

Rumpelstiltskin

THERE was once a miller who was very poor, but he had a beautiful daughter. Now, it fell out that he had occasion to speak with the king, and, in order to give himself an air of importance, he said: "I have a daughter who can spin gold out of straw."

The king said to the miller: "That is an art in which I am much interested. If your daughter is as skilful as you say she is, bring her to my castle tomorrow, and I will put her to the test."

Accordingly, when the girl was brought to the castle, the king conducted her to a chamber which was quite full of straw, gave her a spinning-wheel and winder, and said, "Now, set to work, and if between tonight and tomorrow at dawn you have not spun this straw into gold you must die." Thereupon he carefully locked the door of the chamber, and she remained alone.

There sat the unfortunate miller's daughter, and for the life of her did not know what to do. She had not the least idea how to spin straw into gold, and she became more and more distressed, until at last she began to weep. Then all at once the door sprang open, and in stepped a little manikin, who said: "Good evening, Mistress Miller, what are you weeping so for?"

"Alas!" answered the maiden, "I've got to spin gold out of straw, and don't know how to do it."

Then the manikin said, "What will you give me if I spin it for you?"

"My necklace," said the maid.

The little man took the necklace, sat down before the spinning wheel, and whir-whir-whir, in a trice the reel was full.

Then he fixed another reel, and whir-whir-whir, thrice round, and that too was full; and so it went on until morning, when all straw was spun and all the reels were full of gold.

Immediately at sunrise the king came, and when he saw the gold he was astonished and much pleased, but his mind became only the more avaricious. So he had

the miller's daughter taken to another chamber, larger than the former one, and full of straw, and he ordered her to spin it also in one night, as she valued her life.

The maiden was at her wit's end, and began to weep. Then again the door sprang open, and the little manikin appeared, and said, "What will you give me if I spin the straw into gold for you?"

"The ring off my finger," answered the maiden.

The little man took the ring, began to whirl again at the wheel, and had by the morning spun all the straw into gold.

The king was delighted at sight of the masses of gold, but was not even yet satisfied. So he had the miller's daughter taken to a still larger chamber, full of straw, and said, "This you must spin into gold tonight, but if you succeed you shall become my queen." "Even if she is only a miller's daughter," he thought, I shan't find a richer woman in the whole world.

When the girl was alone the little man came again, and said for the third time, "What will you give me if I spin the straw for you this time?"

"I have nothing more that I can give," answered the girl.

"Well, promise me your first child if you become queen."

"Who knows what may happen," thought the miller's daughter; but she did not see any other way of getting out of the difficulty, so she promised the little man what he demanded, and in return he spun the straw into gold once more.

When the king came in the morning, he found everything as he had wished, and celebrated his marriage with her, and the miller's daughter became queen.

About a year afterwards a beautiful child was born, but the queen had forgotten all about the little man. However, he suddenly entered the chamber, and said, "Now give me what you promised."

The queen was terrified, and offered the little man all the wealth of the kingdom if

he let her keep her child. But the manikin said, “No; I would rather have some living thing than all the treasures of the world.”
 100 then the queen began to moan and weep to such an extent that the little man felt sorry for her. “I will give you three days,” he said, “and if within that time you discover
 105 ma name you shall keep the child.”

Then during the night the queen called to mind all the names that she had ever heard, and sent a messenger all over the country to
 110 inquire far and wide what other names there were. When the little man came on the next day, she began with Caspar, Melchior, Balzer, and mentioned all the names which she knew, one after the other; but at every one the little man said: “No; that’s not my
 115 name.”

The second day she had inquiries made all round the neighbourhood for the names of people living there, and suggested to the little man all the most unusual and strange
 120 names.

“Perhaps your name is Cowribs, Spindleshanks, or Spiderlegs?”

But he answered every time, “No; that’s not my name.”

125 On the third day the messenger came back and said: “I haven’t been able to find

any new names, but as I came round the corner of a wood on a lofty mountain, where the fox says goodnight to the hare, I saw a little house, and in front of the house
 130 a fire was burning; and around the fire an indescribably ridiculous little man was leaping, hopping on one leg, and singing:

“Today I bake; tomorrow I brew my beer;

135 The next day I will bring the queen’s child here. Ah! lucky ‘tis that not a soul doth know That Rumpelstiltskin is my name, ho! ho!

Then you can imagine how delighted the queen was when she heard the name, and when presently afterwards the little man came in and asked, “Now, your Majesty, what is my name?” at first she asked:

“Is you name Tom?”

“No.”

145 “Is it Dick?”

“No.”

“Is it, by chance, Rumpelstiltskin?”

145 “The devil told you that! The devil told you that!” shrieked the little man; and in his rage stamped his right foot into the ground so deep that he sank up to his waist.

Then, in his passion, he seized his leg with both hands, and tore himself asunder in the middle.

From Grimm’s Fairy Tales

Vocabulary:

Air of ... = ‘*Anschein, Auftreten, Gehabe*’; straw = ‘*Stroh*’; skilful = ‘*geschicklich*’; to conduct = ‘to lead’; chamber = ‘room’; winder = ‘*Drehrad*’; to remain = ‘to stay’; to whir(r) = ‘*surren, brummen*’; reel = ‘*Spindel*’; avaricious = ‘*gierig*’; to value = ‘*Wert legen auf*’; to demand = ‘*verlangen*’; to moan = ‘*stöhnen*’; to inquire = ‘to ask for information’; ridiculous = ‘*lächerlich*’; doth = old use: ‘does’; to tear = ‘*reißen*’; asunder = ‘*auseinander*’.

Questions:

1. Why did the miller tell the king his daughter could turn straw into gold?
2. Which three deals did the girl make with the manikin?
3. Why did the king want to marry a poor miller’s daughter, not a noblewoman?
4. How did the girl find the manikin’s name?