

Spinners Study Guide

Spinners by Donna Jo Napoli

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Spinners Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1, Young Love: Chapters 1-4.....	5
Part 2, Survival: Chapters 5-10.....	7
Part 3, Yarn: Chapters 11-13.....	9
Part 4, Gold: Chapters 14-20.....	10
Part 5, Preparation: Chapters 21-28.....	12
Part 6, Names: Chapters 29-33.....	14
Characters.....	16
Objects/Places.....	19
Themes.....	21
Style.....	23
Quotes.....	25
Topics for Discussion.....	26



Plot Summary

Spinners by Donna Jo Napoli and Richard Tchen is a new take on the fairy tale Rumpelstiltskin. In this novel, a young man falls in love with a beautiful girl, but her father does not think a tailor can provide as well for his daughter as a miller. The young man insists that he can and is given the chance to prove himself by creating a dress of gold for his beloved. To do this, the young man works night and day spinning straw into gold, but at a price. In the end, the young woman chooses the miller over the tailor, then dies giving birth to the tailor's daughter. Years later, the man learns that his daughter has become a celebrated spinner but that her father has boasted to the king, causing the young girl's life to be placed in danger. The tailor saves his daughter, but at a price that will lead to ultimate disaster. Spinners is a fascinating retelling of a story that gives motive to the actions of a dark and misunderstood character.

The young tailor has finally found his love for a young maiden returned. They spend several afternoons enjoying their new love before the tailor finally asks for the maiden's hand in marriage from her father. However, the tailor learns that the miller has also asked for the maiden's hand and the father is considering this request because of the future the miller can give his child. To win the father's favor, the young tailor promises to create a wedding dress of gold for his young love. Unfortunately, the tailor does not have the money he needs to buy the gold thread required. Instead, the young tailor steals a spinning wheel from an old woman and spins straw into gold. However, the work causes the young tailor's leg to cramp, leaving it permanently drawn up against his hip.

The young maiden loves her dress, but she will not marry the tailor while he is crippled. The young tailor begs her to wait a few months, but the young woman is pregnant and cannot wait. In the end, the young woman marries the miller. The tailor pays the young man working at the mill for information on the young woman, learning when her time to give birth comes near. When the tailor is sure the young woman is to give birth, he arranges to meet her in secret. The young woman is disgusted by the man who was once her lover, due to the twisting that has taken place in his damaged body. The man gives the woman the ring he intended to give her on their wedding day and is rewarded when the young woman calls him a cruel, made up name. A short time later, the woman dies in childbirth.

The tailor leaves the village, going from home to home where he exchanges room and board for custom made clothing. At the same time, the tailor's daughter grows alone in the home of her father, the miller. Once, while the miller is drunk, the daughter cuts his hair and shaves his beard in hopes that he will gain the affections of a single woman in town. Instead, the miller becomes ashamed of his look and takes to his bed for many months. The mill shuts down and the girl is forced to find a way to survive on her own. The girl begins spinning threads for her friend's mother, helping her sell the yarn in the market. In time the girl becomes an expert spinner, creating yarns that are unique and high in demand.



The tailor has returned to the village and given shelter in a deserted cabin in the mountains by a servant of the king in exchange for him spinning the king's yarns. When the tailor learns of this girl who is creating such unique yarns, the tailor asks the king's servant to exchange his spinning wheel with hers. In time, the king learns of the girl's yarns and has her come to the castle. The miller boasts that his daughter can spin straw into gold. The king shuts her in a room and tells her if she does not make gold he will kill her. The tailor comes to her aid, spinning straw into gold three times for her in exchange for two pieces of her mother's jewelry and her first born child.

The young girl marries the king soon afterward, but is afraid to become pregnant. When her first child is born, the tailor comes to her and asks for the child. When the queen refuses, the tailor gives her three chances to guess the made up name her mother gave him sixteen years before. The queen is successful on the final day thanks to the king's spies, but she has also guessed that this twisted man is her father. Too late, the man rushes away in a rage, leaving behind the twisted leg that cheated him of his family so many years before.



Part 1, Young Love: Chapters 1-4

Part 1, Young Love: Chapters 1-4 Summary

This novel is a new take on the traditional tale of Rumpelstiltskin, a twisted monster that spun gold out of straw in exchange for a young maiden's first born child.

Chapter 1. The tailor and his love lay naked in the straw of a farmer's barn and discuss his planned meeting with her father. The young maiden warns the young tailor that her father wants her to marry someone else, but the tailor is so confident in their love that he is not concerned. After the young maiden leaves, the tailor is caught by the farmer and finds himself forced to buy straw to cover his reasons for being in the barn. The next day, the tailor meets with the young maiden's father, but learns the father is concerned that a simple tailor cannot provide the life he wants for his daughter, but the miller can despite being something of a drunk. The tailor convinces the father that he can provide for his daughter and will prove it by creating a wedding dress of gold before the end of the month.

