



A Time upon Once, there was a splendid Castle in which a King lived with his Queen. All around the Castle were gorgeous gardens and at the furthestmost edge of these, the Queen asked the King to make a playground to be used freely by all the children of their subjects, and this was done.

Beyond the playground stretched meadows of heather and wild flowers where a Shepherd tended his sheep, to provide wool for all the cloaks and tapestries and curtains and blankets that such a magnificent Royal establishment might require. On fine mornings, the Queen watched from her window wearing her golden dress as children ran laughing in the playground and their parents sat on benches and, in the distance, the shepherd drove his sheep among the heather.

It was all so idyllic that it came into the Queen's head that she would like a child of her own; so she drew the curtains and turned, smiling, to the King.

But when her child was born, the Queen died and the grief-stricken King was left alone with his son. He took her golden blanket off his dead wife's shoulders and cried until it was full of tears, and then he locked it away.

When the King looked at his son his broken heart could feel no love, his tear-scoured eyes could see no beauty, and his hoarse voice could find no words of kindness. He wished that the child had died instead of the mother and refused even to give him a proper name. But when he was ever alone with the boy, the King scowled and glowered at him and called him an ugly little Rumpelstiltskin.

The boy grew up strange and awkward and unloved and when he was tall enough to fend for himself, the King banished him from the Castle and gave himself up entirely to mourning for his Queen and to counting his treasure, which was the only thing that stopped him thinking.

Rumpelstiltskin lived in the fields and hedgerows and only the sheep and other wild creatures were his friends.

He learned to smell when it would rain, or taste when it would thunder. He knew where to forage for food in winter and where to pick fruit in summer. He became part of the landscape.

When he stood at the edge of the playground, the children would run to see him - and the kindest of all was the Shepherd's daughter - but their parents would pull them away from the weird boy whose name no-one knew. But the spirit of the Queen, his mother, was with him always and even though she was dead her love was so strong that the boy learned how to turn ordinary things into gold. So he grew stronger outside the Palace walls and never forgot the sweetness of the kind girl.

Time passed and once a month, the Courtiers, the Palace Servants and all the King's subjects gathered together in the Palace Courtyard and the King stared bleakly down from his balcony as everyone tried to come up with something that might distract the morose monarch from his misery. But nothing worked. People thronged beneath the Royal balcony, walking on their hands, or swallowing fire, or juggling with eels, but it was all useless and the King remained frozen within his grief, wanting only to get back to mindlessly counting his treasure. The Shepherd, who was present alongside his beautiful daughter, was a terrible show-off, and before he quite knew

what he was saying, he shouted out that his daughter could spin straw into gold!

As soon as the words left his lips, he regretted them - for his poor daughter could do no such thing - but it was too late, for the King had heard him. 'That's a talent that would please me hugely' said the King, 'for I would have more treasure to count and since the Queen died that is the only thing that gives me peace of mind. Bring the Shepherd's daughter into the Palace and I'll put her to the test. If she fails, all your sheep will be slaughtered'

The horrified show-off could only watch as his daughter was led away.

The King took her to a room that was full of straw, gave her a spinning-wheel and said, 'Set to work. You have all night ahead of you. But if you haven't spun all this straw into gold by dawn, your father's flock will die.'

The poor girl sat there without a clue what to do. She had no idea how to spin straw into gold and she grew more and more frightened and started to cry. Suddenly the door opened and in came a strange youth who said, 'Good evening, Mistress Shepherd, why are you crying?' Although she did not recognise him, she was not afraid of him.

'Oh, I have to spin this straw into gold and I don't know how to do it.'

'What will you give me if I do it for you?'

'My ring.'

'Done.'

The unusual boy took the ring, sat down before the spinning-wheel, and whirr, whirr, whirr! Three turns and the bobbin was full. And so he went on all night and at sunrise all the bobbins were full of gold.

First thing in the morning, in came the King and when he saw all the gold he was impressed. But it still wasn't enough so he had the Shepherd's daughter taken to an even bigger room filled with straw and told her to spin the lot into gold if she valued her father's livelihood. She really didn't know what to do and was crying when the door opened. In stepped the gifted boy again saying, 'What will you give me if I spin all this straw into gold?'

'I have nothing left to give.'

‘Then I will do it for a kiss.’

The girl kissed the youth and then he whirled away at the wheel all the long dark night and by dawn each dull strand of straw was glistening gold. As he did this, the Shepherd’s daughter looked out from her window. She saw her father pacing up and down below, crying with remorse at what he had done to his child.

But when the King arrived he wanted even more, so he took the girl to an even larger room full of straw and told her, ‘You must spin all of this into gold tonight and if you succeed you shall be my wife, for your talent has helped me with my grief.’

As soon as the girl was alone, the strange youth appeared for the third time and said, ‘What will you give me this time if I spin the straw into gold for you?’

‘I have nothing left to give.’

‘Then you must promise to give me the first child you have after you are Queen.’

‘Who knows what the future holds’ thought the girl. And as she had no choice, she gave her word to the strange youth. At once he started to spin until all the straw was gold.

When the King arrived in the morning and saw everything just as he wished, he held the wedding at once and the Shepherd’s beautiful daughter became a Queen. She was given her own chambers in the Palace and the King settled down to count his new treasure.

After nine months had passed, she brought a perfect child into the world and thought less and less of the strange youth. But one day he stepped suddenly into her room and said, ‘Now give me what you promised.’

The Queen was terribly distressed and offered him all the gold and riches of the kingdom if he would only leave the child. But the gifted boy said, ‘No. I’d rather have this living child than all the treasure of the world.’ At this, the Queen began to sob so bitterly that the strange youth comforted her and said, ‘I’ll give you three days. If you can find out my name by then, you can keep your child.’

The Queen stayed up all night searching her brains for his name like someone sieving for gold. She went through every single name she could think of. She sent out a messenger to search the land for every name that could be found. On the next day, when the strange youth came, she recited the whole alphabet of names that she’d learned, starting with Balthasar, Casper, Melchior... But to each one, the strange youth said, ‘That isn’t my name.’

On the second day, she sent servants all round the Kingdom to find more names and she tried all the strange and unusual ones on the youth. 'Perhaps you're called Sheepshanks or Tumbleweed or Touselhead.' But he always said, 'That isn't my name.'

On the third day, the whole crowd came back and said that they hadn't been able to find a single new name. But her father, who had searched harder than anyone said, 'As I approached a dark glade in the middle of the woods, I saw a rough shelter with a fire burning outside it and round the fire danced a strange youth who was singing:

"Though my Mother will never be old,
her love for me makes all things gold.
Where there is love, there is no shame
and Rumpelstiltskin is my name."

The Queen was beyond joy when she heard the name. And when soon afterwards the strange youth walked in and asked, 'Well, Mistress Queen, what is my name?' She started by saying, 'Is it Ryland?'

'No.'

'Is it Herdwick?'

'No.'

'Is it Romney?'

'No.'

'Then perhaps your name is Rumpelstiltskin.' And she laughed and kissed him on the mouth.

At this, the strange youth began to dance, spinning and spinning in the air with his hands til the room filled with gold and when he had finished he stood before her as the true prince that he was.

The King looked at him and saw how like the dead Queen he was and his heart filled with such love for them both that he could no longer stand so the servants carried him to his room, where he died peacefully and everyone prayed that he was now at last re-united with his Queen.

And so the Prince and the Shepherd's daughter were married with great ceremony and celebration and the child was named Rumpelstiltskin - after his father.