is pacing, glancing darkly at the Director of Maritime Affairs (DUMONT).

THE MERCHANT

How could you let them do this, Dumont?

DUMONT

They came with their letters of credit, acknowledgements of debt. All signed by you...

THE MERCHANT

They are leaving us nothing. How am I going to tell the children?

Maxime loses his composure. In an outburst of anger, he grabs Dumont by the collar.

MAXIME

You scum! I'll have your hide!

The merchant grabs his son.

THE MERCHANT

Stop that this instant!

Maxime lets go of Dumont and looks angrily at his father.

MAXIME

You've already given up... Look where your legendary kindness and honesty have gotten us! You make me sick.

The merchant's face falls. Maxime freezes. Understanding that he has insulted his father profoundly, he runs away.

Distraught, the merchant turns to Dumont, who looks away, then he runs outside.

THE MERCHANT

Maxime!

EXT. ALLEYS NEAR THE PORT - NIGHT

We find the merchant in the freezing rain, searching the narrow alleys of the seedy port. He stops at the fogged-up windows of a dimly-lit tavern.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

The tables are full of thugs and drunken sailors. A young girl is serving them—while trying to avoid their wandering hands.

The merchant goes up to the BARMAN behind the counter.

BARMAN

Bad night in here, a real powder keg. What can I get you?

THE MERCHANT

I'm looking for my son. I've been told he's a regular here.

The barman looks solemnly at the merchant.

BARMAN

Children! I also had a son...once. What's your boy's name?

THE MERCHANT

Maxime de Beaufremont.

The barman freezes. Nearby, one of the thugs has overheard, and whispers in the ear of a man who looks to be the leader of his gang (PERDUCAS).

BARMAN

(whispering)

You should have spoken more quietly. I'm going to have to let you out the back door.

Perducas gets up from the table of thugs. His build is impressive.

THE MERCHANT

I have to find him, at all costs.

BARMAN

(gesturing toward
Perducas)

You're not the only one. Come
back behind the counter, and
fast.

The barman opens a low door that opens onto an alley. Too late! Perducas and his men have already surrounded the merchant.

PERDUCAS

Monsieur de Beaufremont! I've
been looking for your son for
months. But in the end you're the
one I find...

THE MERCHANT

What do you want with him? I
don't know you...

Perducas lifts a side of his coat. He is carrying a long, razor-sharp knife in his belt.

PERDUCAS

Maxime owes me a certain sum...
Where have you been hiding all
this time?

THE MERCHANT

We've not been hiding...

The barman pulls an old rifle from under the bar and aims it at Perducas's temple.

BARMAN

None of that in my bar, Perducas.
Leave the old man alone.

Perducas steps back. His eyes filled with rage, he sees the merchant slip behind the bar.

The merchant thanks the barman with his eyes and disappears into the night.

Giving up on confronting the barman, Perducas and his men surge back and leave through the front door.

EXT. ALLEYS NEAR THE PORT - NIGHT

Racing around the tavern, Perducas and his men reach the head of the alley. No sign of the merchant. He has disappeared.

A bit further away...

The rain has turned to snow. The merchant picks up his pace as he reaches his horse, glancing backwards with fear.

EXT. FOREST/PATH - NIGHT

Slumped on his horse, the merchant is travelling through a snowstorm. The wind whistles through the trees. A thick layer of snow covers the path.

Exhausted, chilled to the bone, the merchant has fallen asleep in the saddle. Left to itself, his horse has wandered off the path.

A strange silhouette is watching the scene through the trees.

It is impossible to say whether it's a man or a beast. All we can see are its orange eyes, fluorescent like melted glass. Its long, downy ears make it look like a demon. Wearing a coat of white furs, THE BEAST almost blends in with the frozen landscape.

The horse senses the Beast's presence and rears up. The merchant emerges from his slumber. Too late! The ground falls out from beneath the horse's hooves. The rider and his mount fall into a ravine.

EXT. FOREST/RAVINE - NIGHT

The merchant struggles to get up and sees that the two front legs of his horse are broken.

THE MERCHANT

I don't even have a weapon to finish you off. Please forgive me.

After stroking the horse's muzzle one last time, the old man begins his climb up out of the ravine, talking to himself the whole time.

THE MERCHANT (CONT'D)

I'll prove to you that I am not weak, my son.

Left alone, the terrified horse suddenly sees the Beast approaching, growling...

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

In the middle of the storm we hear the horrible whinnying of the horse, followed by the long howl of the mysterious Beast.

Gripped with fear, the merchant starts running, struggling against both the wind and the snow.

Suddenly, through the branches, he spots a faint light below him. He runs toward it.

THE MERCHANT

The house! I've made it home!
(suddenly turning pale)
No, it's not the house...

His foot slips in the snow. He falls backward and slides endlessly down a series of narrow, ice-covered gullies... His head hits a stone.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GROUNDS - NIGHT

After his long fall, the merchant lands in thick grass. Fireflies flutter about him.

Groggy, he looks around at the garden planted with strangely-shaped trees, a mysterious oasis bathed in eternal spring.

Taking a few steps, the merchant finds himself face to face with a colossal, moss-covered stone head, half-hidden by a bed of flowers.

Further away, an enormous sculpture of a hand emerges from the earth, as if the remains of a giant were buried under the garden.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GARDEN PATH - NIGHT

Escorted by the fireflies, the merchant walks down a garden path. The full moon is casting its soft light over the extraordinary garden.

The merchant sees other monumental faces that seem to be staring at him from their sculpted eyes.

At the end of the path, the merchant finds a castle of unimaginable splendor overhanging a rocky abyss spanned by a bridge.

The merchant crosses the bridge. The monumental door of the edifice is standing open. The merchant steps inside.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

The merchant finds himself in an immense entrance hall.

THE MERCHANT
(shouting)
I'm lost...the door was open...
(louder)
Is anyone here?

His voice reverberates through the vaulted hall. A feeling of desolation hangs over the place—the entire castle is invaded by brambles. A door creaks open. The merchant takes a few steps, worried.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

He enters a vast dining room, the high walls of which, covered with statues, reach up into the darkness. He senses a presence, some murmuring. Things are hiding in the shadows...

THE MERCHANT
Are you there?

All of sudden, two chandeliers come alight, lighting a table so long that the other end of it is lost in the darkness. Another chandelier is lit further away, revealing a large dish of steaming meat pies.

THE MERCHANT (CONT'D)
I'm dreaming. Or I'm dead and
this is paradise.

The merchant holds his hand out to a candle. He pulls it back instantly, grimacing.

THE MERCHANT (CONT'D)
No, I'm alive. And starving.

He grabs a meat pie, hesitates a moment, then devours it. Overcome by raging hunger, he gobbles up a few, one after the other.

THE MERCHANT
I'm just taking a few things from
the table, OK?

A few more candles come alight, revealing in succession baskets of fruit, plates full of cakes, crystal decanters full of luminous wines. The merchant walks along the table, wolfing down fruits and cakes, throwing back glass after glass of wine.

As soon as one chandelier lights up, another goes out. In the darkness, we can make out strange little creatures with big round eyes (TADUMS) who carry away the platters with impish little yelps.

THE TADUMS (O.S.)
Tadum! Tadum!

Sensing their presence, the merchant halts.

THE MERCHANT
(mouth full)
Who's there?

THE TADUMS (O.S.)
Tadum! Tadum!

The merchant leans over the table, trying to see the little creatures, but they immediately slip into the darkness.

Suddenly dizzy, the merchant drops into a chair and pulls open his coat.

THE MERCHANT
Don't worry, I'll go in a few
minutes!
(he burps)
Pardon me!

He laughs to himself, a bit drunk. Suddenly, a light comes on at the other end of the room, revealing two enormous chests. Intrigued, the merchant gets up and goes to look.

When he discovers their contents, he is stunned. His hands trembling, he rummages in his pocket for Anne and Clotilde's list. He takes the inventory of the chests as he goes down the list.

THE MERCHANT (CONT'D)
...the robes...the shawls...the
powders... Incredible!
Everything's there! Except...

There is a picture of a rose at the bottom of the list!

The merchant jumps at the sound of whinnying. He turns around—and his horse is coming toward him, pawing at the floor, its hooves clicking on the wood flooring.

Stunned, the merchant stares at the horse's legs, miraculously healed. Chomping at the bit, the horse pushes the merchant toward the chests with his head, then lowers himself down on his front legs. After a moment's hesitation, the merchant loads the chests onto his horse's back...

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GARDEN PATH - NIGHT

The merchant is leading the horse away from the castle, though it has a hard time advancing under the weight of the chests. The fireflies light the path.

The old man notices an incredible hedge of roses in the garden, almost ten feet high. Seeing one flower more

beautiful than the others, the merchant reaches out to pick it. A thorn tears at his hand, but he pulls harder and manages to take the flower.

Just as the stem breaks, the earth starts shaking. The plants spread apart. An enormous stone face springs out from the rose hedge, its mossy mouth open in a deafening scream.

The merchant steps back, terrified.