Chapter 2. For a week the tailor attempts to find a way to buy the gold thread necessary to create the dress, but all his money has been spent. The tailor is determined, however, and he goes to a local spinner and asks to borrow her low wheel. The woman does not want to lend the wheel, so the man takes it against her will, promising to return it in a week. At home, the tailor tries many things to spin a yarn that looks like gold, finally desperate enough to try straw. After the man cries on the straw, he is able to spin it into gold, creating a beautiful gold yarn that he is able to turn into a cloth. However, the tailor's leg has cramped from the hard work and refuses to straighten again.

Chapter 3. As the man plans and creates the wedding dress, his beloved comes to his home and tries to massage the cramp from his leg. The more the girl rubs his leg, the tighter the leg seems to become trapped in its cramp. As the tailor works, the girl tries remedy after remedy. Finally the maiden stops coming to the tailor's home. The tailor assures the girl that the cramp will eventually go away, that they simply must wait till then. The tailor tells the same to the girl's father when he shows him the dress. The tailor then attempts to return the wheel to the old woman he took it from, but she does not want it. To show he is honest, the young tailor leaves the gold dress with the old woman. At home, the tailor runs into his beloved and she tells him she cannot wait until his leg is straight again.

Chapter 4. The young woman has married the miller and now lives with him in his mill while the young tailor continues to live alone in his house with his twisted leg. The young boy who works at the mill comes and tells the tailor about his beloved frequently. On the day the woman is due to give birth, the young man comes and tells the tailor he can find her alone in the garden. The tailor gives the young woman the ring he had intended to give her on their wedding day and vows his continuing love. The woman



laughs and calls the man by a cruel, made up name. Later that day, the young woman dies in childbirth and the tailor leaves town.

Part 1, Young Love: Chapters 1-4 Analysis

These chapters introduce one of the main characters of the book. This character is never named beyond the title of tailor. This man is very talented, able to spin yarn out of thread, to create cloth out of the yarn, and to create clothing out of the cloth. The tailor has fallen in love with a young spinner who he plans to marry and incorporate into his business. However, the girl's father is worried that a simple tailor, one with competition all across town, will not be able to provide for his daughter as the miller, one of only two millers in town, can.

The tailor does all he can to make sure his beloved becomes his wife, but in doing so he uses a stolen spinning wheel that has somehow caused his leg to become irrevocably twisted and drawn up against his body. The maiden he would like to marry appears to be shallow, unwilling to marry a deformed man. Instead, the maiden insists that he fix his leg and do it quickly. The reader realizes in the final sentences of chapter three that this young woman has become pregnant by the tailor and she must marry soon before her condition becomes obvious.

The tailor continues to suffer the loss of his love and his leg throughout the winter. Finally the tailor tells his love how he feels and she makes fun of him. Heartbroken and angry, the tailor leaves the village after the death of his beloved in childbirth. The tailor has suffered and been wronged, leaving the reader curious if he will continue to hold on to this anger until he becomes bitter, or if he might one day claim his child.



Part 2, Survival: Chapters 5-10

Part 2, Survival: Chapters 5-10 Summary

Chapter 5. Saskia, the miller's daughter, is playing with her girlfriend when they discuss her father. Saskia gets the idea that if her father cut his hair and shaved, he might attract a new wife. That night, when the miller comes home from drinking, Saskia and her girlfriend, Dagmar, shave him and cut his hair. After Dagmar leaves, Saskia worries that the haircut is not even and attempts to fix it. Instead, Saskia accidentally cuts her father's cheek.

Chapter 6. When Saskia's father wakes the following day, he believes he has been the victim of a bad joke. The miller becomes depressed and refuses to get out of bed. A month passes and miller remains in bed. The mill closes and all their employees abandon them. Saskia finds herself forced to sell herbs and vegetables from her own garden at the market to survive.

Chapter 7. The tailor is sitting on the side of the road when a poor farmer and his son come across him. The tailor convinces the farmer to take him home and give him room and board in exchange for custom made clothing. Over the next few weeks, the tailor feels as though he has become a part of the family. However, the tailor learns when the father and son plan to take a trip without him that he is simply seen as a servant. The tailor leaves the family that night.

Chapter 8. The tailor makes his way back to his home village over the next few weeks, hoping to find refuge in his brother's home. However, the tailor discovers that his brother is gone and his sister-in-law has remarried. The tailor goes to market to sell some of his yarns and is noticed by a plain, middle-aged woman who insists on seeing him create some of his fine yarns. The woman, Elke, tells him that she works for the king and that he is to become the king's chief spinner. Elke places the tailor in an isolated home in the woods and becomes his only connection to the outside world.

