

Rumpelstiltskin, Private Eye

by Jason Sanford

*From Newfangled Fairy Tales, Book
#2*

When Rumpelstiltskin is framed in a scam involving straw spun into gold, he must use his wits to clear his name and protect the king from greedy con artists.

Characters in Order of Appearance

Narrator* (or Rumpelstiltskin)

Rumpelstiltskin

Miller

Happy

Captain of the Guard

Miller's Daughter

The King

*You may want to divide the narrator's longer passages among several readers.

Narrator: The name on my door says it all-"Rumpelstiltskin, Private Eye." I'm the one people turn to when they're in a jam. That crazy wolf who blew down those pigs' houses? I caught him. When Jack stole the giant's golden-egg-laying hen, I tracked him down. 'Course, things don't always go so smoothly. Take my last case. What started out as a good mystery almost ended with me in the dungeon...all because of the captain of the guards, a miller's daughter, and a whole lot of straw.

It began on a rainy Friday afternoon. I was watching an old Sherlock Holmes movie on TV when the miller walked in the door. I recognized him right away; he and his daughter had been in the news a lot lately. Rumor had it she'd been spinning straw into gold for the king, but I didn't believe that for a minute.

Miller: I'm looking for a private eye.

Narrator: the miller said.

Rumpelstiltskin: That's me. Have a seat.

Narrator: I poured the miller a glass of soda pop. He was a scraggly looking man, clothes

patched and double patched. He needed a haircut worse than Rapunzel. The miller sipped his drink, then sighed.

Miller: It's my daughter.

Narrator: he said.

Miller: She's been kidnapped by the king.

Narrator: I whistled. The king was a little greedy-he said he'd marry anyone who could increase his stash of golden cash. Still, he was a nice guy and I had trouble believing that he would kidnap anyone.

Rumpelstiltskin: Can your daughter really spin straw into gold?

Narrator: The miller shook his head.

Miller: Of course not. What fairy tale do you think this is?

Rumpelstiltskin: Then why would the king kidnap her?

Miller: Well...

Narrator: the miller said, looking a little sheepish.

Miller: I was bowling with the captain of the palace guard, and I happened to mention how intelligent my daughter is, how beautiful she is, how...

Narrator: he paused.

Miller: How she can spin straw into gold. Next day she was gone.

Narrator: I groaned. There's no telling how many kids have gotten into trouble because their parents brag a little too much.

Miller: I guess the captain told the king what I said.

Narrator: the miller concluded.

Miller: Can you get my daughter out of the castle?

Narrator: I thought about it. I'd had a run-in with the captain of the guard before-caught him taking a bribe from Puss in Boots. It didn't surprise me that he was mixed up in this. But why would the king keep the miller's daughter in the castle if she couldn't spin straw into gold? Surely he'd have discovered that little fact by now.

I told the miller I'd take the case. I loved a good mystery, and this one was a puzzler. I shook hands with the miller, then ran to the castle. It was still raining, but I figured, hey, this'll save me the trouble of bathing tonight.

I stopped at the guard house by the drawbridge. My friend Happy was on duty. He and I had been the first really short people to make it through the Guard Academy. After I quit to become a private eye, Happy'd stayed on and became lieutenant. He said being a castle guard paid better than working for Snow White, and it was easier than being self-employed like me.

Happy: What's up, Rump?

Narrator: Happy asked.

Rumpelstiltskin: I need to see the king.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: Got a case that involves him.

Narrator: Happy shook his head.

Happy: No can do, bud. The captain of the guard said no one gets in today, and I'm doing just what he says. The captain's got a major case of hay fever and is in a nasty mood.

Rumpelstiltskin: Now why would hay fever be bothering him in the castle?

Narrator: Happy grinned.

Happy: The captain found someone to spin straw into gold for the king. His Highness was so excited he ordered us to bring him every bit of straw in the kingdom. One of the three pigs came by today and yelled at me because we even took down his straw house.

