

Rumpelstiltskin

by John Burkardt

At the inn sat the miller with his daughter,
The one with the long dark hair -
As the miller got drunker and drunker,
He bragged to the men who were there.

But the man sitting next to the miller
Was in truth the country's king,
And he listened to the young girl's father,
Who began again her praises to sing.

"My daughter's a pretty young woman,
She's lovely to behold,
But she has more than just her beauty,
My daughter can spin straw to gold!"

The king said, "Well, bring her before me,
This beauty of whom you have told,
I will take her right back to my castle,
And tonight she shall spin me some gold!"

The miller cried out to stop them,
But the soldiers took her away,
Took her to the mighty palace,
To a room that was filled full of hay.

"Now spin all this straw so it's golden,
If you do, I shall make you my wife,
But if I see that you were lying,
Tomorrow you'll give up your life!"

The king slammed the door and he locked it,
He left her in there all alone,
With only a wheel for her spinning,
So she fell down to cry and to moan.

A little man appeared right before her,
"I can help you," he said, sweet and mild,
"And all you have to promise,
Is to give me your first born child."

"I see you're a bit astonished,
Though to me it's all the same,
So if you should want your baby,
Then you only have to guess my name!"

"Now promise or you die tomorrow!"
And she did as she was told,

Then he sat down and started spinning,
And soon all the straw was gold.

When the king returned in the morning,
And opened the door he saw
That his room was full to the brimming,
With heaps of golden straw.

“Awaken,” he said to her softly,
“You’re fit to be my queen,
And this very day we’ll be married,
In the grandest wedding ever seen!”

No sooner said than accomplished,
The crown was on her head,
But she dreamed about the little man,
At night asleep in bed.

And when the summer winds were blowing,
The Queen gave birth to a son,
And a message came in the evening,
To say an ugly dwarf had come.

“Remember, fair queen, your promise,
To give me your first born child,
So let me take him away now,
To the forests thick and wild.”

The Queen looked down on her baby,
And nearly began to cry,
But there was a way to keep him,
She knew she had to try.

“Remember, O Dwarf, your challenge,
To guess your secret name,
So I ask that instead of my baby,
You let me play your wicked game.”

“Oh, don’t cry!” said the little fellow,
“Your tears are dripping on my nose!
If you can get my name in three guesses,
You may keep your boy, I suppose!”

With that he ran from the castle,
And promised to return next day.
The Queen sent out her courtier,
To find out what he may.

He followed the dwarf to the forest,
And offered him bread and wine,
And he said to the little fellow,

“Tell me your name, I’ll tell you mine!”
“Some people are afraid of their neighbors,
And lie without any shame,
But I’m truly glad to tell you,
Jack Johnson is my name!”

The courtier returned to the castle,
Riding as fast as he could,
And he ran to the room of the Queen,
And yelled, “Jack Johnson’s the man of the wood!”

When the dwarf returned next morning,
The Queen had hopes of his doom.
“Your name, sir, is Jacky Johnson!”
But he laughed and ran from the room.

Then the Queen sent out her hunter,
To make the hunchback tell,
To save her little baby,
And make everything well.

He found the dwarf asleep in the meadow,
Gave him gold with which he came,
And then the hunter bravely asked him,
“O say, fellow, what is your name?”

The little man grinned at him strangely,
And first he would not say,
But when again the hunter asked him,
Said, “My name is William Day.”

“O Queen,” said the hunter in glory,
“His name is William Day,
And now we’ve saved your baby,
And sent the little man away!”

And when the dwarf arrived in the morning,
“William Day,” said the Queen, “you’re done!”
But again he laughed at her guessing,
And away from the palace did run.

So the Queen came up to her husband,
And told what she had done,
And begged his royal forgiveness,
For losing their first born son.

For tomorrow the dwarf was coming,
And if she could not guess,
He would take her little baby,
So full of loveliness.

“You witch!” cried the King in fury,
You don’t make gold out of hay,
And you think now to sell my baby,
Well I’m sending you away!”

So the Queen left her King in tatters,
And wandered the forestland,
While the King hid away his baby,
Kept the only key in his hand.

But the dwarf had many disguises,
A lass or a knight or an ape,
He could change his height and his clothing,
Could change his voice and his shape.

That night at the Court come a lady,
Of beauty beyond compare,
And the King was the first to greet her,
Forgetting his Queen so rare.

And soon the foolish king was swimming
In passion that was so deep,
And when the fair lady asked him,
He showed her his child asleep.

But when she lifted up the baby,
It awoke and cried aloud,
And the lady turned back to the hunchback,
Took the child and ran through the crowd.

And soon at the dwarf’s little clearing,
He howled and danced with delight,
Then a woman, dressed all in tatters,
Came and asked if she could stay the night.

“Can you cook me a meal?” asked the hunchback,
“Three shillings I’m prepared to pay.”
“Indeed,” said the ragged woman,
“I can do it right away.”

For meat he gave her the baby,
And told her to strike it dead,
But when he wasn’t looking,
She butchered a pig instead.

She hid her child in the brambles,
And soon the stew was done,
But instead of the three bright shillings,
He only gave her one.

“You promised me three!” said the woman,

“And me you cannot blame.”
Said he, “If this stew’s made of baby,
Then Rumpelstiltskin isn’t my name!”
She flew from the old man’s curses,
And took her baby too.
She ran to the mighty palace,
And told the King her news.
Next morning they all went riding,
The King with his Queen and his men,
And they rode through the gloomy forest,
Til they came to a little glen.
The men were quick and they caught him,
Before he could turn and run,
So he stood facing King and Queen now,
And they showed him their little son.
“So now you think you have tricked me,
But soon you’ll all be done,
For I’ll turn you into rabbits,
And eat you one by one!”
“Remember the cook that you cheated?
She and I are the very same,
And I think it is time to tell you,
Rumpelstiltskin is your name!”
The dwarf turned as white as an onion,
And screamed til he nearly choked,
And then with a flash of lightning,
He disappeared in a cloud of smoke.

MORAL:

So if you’re the miller’s daughter,
Don’t go with him to the inn,
Or else kick him if he mentions
How terribly well you spin.
And if the King takes you to his castle,
And you don’t try to explain,
When he throws you into the hay loft,
It’s probably too late to complain.
And if a little dwarf should help you,
And you can’t refuse for shame,
And promise him you first born baby,
Remember his awful name:

RUMPELSTILTSKIN!