Chapter 9. Saskia has begun helping Dagmar's mother sell her yarn in order to make enough money to feed herself and her still depressed father. Saskia asks Dagmar's mother to teach her how to spin thread into yarn. As Saskia learns, she uses her mother's low spinning wheel.

Chapter 10. Saskia has been selling her own yarn and some of her father's gin in order to survive. One day in the middle of winter, Saskia's father wakes and discovers that his cellar is nearly empty of gin. This shocks the miller into sobering up for the first time in nearly a year. A few days later, Saskia's father takes her yarn to market in order to help.



Part 2, Survival: Chapters 5-10 Analysis

In this section of the novel, the reader gets to know Saskia, the daughter of the tailor and his young lover. Saskia knows nothing of the tailor since her mother died in childbirth and believes the drunken miller is her father. As Saskia reaches puberty, she finds herself forced to become mother and father to herself, providing for herself while her father suffers a depression she set off in bed. Saskia proves herself capable, however, becoming an expert spinner, better than her mother before her. In fact, the only spinner who can rival Saskia is her unknown father, the tailor.

The tailor, who has searched for love and acceptance on the road, returns to his home village more broken and angry than before. The tailor now lives in a cabin in the woods, making fine yarns for the king, but hiding from the world with a middle-aged servant as his only contact with the outside world. The tailor has seen his daughter, but is unaware of who she is and at this point is unconcerned. The tailor is angry at the world for shunning him because of his deformity and wishes harm to all in revenge for his emotional pain. This sets up a situation that leaves the reader unsure the tailor could ever come to love and accept anyone thanks to the treatment he received at the hands of Saskia's mother.



Part 3, Yarn: Chapters 11-13

Part 3, Yarn: Chapters 11-13 Summary

Chapter 11. Elke comes to visit the tailor often in his isolated cabin. The tailor meets her outside, loath to have her inside his sparse little home, even though he has come to believe that Elke has some feeling for him. One day, Elke brings the tailor a skein of Saskia's yarn, convinced he would get a kick out of the beauty of the yarn. The tailor asks about the spinner, and when he learns that she is miller's daughter, the tailor realizes they are talking about his own daughter. The tailor insists that Elke contact the girl and trade his spinning wheel for hers, desiring to touch the wheel in the same places where his dead love's fingers once touched it.

Chapter 12. Elke gives the tailor's wheel to Saskia's father and asks him to exchange the wheels. The miller sees it as a good trade and encourages Saskia to do it. Saskia does not want to give up her mother's wheel, however, a wheel that is worn where her mother touched it and on which she has created so many unique yarns. However, Saskia cannot resist spinning a small number of threads on the tailor's wheel. As she does this, the miller takes Saskia's wheel away. Angry, Saskia promises herself that she will save up money and buy the wheel back as quickly as possible.

Chapter 13. The tailor asks Elke many questions about his daughter. Elke believes he loves this girl he has not met, but the tailor still loves the child's mother as he did so many years before.

Part 3, Yarn: Chapters 11-13 Analysis

These chapters bring Saskia and the tailor together in ways that Saskia is not even aware of. The tailor learns that Saskia is creating unique yarns that are getting the attention of the entire village. This brings to mind the spinning wheel that the tailor's beloved once used and he asks Elke to exchange his wheel with Saskia's, leaving him able to touch his beloved's wheel where she once touched it, something that Saskia too finds emotionally overwhelming. This shows the reader that the tailor is still deeply in love with his young lover despite what she did to him at the end of their relationship, but that he is not overwhelmed with concern for his own child beyond his curiosity about her.



Part 4, Gold: Chapters 14-20

Part 4, Gold: Chapters 14-20 Summary

Chapter 14. Saskia has gone into business for herself, something that has brought she and Dagmar closer together on the even of Dagmar's engagement. One day, while working on a new yarn, Saskia learns that her father has arranged for her to meet the king.

Chapter 15. The king inspects Saskia's yarns, but he is clearly not impressed with her unique combination of vegetation and thread. Desperate for his daughter to be declared the king's spinner, the miller claims that Saskia can spin straw into gold. The miller claims that Saskia's mother once told him about a man who did this and created a gold wedding dress. Saskia, however, knows it cannot be done.

Chapter 16. The king locks Saskia in a small room filled with straw and threatens to kill her if she has not turned it all into gold by morning. Saskia resigns herself to die.

