

BEAUTY
& the
BEAST



a retelling

by

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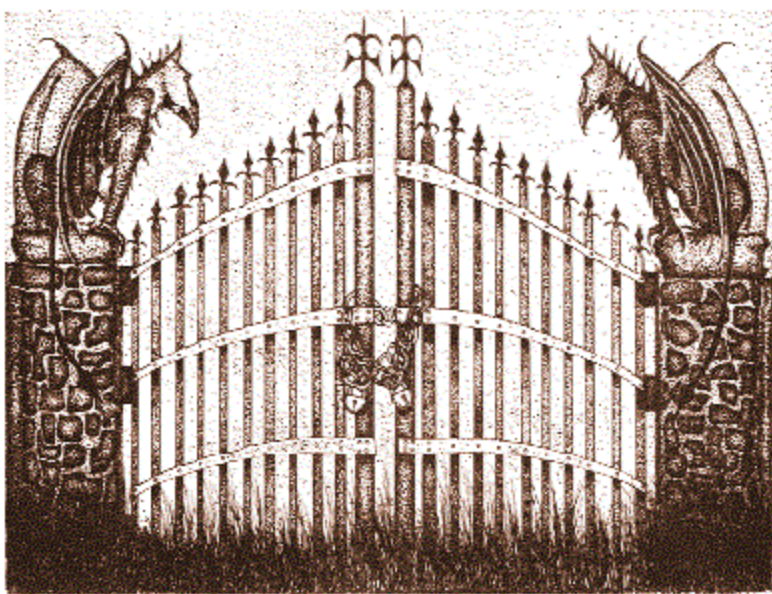
illustrations by Claire Roberts

Feral Press, Inc.

... Quentin had observed the man's bear-like gait as he made for the spinet. But, oh, the moment when Bruto glanced up and Quentin saw that hideous, upturned face:

Man? This was an animal, a huge animal. A beast—and none their world had ever seen!

Narrator



...the Way stopped at tall iron gates...

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Once upon a time, down near the end of Winding Way, stood a cottage, and in that cottage lived Quentin Smith.

Just past there, the Way stopped at tall iron gates and a high stone wall topped with curly spikes. Beside the gates stood round stone pillars, and atop each pillar crouched a big stone beast with a lion's body, an eagle's beak, and wide, clawed wings.

They looked so fierce that Quentin sometimes had nightmares about them, where they came alive and flew at the bedroom window, rapping with sharp, curved beaks.

"They're hideous," Quentin told the baby-sitter one night after a really bad dream. "Who'd make such things?"

The baby-sitter gave Quentin a comforting hug. "They've been around a while. They're called griffins, and they're there to guard the gates, so as long as you stay on this side, you'll be safe." Looking to Quentin's bedroom window, she added, "I think they're magnificent."

She would, thought Quentin. She found good in everyone and everything. Her full name was Annabella, but because she was the prettiest—and nicest—girl in town, people called her just, Bella.

Quentin adored her.

Bella was the only baby-sitter who didn't mind walking down the lonely Way at nights. No one else would because of the rumors about Tristholm, the place next door. Some said there were ghosts in there, others said monsters. From time to time, Quentin heard noises in the night. Like a lion roaring, once, and also a weird howling. Quentin's parents said that the noises came with the nightmares and the rumors were just superstition. Mr. Bruto, their landlord, lived behind those gates and he was no monster.

"How do you know?" Quentin demanded. "You haven't seen him." No one had, as far as Quentin knew.

Bella said Mr. Bruto was a recluse, which meant he liked to stay private. So private, in fact, that the lease said they'd lose the cottage if ever they set foot inside his property.

As if anyone could! From the attic window, all Quentin saw was wild vine draped from tree to tree like sheets spread out to dry. If there was a house somewhere back of all that, you couldn't see it even in winter when the trees were bare.

Almost every day, going in and out of the cottage under the gaze of the griffins with their fierce, bulging eyes, Quentin wondered about Mr. Bruto. How old was he? What was he really like? And how did he live? The rusty padlocks on the gates hadn't been used in ages, and no one ever went in or out of the estate. The mailman never stopped there, no vans delivered groceries.

There had to be a back gate, Bella said.

Tristholm was so large, Quentin had never walked all the way around it. As time passed, the wish to find that other entrance grew and grew, but the chance never came, until one summer's day, Quentin's parents went off on a long trip, while Bella moved in to look after things.

Quentin didn't mind. It was fun having Bella in the house. She let Quentin pick what to eat, and stay up late—because school was out, she said, and to make up for being left at home for the entire summer vacation.

But there was one thing she absolutely would not allow.

"Quentin, whatever you do, you must not go into that place next door or there will be trouble for all of us."

Bella didn't say not to follow the wall around, though. One hot afternoon, when she was busy with the laundry, Quentin slipped away to seek out the other gate in the high, spiked wall.

Way along, some distance from the cottage, Quentin came across a tall tree with branches curving right over the top of the wall, affording a really good view of the other side. Now who in the world could have resisted the urge to climb up onto the stoutest branch—not meaning to disobey Bella, mind, but just to take a peek.

It was a total waste of time. The view was just the same as from the attic window: masses of vine draped over trees, hiding whatever lay beneath. Better get down, Quentin thought uneasily. If you get caught up here, there could be trouble.

Just as Quentin turned to climb down, there came a cracking of twigs close by. It was a gray squirrel, just as startled as Quentin. The squirrel fled, and Quentin, caught off-balance was falling, falling . . . inside the wall!

