

Spinning Gold: A Fairy Tale

by Janet Harper

I. Caught

They had me by sundown,
scythed and gathered

floored, choked,
ordered, *Spin it.*

Slammed and stacked
behind a hopeless task

I watched a full moon
floating over stalks.

Tightened and trapped,
I gave a strangled cry

answered by a crook'd man
a stranger by my side.

Rescued by his game,
I watched the trick he played,

harvest of my father's boast
a bitter, gilded trade.

II. The deal

A king, a poor man
and a woman's life.

*Turn straw to gold
and you can be my wife.*

*If you fail, you die
your choice, my knife.*

But always on the market floor
another deal is another door.

*I'll do this for you
only taking what I'm due*

pay what you can,
smiled the little man.

When liberty's lost
who can count the cost?

For gold from corn,
I promised my first-born.

III. Waiting

So time spun on
and I held my wealth,

cradled and bound
in soft and silken threads.

Fed and warm,
I waited for my year to turn,

seeing in each joy, the debt,
in each stitch, the stab.

Waiting for the shadow cast
when he would come to call at last

to ask for what
was his and never mine,

to stake his claim
on what I'd dared to own.

I nursed and tended,
- love and anger sewn.

IV. Winning

The spinner turns the wheel,
and drives the fibre home.

A woman's work is
coarse and strong.

I called him back
with my siren song.

I watched the spindles run,
and let my yarn draw in.

Your name is Rumpelstiltskin
was the net I caught him in.

The spinner turns the wheel
but he'd forgotten that.

He spewed and fumed
and I kept my prize.

The wheel turns.
For now, the spinner survives.