On the shoulder of the stone giant sits the Beast. Its massive silhouette stands out against the moon.

THE BEAST
(roaring)
On your knees!

The merchant remains motionless, petrified by this vision, of which all we can see are the eyes of fire.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)
You see me, yet you dare disobey me?

THE MERCHANT
(falling to his knees)
What... Who are you? I thought the chests...

THE BEAST
My gifts were not enough for you?
You had to desecrate the most hallowed of my treasures?

The merchant squeezes the rose so hard that it loses a petal. Furious, the Beast pounces on him, flattening him to the ground with his huge clawed paws. Terrified, the merchant looks away and begs for forgiveness.

THE MERCHANT
I'm not a thief. I'm an honest and worthy man.

THE BEAST
Are you? Then you shall die on your feet, like an honest man.

THE MERCHANT
Die for a rose? Misfortune pursues my family without pity...

The Beast relaxes his hold. The merchant avoids meeting the creature's incandescent gaze.

THE BEAST
To whom was the rose destined?

THE MERCHANT

To the youngest of my daughters.
She is the most precious thing I
have in the world.

THE BEAST

I leave you twenty-four hours to
bid adieu to those you love. Then
you shall come back here to
receive your punishment.

The merchant shakes his head.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

You think you have a choice?

THE MERCHANT

I cannot abandon my children.

THE BEAST

You need only whisper to your
horse "More than anything in the
world," and he will bring you
back here.

The merchant closes his eyes, terrified.

THE MERCHANT

I will not return.

Sharp claws emerge slowly from the Beast's huge paws.

THE BEAST

(in the merchant's ear)

Believe me, you will return. If
you are not here tomorrow, I will
decimate your family. They will
die, one by one. And I will
finish with the youngest of your
daughters, since she is the one
you love most.

The Beast's voice seems to fade.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

Remember: A life for a rose.

The Beast's voice goes silent, replaced by the howling
of the wind. The merchant opens his eyes again.

EXT. FOREST/PATH - NIGHT

...and finds himself once again in the snow-covered
forest, lost in a blizzard. His horse is by his side,
the chests harnessed to the saddle. He is still gripping
the stolen rose.

The merchant hears voices calling out, sees flickering lanterns coming his way.

Having come out in search of him, Maxime and his brothers are now riding to meet him.

INT. COTTAGE/BELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Woken by shouts coming from downstairs, Belle gets out of bed.

INT. COTTAGE/STAIRS - NIGHT

The girl heads down the stairs toward the kitchen.

MAXIME (O.S.)

This monster and rose business makes no sense! Father, think about it for a minute...

In silence, Belle observes her family through the half-open door.

INT. COTTAGE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

The merchant's children surround their father. He leans toward the two chests open at his feet.

THE MERCHANT

(to Maxime)

So how do you explain this? You can clearly see that they're real.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

"More than anything in the world..." And by magic your horse will find the castle again?

Belle's sisters are crushed.

CLOTILDE

It's our fault. It's all our fault...

ANNE

Don't be ridiculous. You're not the one who asked for that flower!

JEAN-BAPTISTE

It's not anyone's fault!

THE MERCHANT

Children! I cannot explain who that beast is. But since I stole this rose, I must go back there in only a few hours.

TRISTAN

What is he going to do?

THE MERCHANT

I don't know, Tristan. He said,
"A life for a rose..."

TRISTAN

And if you don't obey him?

The merchant looks solemnly at his children.

THE MERCHANT

Then you will all die as well.

Clotilde notices Belle through the half-open door. Everyone falls silent. Belle comes in, deathly pale, and goes to the table where the rose is lying.

The merchant casts his eyes downward with great sadness.

INT. COTTAGE/BELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Strangely calm, Belle changes her nightshirt for a dress. The merchant comes in, his face solemn. He closes the door behind him.

BELLE

Don't say anything. I know what they're all thinking. That mama died giving me life, and now...

THE MERCHANT

I don't understand what you're saying.

BELLE

I won't be responsible for your death as well!

Belle leaves the room, closing the door behind her.

The merchant runs after her and discovers that she has blocked the door.

THE MERCHANT

Belle! BELLE!

INT. COTTAGE/STAIRS - NIGHT

Belle races down the stairs. Her brothers and sisters watch her pass in front of them in disbelief. We hear the merchant banging on the door upstairs.

Belle takes a cloak from a peg near the door and puts it on.

BELLE

Don't forget to love me!

And she runs off.

Tristan runs up the stairs to free their father. The door is blocked by a chair slid up under the knob.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAWN

The day is dawning over the snowy hills that surround the cottage. Belle, mounted upon her father's horse, turns back one last time...

She sees the merchant, followed by his children, racing from the cottage to catch her. So she flees at a gallop, disappearing into the shadows of the hills.

In tears, the merchant hurries to follow her. He is immediately surrounded by his children, who keep him from going any further. In their embrace, he falls to his knees in the snow, sobbing...

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

Belle and her horse enter the forest. The young girl hesitates a few seconds, then leans forward to whisper in her horse's ear.

BELLE

More than anything in the world...

The horse leaps up. The trees, the bushes, the forest itself parts to let it through.

Belle clings to her horse's neck. Her eyes staring at the horse's feet kicking up the powdery snow, she speaks to the animal.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Guide me to the castle. Lead me to that beast. Let me save my father's life.

Belle is scratched by dead branches as she races by. The ribbon that was holding her hair is pulled off and left behind, hanging from some brambles.

Suddenly, under the horse's feet, there is no more snow, but thick green grass...

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GROUNDS - DAWN

...Belle sits up in her saddle and discovers the Beast's estate. Fog creates halos over the landscape. A heavy silence reigns everywhere.

Belle gets off her horse, shivering with fear and cold. Her cloak is torn, covered with brambles and leaves.

Grimacing, she pulls a thorn planted deeply in her finger. A drop of blood falls into the grass.

Belle walks through the grounds, watched over by the half-buried stone faces.

Behind her, just where her drop of blood fell, a red flower is slowly emerging from the earth!

Belle walks all the way to the castle. The first light of day outlines the graceful architecture.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/ENTRANCE HALL - DAWN

Filled with a dense mist, the interior of the castle is a blur of stone, gray and brown tones. All of the doors are closed.

Candles light, bringing out the colors and inviting Belle to climb the great staircase.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/STAIRS - DAWN

Belle's steps ring out on the stairs. She decides to remove her shoes. Carrying them, she skirts the life-size broken statues that litter the floor.

The staircase is lined with moldy, faded tapestries. The brambles mesh with the motifs in a sort of floral trompe-l'oeil.

Amidst the unicorns and other chimeras embroidered into the tapestries, one of the creatures follows Belle with its eyes: it is the Beast, who is hiding among the mythical creatures!

The Beast steps silently after Belle. Then, gripping the vines, he continues his way by climbing the walls.

At the top of the stairs, Belle discovers the back side of the castle, completely smashed open. She leans out over the abyss.

BELLE
(whispering)
AH hahhh! OH hohhh! EH hehhh!

Her whispers resound in the chasm...

A crashing noise makes her jump. In the distance, an arch collapses. The castle is an unstable ruin that the plants are slowly but surely destroying.

EXT. BEAST'S CASTLE/GALLERY - DAY

Belle follows the chandeliers that light up all along an outside gallery that overhangs the abyss. She has to climb over the broken statues on the floor.

Feeling she is being watched, she looks around, but doesn't see the Beast who is moving along above her head through the plants.

One of the doors giving onto the gallery opens...

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - DAY

Belle discovers a room. The wild plants give it the appearance of an interior garden.

Shivering, she holds her shredded cloak tight. Immediately, a fire begins to burn in the fireplace. The flames cast a gentle and soothing light that dispels the foggy veil. Belle raises her round eyes to the shimmering wall coverings. Above her, the crystal chandeliers begin to sparkle. The entire room comes to life.

On a silk mannequin enthroned near a dressing table is a sumptuous ivory dress adorned with opaline glass beads. Filled with wonder, Belle goes to touch the fabric, but freezes: her hands are dirty and scratched.

Belle sees a large basin carved from giant block of amethyst. She leans over it and plunges her wounded hands in. Tiny lights come and dance around her fingers. The girl pulls her hands out. Fascinated, she sees her cuts fade, then disappear entirely.

A growl, like that of a wild cat, pierces the silence. Belle looks around. She seems to be alone...

EXT. BEAST'S CASTLE/WALLS - DAY

Through the window, hanging from the outside wall, the Beast is watching Belle get undressed and dip her entire body into the amethyst basin.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - DUSK

Dressed now in the ivory gown, Belle is looking at herself in a tall standing mirror. We've never seen her this beautiful, this much a woman.

Suddenly, she hears a melody. A few simple, melancholy chords.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BALLROOM - DUSK

Guided by the music, Belle goes back down to the entrance hall. Two grand doors open, inviting her to step into a sumptuous ballroom.

The music has stopped, but a note is still resonating. It is coming from a cello, standing there with other instruments, one of its strings still vibrating.