Crashing through the vine, Quentin landed with a thud on moist

leaves to lie dazed and winded, staring up toward the sky. All around were bushes covered in the vine. It was very dark down there although it was still mid-afternoon. Quentin could just see the tree branch above the vine, too far out of reach from the ground.

"I'd better get out of here," Quentin murmured, scrambling up and rubbing a couple of tender spots. "But how?"

A path of sorts ran along the wall both ways. Quentin set off homeward, looking for a way to climb back out.

The path seemed very long. Quentin thought nervously of the griffins guarding the gates. "You'll be safe as long as you stay outside," Bella had said. If a person came in by another way, would the griffins know? And would they come alive and attack? And then there was another worry. Mr. Bruto had threatened to throw them out of the cottage if anyone set foot inside his property! Quentin put on speed.

Sunlight gleamed across the way ahead. An opening in the trees, a patch of grass and fern. It looked mysterious and inviting, the sort of place where something quite magical could happen. Forgetting Mr. Bruto and the griffins, Quentin left the path and moved toward it.

There came a sudden screech and a flash of green shot past. A peacock, outraged at being disturbed! Quentin stopped still, breathing fast. Had Mr. Bruto heard? Did he know that someone had come onto his place?

Everything stayed peaceful.

Don't press your luck, get going—now! thought Quentin, and was just about to head back for the path, when sunlight flashed off glass some way ahead. Windows. Mr. Bruto's house? Quentin crept closer.

Greenhouses, bigger than the cottage! But many panes were broken and the plants inside were running wild. Such pretty flowers, such

bright colors. A patch of red caught Quentin's eye: A rose, the only one.

Bella loved roses, especially red ones. One day, she said, she'd grow them all around her front door. One day when she was married with a house of her own. Some dream. Bella lived with her grandma and wouldn't date because her grandma needed her, so she said. Even now, while she stayed in the cottage, she checked every day to see her grandma was okay, even though, as far as Quentin could see, the old lady was perfectly capable of looking after herself.

In a rush of affection, Quentin reached in through the broken pane, seized the rose, and pulled. The stem gave, the rose came away and the instant it broke free there came a high-pitched wail, so loud and so close that Quentin dropped the rose and it fell onto the greenhouse floor.

Quentin looked all around but saw no one. The wail seemed to have come from the rose itself, but how could it? Flowers did not speak.

Sensing now that there was something very strange about that place, Quentin turned to run, but the way was blocked by a gigantic winged shadow. Quentin ducked low, thinking, This has to be another bad dream. But looking out again, Quentin saw that it was not. The winged shape was indeed a stone griffin—come alive! Quentin turned to run in the opposite direction, but there was the other one, blocking the way.

Just then, a great, loud voice boomed out: "You—stay where you are!"

Quentin shrank into the greenhouse wall. A man's voice, very angry. *Mr. Bruto!* There'd be trouble now!

Looking around fearfully, Quentin waited for Mr. Bruto to appear, but he didn't. After a moment, the voice came again.

"Pick up the rose—go on!" it roared, as Quentin hesitated. Quentin leaned over the greenhouse wall, and, reaching in, lifted up the rose with trembling hands. The velvet petals were wilting already, and their deep

rich red was turning dark brown, the color of dried blood.

As Quentin slowly brought the rose into the light, there came a heavy thud as from a giant stamping his foot. The ground shook, sending Quentin staggering back against the wall. Overhead, the griffins swooped low with loud, fierce shrieks, so close that Quentin felt the draft from their wings.

The voice came again, now soft and full of anguish:

“Oh, what have you done?”

“I only meant,” Quentin began.

“Silence! Look through the window, child—see the bush you plucked it from—go on, look!”

The rose bush did not appear at all well. Its leaves were shrivelling and drifting to the greenhouse floor. Just because the rose was picked? But that shouldn't be, Quentin was sure. There were roses in the cottage garden and Mom cut them all the time. She said it brought on new blooms.

“This is what I get for letting people rent next door!” the voice said, chill with menace. “Well, now you'll pay!”

“Oh, please, I'm sorry, I meant no harm.” With one eye on the griffins still circling overhead, Quentin explained about falling into Tristholm by accident, and finding the rose. “I picked it for Bella. It looked wild. I—I didn't think anyone would miss it.”

“Bella, you say?” There was a silence. Then the voice came again, really quiet now. “Who is she?”

“My baby-sitter. She's staying over while my parents are away. She told me not to come in here,” Quentin added. It wasn't Bella's fault. No reason for her to be in trouble, too.

“But you did trespass, even so.” The voice was rising again. “Where is

this Bella now?"

Quentin explained how Bella was busy with the laundry. "Down in the basement, so she didn't see me go out. She'll be wondering where I am," Quentin added nervously. "Is it okay if I go now?"

"Oh, yes, and bring this Bella straight back here—"

"But—"

"Or your parents will be hearing from me."

"It wasn't her fault, she—"

"Go!" The word hit the air like a thunderclap, setting off the winged beasts afresh. Quentin fled headlong back into the shelter of the bushes, making for the path. But the search was not necessary. The tangle mysteriously parted, a path seemed to form on its own, guiding Quentin on, and in no time there were the tall iron gates and, through them, Winding Way.

Nearing the gates, Quentin looked up fearfully. The tops of the pillars were empty: the griffins were gone. So were the padlocks. The gates stood open just wide enough to let Quentin pass. Never before had the sight of that little brick path and the small front door been so welcome.

"Bella! Bella!" Quentin ran, yelling, into the house.