Rumpelstiltskin: Can the miller's daughter really spin straw into gold?

Narrator: I asked. Happy nodded.

Happy: Seen it myself-straw goes in the main storeroom at night, gold comes out the next day. The king's making a bundle.

Narrator: I was just about to ask Happy to let me in the castle to snoop around when the captain of the guard appeared.

Captain: What is *he* doing here?

Narrator: The captain barked at Happy.

Rumpelstiltskin: I'm looking for the miller's daughter.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: Have you seen her?

Narrator: The captain glared at me. As he leaned close to me, I caught a whiff of him. Phew! His uniform was filthy, and he smelled like rotten fish.

Captain: I don't talk to little creeps like you, Bumpelstiltskin.

Rumpelstiltskin: Rumpelstiltskin.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: The name's Rumpelstiltskin.

Narrator: The captain had never been able to remember my name.

Captain: Whatever.

Narrator: the captain said.

Captain: Happy, follow your orders. No visitors.

Narrator: He walked back into the castle. Happy sighed. He didn't like the captain either.

Rumpelstiltskin: Where's the miller's daughter?

Narrator: I asked.

Happy: She's in the storeroom,

Narrator: Happy whispered,

Happy: but you'd better stay away. You get anywhere near her and the captain will be after you like the Big Bad Wolf.

Narrator: I thanked Happy, then walked away. Things just didn't make sense. No one could spin straw into gold, but it sure sounded as if that were happening. I had to get in the castle to see for myself-but how? The castle walls were forty feet tall, and the rain made them as slick as ice. I looked down at the moat and saw water shooting out of a drainpipe. Bingo, I thought. Every room in the castle had a large drain on the floor to let water out.

Later that night, after the rain had stopped, I swam across the moat and squirmed like a worm through the drainpipe. Talk about disgusting-mushy garbage and rats everywhere. I even got a

bath in some old fish stew that someone had dumped down the drain. Soon the drainpipe widened into a sewer. It was so dark in there. I had to feel my way along the sewer wall. Suddenly I stumbled over some heavy bags of trash. One of the bags slumped onto me as I went sprawling in the muck. I wiggled out from under it and kept groping along. Eventually I found the pipe leading to the storeroom. As I eased up the room's drain cover, it clanked softly on the stone floor.

Miller's Daughter: Who's there?

Narrator: a voice snapped. I looked around and saw a young woman sitting by a spinning wheel in one corner of the room.

Rumpelstiltskin: My name's Rumpelstiltskin.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: I'm a private eye. Your father sent me to help you.

Miller's Daughter: Great.

Narrator: she said.

Miller's Daughter: I thought I'd be stuck in here until not-so-happily ever after.

Narrator: Suddenly she wrinkled her nose.

Miller's Daughter: Phew!

Narrator: she said, waving her hand at me.

Rumpelstiltskin: Yeah, well.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: Real-life rescues tend to be messier than in fairy tales.

Narrator: I crawled out of the drain and stood up.

Rumpelstiltskin: The cleanest escape would be out the window.

Narrator: I said as I approached her. Then it hit me: the miller's daughter had supposedly been spinning straw into gold all night, but there was no gold-and only a little straw-in the room.

Rumpelstiltskin: Aren't we missing something here?

Narrator: I asked.

Rumpelstiltskin: Where's all the straw and gold?

Miller's Daughter: Oh, the captain's already stashed the straw. As for the gold... well, I suppose you'll be taking the blame for that.

Narrator: Blame for what? I thought. Suddenly an alarm went off in my head. I'd been set up! I tried to run, but the woman grabbed me. She a full two feet taller than me and held me in a half nelson.

Miller's Daughter: I've got the thief!

Narrator: she yelled, tightening her grip on my neck.

Miller's Daughter: Guards! Guards!

Rumpelstiltskin: No!

Narrator: I choked.