Near the instruments, Belle is alarmed to discover some marks in the dust: the tracks of an animal, twice as big as her own feet.

The chimes of a standing clock begin ringing seven o'clock. The doors of the dining room open. Belle steps toward them...

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/DINING ROOM - DUSK

One place setting has been laid out on the dining room table.

Hiding in the shadows, the Tadums greet Belle's arrival with mischievous murmuring.

Belle walks toward the table and suddenly notices, spreading out on the floor, the diabolical shadow of the Beast following her. Belle freezes, terrified. Without turning around, she introduces herself.

BELLE

My name is Belle. I am the daughter of the merchant, and I have come to exchange my life for his.

THE BEAST (O.S.)

Sit down.

Belle is petrified with fear, unable to move. The Beast lets loose with a roar that sounds like an order.

Belle sits down, trembling. Tears are running down her cheeks. The small furry paw of a Tadum comes out of the shadows and places a lace handkerchief on her knees. Belle stares wide-eyed, seeing the little paw disappear almost instantly.

THE BEAST (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Eat.

The Tadums, hidden under the table, follow the scene, commenting on it with their strange little yapping.

Belle brings a piece of bread to her lips. Behind her back, the Beast gradually emerges from the dark. For the first time, we distinctly see his feline face and dark, lustrous fur.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

Once you've regained your strength, go where you like on my

estate. But you may not leave the castle once night has fallen.

BELLE

Who gave you permission to speak to me with such familiarity?

Surprised, the Beast hesitates a moment, then bursts out in ferocious laughter.

THE BEAST

You have your father's nerve!

BELLE

I forbid you to speak of him.

THE BEAST

Cease giving me orders!

BELLE

Cease being disrespectful!

The Beast growls in Belle's ear. She remains silent.

THE BEAST

You must be here at seven o'clock every evening. And you must answer all of my questions.

BELLE

If I am to die, it would be better if it were now.

The Beast leans toward Belle. She senses the tips of his whiskers prickling her neck and shoulders. She holds her breath.

THE BEAST

I'm warning you: it is pointless to attempt to flee. The forest will close around you and you will die of fear and cold. Remember, I know where to find your family...

Belle suddenly glimpses the deformed reflection of the Beast in the gold of the platters sitting before her. Horrified, she grabs a knife and turns toward him, brandishing it. But the Beast is no longer there!

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Belle returns to her room. Her bed has been made by the Tadums who slip away and hide in the corners. They watch her kneel down at the foot of her bed and join her hands in prayer.

BELLE

Dearest mama... I don't know
where I am, and I'm afraid...

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Motionless behind the door to Belle's room, the Beast listens to her murmur her prayers. Then he wanders off into the depths of the castle.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Belle is finishing her prayers.

BELLE

Watch over Papa and my brothers
and sisters. Help them never to
forget me. Give me courage and
protect me with your love.

Exhausted, Belle climbs onto her enormous bed. She curls up, fully dressed, on the soft eiderdown and falls asleep. The candles go out, one after the other.

The Tadums come out of their hiding places and assemble around the bed, murmuring their adoration. In the half-light, their gentle eyes look like tiny paper lanterns.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GROUNDS - NIGHT

The climbing plants continue their slow work of destruction. A balcony collapses.

A nocturnal breeze rises. The grass and leaves begin to rustle. The water in the fountains ripples. Nature buzzes with its thousand sounds, its own simple lament.

Hundreds of fireflies rise from the hedge of roses and fly to the castle in long, luminous ribbons.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Coming in through the window, the fireflies land all around the sleeping, agitated Belle, who is deep in a dream...

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE - NIGHT (BELLE'S DREAM #1)

Belle is running through the half-lit castle. Like a moth, she is drawn to the bright light in the dining room.

The glimmer is coming from a large mirror decorated with animal heads. In the reflection of the glass, Belle discovers the castle as we've never seen it: colorful, lively, filled with guards in armor and servants coming and going with food-laden platters.

Belle suddenly realizes that the reflection in the mirror is not her own. It is that of a young PRINCESS with almond-shaped eyes and honey-colored skin. Her blond hair is braided into one long braid that hangs all the way down her back.

The camera moves through the mirror.

INT. CASTLE/ENTRANCE HALL - DUSK (BELLE'S DREAM #1)

...and now we are transported to the Princess's side.

She races down the staircase, bumping a servant.

THE PRINCESS
There they are, at last!

Two guards open the main door, letting in a pack of hunting dogs, who spread through the entrance hall, barking. One of them jumps up into the Princess's arms and nuzzles at her neck.

She smiles as her husband, THE PRINCE, comes inside. He is splendid in his gold-brocaded black leather hunting attire. But his gaze is cruel, his smile ferocious. Everything about him radiates power.

He is accompanied by his closest friends, four splendid and arrogant young men. They carry over their shoulders the carcasses of wild boar and deer from their hunt.

FRIEND #1
Where are our women?

FRIEND #2
Yours is in my room, didn't you know?!

FRIEND #1
(laughing)
Oh yes, I forgot, it's your sister who awaits in my bed!

FRIEND #2
I'll bash your teeth in, you filthy beggar!

They throw the carcasses down and pretend to fight.

FRIEND #3
(to a servant)
You, over there, come take all this off our hands.

The servants bustle about the hunters. At the sight of the dead animals, the Princess's smile slowly fades. The Prince steps toward her, looking threatening.

THE PRINCE
I've always known you were
unfaithful.

THE PRINCESS
What are you saying?

THE PRINCE
(staring ferociously at
the dog)
I'll finish off that wretch in
one bite.

The dog, cuddled in the Princess's arms, wriggles and begins to whimper with fear. The young woman laughs and lets it escape. She sighs when she sees it hiding under a pedestal table.

THE PRINCESS
Ah! Such a hairy chest and yet so
cowardly!

The Prince grabs the Princess by the waist and places on her lips a passionate kiss. Their friends circle them and try to pull them apart.

FRIEND #1
Keep your filthy paws off there!

FRIEND #2
Ha, hah, my friend! No doe, no
reward!

The Princess's face clouds over.

THE PRINCESS
You still haven't given up?

THE PRINCE
For years she has escaped me, but
I know I shall have her. She will
be my most beautiful trophy,
after you...

A young man removes an arrow from a quiver, gilded with fine gold, and shows it to the Princess.

FRIEND #2
Look what we've given him.
Entirely golden, like the coat of
that doe.

FRIEND #3
Come along, I'm thirsty, we need
a drink!

The Prince is dragged away by his friends. The Princess slowly climbs the stairs, gripping the railing.

INT. CASTLE/BEDROOM - NIGHT (BELLE'S DREAM #1)

The Princess is facing the open windows of her bedroom. She is brushing her long hair, staring into space. Her golden hair dances on a slight breeze. She closes her eyes and breathes of the odors of outside.

The Prince comes to join her. He takes off his leather coat and, his shirt half-unbuttoned, he comes toward his wife to kiss her neck. She laughs.

THE PRINCESS
You smell of the hunt!

He lifts her up in his arms and lays her out on the bed.

THE PRINCESS (CONT'D)
My love, I want to ask you something.

He starts unfastening her bodice.

THE PRINCE
Something amoral?

THE PRINCESS
I want you to renounce that doe.

THE PRINCE
Why?

THE PRINCESS
I've had enough of you leaving all night to hunt her. I feel terribly alone here without you.

The Prince thinks it over.

THE PRINCE
Very well. But on one condition: that you give me what I've always dreamt of.

THE PRINCESS
I thought I had fulfilled all of your dreams!

The Prince looks at her with great solemnity.

THE PRINCE
Give me an heir.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - DAWN

Belle opens her eyes. Right in the place of the Prince, she sees the Beast leaning over her, watching her sleep.

Belle's eyes go wide with terror. The Beast stands up straight, and, pulling back into the shadows, disappears.

Belle sits up, trembling.

The first rays of dawn are lighting the mannequin, where now a green dress adorned with emeralds awaits.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GARDEN - DAY

Belle, magnificent in the emerald dress, is exploring the garden, intrigued by the stone giants. She walks around one of the immense heads. When she lays her hand on it, she thinks she hears a sort of scream in the distance. She runs away.

Further along, she sees a tree leaning at an angle, which she climbs, being careful not to damage her dress. From this observation post, she sees that the borders of the estate are lost in the fog.

A cracking sound makes her jump. Below her, Belle thinks she sees a doe racing through the trees. A ray of sun shines on her golden hide. Belle climbs back down the tree, jumping from branch to branch, and starts running after that unreal vision.

Once the doe seems to have vanished into nature, Belle notices the rosebush from which her father picked the rose, and in which the garden fireflies nest.

Belle walks around it and discovers, hidden in the heart of the hedge, a passage. She steps into it.

INT. BEAST'S ESTATE/NAVE OF PLANTS - DAY

Belle walks cautiously through the enormous, tangled roots: the plants that are taking apart the castle all grow from this place!

In the heart of the hedge, in the middle of a sort of nave made of plants, stands a magnificent statue of a woman, partly covered in ivy.