Chapter 17. Elke tells the tailor about Saskia's situation. The tailor asks Elke to sneak him into the room where Saskia is imprisoned. Saskia gives the tailor her mother's shell necklace, a necklace she does not realize the tailor gave to his lover many years before. The tailor cries over the straw and spins it into gold for his daughter.

Chapter 18. The king is impressed with the gold and asks Saskia if she is a magician. The king then moves Saskia into a larger room with more straw to be turned into gold. Again Saskia is desperate and again the tailor comes. This time Saskia gives him her mother's ring, a gold ring the tailor gave his lover the day Saskia was born.

Chapter 19. A second time the king is impressed. The king moves Saskia into a third room, the largest of them all, and promises again to kill her if she fails him. This time, however, Saskia has nothing to offer the tailor.

Chapter 20. When the tailor comes a third time, Saskia explains she has nothing left to give him. The tailor comments on her healthy body, making Saskia think he wants to have sex with her in exchange for creating the gold. This deeply offends the tailor, causing him to ask for something that is so outrageous he cannot believe his own words. The tailor asks for Saskia's first born child in exchange for spinning this finally room of straw into gold.

Part 4, Gold: Chapters 14-20 Analysis

This section of the novel takes the reader to the beginning of the original story of Rumpelstiltskin. Saskia, a young, beautiful spinner, goes to the king's castle where her father convinces the king she can spin straw into gold. The miller explains this by telling Saskia that her mother once claimed a young tailor did this very thing to make her a



gold wedding dress. However, the miller never saw the dress and does not know if the story is true. The miller believes, though, if the story is true, his daughter should be able to do it too.

Saskia is desperate because she knows the king will kill her if she fails to create the gold. When the tailor hears her story, he rushes to save his daughter. The tailor is proud of his actions in saving his child twice, but the third time he believes he sees in his daughter the same repulsion he once saw in her mother. Convinced his own daughter is no better than her callous mother, the tailor asks for her first born child. The tailor hopes that this baby will accept him because he will know nothing else.



Part 5, Preparation: Chapters 21-28

Part 5, Preparation: Chapters 21-28 Summary

Chapter 21. The king is so happy with his rooms filled with gold that he asks Saskia to marry him. Saskia refuses, still angry that he threatened to kill her.

Chapter 22. Saskia returns home and discovers that her father now wants for her to spin straw into gold for him. Saskia runs away and ends up at the home of Dagmar's family. When she speaks with Dagmar, Saskia learns that Dagmar's mother wants her to marry her one unmarried son. It seems everyone has heard about Saskia's experience at the castle and wants her to make straw into gold for them. Saskia decides she must run away and go where no one knows about her. On the road, Saskia runs into the king and he takes her back to the castle where he burns her wheel to prove he will never ask her to spin straw into gold again.

Chapter 23. Saskia has resigned herself to marriage to the king. However, Saskia uses vinegar to wash herself each morning in the hopes of preventing pregnancy. Saskia does not love the king, but she knows her best protection against his wrath should he ever learn her secrets is love, so she does all she can to make him love her. At the same time, Saskia finds herself lonely, so she asks Dagmar to the castle. In fact, Saskia makes Dagmar and her baker husband the royal bakers so that they can spend every day together.

Chapter 24. Elke finally tells the tailor how she feels for him. The tailor has known all along and might have reciprocated once, but now he is completely focused on the grandchild he will soon have care of and decides to deny himself Elke's affections.

Chapter 25. After a year and a half, Saskia finally becomes pregnant. While Dagmar is thrilled for her, Saskia is frightened. Saskia asks that the miller be watched so she might be kept up to date on his health. Saskia then thinks that perhaps the strange spinner might live near the castle, so she asks the head servant and guard to keep an eye out for him.

Chapter 26. The tailor has fixed up his home and begun to get his own body into top shape in anticipation of taking custody of his grandchild. As he finishes hanging shutters, Elke arrives and tells him Saskia is pregnant. The tailor is pleased with this news and is unbothered by the news that Saskia has asked the guards and servants to keep an eye out for the tailor.

Chapter 27. Months pass and Saskia continues to fear for her unborn child.

Chapter 28. The tailor continues to prepare for the infant and even plans to leave the village for a year so that Elke will not guess what it is he plans to do.



Part 5, Preparation: Chapters 21-28 Analysis

Saskia finds herself left in a world where she must leave all she knows or marry the king in order to find peace. In the end, Saskia marries the king when he promises not to force her to spin straw into gold ever again. Now Saskia worries about becoming pregnant and being forced to give up her first born child. Saskia takes action against this, but finds she cannot escape the inevitable.

