**Shadows of What May Be**

by [Interrobam](https://archiveofourown.org/users/Interrobam)

**Summary**

Belle cried in front of the dancers, in front of all of the guests gathered for Fezziwig's Christmas feast, in front of Ebeneezer. She felt a foolish little girl, but even more so she felt him a bitter old miser, a man for whom she had no further reserves of patience.

**Notes**

Written for a prompt in the Disney Animated Kink Meme that proposed an AU where Belle in A Christmas Carol and Belle in Beauty and the Beast were the same person. Please bear with my Dickensian ignorance, I know the Scrooge story mostly from cartoon adaptations and am taking some liberties to make it more compatible with BatB.

It was a grand feast that Fezziwig threw, and it was there, with her in her neatest dress, that he asked her. It was then, her radiant smile outshining her modest means, when he gave her what he called a little piece of their future.

What is round and shines with golden light?

A ring, Belle thought, and her heart swelled in her breast. But as he pressed it into her hand it was too thin and too solid, a coin. A bitter, golden coin. It was impossible for her to stop herself, and she threw the mocking currency to the floor, stomping her foot. She cried in front of the dancers,
all of the guests gathered for the Christmas feast, in front of Ebeneezer. She felt a foolish little girl, but even more so she felt him a bitter old miser, for whom she had no further reserves of patience.

She was the one who had made a scene, who had created this discordant fit of feelings, so she was the one who left the party early. She straightened her skirts in the cold air, wiped the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand, and set off for her Father's house. She would break of the engagement, she swore on that cold uneven walk; for there was no love that she could find in her fiancee's heart. By the time she reached her door of this decision she was absolute, and when she tearfully told her Father of it he was kind to her. He stroked her hair and showed her a new book: one bought with painfully saved pennies for Christmas, about a virtuous maiden and a prince in disguise. She hugged it's leather cover tight and laughed to him through her tears that it was the greatest gift in the world.

Painful weeks passed, and soon it was the eve of spring. Her father wished to move to France, another one of his outrageous schemes, another impossible dream. She supported it just as fiercely as she had supported every other scheme, as he had supported her when she had broken the engagement, despite the security that could have been had.

“France will be wonderful.” She smiled, tying a ribbon in her hair “The countryside will be so much cleaner than this dreary old city. And safer as well.”

Passage was expensive, but they were careful; they scrimped and they saved. She worried, from time to time, that she would become the miser she had cut from her life; but it was worth it to come out the other side and to see the countryside and smell the clean air. At first they were foreigners there, with strange tongues and strange money, but Belle grew tired of reading the same english books again and again, and she forced French into her mind story by story. She learned the language as a side effect of reading far more than she read to learn the language. Her father never came as far; his grammar weak and his pronunciation sloppy, so it was Belle who came into the village to purchase wares, and Belle who translated blueprints and the names of tools. Ebeneezer healed like an old, vicious scar. As Gaston chased her around the village she swore that she would never consider a man who she knew could not love her fully. As the villagers mocked her father, she swore herself faithful to him and his dreams before even her own. The second pledge was the call that urged her to enter the woods on that fateful night, and to venture inside the darkened castle she found therein. The first pledge was the call that urged her to love the beast inside.

It was a bitter winter's night when all of these things were shown to Ebeneezer by a phantom of the past. As he wept for loss of her, his tears were cold on his skin.

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