Fascinated, Belle takes a step toward her. But she freezes and stops breathing: the Beast, asleep, is curled up at the feet of the statue. Bones and masses of fur litter the ground around him, the remains of the wild cat's meals.

Belle leans toward him. She sees his chest rising and falling, rays of light illuminating his silky fur. Belle slowly extends a hand. Suddenly, the Beast's ears twitch: he has sensed Belle's presence.

He sits up, growling. Belle has disappeared, but her perfume still lingers in the air. The Beast sniffs all

around him, then, in a leap, climbs up a root. In the distance, we can see the young woman running back toward the castle.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/DINING ROOM - DUSK

The standing clock finishes ringing seven o'clock. The Beast is already in the dining room, his back turned.

THE BEAST
You are late.

Belle sits down, a bit stiffly.

BELLE
Never come into my room again.

THE BEAST
I have every right.

BELLE
That we shall see. Mind you, I should do as you do and sleep during the day.

Stunned by the allusion, the Beast turns toward Belle. Lit by candlelight, he is both fascinating and terrifying. Belle gives him a challenging look.

THE BEAST
Don't look at me.
(turning away)
Eat.

BELLE
And you, aren't you eating?

THE BEAST
You wouldn't like to see it.

A weighty silence settles in.

BELLE
Am I allowed to speak, or am I to eat in silence like a child?

THE BEAST
That is what you are. An arrogant child.

Belle is about to take a sip from a big glass of wine, but puts it down instead.

BELLE
I like to give the impression that I am childish and frivolous. That way, people get the wrong idea about me. And I have time to

think about the kind of woman I'd like to be.

THE BEAST

You are terrible chatterbox.

BELLE

I'm certain you like it. I fill the emptiness...

(looking around)

I had a strange dream... It was as if I was here, but at the same time elsewhere. To whom does this castle belong?

THE BEAST

It is mine. Everything here belongs to me.

BELLE

You are a beast, but you talk like an ordinary man! In the end, you are quite disappointing. Speaking of beasts, I...

She stops, aware of her own audacity.

THE BEAST

Continue, please. You were talking about a "beast"...

BELLE

I... I thought I saw a doe this afternoon.

The Beast darkens.

THE BEAST

A doe? Impossible! No animal dares venture onto my domain. They all fear me.

He takes a few steps toward Belle, who sinks into her chair.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

And you, do I scare you?

BELLE

You know it very well.

THE BEAST

Do you think you could be happy here?

BELLE

Night, like day, I wait for you to decide my fate. You play with

me as if I were a mouse between your paws. So no, I will never be happy here.

THE BEAST

It could be so simple. All you have to do is...love me.

Belle leaps up from her chair.

BELLE

You are completely mad!

The Beast leaps like a wildcat onto the table and swoops down upon Belle, knocking over everything between them. He stops mere inches from her face.

Belle confronts him. The depths of the Beast's eyes, usually yellow, turn to red. He roars.

THE BEAST

Cast your eyes down! I told you never to look at me!

Belle holds his eyes for a few seconds. Then at last she obeys him.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

I repeat, everything here belongs to me. You may well resist, but you belong to me. Like everything on this estate.

Under the table, the Tadums tremble with fear, huddling close together.

With a roar, the Beast disappears into the shadows.

Belle sits down, erect and dignified.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BALLROOM - DAY

Dressed in a raw silk gown embroidered with pearls, Belle is exploring the castle. She starts with the ballroom, plunged in semi-darkness. She pulls back the torn curtains to let in the daylight.

She blows off the dust that has settled over the musical instruments, pulls off the wild plants that have closed in on the furniture.

Turning around, she looks up and discovers a fresco painted on the ceiling. It shows scenes from the life of the castle, the court, the hunting parties. In the middle of the fresco, we recognize the Prince and the Princess. Dressed in red, they are holding hands.

BELLE

A love like yours... What became
of it?

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/VARIOUS ROOMS - DUSK

The seven o'clock chimes are ringing through the dark castle, lit by the blood-red glow of the sunset. We follow the Beast, who is walking to his daily rendezvous. The doors open before him as if by magic.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/DINING ROOM - DUSK

The Beast stops at the threshold of the dining room when he sees Belle seated at the table. For the first time, the young woman has arrived ahead of him.

Belle's eyes are staring straight in front of her, impassive. The Beast approaches behind her back. He contemplates her shoulders, white as porcelain, without daring to lay his cat paws on them.

THE BEAST

You say nothing this evening?

(beat)

You know, you are right: you are filling a great absence. I think I have never heard you laugh, and that would please me greatly...

Motionless, Belle still says nothing. The Beast strokes the fabric of Belle's gown, and she shivers.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

Do you like my gifts? You haven't said... I want you to be happy here, Belle...

Belle remains mute. The Beast brings his paw to her long, golden curls. He is about to touch them, then changes his mind. He looks a long time at the young girl whose back is to him, then leaves the room, without Belle having moved or spoken.

Belle listens to the sound of his steps moving away through the castle. Without touching her meal, she gets up and leaves.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/CORRIDORS - NIGHT

Belle goes up to her room, holding a candlestick. A tiny glimmer in the immense, gloomy castle.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Belle blocks her door with a chair. Then, throwing her clothes onto her bed, she begins slipping into a lace nightdress.

BELLE
(imitating the Beast)
"You belong to me; laugh; don't
look at me; love me!" Ha...

Exasperated, she struggles with the nightdress.

BELLE (CONT'D)
I shall teach that animal
manners.

Her nightdress on, Belle climbs into her bed and screams: nested in her pillows is a crude doll made of clumps of fur, sticks, and leaves!

She picks up the doll with her fingertips and starts laughing.

BELLE (CONT'D)
Oooo, what a marvelous gift! Did
you make it?

THE TADUMS (O.S.)
TaaaaDUUUUUM!

Belle looks all around, trying to guess where the Tadums are hiding. She examines the doll.

BELLE
Well, look at that! It's me! An
exact copy! I'll put it on the
dresser. That way I'll always
have it close by!

Hidden under the bed, the Tadums chuckle with joy.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE - NIGHT

An uncanny wind starts to blow through the ruins of the castle. It catches in the torn curtains, makes the chandeliers sway.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GARDEN AND NAVE OF PLANTS - NIGHT

In the garden, clouds of fireflies rise from the hedge of roses. They pour from the statue in the heart of the nave!

Like the previous night, the clouds of fireflies go in through the window of Belle's room, where she is tossing and turning in her sleep...

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE - NIGHT (BELLE'S DREAM #2)

Once again, Belle is dreaming that she is running through the darkened castle, irresistibly drawn to the

great mirror. This time, we hear music. On the other side, there is a ball...

INT. CASTLE/BALLROOM - DUSK (BELLE'S DREAM #2)

Men and women in evening dress are awaiting the arrival of the princely couple. Concert artists are playing joyful music, accompanying the impassioned discussions and crystal-clear voices of the women.

The Prince and Princess finally arrive, dazzling in their ceremonial attire. They are flanked by the Prince's four friends.

Winning smiles for the women, virile nods to the men...

The crowd goes silent when the Prince speaks.

THE PRINCE

My friends! Today is a big day!
(he looks at his wife)
Our kingdom shall at last have an heir!

Everyone applauds. The Prince's friends boast and brag.

FRIEND #1

(to a young woman)
What do you say I give you an heir as well?

YOUNG WOMAN

You'll be needing a kingdom first!

FRIEND #2

(to the Prince)
Pray heaven it doesn't look like you!

FRIEND #3

That's what your mother said to your father, and look what happened!

They all laugh as the princely couple leads the dancing.

THE PRINCESS

(waltzing)
You've never been as handsome as you are now.

THE PRINCE

Because I've never been as happy as I am now.

THE PRINCESS

I've kept my promise, so you must keep yours.

THE PRINCE

Remind me what it was...

THE PRINCESS

The golden hind. You promised you would stop hunting her.

The Prince hesitates a moment. In lieu of an answer, he leads his wife into the swirl of the dance as the guests applaud.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - DAWN

Belle comes back to herself. She is standing in the middle of her room, turning like a sleepwalker in the golden glow of dawn.

Around her, the notes of the waltz and the applause of the crowd fade to faraway echoes.

The door is still blocked by the chair. And yet, on the mannequin we see a blue gown adorned with turquoise beads!

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE - DAY

Dressed in blue, Belle continues exploring the castle. She looks through keyholes, tries to pick locks with a hairpin. In vain.

She hears the yapping of the Tadums, who are following her on tiptoe. But whenever she turns around, they flee and hide.

Picking up speed to leave them behind, Belle hides behind some wall hangings. Through the torn fabric, she sees the Tadums coming closer, surprised not to see her anymore. For the first time, she can look at them at her leisure. They are a joyful troop of long-eared, short-legged creatures.

Suddenly, a little spider comes and lands on Belle's nose. The young girl bursts out of her hiding place, shrieking.

Terrified by her sudden appearance, the Tadums scatter, yelping frantically.