The tailor is happier than he has been since he first found himself receiving the return of love from the maiden he wished to marry. The tailor has finally found someone who can love him for who he is, his own infant grandchild. The tailor makes plans and prepares himself and his home for this new child, giving up love with Elke in order to have this child's unconditional love. All the tailor wants is to be loved despite his deformed body. The reader suspects, however, this will never happen.



Part 6, Names: Chapters 29-33

Part 6, Names: Chapters 29-33 Summary

Chapter 29. After the birth of her daughter, Saskia tries to convince herself that the tailor will not show up to take her child. Unfortunately, the tailor does show up. Saskia tries to bribe him, but he refuses to be bribed. Instead, the tailor offers to give Saskia three chances to figure out his true name, the name Saskia's mother called him before her death.

Chapter 30. On the first night, Saskia goes through every name of the villagers she can think of, but none of them are the tailor's name. The tailor laughs, convinced she will never figure out his name.

Chapter 31. On the second night, Saskia goes through every foreign name she can think of. When the tailor leaves, Saskia cannot stop thinking of him, or the fact that he called her daughter. Saskia calls for the miller and tells him all that has happened, hoping he might know something that will help her. Elke overhears Saskia's story and reveals that the man who has come to visit her is the tailor, a man who lives in an isolated cabin outside of the village with only her as a visitor. Saskia immediately sends guards to watch this man and to figure out what his name is.

Chapter 32. The tailor finishes his preparations and anticipates taking the child that night. As he anticipates seeing his grandchild, the tailor sings a song in which he says aloud the name Saskia's mother called him.

Chapter 33. Saskia asks the tailor many questions when he comes, but he taunts her, so convinced is he that she will not be able to guess his name. Saskia, however, speaks his name. The tailor becomes so enraged that he stomps on the floor, forcing his bad leg through a hole in the floor. The tailor then leaves the room, leaving his leg behind.

Part 6, Names: Chapters 29-33 Analysis

In this section, Saskia has given birth and the tailor has come for her first born. Saskia is desperate to save her child, however, and begs the tailor to allow her to do so. The tailor gives her an opportunity to save her child by challenging her to guess the odd name her mother gave to him the day of Saskia's birth.

Saskia seeks to learn all she can about the tailor. Saskia learns that the tailor has been living in the forest with Elke as his only companion. While Saskia tries to save her child, she also finds herself feeling sorry for this strange little man. Not only this, but Saskia has figured out that the tailor is her father. Saskia wants to make things right between her and this strange man, but before she can get this across to him, he learns that she knows the truth and runs away in a fit of anger. It turns out that anger is the strongest

emotion the tailor has and it is this anger that is his ultimate downfall, not love or heartbreak.



Characters

Saskia

Saskia is the young daughter of a miller and his wife. Saskia's mother died when she was born; therefore, Saskia has never known of her mother's love affair with a young tailor or that the miller is not her father. Saskia only knows that her mother was once a spinner and she takes up that profession when her father falls into a depression and cannot care for her any longer.

Saskia learns early how to stand up for herself and to care for herself. However, when her father boasts to the king that Saskia can spin straw into gold, Saskia finds herself trapped in a situation in which she is forced to rely on another. Saskia gives all she holds dear to the tailor when he comes to spin the gold for her. On the third day, Saskia has nothing left but herself to offer the tailor. Instead, the tailor asks for her first born child. Saskia uses every resource left to her to stop this from happening, learning to late that the tailor is her biological father.

The Tailor

The tailor is one of several tailors who live in this small village. The tailor has loved a fair maiden for most of his life and is thrilled when she finally returns his love. However, when the tailor goes to ask the maiden's father for her hand in marriage, the father claims that the tailor will never be able to give his daughter the life she deserves. Instead, the father wants the maiden to marry one of only two local millers. This man can give his daughter a life of luxury.

To convince the father to allow him to marry his daughter, the tailor agrees to make her a dress of gold. However, unable to afford to buy gold thread, the tailor steals a spinning wheel that turns out to be magical and makes straw into gold. This causes the tailor's leg to cramp up and become deformed. Although the tailor makes the dress and presents it to the maiden's father, the marriage does not take place because of the revulsion the cramped leg causes the fair maiden.

The tailor becomes bitter in his heart break and leaves the village for more than ten years. When he returns, the tailor hides out in a cabin in the woods, his only contact with the outside world a servant from the king's castle. The servant, Elke, tells the tailor what is going on out in the real world, including news of his own daughter, even though Elke does not know who she is. The tailor sees hope in his daughter, especially when she agrees to give him her first born child. The tailor believes an infant is the only person in the world who can truly love him despite his deformities. However, his daughter cheats him out of this opportunity when she comes up with the name her mother gave him on the day of Saskia's birth.



