

An Act of Desperation

A short story by Henry Cavanaugh



Things in Storybrooke were never anything less than complicated, but what else could really be expected? After all, they were all the subjects of a curse that had pulled them from their home realm of the Enchanted Forest and forced them to live in a world where magic was almost completely non-existent! One of the few beings in the sleepy town who still possessed some level of magical ability was Mr. Gold, who had been known in the Enchanted Forest as Rumplestiltskin. Once the most powerful sorcerer in all of the Enchanted Forest, Mr. Gold's magical abilities had been significantly dimmed by the curse that placed them all in Storybrooke, although it was enough for him to get by and live a comfortable life as the owner of a pawnshop.

While once upon a time it was power that Rumplestiltskin desired above all else, the times had changed and Mr. Gold had found himself deeply in love. It was an unexpected twist and it was clear as day to absolutely everyone in Storybrooke that Belle was far too good for him, but he simply couldn't deny the depths of his feelings. After several lifetimes of selfishness and misery, Belle had brought an optimism into the sorcerer's life and made him want to change for the better. Unfortunately that was much easier said than done; Mr. Gold couldn't seem to shake the darkness that resided within him, and time and time again he found himself unwittingly pushing Belle further away. He despised how his actions only seemed to cause emotional pain for the woman he so deeply loved, so much so that it kept him up at night. Although he knew it would be for the best if he simply left her alone, Rumplestiltskin simply couldn't bring himself to. He was *obsessed*. He had to have her!

Early on into his turbulent relationship with Belle, Mr. Gold had predicted that he would one day spiral into desperation. To try and ensure that his future self didn't warp the woman's mind with magic, he had secretly cast a spell on her that made her permanently resistant to bewitchment. Now that he was at such a point of desperation and obsession, Mr. Gold was furious with his past self. A love spell would have been such an easy cast and Belle would have been his forever! *The townsfolk would have worked it out though, he realized miserably, They would have demonized you more than*

they already do! No, even if Belle wasn't resistant to his magic, a love spell was perhaps not the best way to go. Rumplestiltskin would have to think a little more creatively and thankfully that had always been one of his strong suits...

It didn't take long for the sorcerer to decide on a new plan to win Belle's heart. He knew all too well that his reputation as both Mr. Gold and Rumplestiltskin was in a complete shambles and there would be no coming back from that in the eyes of some people, so he'd need to take on a new identity. Rather than starting from scratch though and slowly earning the trust of Belle and the other citizens of Storybrooke, Mr. Gold decided to take a shortcut. He could possess the body of somebody who the population already trusted and use that trust in order to get to his happy ending even quicker. He didn't even have to consider for long who the target of his possession would be, as there was a clear winner right from the start. Nobody in Storybrooke was more respected or adored than David Nolan, the local sheriff.

Back in the Enchanted Forest, David had been known as Prince Charming and he more than lived up to the name. Anybody who met the prince was almost immediately enamored with both his good looks and his kind heart, and none more so than Snow White, who he had taken to be his wife. All of those things had carried across to Storybrooke after the curse, with the exception of his marriage to Snow White. The pair were still deeply in love but the relationship wasn't as smooth as either would like, with various external pressures keeping them apart. The plagued nature of Charming and Snow's romance would work in Mr. Gold's favor, as although "David" suddenly displaying a romantic interest in Belle would certainly raise some eyebrows among the townsfolk, it wouldn't be completely out of the question. After all, could anybody blame him for giving up on Snow when the universe (or more accurately the curse) seemed so intent on keeping them apart?



All that Mr. Gold needed was to get the good sheriff alone and that wasn't even that difficult. With a simple telephone call and a request that the other man come check out a suspicious object that had arrived at the pawnshop that morning, David was lured right into the lion's den. Prince Charming had always been far too trusting for his own good and so he had failed to see that he was walking right into a trap, even knowing Mr. Gold's slimy reputation. *You poor sap*, the sorcerer thought to himself, equal parts mocking and sympathetic, *You really have no idea, do you?*

“What is it you wanted to show me, Mr. Gold?” the sheriff asked, not even displaying the smallest hint of suspicion as he shook the pawnshop owner’s hand. If Rumplestiltskin hadn’t been so deeply consumed by his desperation for Belle then he actually might have felt guilty about what he was planning to do. Unfortunately for David, the sorcerer was much too far gone to change his mind and spare the kind hearted man. David’s body would help him win Belle’s love for good, Mr. Gold was certain of it, and so the man’s sacrifice (for he would indeed never regain control of his body or get to live his own life once Rumplestiltskin was in charge) was absolutely necessary.