Belle slips to the ground laughing, her clothes covered with cobwebs.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Belle is seated at the table, waiting for the Beast. She continues her conquest of the Tadums, offering them an orange. They fight over the fruit, squealing with excitement. The victorious Tadum lays the orange peel on the table, folded like a flower.

BELLE
A flower! Oh, it's a rose...

Belle suddenly becomes melancholy.

BELLE (CONT'D)
You must have seen my father when
he was here?

The chimes sound seven o'clock. The Beast appears. Belle stands up to greet him. He gazes at her in her blue gown.

THE BEAST
Your name suits you very well.

A tear runs down Belle's cheek.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)
What is it?

BELLE
I miss my family. I need to know
if they are well.

THE BEAST
Everything you had before, you
must forget.

BELLE
Perhaps it suits you never to
think of your past, but I haven't
given up.

THE BEAST
You know nothing about me.

BELLE
You're right, perhaps I am
mistaken... Let me offer you a
deal.

THE BEAST
News of you family in exchange
for your love?

BELLE
You are stubborn.

THE BEAST
Hard-headed.

Belle approaches the Beast.

BELLE

I'll give you a dance. In exchange, you tell how my family is.

The Beast narrows his cat eyes.

THE BEAST

Just one dance... You favor me with your immense generosity.

ELLE

I will lead if it frightens you so!

The Beast snarls with pleasure.

THE BEAST

The thought of your body pressing against mine doesn't repel you?

Determined, Belle steps toward the Beast. With the gestures of a great lord, he bows before her and spreads his arms.

In the shadows, the Tadums comically imitate the movements of the Beast and Belle.

The young girl places her hand delicately in the Beast's paw. She shudders at the touch of his claws, which immediately retract.

Belle lets herself be led by her partner and closes her eyes. The music of the waltz in her dream begins to play. At first far away, the music finally fills the whole space. Belle opens her eyes again...

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE - NIGHT

...and finds herself waltzing with the Beast in the middle of a floor full of guests. They applaud, then join in the swirl of dancing.

Belle stares into the Beast's eyes. For the first time, she and the Beast look at each other without fear. The Beast has never been so magnificent. Belle abandons herself in his arms until she can hear him murmuring.

THE BEAST

Would you like to love me?

The spell is broken. Belle sees their reflection in a mirror: a monster and his prisoner waltzing alone in the middle of a crumbling castle.

Belle pulls herself out of his embrace.

BELLE

I've told you already: never! And now, keep your promise.

THE BEAST

It has been a long time since I promised anything.

Belle watches him walk away, haughty and majestic.

BELLE

I hate you with all my heart.

Out of Belle's sight, the Beast totters, as if the young woman's words had struck him to the heart.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Belle is kneeling at the foot of her bed. She is crying. A Tadum comes to her and lays its head tenderly on her knees. It snuffles sadly.

A few fireflies appear and, flying around Belle, invite her to follow...

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GARDEN - NIGHT

The fireflies lead Belle through the garden. Nature is buzzing, awakened by the wind.

In the distance we hear the roaring of the Beast. Despite her fear, Belle continues walking toward the giant rose bush, guided by the fireflies.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/NAVE OF PLANTS - NIGHT

At the heart of the rose hedge, the fireflies are fluttering about the stone statue.

Belle pulls aside the brambles that hide the statue's face and discovers two enormous almond-shaped eyes carved in stone. Feverish, she continues pulling away the plants. The statue is carved a long braid coiled around the body. The Princess from her dreams!

BELLE

You're the one who shows me the past while I sleep!

A beastly scream rends the night, startling Belle. The wind shakes the rose bush.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Why do you do it?

Another scream rings out, more heart-rending than the first. Red petals slip down the face of the stone Princess like tears of blood.

The Beast approaches. Branches part to make a refuge where Belle can hide. So concealed, she sees the Beast enter the heart of the nave. He is carrying the carcass of a wild boar. Belle watches him through the brambles.

The Beast tosses the remains of the boar at the foot of the statue and kneels down. With a heartbreaking moan, he plunges his razor-sharp teeth into the flesh.

Belle looks away, but the groaning of the Beast is so painful that she turns to look again. Smoke is rising from his fur: the Beast is devouring himself from inside, as if eating was, for him, a form of torture...or of punishment! Deeply moved, Belle emerges from her hiding place and approaches the Beast.

When he looks up, a few drops of blood are spattered on his lips. He breathing is labored.

THE BEAST

No, Belle! Leave, I beg of you!

The Beast roars at Belle, who steps back in fear, then he falls backwards, exhausted. His chest heaves under his smoking fur.

Belle kneels at his side and begins stroking his forehead. He looks at her with his bloodshot eyes.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

It is unbearable to me that you look upon me.

BELLE

Seeing you suffer gives me no power over you.

THE BEAST

And yet, this is what I am. A beast that devours other beasts. Say it, that it's revolting.

In lieu of responding, Belle continues to stroke him.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

Leave now.

Belle gets up and leaves him.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/CORRIDORS - DUSK

The chimes are ringing seven o'clock. Seated at the table, Belle is waiting, worried, for the Beast to come. A noise startles her.

BELLE

Is it you?

THE BEAST (O.S.)

Yes, Belle, I am here.

Belle turns: it is as if the Beast had materialized at her side. He is once again magnificent, far from the pained Beast of the previous night. He holds out his gloved hand to her in a princely gesture.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

Allow me to honor our
agreement...

Belle gives him her hand.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/CORRIDORS - DUSK

On the Beast's arm, Belle accompanies him through the corridors of the castle. He opens a hidden door and bows to let her pass into the secret room.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/HALL OF MIRRORS - DUSK

The couple enters a room filled with hundreds of tiny round mirrors. They are hanging from a complex mechanism made of chains and pulleys.

The Beast pulls one of the chains to lower a mirror to Belle's level.

In a corner of the room, the Tadums are climbing one on top of the other in order not to miss a thing.

THE BEAST

Blow on it. As hard as you can.

Belle takes a deep breath and blows, making the dust fly. The mirror starts spinning, followed by all the others.

The light bounces off the mirrors and the gems that adorn Belle's gown.

Veiled in thousands of swirling reflections, Belle sparkles like a diamond. When suddenly...

INT. COTTAGE/KITCHEN - DUSK

...she is transported to the family cottage.

Her bothers and sisters are there, all together in the kitchen. They are arguing.

TRISTAN

I forbid you to speak like that.

ANNE

And I'm telling you that she's dead.

CLOTILDE

The Beast has certainly eaten her up.

TRISTAN

I know she's alive.

ANNE

My poor brother! It's the most we can wish for her—to have died quickly, without suffering.

TRISTAN

Belle is stronger than the rest of us put together.

Belle calls to her brothers and sisters.

BELLE

Tristan, Anne, Clotilde! I'm alive!

But they can't hear her or see her. Belle walks among them like a ghost.

Seated near the fire, Maxime is sharpening the blade of his sword.

MAXIME

I am going to kill that monster and avenge our sister's death.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

I'm with you!

ANNE

You're being ridiculous. We're not in one of your adventure stories. This is reality. Sadness and misery.

Maxime looks at Anne, his eyes feverish.

MAXIME

You're right, Anne. We've got to get out of this mess. We'll kill the Beast...and take all of the treasure in his castle.

TRISTAN

Have you listened to yourselves? A second-rate hero. An amateur

thief. And all the while, our
father...

The image and sound blur bit by bit.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/HALL OF MIRRORS - DUSK

The mirror stops spinning and the illusion immediately disappears.

Belle looks at the Beast with dread.

BELLE
Something has happened to my
father! I must see him!

So the Beast blows on another mirror...

INT. COTTAGE/MERCHANT'S ROOM - DUSK

...and Belle finds herself in her father's bedroom. The old man is bedridden. His waxy face looks like a death mask.

Belle leans over him.

BELLE
Father, hear my voice. I beg of
you, open your eyes.

The merchant opens his eyes: he has felt the presence of his daughter!

THE MERCHANT
Belle? Is it you?

Sparkling glints of light fill the room. The merchant sees his missing daughter materialize slowly in front of him.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/HALL OF MIRRORS - DUSK

The Beast lays his paw on the mirror to interrupt the flow of images. The spell is over.

Crushed, Belle clings to the Beast.

BELLE
He's dying! Let me go see him.

Seeing a clear and final refusal in the Beast's eyes, Belle collapses on the freezing floor, unconscious.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - DUSK

The Beast carries the lifeless Belle to her room. He lays her gently on her bed and gazes at her.

THE BEAST

You ask of me something I cannot grant you.

Belle's chest slowly lifts.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

Belle, stay with me! It doesn't matter that you don't love me and that I shall remain cursed for all time. You light up my existence. Let us live this strange life, unlike any other.

The Beast buries his muzzle in Belle's gown. His claws tense, shredding the bedspread.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/GARDEN - DAY

The plants and animals on the grounds are motionless and silent.