The Miller

The miller is one of only two mill owners in the small village where the novel takes place. For this reason, the miller gets more than half the business in the village. The miller is a wealthy man, but he is also a loner and a drunk. The miller marries the tailor's lover and becomes a single father when she dies giving birth to the tailor's daughter, Saskia. When Saskia is a teenager, she cuts the miller's hair, setting off a depression that puts him to bed for nearly a year. The mill shuts down and Saskia is forced to fend for herself. When the miller finally comes out of his depression he is content to live off of Saskia's earnings with her yarn. Not only this, but the miller arranges for Saskia to meet the king, bragging to him that Saskia can spin straw into gold, creating the situation that forces Saskia to offer her first born child to the tailor.

Dagmar

Dagmar is Saskia's young friend. Dagmar is not as beautiful as Saskia and she cannot spin yarn as well as Saskia, causing some friction in their relationship. However, Dagmar becomes engaged to and marries the local baker, taking her out of competition with Saskia. When Saskia becomes queen, Saskia makes Dagmar and her husband the royal bakers so that she and Dagmar can spend every day together.

Elke

Elke is a middle aged woman who is the head servant for the king. Elke discovers the tailor in the market and is so impressed by his yarn that she makes him the royal spinner. Elke hides him away in a cabin in the woods, aware that he will not want to live in the castle with the others. Elke becomes the tailor's only companion for the next several years. In fact, Elke falls in love with the tailor and helps him when he wants to sneak into the castle to be with his daughter. In the end, Elke gives Saskia information to help her outwit the tailor and stop him from stealing her child.

The King

The king is a young man who is spoiled and likes to have unusual things around him. When the king learns of Saskia's skills with yarn, he wants to meet her. The king is not impressed with her yarns until her father tells him that she can spin straw into gold. The king forces Saskia to do this for three nights, each night a bigger room than the night before. When these three nights are over, the king convinces Saskia to marry him.

Dagmar's Mother

Dagmar's mother is a spinner of common yarns. Dagmar's mother shows Saskia how to spin her own yarns, creating a situation in which Saskia is able to learn to make



beautiful and unusual yarns. When Dagmar's mother learns that Saskia can spin straw into gold, she wants Saskia to marry her son.

The Young Maiden

Saskia's mother is a young woman when she falls in love with the tailor. They have a love affair in which their relationship is consummated in secret to protect the maiden from unkind rumors. The young maiden is confident her father will allow her to marry the tailor until the miller makes a proposition for her hand. The young maiden sees the tailor as her great love until his leg becomes deformed while he is making her dress of gold. Suddenly in desperate need to get married because of an unplanned pregnancy, the maiden agrees to marry the miller. The maiden is embarrassed by the tailor's deformed leg and refuses to be seen with him in that condition. In fact, when he comes to declare his love on the day of her child's birth, the maiden calls the tailor by a made up name that becomes the name Saskia is to come up with at the end of the novel.

The Young Maiden's Father

The young maiden's father is a widow who wants what is best for his daughter. When the tailor proposes to marry his daughter, the maiden's father refuses to allow him to marry her in favor of allowing the miller to marry her. The tailor tries to prove himself worthy of the maiden by making her a gold dress, but the resulting deformity of his leg turns off the father as much as the daughter.

Hansjakob and Thomas

Hansjakob and Thomas are farmers who pick up the tailor on the side of the road and take him home with them in exchange for custom made clothing. Hansjakob is the father, Thomas the son. For more than a month, Hansjakob and Thomas make the tailor feel as though he is a part of the family. However, on Thomas's birthday, they discuss a trip they can now make because the tailor can remain at the house to care for the animals. This makes the tailor feel like a servant and he leaves.



Objects/Places

Straw

The tailor spins straw into gold because it is all he has left to prove his ability to provide for his lover after their marriage.

Yarn

Saskia spins different fibers and threads into yarn, sometimes using grass and flowers to make the yarn stronger and to smell good.

Toys

The tailor carves toys out of wood for his future grandchild.

Baby Clothing

The queen has baby clothing made out of yarn spun by the tailor while she is expecting her first child.

Shell Necklace

The tailor gives a necklace made of sea shells to his lover. When the woman dies, she gives the necklace to the midwife and asks that they be given to her daughter when she is older. Saskia gives this necklace to the tailor the first night she is to spin gold for the king.

Gold Ring

The tailor has a gold ring with what looks like a ball of yarn on it to give his lover on their wedding day. On the day his daughter is born, the tailor gives the ring to his love. The woman arranges for the midwife to give the ring to her daughter when she is older. This ring is given to the tailor by Saskia on the second night she is to spin gold for the king.

Gold Dress

The tailor makes a gold dress for his lover to prove his worthiness to her father.



