

## The Spinner

To say this story began a long time ago is an understatement. To say it began far, far away would be wrong. This story begins before any real sense of time, and before any semblance of place. It begins with a lonely old spinner who, one day, decided to try weaving something more than an occasional pair of mittens.

With little more than a needle, thread, and a curious notion, this spinner wove the first tree. But it seemed strange on its own, and so the spinner wove the first forest. Such an impressive sight only made the nothing around it more obvious and bland, which made the spinner ponder on what to fill it with. The spinner wove a sky above and earth below, and then wove water among the lands to help this strange garden grow. Satisfied, but still seeing the world as incomplete, the spinner wove animals to live among these new places. Beasts and birds and fish were placed among the land, sky, and sea, and the spinner was pleased to have such new companions.

As this world grew and flourished, the spinner decided to finish this magnificent tapestry. As a final creation, the spinner wove a creature that could encompass all things. A creature that could swim and walk, and who could learn to fly; a creature given curiosity of the world and the capacity to explore it in its fullest. The spinner wove man, and so finished the tapestry of life.

Although younger than the rest of the world, man quickly grew to find a place within it. Man knew that trees were strong, and so used them to build shelter. Man knew that land was fertile, and so planted crops for food. Man knew that beasts and birds had gifts they lacked, and so studied and tamed the wild to learn. The spinner saw this and was impressed with how far man had come in such a short time. The spinner decided to approach man and help them learn the secrets of the world.

Man recognized the spinner at once, for their earliest story spoke of the one who had woven the threads of life. Gracious for the world they lived in, and honoured by their creator's presence, man could only bring itself to ask the spinner a single question. They wished to know why life, in all its glories and pleasures, had to end. The spinner answered the question as plainly as it was asked. The threads of life ended because they were trimmed by the hand that had woven them.

Terrified by this knowledge, man grew to despise the spinner as a feared bringer of death. The spinner was cursed each time a crop failed, and vile oaths were uttered whenever sickness claimed a loved one. The beasts, birds and fish began to see the spinner as a source of evil as well. The spinner tried to speak with those who proclaimed the vilest words, but was met with closed minds and unflinching hate. Soon, the spinner could no longer take such scorn, and eventually retreated.

When the spinner left, the world rejoiced. Bliss ruled for a time, as all creatures thought they could live forever. Man thrilled as their loved ones shrugged off illness and injury. Fish, bird, and beast laughed as neither the fiercest storm nor most vicious predator could claim them. Such joys were not to last. What none of the creatures realized, and which they had been unwilling to hear, was that the spinner did not cut life out of malice or sport. Threads were trimmed only when they became frayed and damaged,

unable to sustain themselves. Death was a needed part of life, but the world feared it too much to listen.

Without the spinner, the world began to decay. The old grew too weak to hold their own bodies, and the sick and injured were left crippled and in agony. Without death, none could hunt or harvest, and soon creatures of earth, sky, and sea were left suffering unending pains of hunger. Without the trimming and recycling of threads, no new life could arise either. The world was immortal, but stagnant. All creatures cried out for the spinner, but their pleas were unreturned. Unable to call their creator back, it was decided that a party should be sent to find the spinner and make a case in person. Man, who knew most about the world, was selected for this task. Of man, the four healthiest were chosen, for only they could properly focus on the task at hand. With the blessings of every species, the group set out to find the spinner.

It was an arduous task. Away from the domains of civilization, the land had grown cracked and overrun with decayed but unending growths. Gnarled trees spiralled beyond the clouds and thick briars choked the ground. This did not stop the travellers. They pushed through the briars even as thorns cut their skin, and they tread onwards as their bodies weakened from the blocked sun. The knowledge of man helped the group navigate this broken world, but among neither highest peak nor deepest cave could they find the spinner. It was not until every inch of the stagnant land, sea, and sky was crossed did the four realize that the spinner was not merely hiding, but had left the world altogether. Still they persevered. The men had travelled the world, and so they had learned where it could be escaped. It was here at the End of the World, the last remaining pocket of nothing, did the four find the spinner.

The four collapsed at the spinner's feet as the first traveller delivered the apologies of every man, the second traveller pleaded the sorrows of every beast, the third traveller offered the regrets of every bird, and the fourth begged the forgiveness of every fish. Uncountable years passed as the four told the sorrowful words of all creation, and the spinner remained silent throughout it all. When at last the four had finished, did the spinner finally speak. The creatures of the world could be forgiven, the spinner said, but far too much damage had been done for the spinner alone to fix. Threads could not be restored and healed. For the world to continue, all current life would end.

The four had travelled the world and seen lands throttled in unending vines, waters thick with rotting sludge and skies shrivelling with meager gusts. They had seen men crippled, beasts withering, birds flightless, and fish decrepit. The four men loved their world, but accepted that its time had long since come. They pledged themselves to the spinner in whatever way they could, vowing themselves in body and soul to renew the world.

The spinner thanked the men and unwove their forms. From the threads of the fourth man was a mighty leviathan woven; a serpent that circled the world's seas and who could swallow any fish that swam. From the remnants of the third man was a great roc woven; a swift flier with talons that could catch any bird that flew. From the pieces of the second man was a ferocious predator woven; a cunning wolf that could hunt any beast that ran. From the shreds of the first man was an unyielding shadow woven; a reaper that could collect man from wherever his ingenuity took him.

These four were sent out to restore death to the world's creatures. Sorrow filled the four as they slew, but they knew it was the only choice. When at last the work was done, the four returned to the spinner. They were thanked for their work, and informed that the threads would be recycled into new life. It would take time, but the creatures and lands of the world would grow back and flourish as the natural order returned. However, the spinner added, the nature of creatures would not change, and they would always fear death. While the spinner could forgive the creatures for their hate, the pain it had caused would never be forgotten and would not be endured again. Due to this, it would be left to the four to trim the loose threads of the creatures of the world while the spinner would care for the land, which had never spurned death. Such would be the way of the world. Such would be the way of life.

*Jonas Belford, 2011*