EXT. BEAST'S CASTLE - DAY

In the distance, a tower of the castle collapses with a terrible crash.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE/NAVE OF PLANTS - DAY

All around the statue of the Princess new roses are blooming. One of them is opening slowly, more beautiful than the others.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/DINING ROOM - DUSK

The chimes ring out the dinner hour, but there is no one in the dining room. The chandeliers go out one by one, casting the castle into darkness.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Belle is lying down, her face covered with tears.

The Beast comes into the room and lays the freshly bloomed rose on her covers. Belle looks at it sadly.

The Beast delicately dries one of her tears. Belle lets him do it.

THE BEAST

You've won: I shall allow you to go see your family.

Belle gives the faintest of smiles.

BELLE

Truly? You're not saying that to torture me?

THE BEAST

I grant you one day, one and no more.

Belle sits up.

BELLE

I shall have to prepare. And I'm so hungry!

We hear hysterical little voices. The Tadums come into the room carrying platters of fruit, dropping apples and oranges and tripping over them in their haste. They scurry after the fruit rolling around on the floor.

The Beast helps Belle to sit up with her back resting on her pillows, then goes to lean over the amethyst basin.

THE BEAST

(coming back toward her)
Hold out your hand.

BELLE

Which one?

THE BEAST

I don't know, whichever! The left one!

BELLE

You're not going to give me a ring!

THE BEAST

Keep quiet for once!

She holds out her hand. The Beast places in it a crystal vial mounted as a pendant. Tiny lights dance inside it.

The Beast looks at Belle with a solemn expression.

THE BEAST (CONT'D)

You know the powers of this water. If ever you are injured, if ever anything happens to you...

BELLE

Nothing will happen.

THE BEAST

Belle...if you do not return...

BELLE

I know, you'll kill us all.

THE BEAST
No, I shall die.

Belle tries to see his eyes, but he looks away.

BELLE
I'll be here tomorrow. At seven
o'clock.

EXT. COTTAGE/GARDEN - NIGHT

Belle is on horseback, riding toward the cottage at full gallop. Men suddenly spring from the shadows, swords in hand, to circle the horsewoman. The horse rears in terror.

Belle discovers that her assailants are her own brothers. All four siblings double-take, each looking around at the others, astounded.

BELLE
Is that how you welcome your
long-lost sister?

Belle's brothers help her dismount and hug her, one after the other.

TRISTAN
I knew it! I kept telling
everyone that you were alive!

BELLE
Why these weapons?

Jean-Baptiste sheaths his sword and glances furiously at Maxime.

JEAN-BAPTISTE
Ask him. I'm not sure he'll have
the courage to tell you the
truth.

BELLE
We'll discuss it later. Where is
Father?

TRISTAN
You need to know. He lost
consciousness four days ago.

Belle runs into the cottage.

INT. COTTAGE/MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Anne and Clotilde jump with fright when Belle suddenly appears before them.

Belle quickly tosses off her cape, dazzling in a coral pink dress woven with rubies. She throws herself at her sisters, embracing them both.

BELLE

You're not dreaming, it's really me! I love you so, and once I've seen Father I'll tell you everything!

She goes running up the stairs.

Stunned, Anne and Clotilde haven't budged.

INT. COTTAGE/MERCHANT'S ROOM - NIGHT

The merchant is in bed. His breathing is labored.

Belle climbs up onto the big wooden bed and snuggles up against her father like a small child.

BELLE

I'm back! It's me, it's really me! Come back to life, Father dear, do it for me!

Maxime, who has witnessed the scene, closes the bedroom door soundlessly.

INT. COTTAGE/MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Maxime returns to his brothers and sisters. Anne and Clotilde are admiring Belle's cape, the clasp of which is an enormous ruby. He takes it from their hands.

MAXIME

We could get a lot for this stone...

JEAN-BAPTISTE

Not enough to cover your debts.

No one notices when a firefly escapes from the folds of Belle's cape.

MAXIME

So we have to prepare for the worst. Perducas and his gang will come to take everything. And since we have nothing left...

CLOTILDE

Why don't we just go away for a while? We can hide in the barn.

TRISTAN

We can't transport father. He's too unwell.

JEAN-BAPTISTE
There's only one solution: fight!

With a quick yank, Maxime tears the ruby from the cape.

MAXIME
Maybe not...

The firefly flutters upstairs...

INT. COTTAGE/MERCHANT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Belle has fallen asleep beside her father. The firefly comes and lands on the tips of her eyelashes. The young girl is once again visited by a dream.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT (BELLE'S DREAM #3)

Belle is running through forest in the dark of night, guided by a bright light. The glimmer comes from a mirror, this time hanging at the edge of a clearing.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

On the other side of the mirror, it is day. And the golden hind is standing in the middle of the clearing.

The beautiful animal freezes, on alert. Preceded by a pack of dogs, the Prince and his friends burst into the clearing at a gallop. One of them sees the golden hind and points her out to the Prince, bewitched.

FRIEND #1
Look at her quaking flanks. Her gleaming coat. I can almost smell her odor.

THE PRINCE
*Her time has come.
(to his friends)
She is mine, understood?*

The doe bolts.

Galvanized by the barking of the dogs, the men gallop off in pursuit of the animal.

EXT. ESTATE - DAY

They pursue the golden hind onto the grounds of the castle, where she is surrounded.

The Prince whistles to his dogs, calling them off, then loads his crossbow with the golden arrow. He aims carefully and pulls the trigger. The arrow strikes her and she collapses.

The Prince dismounts, hailed by the cries of his friends and the barking of the dogs. He approaches his prey and freezes: the doe gazes at him with her big almond-shaped eyes, and at the same time as the Prince, we recognize that gaze!

Slowly, the doe takes on a human form and becomes the Princess again. The golden arrow is sticking out above her left breast.

The Prince collapses to his knees and takes his wife in his arms.

The Prince's friends, dumbfounded, try to calm their horses, rearing and whinnying.

THE PRINCE

No! Nooo!

He bends over her, in tears.

THE PRINCE (CONT'D)

Look at me, speak to me. Tell me none of this is real.

Very weakly, the Princess strokes her husband's face.

THE PRINCESS

I am the Forest Nymph, and I was granted permission to take human form. I so desperately wanted to know this thing men call Love. And I knew you, my Prince.

A shadow falls over them. The Princess looks skyward, where threatening clouds are gathering.

THE PRINCESS (CONT'D)

Fathers! Gods of the Forest! Spare my beloved, the man of my dreams, he who filled your daughter with eternal love.

Her voice goes silent as she expires in the Prince's arms. All around them the wind, the plants, the trees, and the water of the fountains together begin murmuring a strange litany: "Animal, vegetable, mineral... Those who wound the heart of the Forest Nymph shall be transformed..."

As the Prince looks on, the arrow that pierced the Princess's heart turns into a red rose. All around the nymph's body, roots spring from the ground. They grow quickly, lifting the lawn, invading the grounds.

The Prince's companions try to flee. Caught by the roots, they are unhorsed and thrown to the ground. One

after another, the roots grab them and hold them to the ground, where they become the stone giants!

The vengeance of the gods of the forest continues. The giant rose bush launches its attack on the castle. It smashes the walls, pushes into every corner. When they are touched by the rose bush, the guards and servants who are trying to flee are transformed into statues, which shatter and collapse on the floor.

As for the Prince, kneeling beside his wife, he begins his incredible transformation: his skin is covered with fur, his fingers become claws, his eyes turn yellow. The Prince becomes the Beast.

INT. COTTAGE/MERCHANT'S ROOM - DAWN

Belle wakes with a start. She struggles to catch her breath, her hands clutching at her chest.

She feels the pendant the Beast gave her hanging around her neck. She squeezes it tightly in her hand and leans toward her father to hear his breathing. After a few moments of hesitation, she opens the vial and pours a few drops of the phosphorescent liquid between his lips.

The old man slowly opens his eyes.

THE MERCHANT
My child!

He hugs her with his renewed strength.

THE MERCHANT (CONT'D)
I've missed you so!

Belle kisses his wrinkled face, his hands.

BELLE
I'm going to leave again, Father.
I must return there.

He looks at her, full of love.

THE MERCHANT
Something about you has changed.

Tristan opens the door. He is carrying a tray with a bowl of soup and some bread.

TRISTAN
Belle, I've brought you some
food...

Tristan freezes in the doorway.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)
Father? Oh my God!

Dropping the platter, he races back down the stairs.

Belle and her father smile.

BELLE

Do not think that I'm abandoning
you.

THE MERCHANT

I know.

They hear the exclamations of joy coming from the kitchen.

The merchant takes a handkerchief from his bedside table and unfolds it delicately.

Inside is the rose stolen from the Beast's garden. Its petals are intact, bright red and velvety.

THE MERCHANT (CONT'D)

It's the rose I promised you and
was never able to give you.

BELLE

Keep it. You'll think of me when
you look at it.

INT. COTTAGE/BELLE'S ROOM - DAY

Belle is packing a few personal belongings in a bag.

Her brothers and sisters come in without knocking.

ANNE

What are you doing?

BELLE

I'm going back. I'm taking a few
small things. Souvenirs.

Anne approaches Belle and touches the fabric of her embroidered dress.