Magic Spinning Wheel

The tailor steals a spinning wheel from an elderly lady in the village, and using this wheel causes the tailor's leg to cramp up even as he spins straw into gold. The tailor later gives this wheel to his daughter, Saskia, and once again uses it to spin straw into gold to save her life.

Maiden's Spinning Wheel

Saskia uses her mother's wheel to create yarns. When the tailor learns she has this wheel, he arranges a trade with her, giving Saskia his wheel while taking the maiden's wheel so that he might place his hands where the maiden once touched it.

Market

There is a market in the small village where Saskia lives. Saskia survives during her father's depression by selling vegetables and herbs from her garden in the market and later her yarns.

Castle

Saskia goes to the castle to see the king and ends up locked in several rooms to spin straw into gold for the king.

Village

Saskia, the tailor, and the miller all live in a small German village near the castle where the king lives.



Themes

Heartbreak

The tailor falls in love and finally finds his love returned. The tailor believes he will marry this young woman and give her a perfect life. They plan to work side by side in his tailor business, her spinning yarn and he turning it into cloth and then custom clothing. However, the tailor soon learns that the miller has made an offer for the young woman and her father believes that the miller can give her a better life even though they do not love one another.

The tailor does all he can to convince the maiden's father that he can provide for her. The tailor makes a gold dress out of straw for the young woman, sacrificing his own leg in the process. The maiden, however, is so shallow that she will not marry a man with a deformity. The young woman marries the miller instead, convincing him that the child she carries is his.

The tailor learns that no one in the world can accept a deformed man. The tailor cannot find love or acceptance anywhere he goes, even in his own daughter. For this reason, the tailor decides to steal his first born grandchild in the hopes that an infant will accept him for what he is, to not judge him by his looks. However, Saskia cheats him out of this by correctly guessing the made up name her mother gave to him. The tailor has been so heartbroken for so long that this final insult is the end for him and he runs away, leaving his deformed leg behind.

Family

Saskia believes the miller is her father. In order to help him find love and happiness, Saskia cuts his hair and shaves his beard. This causes the miller to fall into a dark depression that keeps him in bed for months at a time. Saskia remains loyal to him despite this, working to support both her and her father rather than running out on him to care for herself. The miller later comes back to reality and attempts to make things right with Saskia. However, the miller is too greedy and he first forces Saskia into a situation where she could be killed and later expects her to spin straw into gold for his own wealth.

It is family that keeps the tailor from his beloved, as well. The maiden's father refuses to allow his daughter to marry a man who cannot give her the life he believes she deserves. Instead, the father pushes a marriage to the miller, a man with money but also with a drinking problem.

Family is a strong part of this novel, but it is not the happy family that many novels have as their themes. In this novel, it is family that tears apart and brings pain. Saskia never really learns that the tailor is her true father. Instead, she believes him to be an evil being who wants to steal her first born child. For this reason, Saskia fights him until she



wins, realizing when it is too late who he is and what he wants. Saskia is willing to give this man all he has been missing, but he is too angry and heartbroken to see it.

Love

Love is what motivates many of the characters in this novel. The tailor is motivated to create a gold dress out of love. The miller is inclined to drink too much out of a love for gin. Saskia is inclined to find out the tailor's name to save her first born child.

If not for love, the tailor might not have gotten his heart broken. From the beginning of the novel, the tailor learns that his love can only see him skin deep, not beyond his appearance once his leg becomes shriveled. This breaks the tailor's heart and sends him searching for someone who can see him for who he is and love him anyway.

Saskia wants to be loved, but she also knows that she must care for herself first. Saskia refuses to marry the king, but finds herself with little choice. Saskia becomes queen, but she does not love the king. Instead, Saskia fights hard to make him love her to protect her should he ever learn the truth about the straw she supposedly spun into gold. Love is a strong motivator and it motivates most of the characters in this novel.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told in a third person omniscient point of view. The story is told from the point of view of two characters, Saskia and the tailor. The novel begins from the tailor's point of view when he is a young man, in love with a beautiful woman. The novel progresses through the years, shifting to Saskia's point of view when she is a young girl. From there, the point of view shifts back and forth wherever it is necessary to help the reader follow the story line.

The point of view of this novel works well in the novel because it allows the reader to understand and develop a relationship with both the main characters. The motives of the tailor are important because the tailor will do several things that will change the course of the plot. At the same time, it is important that the reader know Saskia intimately because she is a major part of the plot, in fact concern for Saskia's happiness is pivotal to the conclusion of the plot.

Setting

The novel is set in a small village somewhere in Germany. The setting has the impression that it is somewhere in the early nineteenth century because there are still spinners and others who make clothing from scratch and the people move around on carts and horses. The setting has a clear fairy tale feel to it, creating a world where people can believe in monsters and magic.