Rumpelstiltskin: I'm here to help you.

Miller's Daughter: I don't need your help.

Narrator: she said.

Miller's Daughter: I'm going to be queen.

Narrator: I couldn't believe my ears. Before I could say anything, the storeroom door opened, and in walked the captain and a couple of guards.

Captain: Looks like we've caught the thief.

Narrator: the captain said.

Rumpelstiltskin: I'm not a thief.

Narrator: The captain chuckled.

Captain: You made it easy, Bumpeltallskin.

Narrator: he said.

Rumpelstiltskin: Rumpelstiltskin.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: The name's Rumpelstiltskin.

Captain: Whatever.

Narrator: the captain said. He pulled out a handkerchief and sneezed.

Captain: Anyway, I knew you couldn't ignore a good mystery.

Rumpelstiltskin: What's going on?

Narrator: I asked.

Rumpelstiltskin: Tricking the king into believing the miller's daughter can spin straw into gold isn't going to do anything for you.

Narrator: The captain laughed.

Captain: We'll see.

Narrator: he said.

Captain: Arrest him.

Narrator: Gee, I thought, the Wicked Witch hasn't got anything on this guy. Still, you don't get to be a P.I. if you can't improvise. I pushed my shoe under some straw and kicked it up into the captain's face. He exploded into a fit of coughs and sneezes as the other guards tried to help him.

Rumpelstiltskin: Gotta love hay fever.

Narrator: I said to the miller's daughter as I stomped on her foot. She screamed and let me go. I lunged for the window.

Captain: Get him!

Narrator: the captain gasped, but I was already jumping. It was forty feet down-right into the moat. Looks like I was finally getting my bath. I pulled myself out of the water and ran for my life.

The next morning I was on the lam. I hid in an apple tree on Old McDonald's farm, listening to my Walkman. The radio was full of news about me stealing twenty bags of gold from the king's treasury.

I groaned. It was a good scam. The captain was stealing gold from the treasury to convince

the king that the miller's daughter could spin straw into gold. With me accused of robbing the treasury, it would be hard to prove that no new gold had been added to it. Instead, the miller's daughter would marry the king, the captain would gain a fortune in stolen gold, and I'd be on my way to the dungeon.

I wanted to scream. I couldn't let the captain get away with this, but what could I do? It would only be a matter of time until the guards found me.

Suddenly it hit me. Actually, it bit me. A horse thrust its head into my apple tree to nibble an apple and got me instead. I fell out of the apple tree and landed hard on my butt. As I rubbed my bruised leg, I felt something in my pocket that hadn't been there the day before. I pulled it out: a gold coin. How had that gotten in there?

Then I smiled. All at once, I knew how to expose the captain as a thief, stop the king from marrying a con artist, and clear my name. The radio said the king's wedding would be that Saturday in the castle. The entire kingdom was invited, and I figured it wouldn't be too hard to sneak in. Nobody would expect that I'd be dumb enough to return to the scene of the crime.

On the wedding day, I hid until the miller and his daughter were marching down the aisle. Then, with a yell I jumped up on the pipe organ. That wedding went quiet faster than Little Bo Peep lost her sheep. The king and his bride were horrified. The captain of the guard ran toward me.

Captain: You're under arrest, Wrinklesoftskin!

Narrator: he shouted.

Rumpelstiltskin: Rumpelstiltskin!

Narrator: I yelled.

Rumpelstiltskin: The name's Rumpelstiltskin!

Captain: Whatever.

Narrator: the captain said. Behind him, the wedding guests whispered excitedly. Well, I'd give them even more to whisper about.

Rumpelstiltskin: I have come to throw myself on the mercy of Your Majesty.

Narrator: I said, bowing low.

Rumpelstiltskin: And to restore the stolen gold.

Narrator: As you can imagine, that got the greedy king's attention. He signaled for silence,

then looked at me.

King: Very well.

Narrator: he said.