ANNE

I get the impression that you
lack for nothing.

Belle is surprised by her sister's tone.

CLOTILDE

You have no idea what we've had
to endure.

MAXIME

Belle, tell us what it's like at the castle. Do you know where the Beast hides his treasure?

Belle looks at her brothers and sisters, distraught.

BELLE

I just came to tell you not to worry about me.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

Leave her alone. Come let me hold you in my arms before you go. You shall be the heroine of my next novel. It will be magnificent!

Instead of letting Jean-Baptiste hug her, Belle runs from the room. Her brothers and sisters look at each other.

ANNE

(to Maxime)

Fool.

MAXIME

Viper.

EXT. COTTAGE/VEGETABLE PLOT - DAY

Belle has fled out back behind the cottage, to her vegetable plot. Tristan joins her.

BELLE

You've looked after it well.

TRISTAN

I come every day. It calms me, and I feel as if I'm with you somehow.

BELLE

They hate me. Whether I go or whether I stay.

TRISTAN

We were so upset with ourselves that you alone sacrificed yourself. And now you come back and you look almost happy.

BELLE

Are you upset with me?

He shakes his head.

BELLE (CONT'D)

You know, I'm not even certain what awaits me.

TRISTAN

So what makes you go back to him?

BELLE

I think I've penetrated his mystery. He is a sad, tormented, and lonely soul.

TRISTAN

You speak of him as if he were a man.

BELLE

He was a man. A magnificent and arrogant Prince. But by breaking his word, he lost his wife and the child she was carrying.

Belle looks down.

BELLE (CONT'D)

I even think that some day...I might love him for what he is.

As they are speaking, Belle and Tristan pay no attention to the whinnying coming from the other side of the cottage.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

Not without difficulty, Maxime mounts Belle's horse. Jean-Baptiste tries to hold him back.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

Are you sure about what you're doing?

MAXIME

I didn't ask you to come along.

Jean-Baptiste mounts his own horse and races after his brother.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Having reached the entrance to the forest, Maxime and Jean-Baptiste stop.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

You are betraying Belle.

MAXIME

I'm saving us. She'll understand.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

Oh, so you're saving us now, are you?

MAXIME

Your morals and your virtue—it's just a cover for fear! If you want to be a man, you have to take risks.

We hear shouting and the whinnying of horses. Perducas, accompanied by a dozen armed men, arrives at a gallop.

Sticking with his brother, Jean-Baptiste stands by his side.

MAXIME (CONT'D)

You would have preferred having a different brother, wouldn't you?

JEAN-BAPTISTE

Not on your life, blockhead. Don't worry, I've got our backs.

Maxime smiles at his brother as Perducas's men surround them.

PERDUCAS

(to Maxime)

What are you doing here, little boy? Weren't we supposed to meet at your daddy's house? Look, my men have gotten themselves all gussied up to meet your sisters!

MAXIME

I've got a deal to offer you.

PERDUCAS

There are no more deals.

Maxime takes the ruby from Belle's cape out of his pocket. He throws it at Perducas.

MAXIME

That stone comes from an abandoned castle. I'll take you there. You take the rest of the treasure, and you wipe my slate clean.

Perducas examines the gem, his eyes bright with covetousness.

PERDUCAS

A castle, a treasure... How many more of these are there?

MAXIME

Chests full.

Perducas comes over to Maxime. Watchful, Jean-Baptiste puts his hand on the butt of his revolver.

PERDUCAS

Don't disappoint, little boy.
This is your last chance, and I
won't hesitate, as you know.

MAXIME

Tell your men to follow me.

PERDUCAS

(to his men)
Do what he says.

The gangsters line up behind Maxime.

Suspicious, Perducas watches Maxime whisper a few words in his horse's ear before the horse suddenly leaps forward.

The riders throw themselves into a reckless stampede trying to follow Maxime. And suddenly, the whole forest opens before them. The trees bend down, the bushes pull themselves aside, the ravines flatten out.

Jena-Baptiste, bringing up the rear, looks over his shoulder. Behind them, the forest closes again in a tumult of branches and leaves.

INT. COTTAGE/MERCHANT'S ROOM - DAY

Belle and her sisters are seated on the edge of the Merchant's bed. They are fluffing his pillows and pulling up his covers.

ANNE

There you go! Living a life of
ease!

THE MERCHANT

Do something that will make me
happy: make peace before Belle
has to go.

Belle and Anne conspicuously avoid looking at each other. Clotilde shrugs.

CLOTILDE

We're only upset with her because
she left home before us.

The Merchant raises an authoritarian finger.

THE MERCHANT

Tsk, tsk! You're not going to start being jealous of Belle. Don't forget what she's done for us.

CLOTILDE

You know, it doesn't show, but we're devastated deep down inside.

She starts sobbing like a fool.

CLOTILDE (CONT'D)

Belle, if you leave us, I shall kill myself!

Appalled, Anne looks at Clotilde.

ANNE

It's amazing how many stupid things can come out of your mouth.

Clotilde bursts out laughing, provoking the merchant's mirth—and then everyone starts giggling.

The three sisters fall into each other's arms there on the bed, almost forgetting their father.

THE MERCHANT

You're crushing me, you silly geese!

INT. COTTAGE/ENTRANCE - DAY

We find Belle once again at the bottom of the stairs, ready to leave. She looks at the clock, which reads six o'clock. As she takes her cape, she discovers that the clasp has been torn off. Tristan looks away, ashamed.

TRISTAN

Maxime also took the horse...

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

Belle races out to the courtyard and realizes that her horse has disappeared.

TRISTAN

We didn't tell you, but Maxime has some problems. Big problems.

BELLE

(panicking)
How will I get back to the castle?

TRISTAN

I tried to stop him. So did Jean-Baptiste. Maxime decided to lead Perducas to the castle.

Belle stares wide-eyed, terror-stricken.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

They want to kill the Beast and steal his treasure. Forgive us.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Together on the back of the same horse, Belle and Tristan gallop into the forest. They slow down to follow the tracks left by their brothers and Perducas's gang.

Tristan forces his horse to walk through the ever thicker vegetation. But soon they are completely blocked, and the tracks disappear into a thicket of thorny bushes.

TRISTAN

We can't go any further.

BELLE

But we have to get there! I have to be back at seven o'clock.

Belle suddenly notices something colorful. She leans down from the saddle to grab it.

BELLE (CONT'D)

It's the ribbon I lost as I was going to the castle. We're not very far, I'm sure of it!

The young girl dismounts and tries to make her way through the brambles. But the thorny canes block her way, clinging to her hair, her dress. Her eyes fill with tears, and she groans with rage and pain.

Tristan looks on anxiously as his sister struggles through the brambles...

TRISTAN

Belle, come back!! You can't get through!

Belle persists, though she is cruelly slashed all over her neck and arms. Finally defeated, she curls up in the middle of the thorny thicket. And then her eyes fall upon the vial hanging around her neck...

Grasping it, she holds it tightly to her heart and closes her eyes.

Inside the vial, tiny lights begin to whirl around, lighting Belle's face. She starts to whisper.

BELLE
Gods of the Forest, hear me. Let
me return to him. It is what I
wish, what I desire...

The trees above her begin to sway, as if a mysterious wind were shaking them.

BELLE (CONT'D)
...more than anything in the
world.

Answering her prayer, the brambles part, and then the whole forest opens before her. At the other end of a long, magical path, we can see the Beast's castle, standing on its rocky outcropping, emerging from the fog.

Belle climbs on behind Tristan.

BELLE (CONT'D)
At a gallop!

Tristan launches them into the passage.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE - DAY/FOG

Maxime and Jean-Baptiste, followed by Perducas and his gang, arrive at the Beast's estate.

The grounds are plunged in thick fog. The men dismount.

PERDUCAS
You there, and you three—deploy
to the west. The rest of you, the
eastern flank.
(to the two brothers)
And you, little boys, you stay
right in front of me.

He draws his pistol.

PERDUCAS (CONT'D)
And don't you even think about
giving me the slip.

The men deploy around the grounds...

FURTHER AWAY

One of Perducas's bandits suddenly sees some movement in the mist. He takes a few cautious steps and discovers a giant hand slowly spreading its granite fingers.

Terrified, he sees the hand lay itself out flat on the grass to get leverage. The earth rises and lets an arm through, then an enormous shoulder.

The gangster's screaming resonates in the fog.

Perducas and Belle's brothers see the bandit come running through the fog. Suddenly, a giant hand closes around the runaway and picks him up. He continues to flail and scream with terror.

Perducas looks up and sees an enormous stone face watching him with curiosity.

The leader of the gangsters opens fire. The bullet explodes the giant's nose, and it disappears in the fog with a long guttural wailing.

The earth starts to tremble under the feet of the intruders: around the grounds, three more stone giants are pushing up from the earth!

They stand up, covered with soil and roots, their shoulders and heads carrying the beds of flowers under which they were buried. Flower petals rain down along their immense bodies.

The gangsters beat a retreat. One of them is almost trampled by a giant. The shock of the enormous foot on the ground is accompanied by a shower of petals.