The setting of the novel is important to the plot of the novel because it sets up a world in which spinners are common and magic is possible. If the novel were set in the modern world, the plot of the novel might not be quite as believable as it is in this particular setting. The setting creates a world that makes the plot possible.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple. The language is slightly more difficult than one would expect in a novel that is intended for young readers, including some language dealing with sexual acts and the prevention of pregnancy. However, the language is not complicated by foreign words, nor does it include made up words that are sometimes common in stories of this type.

The language of the novel is appropriate to the novel because it is simple, but it does not talk down to its readers. The language is appropriate to the characters, telling the story in words that one can believe these characters would speak in the normal world. The language tells a simple story without the complication of fantasy and supports not

only the characters, but the plot, making it a strongly written novel appropriate to the intended readers.

Structure

The novel is divided into six parts. Each part has a title that describes something that will or has happened in the plot. The novel is also divided into thirty-three simple chapters, some of which are shorter than two pages long. The novel is told in exposition and dialogue, showing the story rather than telling it to the reader.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot of the novel follows the tailor and his deep heartbreak after the end of his relationship with the fair maiden. One of the subplots follows the relationship of Saskia with her father, the miller. Another subplot follows the budding relationship between the tailor and Elke. In the end, all the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"He has adored her for as long as he can remember. And now, finally, she reciprocates."
Part 1, Young Love: Chap. 1, p. 3

"But the only kind of wheel the tailor knows is a spinning wheel. And all a spinning wheel offers is yarn and thread."
Part 1, Young Love: Chap. 2, p. 11

"He sews. She gathers remedies."
Part 1, Young Love: Chap. 3, p. 21

"The miller has a daughter. He'll raise her. She'll love him. The tailor will be no one to her."
Part 1, Young Love: Chap. 4, p. 33

"Saskia stiffens in distaste. She feels disloyal talking about Father behind his back."
Part 2, Survival: Chap. 6, p. 45

"Neither of them has ever asked his name. Maybe he has no real name anymore."
Part 2, Survival: Chap. 7, p. 58

"He digs his fingers deep into the yarn, the precious yarn his daughter has spun."
Part 3, Yarn: Chap. 11, p. 91

"Saskia walks around the room of straw. It is a small room, the size of the room she sleeps in at home."
Part 4, Gold: Chap. 16, p. 112

"The spinner cries and spins. Gold thread hisses to the floor."
Part 4, Gold: Chap. 18, p. 125

"She is free. Just like that, the nightmare is over."
Part 5, Preparation: Chap. 21, p. 139

"Taking the baby isn't stealing, though. After all, this is his grandchild, someone who will share his name."
Part 5, Preparation: Chap. 28, p. 175

"That leg that goes still, at last."
Part 6, Names: Chap. 33, p. 197



Topics for Discussion

Who is the tailor? Why does he want to marry the fair maiden? What does she bring to him? What must he do to prove his love? Does he? How does the maiden feel about the tailor? How does she show these emotions? What finally breaks them apart? Why?

Why does the maiden marry the miller? What does this say about her? How does the maiden feel when she is confronted by the tailor in the hours before she gives birth? What does she say to him? What does he say to her? How does the tailor react to this situation? How does it impact his behavior throughout the rest of the novel?

Who is Saskia? What has her childhood been like? What changes in her life? Why does Saskia decide to shave her father and cut his hair? What is the hoped for results of this act? What really happens? How does Saskia react to this situation? How does her father? What does this say about Saskia's personality? What does this say about the miller?

Why does Saskia decide to learn to spin yarn? Why does Dagmar complain that she does everything better than everyone else? What does Saskia do with the materials she uses to make yarn? Why is Saskia's yarn better than everyone else's? Who comes to notice this? For what reason?

Why does the tailor come back to his home village? What does he hope to find there? Does he? Why does the tailor remain? Who helps him? For what reason? How does the tailor feel about this person? How does their relationship grow and change over the years? How does the tailor respond to these changes? How might the novel have ended differently if he had reacted differently?

Why does the miller tell the king Saskia can spin straw into gold? Can she? Where did the miller hear of this skill? How does Saskia survive these tests? How does the king react? Why does Saskia resist the king? How does the king finally convince Saskia he will never ask for her to spin gold again? Why does Saskia marry the king?

What does Saskia offer the tailor in order to get him to spin straw into gold for her? Does he take it? How does the tailor feel about this gift? What happens when the tailor comes to collect on this debt? Why does the tailor stick his leg in the floor? What does the tailor leave behind when he leaves? How does Saskia feel about this final confrontation?