

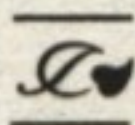
# Beauty

*A Retelling of the Story of*

BEAUTY & THE BEAST

Robin McKinley

*"A splendid story." —Publishers Weekly*



I was the youngest of three daughters. Our literal-minded mother named us Grace, Hope, and Honour, but few people except perhaps the minister who had baptized all three of us remembered my given name. My father still likes to tell the story of how I acquired my odd nickname: I had come to him for further information when I first discovered that our names meant something besides you-come-here. He succeeded in explaining grace and hope, but he had some difficulty trying to make the concept of honour understandable to a five-year-old. I heard him out, but with an expression of deepening disgust; and when he was finished I said: "Huh! I'd rather be Beauty." He laughed; and over the next few weeks told everyone he met this story of his youngest

child's precocity. I found that my ill-considered opinion became a reality; the name at least was attached to me securely.

All three of us were pretty children, with curly blond hair and blue-grey eyes; and if Grace's hair was the brightest, and Hope's eyes the biggest, well, for the first ten years the difference wasn't too noticeable. Grace, who was seven years older than I, grew into a beautiful, and profoundly graceful, young girl. Her hair was wavy and fine and luxuriant, and as butter-yellow as it had been when she was a baby (said doting friends of the family), and her eyes were long-lashed and as blue as a clear May morning after rain (said her doting swains). Hope's hair darkened to a rich chestnut-brown, and her big eyes turned a smoky green. Grace was an inch or two the taller, and her skin was rosy where Hope's was ivorypale; but except for their dramatic coloring my sisters looked very much alike. Both were tall and slim, with tiny waists, short straight noses, dimples when they smiled, and small delicate hands and feet.

I was five years younger than Hope, and I don't know what happened to me. As I grew older, my hair turned mousy, neither blond nor brown, and the baby curl fell out until all that was left was a

stubborn refusal to co-operate with the curling iron; my eyes turned a muddy hazel. Worse, I didn't grow; I was thin, awkward, and undersized, with big long-fingered hands and huge feet. Worst of all, when I turned thirteen, my skin broke out in spots. There hadn't been a spot in our mother's family for centuries, I was sure. And Grace and Hope went on being innocently and ravishingly lovely, with every eligible young man—and many more that were neither—dying of love for them.

Since I was the baby of the family I was a little spoiled. Our mother died less than two years after I was born, and our little sister Mercy died two weeks after her. Although we had a series of highly competent and often affectionate nursemaids and governesses, my sisters felt that they had raised me. By the time it was evident that I was going to let the family down by being plain, I'd been called Beauty for over six years; and while I came to hate the name, I was too proud to ask that it be discarded. I wasn't really very fond of my given name, Honour, either, if it came to that: It sounded sallow and angular to me, as if "honourable" were the best that could be said of me. My sisters were too kind to refer to the increasing inappropriateness of my nickname. It was all the worse

# A strange imprisonment

**B**eauty has never liked her nickname. She is thin and awkward; it is her two sisters who are the beautiful ones. But what she lacks in looks, she can perhaps make up for in courage.

When her father comes home with the tale of an enchanted castle in the forest and the terrible promise he had to make to the Beast who lives there, Beauty knows she must go to the castle, a prisoner of her own free will. Her father protests that he will not let her go, but she answers, "Cannot a Beast be tamed?"

Robin McKinley's beloved telling illuminates the unusual love story of a most unlikely couple: Beauty and the Beast.



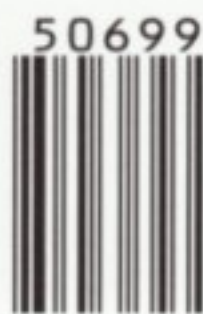
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