ENTRANCE TO THE GROUNDS

Belle and Tristan finally reach the castle. From a distance, they see the bandits trying to escape from the giants, who are moving slowly through the fog.

BELLE

Where are our brothers?

TRISTAN

Over there, with Perducas.

Belle sees the three men. A giant is on their heels. Magnificent and haughty, the Beast is astride the giant, leading it toward his enemies.

BELLE

He's going to kill them!

As Belle and Tristan gallop toward them, the giant is swinging his fists. He strikes Maxime, whose body goes flying and lands in the grass.

His leg injured, Maxime drags himself along the ground. Jean-Baptiste comes to him.

MAXIME

Run! Save yourself! Ask Belle to forgive me.

JEAN-BAPTISTE

Tell her yourself!

Jean-Baptiste picks up his brother and puts him in a sheltered place under a half-destroyed fountain. They look up when they hear howling. The giant, mounted by the Beast, is standing above them, fist prepared to crash down on them...when Belle intervenes, arms spread.

BELLE

Stop!

The Beast roars and the colossus freezes, his fist stopping only a few feet from Belle.

Seizing his opportunity, Perducas jumps Belle and puts his knife to her throat.

PERDUCAS

You, my little pretty, are going to help me.

The Beast takes a few long strides down the giant's arm and lands in front of Perducas, baring his fangs.

THE BEAST

Let her go.

But Perducas uses Belle as a shield.

PERDUCAS

First, you lead me to your treasure.

Belle struggles. Perducas tries to keep her still, and his blade grazes Belle's skin. A few drops of blood bead and fall to the ground at the feet of Perducas and his hostage...

The earth rises up, and rose bushes begin to grow, twisting themselves around Perducas's thighs. In shock, the gangster loses his grip on Belle.

Immense and terrifying, the Beast steps toward Perducas, who is brandishing his weapon.

PERDUCAS (CONT'D)

Come taste my blade.

The Beast has a nasty smile and his sharp claws spring out like so many knife blades.

BELLE

Don't do it.

The Beast turns toward Belle.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Remember that you were once a man! Spare this vermin and let him go with my brothers. What matters is that I am here...and that I shall stay with you.

The Beast hesitates, unsettled. And then Perducas throws himself forward and stabs his knife deep into the Beast's heart.

Belle screams as the Beast collapses in slow motion. Darkness suddenly falls upon them as a violent storm breaks, scattering the fog in waves of gray.

Perducas runs away, whipped by the gusts of wind.

Across the grounds, under the beating rain, the giants sway and collapse. Perducas just misses being crushed by one of them.

On her knees beside the Beast, Belle pleads with her brothers.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Help me! We have to carry him to the castle to...

She cuts herself short. In the middle of the grounds, the thicket of roses is standing up on its enormous roots, like a plant-octopus!

EXT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BRIDGE - DUSK

Belle and her brothers are carrying the Beast's body over the bridge that leads to the main door. Maxime limps after them: wild-eyed, he stares at the castle slowly falling to pieces on its outcropping.

Black smoke and a deafening moan rise from the depths below the castle. Enormous creepers spring up to block their way. But they manage to slip under the destructive vines.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/ENTRANCE HALL - DUSK

Belle and her brothers are carrying the Beast's body up the stairs. All around them, brambles are writhing like serpents.

Blocks of stone from the ceiling crash to the floor. Belle watches the huge wall hangings being reduced to shreds by the anger of the plants.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - DUSK

The small group finally reaches Belle's room. They close the door before the brambles are able to follow them.

BELLE

In the basin, fast!

Her brothers help her plunge the Beast into the amethyst basin.

BELLE (CONT'D)

I can't hear his breathing anymore.

Under the pressure of the brambles, the solid wood door is starting to moan on its hinges. Maxime draws his sword.

MAXIME

(to Belle)

You take care of him. We'll protect you.

The three brothers leave Belle with the Beast and hurry to the door just as it gives way, letting the brambles pour into the room.

While the brothers fight the brambles, slicing and slashing in every direction, Belle bends over the Beast. She pulls his shirt open, revealing the injury on his chest.

The tiny lights in the basin come to swirl around the Beast's body.

Under the pressure of the brambles, the windows in the room shatter. Belle's brothers are overwhelmed by the assault of the plants. They manage to slice a few creepers, but they are quickly seized around their waists.

Having taken refuge under the bed, the Tadums are clinging to each other, whimpering in terror.

Then it is Belle who is circled by the brambles, though she pays no attention, busy as she is gently sprinkling the Beast's body with the magic water.

The Beast comes back to life in a powerful spasm. He opens his eyes and discovers Belle stroking his head.

BELLE

We've missed our dinner...

THE BEAST

You say that as if you regretted it.

BELLE

There will be more.

The wound on the Beast's chest slowly closes. He plunges his feline eyes into Belle's.

THE BEAST

Do you think you could—by dint of
patience, or perhaps habit—
finally come to love me?

Belle leans close to him and whispers in his ear.

BELLE

I think I love you already.

All of the clocks in the castle then begin chiming seven o'clock in unison.

Filled with wonder, Belle watches as the Beast turns back into the Prince.

EXT. BEAST'S ESTATE - DUSK

Outside, Perducas has reached the forest. He turns back one last time toward the castle.

PERDUCAS

We'll meet again in hell, my
friends!

But when he goes to leave via the magic path, he cannot continue. He looks down, incredulous: his boots are shredding, revealing not feet but a mass of roots pushing deeply into the ground.

Perducas looks with horror at his hands: his entire body is growing thorns. Overcome with convulsions, the gangster is being transformed into a human bramble bush before our eyes!

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE - DUSK

Throughout the castle, the brambles are ebbing.

They first leave Belle's room, freeing Belle's three brothers, who are lacerated but relieved. They smile at each other, happy to have done battle together.

Then it is the walls and staircases that are free from the thorny swarming.

In the faint glow of dusk, the statues turn into guards again, the valets and maids rise once more, dazed after their long slumber.

On the grounds, the roots pull back to the rose hedge, closing off the plant vortex.

At the heart of the rose bush, the statue of the Princess displays a slight smile.

INT. BEAST'S CASTLE/BELLE'S ROOM - DUSK

There is joyful barking in Belle's room. In place of the Tadums, a pack of hunting dogs springs out from under her bed.

They tumble all over each other, yapping and yelping, then come to lie down below the basin, all around their master.

Belle can not take her eyes off the Beast, now transformed into the Prince. She advances her face toward his and places a kiss on his lips.

INT. SHIP/ELEANOR'S CABIN - NIGHT

We find Eleanor again, snuggled under her covers, eyes wide. Her monkey, a cut orange half-nibbled between his paws, seems as captivated as his mistress.

Isabelle smiles at her astounded audience.

ISABELLE

The two of you are so sweet! So, the story of over, and it's time to go to sleep.

She gets up and starts putting out the candles.

ELEANOR

And the brothers and sisters? What happened to them?

ISABELLE

Maxime started a printing house to print Jean-Baptiste's books. And Tristan illustrates them! As for Anna and Clotilde, they set their hearts on two handsome twins from a good family!

ELEANOR

Oh, how lucky, that way they'll always be together! And the merchant?

ISABELLE

He went far away to start a trade in flowers. His roses, in particular, made him famous all across Europe.

ELEANOR

His roses? What roses?

ISABELLE

A variety unknown until his time!
The pistil of the rose he stole
may have helped him a bit...

Eleanor is pensive. Isabelle kisses her forehead.

ISABELLE (CONT'D)

Sweet dreams, pretty young girl.

Eleanor's eyes fix Isabelle's pendant. Inside, tiny points of light come and go.

ELEONORE

Madam?

Isabelle puts a finger to her lips.

ISABELLE

Shhhh....

Then she blows out the last candle. Her bewitching silhouette disappears into the night.

EXT. SHIP - DAY

The ship has arrived safe and sound. The sky is a pure and intense blue.

On the upper deck, the passengers are preparing to disembark. They wave their hands and handkerchiefs, attracting the attention of family and friends come to greet them on the quay.

Eleonore, lost among the passengers, is holding her monkey in its wicker cage.

She sees the officers from the day before coming toward her. She takes a deep breath.

The officers bow to her.

OFFICER #1

We would like to apologize for
last night.

OFFICER #2

We're a bit foolish, but we're
harmless.

The youngest of the officers steps forward timidly.

YOUNG OFFICER

I would be honored to escort you
ashore.

Eleanor smiles at him.

EXT. QUAY - DUSK

Eleonore walks down the gangway on the arm of the officer. The bells of the church near the port start ringing seven o'clock.

And then Eleonore sees Isabelle. She is walking slowly along the quay, people stepping aside respectfully as she passes. She is heading toward a magnificent carriage drawn by four black horses.

Standing in front of the carriage is a man with a noble appearance and deep-set eyes. Years have gone by, his hair has turned white, but we recognize the Prince. As the bells sound the seventh stroke, he smiles lovingly at Isabelle.

In his black-gloved hand, he holds a red rose.

END