

Elsa – the beauty in the tower

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess called Else.

She lived in a big castle on an island just off the coast with her stepmother. Her real mother had died giving birth to Else and her father had married again. Her father, the king, had gone to a faraway war and had been killed.

Else was rarely allowed off the island and her schooling was undertaken by a visiting teacher who she adored. He was old and wise and so knowledgeable on just about everything.

Else had always been a pretty child but as she grew older so her beauty increased. Her stepmother, on the other hand, was growing older, and became more and more jealous of her stepdaughter and her long flowing golden locks, deep blue eyes, and the fairest skin you could imagine.

In the castle where they lived, all the talk was about Else's beauty which infuriated the stepmother even more. Finally she forbid her daughter from having any contact with the outside world and, as a curse for her beauty, was banished to a tower in the castle with just a spinning wheel for company. So Else spent her long days alone spinning thread.

Rumour of the princess's beauty circulated around the kingdom and word reached a dashing knight who himself was seeking a bride.

He became determined to find the girl who was described as the most beautiful in all the Kingdom.

He saddled his horse and with his trusty squire, he left his castle to seek the girl of his dreams.

For three days they rode stopping at every village they came to, but no one knew where the girl lived - only that it was on a castle on an island.

Meanwhile, Else's skill in spinning had produced thread of the very highest quality and the wicked stepmother decided she would sell it. The nearest village was just across the causeway which separated the castle from the mainland.

The very fine thread soon became in great demand by the villagers. The stepmother would put on a disguise, so that no-one would know she was the queen, and take Else's thread across to the village market every morning in a boat rowed by one of the castle's footmen. She would return with coins from the sale of the thread which she placed in a large chest in her bedroom.

Else pined for love. Her beloved teacher would often read to her stories of handsome princes on white horses. Oh how she wished she could meet such a man. Instead she was forced to make thread alone, her teacher now banished from the castle.

One day Else looked across the water and could see two lovers walking together on the foreshore on the far bank. She stopped her spinning and watched as they kissed tenderly. She ached for such romance. She wrapped her arms around herself and imagined they were the arms of a dashing knight who had come to rescue her from her incarceration.

She sighed and went back to her spinning

Meanwhile the knight had arrived in the village and enquired in the local hostelry if anyone knew the whereabouts of this beautiful girl. He offered a full shilling to anyone with information.

The landlord of the tavern heard of the reward and sat with the knight and his squire. He gave them both a flagon of ale and then told the knight about the girl in the tower.

'She lives in the castle,' he said. 'Rumour round here has it she's the most beautiful girl in all the kingdom,' he tells the knight.

'How do I reach the castle?' asks the knight.

'Twice a day when the tide is out you can cross on horseback,' said the landlord. 'But beware, if you get caught as the tide is coming in you will be swept away out to sea.'

The knight and his squire spent the night in the tavern and next morning they rode their horses to the causeway which led to the castle.

The tide was out.

The knight told his squire to wait for him and he urged his horse forward over the muddy causeway to the castle.

He reached the large gate and rapped on the wooden structure with the handle of his sword. A footman slowly opened the door.

'What can I do for a fine knight such as yourself?' asked the footman.

'I'm looking for the girl whom I'm told weaves the fine thread.'

'Then you are mistaken, sir, there's no girl here that weaves thread,' says the footman, and tries to shut the door.

But the knight is too quick and swiftly extracts his sword from its scabbard.

He presses the sword against the man's throat.

'If you don't tell me, you will die,' says the knight. 'Tell me and I will reward you well.'

The knight withdraws his sword and takes out a gold coin.

'She will have me whipped if I tells thee,' says the footman.

'Who will?'

'Her majesty, the Queen... her stepmother.'

'So she is here.'

'Aye, she's locked in the tower.'

'Here's a gold coin, take me to her.'

'Aye, but we must be quick her majesty has gone to the village to sell thread, she will return quite soon.'

The knight gives the man the coin and follows his direction to the tower where the girl is incarcerated and climbs the 300 stone steps. He reaches the door but it's locked.

He knocks with the handle of his sword.

'Who's there?' asks the girl.

'It's Sir William of Grantchester, I've come to take you away from your prison.'

'Oh you are the answer to my prayers.'

'Where is the key?'

'My stepmother keeps it on a chord around her neck.'

'How can I release you?'

For a moment they are at a loss but then the girl has an idea - the long needles of the spinning wheel.

They might just work

She smashes the spinning wheel to the ground and the spell is broken.

The needles fall off.

She picks one up and, with guidance from the knight, she lifts the lock.

The door opens.

The knight is stunned by the girl's beauty; the rumours were true.

She too finds the knight the most handsome man she has ever seen.

They quickly go down the steps.

He helps her onto his horse and they leave the castle. They reach the causeway, but the tide has turned

'I can't go back.' says the girl. I'd sooner die.'

The knight eases the horse gently into the rising water.

The water is coming in fast and the horse is struggling against the force of the water.

But then the knight spots a figure coming towards them in a boat. It's his squire. He quickly reaches them and they are saved from certain death.

The knight and the princess jump into the boat and the squire rows back to the village with the knight holding the reigns of the horse.

They reach safety on the other bank.

Before they had time to make their escape, they see her stepmother walking towards her boat where the footman is waiting for her. Else hides behind the knight's horse until she sees her stepmother get on the boat to go back to the castle.

Halfway across, the rowing boat suddenly capsizes and her stepmother is thrown into the swirling tide and is never seen again

The Knight takes Else, the most beautiful girl in the world, back to his castle where they live happily ever after.

The End

