



2007

Beastly

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Flinn, Alex. *Beastly*. HarperCollins, 2007. ISBN 9780060874162. \$17.89. 304p.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Significant shortcomings

Genre: Fiction; Fairy tales;

Subject: Beauty, Personal--Juvenile fiction; New York (N.Y.)--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Retellings of "Beauty and the Beast" are certainly plentiful, but Alex Flinn has managed a unique, contemporary version set in New York City, with a perfectly "beastly" Beast-- rich, handsome, spoiled, crass, unfeeling, maladjusted, 14-year-old Kyle, from a seriously dysfunctional family. Readers rejoice when his highly objectionable behavior results in a magical transformation into a beast by a witch. The "Beauty" teen, Linda (also 14), isn't physically beautiful, but a very ordinary, freckled redhead, living in abject poverty with no mother and an abusive, drug-pushing father. Does this sound like the setting for true love to blossom?

In spite of its excesses, Flinn manages to partially make the story work, even to capture our interest, but isn't as successful in sparking our sympathy for her characters, especially the "beastly" teen hero. Flinn's portrayal of Kyle (the Beast) as the victim of an absent mother and TV celebrity father, who is only concerned about himself and his television image, is somewhat overdrawn. Fortunately, Kyle-as-Adrian (the Beast) does improve over the two year period of the story, but the change seems a little unnatural considering his former anything-but-noble self. We finish the tale feeling wondering if Kyle's former abundant negative traits will again surface, now that he is perfectly tall, handsome and tanned once again. To her credit, Flinn's conversational style is youthful; she is in tune with the popular culture of "some", but only some, teens. Popular slang terms and crass phrases abound, as well as implied sexual activity in the early chapters. Parents may want to preview "Beastly" before allowing their children to read it. Flinn's version of the popular fairy tale is original and has moments of achievement, but suffers from excesses, which leave us questioning the "happily ever after."

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