King: Please tell me where my gold is.

Rumpelstiltskin: I'll do better than that; I'll show you.

Narrator: The captain of the guard started to protest, but the king hushed him. He wanted his gold back. Figuring that he still had the best of me, the captain gave in. Happy came up to tie my hands.

Happy: I can't believe you did it.

Narrator: Happy said with dismay.

Rumpelstiltskin: Wait and see.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: I might surprise you yet.

Narrator: Happy finished tying my hands, then dragged me before the king.

King: Now,

Narrator: the king said,

King: lead us to the gold.

Narrator: I started walking toward the throne room.

King: Where are you going?

Narrator: the king asked.

Rumpelstiltskin: The gold's in the castle.

Narrator: I said. The captain of the guard and the miller's daughter exchanged worried looks, but the king didn't notice. He really wanted his gold back. So I took off, with the king, Happy, the miller and his daughter, and the captain trooping along behind me. I kept close to the captain. We walked through the throne room, past the treasury, down into the kitchen. The captain was starting to get restless.

Captain: You are trying my patience, Stumblestiltskin.

Narrator: he said.

Rumpelstiltskin: The name's... oh, never mind.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: The gold is nearby; I just forgot which room.

Narrator: We descended a stairway and walked down a long hall. This was taking longer than I'd thought it would. I was just getting nervous when the captain pulled out a handkerchief, took a deep breath, and sneezed.

Rumpelstiltskin: The gold's in there.

Narrator: I said, pointing to the nearest door. It led to the dungeon.

Captain: Preposterous.

Narrator: the captain blustered, but he wasn't in charge here.

King: Open the door.

Narrator: the king ordered. Happy marched forward and swung the door wide open. We crowded in to stare at... straw. There were piles and piles of straw. At first no one understood.

King: Where's the gold?

Narrator: the king asked. Then Happy smiled, and turned toward the king.

Happy: The captain said all the straw in the kingdom had been turned into gold.

Narrator: Happy said.

Happy: If that's true, what's this straw doing here?

Narrator: The captain sneezed.

Rumpelstiltskin: The miller's daughter didn't spin any straw into gold.

Narrator: I said.

Rumpelstiltskin: The captain swapped the straw for gold from the treasury, then blamed his

theft on me. The two were working in cahoots to rob you, Your Majesty.

King: Then where is my gold?

Narrator: the king asked.

Rumpelstiltskin: Hidden in the sewer under the castle.

Narrator: I said. Then I pulled out the gold coin I'd found in my pocket.

Rumpelstiltskin: I tripped over the bags climbing up here to "rescue" the miller's daughter, and this slid into my pocket. Then I remembered how the captain smelled like rotten fish the other day-just like I did after crawling through the sewer. I figure he was hiding the gold there until the coast was clear.

Narrator: The king frowned at the captain and the miller's daughter.

Miller's Daughter: It wasn't my fault.

Narrator: the miller's daughter stammered.

Miller's Daughter: My father and the captain made me do it.

Narrator: Well that did it. The miller, his daughter, and the captain began yelling and arguing like you wouldn't believe. There was no honor among these thieves. The king ordered Happy to throw them all in the dungeon. Happy and I then crawled into the sewer and retrieved all the stolen gold. The next day I came to the castle.

Rumpelstiltskin: Congrats on the promotion.

Narrator: I told Happy. He'd been bumped up to captain, what with the former captain doing time.

Happy: Thanks.

Narrator: he said.

Happy: Glad to know that you're not a thief.

Rumpelstiltskin: How's the king doing, now that he knows his gold-spinning bride was a fake?

Narrator: Happy shrugged.

Happy: Actually, he's feeling great. He just heard about this guy named Midas, who has the

golden touch. The king thinks he'll be rolling in gold before the week is out.

Narrator: I groaned. It looked as if the king would be keeping me busy for the next few happily ever afters-very busy. And that's nothing to sneeze at.

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