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YA
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TO TAME A BEAST

Synopsis

Lin travels alone in a world without magic until a snowstorm blows her to the doorstep of a man long since transformed into a beast.

Lin is a professional storyteller at a time when people no longer respect the profession, preferring the practicalities of real life to preposterous tales of fairies and magic. One last town wants no stories from her so she must move on despite impending weather. A beast rescues her from a snowstorm, and Lin is too exhausted to resist.

Lin wakes inside a house. Remembering what she thought she saw, she comforts herself with words like exhaustion, hallucination and hysteria. Until he stands before her—a beast.

She recoils in terror. An eternity passes before Lin peeks from behind the frail protection of her arms. No beast. But two pieces of fruit rest nearby.

Lin permits herself to eat, partly because of her memory of the beast. With his towering height, muscles, teeth and lengthy claws, he needn't use poison to subdue her. While eating, Lin peers into nearby rooms, furnished with an extensive collection of books, and concludes the house belonged to a man. She worries about whether the beast found it abandoned or...not.

Towering roses obstruct views from every room. Blooms of deepest red draw Lin's interest for their size and beauty, until she becomes unnerved, feeling as if the roses watch her in return. She laughs at herself but retreats nonetheless. She discovers a kitchen and a back door and needn't open it to know the beast stands beyond.

He speaks, inviting her to take what she wants. Lin reels. Was he a beast that learned to speak? Or was he a man turned beast? The impossibilities rile her. Did magic exist? That she

should stumble upon it now, too late to save her parents, and wasted on a beast. Fury and grief crest. Spent, Lin rests and realizes she hadn't tried to leave.

Roses and vines constrict Lin's dreams. She wakes resolved to leave, despite the snow and lack of destination. Halfway through the orchard, she encounters the beast. He convinces her to stay. Lin's astonishment with herself gives way to logic. The beast could have harmed her already, but her only wounds are thorn scratches.

The next morning, Lin searches for firewood and finds the beast. Though she has tried to convince herself of his good intentions, the beast's fearsome appearance scrambles Lin's composure. An uneasy conversation followed by the beast's quick departure makes Lin wonder if she hurt his feelings. His consistent kindnesses shame her.

The elemental act of lighting a fire becomes a multi-faceted experience for Lin. Gathering wood, she learns the beast built the house when he had been a man. Preparing the fire, Lin forces herself to draw near the beast and also discovers the roses are part of the beast's curse. Lighting the fire, she notices the beast smells lovely, like the snowy wood, and, like the wood, is rather old with tufts of gray stippling his fur. As the fire thaws long-chilled bones and muscle, Lin lets go some of her fear of the beast and instead pities him for his lonely fate.

Warmed, Lin pursues a bath. Sliding down a slope to a stream is easy enough, but the return proves too difficult for Lin's human limbs. The beast comes to her aid, and Lin holds on as he half-pulls her up the steep hill. Several moments pass before she notices they are safe at the top of the hill, and that she has stood petting him to feel his fur against her palm. She dashes to the house.

In her room, Lin studies a black hair that has clung to her palm. While the roses crowd her window, she decides to save it with the three precious keepsakes from her parents. She clears a place for them on a table that turns out to be a desk. Inside is a badly-aged, blackened journal too malignant in appearance to touch.

Lin returns to the fire and rearranges the room to suit two people. She invites the beast to join her and asks him his name, but he cannot remember. He has been alive generations longer

than he could have without the curse. The knowledge undoes Lin. She bursts into tears, releasing pent-up grief for her parents' deaths from old age. Though magic might have kept them alive, she accepts that they would not have wanted it. They had been happy with their lives; the beast is cursed in his. Lin goes outside to hide and cool her tear-flushed face.

The beast's discomfort with Lin's tears is so very male, Lin is comforted and amused. She relaxes and even argues with him, refusing to call him 'Beast.' He intimidates her into agreeing, but Lin's fear turns to wrath then back to fear for having scolded a beast. Her worry seems justified when he lunges at her, but his quick reach shields her from a lash of roses. Lin had thought the roses a passive element of the curse-the beast would remain a beast as long as the roses lived-but now she understands that they actively administer it.

The beast tells Lin some of his past and how his brother came to curse him. Lin confesses that her parents met because of roses.

When she performs an accidental magic, transforming the fruit from a bland, crunchy thing to a molten, sugary treat, Lin resists the idea that what she has done is magic, preferring instead to think it a happy circumstance of resting the fruit too near the fire. But the roses sense this is a chink in their control over the beast's life. They have only ever allowed him the barest, dullest necessities to keep him alive that they might continue to punish him. The roses become more aggressive, invading Lin's dreams so strongly the beast again must rescue her. In waking her, they share an intimate moment, and Lin wonders what a kiss might be like.

The long-enduring unfairness of such a curse against a kind man galvanizes her. She makes herself examine the repugnant journal, but the words are too faded for any real study. Next she searches the various towers of books for clues to save the beast. Taking a break, Lin steps outside. Her arm becomes tangled in a vine. She tugs free, not quite able to believe the roses overtly attacked her.

When the beast joins her, she notices leafy detritus in his fur and learns that he has tried to pass into the wood. He can enter it to a point, but any farther and he is thrown back. That he had tried, repeatedly, melts her heart.

Later, Lin ponders why a lone man would build such a large house and grows jealous, imagining another woman.

That night the roses inflict a dream in which the beast dies.

Lin wakes in a fury and dashes outside to walk it off. The beast keeps her company as temper drives her too deep into the wood until suddenly he is gone, the magic barrier throwing him back. Kneeling beside him, Lin sees that her anger and fear are rooted in a deep caring for the beast, but the unexpected joy is tamped when the beast reveals his worry. He has been alive many years longer than a man. If they succeed in breaking the curse, will time catch up with him and mean his death?

Just when Lin resolves that she will not try to break the curse after all, that she would rather be with him as he is than risk his loss, she discovers she possesses another magic. Upon their return to the house, the roses snake out at them, but Lin bats them away. At her touch, a vine is scorched black.

Lin fears that she can now break the curse but in the process may lose the beast. To distract herself, she focuses on relighting the fire and decides to burn the decayed journal. With its destruction, both Lin and the beast feel a hope neither can resist.

The next day, eager to see the beast, Lin steps outside. The roses entangle her and drag her deep into their roots. The beast tears vines away, and Lin scorches those she can reach. Once freed the beast notices across Lin's throat four marks left by his claws. It doesn't matter that he saved her, he fears too greatly for her safety and sends her away.

Lin leaves but the walk clears her thoughts. She will not let the roses win. Nor will she lose the beast she loves.

Together, the two break the curse. The beast pulls vines free, and Lin burns them with her touch. While they wait for midnight and the beast's hoped for transformation, Lin becomes convinced that all will be well and that they will live happily ever after.

After all, TO TAME A BEAST is a fairy tale.