“I’m afraid I lied to you, Sheriff Nolan,” the treacherous magic user confessed, still keeping his hand firmly clasped within the other man’s. “The only dangerous thing here is *me*.” With this declaration, Rumplestiltskin’s eyes flashed bright red and the pair were suddenly wrapped in a vortex of magical energy. David was completely frozen as a result of the sorcerer’s magic, but Mr. Gold was still capable of throwing his head back and cackling like the madman that he was. While he laughed, the vortex closed in around the pair and forced their bodies closer and closer together. Once they were so close that Mr. Gold’s thin and wiry body should have been completely pressed up against David’s own muscular frame, something equally terrifying and awesome began to happen. While David’s body remained completely solid, Mr. Gold’s adopted a more opaque form and began to disappear within the prince’s body.

Having his physical form invaded by the consciousness of a dark sorcerer like Rumplestiltskin was a predictable painful experience for David, but given he was held in place by the other man’s magic, he was forced to deal with that agony without letting out so much as a grimace or scream. Still, now that he was aware of what was happening to him, David was doing everything he could in order to try and fight back against the invasion. He focused his mind on his love for Snow White and the history they shared - every time they kissed or danced or embraced - and thought desperately about wanting to maintain that. He knew that only harm would come to Snow should Mr. Gold manage to gain full control of his body. David was smart enough to work out that this was likely some twisted part of the other man’s pursuit of Belle and if that was the case, then Gold might even want to eliminate Snow from the picture entirely. *No, I won’t let you harm her!* The mere thought that Gold might use his hands to hurt (or even kill) his one true love further imbued David with the mental fortitude he needed in order to fight back.

Rumplestiltskin was in complete shock. He’d heard stories that some individuals, those of the purest hearts and strongest minds, had some capability of naturally resisting magic but he had never anticipated coming up against one. Even despite the curse, as the Dark One, Mr. Gold was supposed to be one of the mightiest magic users in every realm! How could a magic-less meathead like *Prince Charming* fight back against him? It seemed utterly impossible and yet there was no denying that it was happening,

because Gold could feel the other man resisting him and attempting to push him right back out of his body. *No, no! This is my chance to have Belle! This body must be mine!*

The two men remained locked in magical combat for several more minutes before finally Mr. Gold's opaque form disappeared entirely within David's body and the swirling vortex of magical energy that had surrounded them completely dissipated. For several moments the man stood mostly still in the center of the pawnshop, the only movement being the rise and fall of his muscular chest as he took several long breaths. Then he finally seemed to shake himself free of whatever stupor he had been in, shaking his head and rolling his shoulders, then looking around the room with a curious expression.

David Nolan found himself frowning as he glanced around Mr. Gold's empty pawnshop. His mind had been completely scrubbed free of the memories from the previous ten minutes - the last thing he could remember was receiving a call from the other man, requesting his presence at the store. *So where is he?*, the sheriff wondered to himself, feeling deeply concerned. While he knew that many of the townsfolk distrusted Gold and were quick to accuse him of dirty dealings, David always tried to see the best in people. It wasn't like Mr. Gold to just suddenly vanish out of the blue! Was it possible that he had fallen afoul of whatever suspicious object he had mentioned on the phone earlier that day? Strangely though, David couldn't see anything out of the ordinary, at least not compared to the last time he had been inside the pawnshop. Which of these items were new? Were there any?

Given how his short term memory had been wiped clean, David couldn't possibly have known that the man he was looking for was indeed in the room with him. Not only was he within the room but he was actually inside David's body, although trapped entirely as a passenger who was unable to communicate with the body's driver! It was a twist that the former Rumpelstiltskin had never seen coming; how could he have known that Prince Charming's deep desires to love and protect would win out over his own greed and lust? Mr. Gold oh so desperately wanted to remove himself from the sheriff's body but to his great dismay, he was completely unable to. It seemed likely that he would remain trapped within his new prison for as long as David lived, forced to watch as Belle and the rest of Storybrooke moved on without him. Oh, what a dreadful curse!

