

RUMPLESTILTSKIN

By Michele L. Vacca

*(Based on the immortal
Brothers Grimm narrative)*

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CHARACTERS:

RUMPLESTILTSKIN – a dwarf. He is selfish, temperamental, obnoxious, unpredictable, and incredibly conceited. He is also amusing and at times even sympathetic.

GRISELDA – his wife and strangely loving companion. She is loudmouthed and complaining, and amusingly hideous to behold, though she, of course, considers herself beautiful.

REGINALD – the young King of the country. He is a gentle, considerate ruler, who has sympathy for his poor subjects and a delightful sense of humor as well.

EDGAR – the Count of Egberton, the King's companion and advisor. Edgar's devotion to the King combined with his snobbishness cause a few conflicts.

MILTON MILLBOURNE – the miller, one of Reginald's poverty-stricken subjects. Milton, however, is a proud man, and his quick temper almost costs him everything.

ROXANNE – Milton's young daughter. She is very pretty, sensible, kind hearted, and loving. Although a simple country girl, her natural dignity makes her a charming Queen.

FILLBURT – Milton's apprentice. Although Fillburt is not the most intelligent person in the world, he is loyal, devoted, and enthusiastic.

NARRATOR – a voice-over role that should be prerecorded.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN PRODUCTION NOTES:

COSTUMES AND SPECIAL MAKEUP:

Costumes for this play do not have to be any particular period or style. Roxanne should have long full-skirted dresses, and tunics or doublets work well for the men. Everyone except Rumpelstiltskin and Griselda needs two costumes, one for the first act, and then another for the second, when the kingdom has become more prosperous. Rumpelstiltskin's costume works well when it is a combination of various earth tones, and possibly somewhat

tattered looking. Green, of course, is his dominant color. In fact, even his makeup should be done in mixed shades of green and brown. He needs a skullcap, and possibly a beard, a fake nose, sideburns and false eyebrows. Griselda needs to be presented in such a way that she appears to be outrageously unattractive, but not in a grotesque or frightening way. Some productions have given her a fright wig, a gaudy and tasteless dress, padding in odd places, and makeup in a variety of tones, such as shades of purple, green or yellow.

SETTINGS:

Elaborate settings for this play are possible, but also in some circumstances can be impractical and unnecessary. Set pieces that can be easily moved are convenient, no matter how elaborate the set may be. Area staging has proven to be one of the best ways to direct the action. Areas needed in Act I are: the forest, the road near the Miller's house, and a small room in the castle. A small area of the stage should be permanently designated as the cave in which Rumpelstiltskin and Griselda live. It should contain a cauldron, perhaps a hanging or two, and other suitable cave decor. The second act takes place primarily in the palace, although twice the setting shifts to a corner of the forest. THE SPINNING WHEEL: It is better to build one than to use a real antique. The wheel needs to be sturdy, and can be mounted on a small platform equipped with wheels to facilitate movement. The gold effect has been accomplished in a number of ways; with lights, by using lengths of gold cord, rope or tinsel, gold coins in a hidden drawer, or by rigging a mechanism that can be easily triggered to reveal a mass of gold, or by any combination of these effects.

The use of music and sound effects, live or taped, greatly enhances the production of this play.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN

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ACT I

(OVERTURE: FLICKERING LIGHTS IN DIFFERENT COLORS, ACCOMPANIED BY ANIMAL NOISES, EERIE MUSIC, AND WIND HOWLING. THE FOREST, A DARK AND GLOOMY CORNER OF THE WOODS.)

NARRATOR: Once there was a beautiful and pleasant little kingdom by the sea. In the middle of the kingdom there was a deep, dark forest. No one ever went into these woods; the tall, dense trees were frightening, and there was no path to follow. As far as the people of the kingdom knew, no one lived in these woods except wild animals and birds. Sometimes, however, in the middle of the night – strange sounds came from the depths of the forest.

(RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (SUDDENLY APPEARS IN THE FOREST AREA. HE LEAPS AND DASHES FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER, LAUGHING AND CACKLING TO HIMSELF AND TO THE AUDIENCE. HE SEEMS TO BE GATHERING ITEMS FOR A SPELL, AT THE SAME TIME PERHAPS WORKING OUT THE MECHANICS OF THE SPELL, TOO. ANY TYPE OF MAGICAL EFFECTS WOULD BE USEFUL HERE. FLASHES OF THE LIGHTS, PUFFS OF SMOKE, ETC. AS HE CAVORTS ACROSS THE STAGE, HE MUTTERS TO HIMSELF . . .)

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: The moon is just right . . . just right for finding the ingredients. Heh-heh-heh . . . Oh, what wonderful spells these toadstools will make! (POINTS.) Aha! Look at that slimy moss! Just what I needed. (GOES ON GATHERING INGREDIENTS.)

(THE LIGHTS FLICKER AND SHADOWS DEEPEN AS RUMPLESTILTSKIN LEAPS AROUND THE

STAGE WITH GREATER SPEED AND INTENSITY.
SUDDENLY . . .)

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (WITH A VERY LOUD AND HARSH LAUGH.)
The forest is mine! All mine! (CACKLES.) They're all
afraid! Afraid of the forest! They're all afraid of me!
Me! (LEAPS UP ON A STUMP.) Rumpelstiltskin!
(LAUGHS.)

(AS RUMPLESTILTSKIN CONTINUES TO GATHER
HIS INGREDIENTS, THE NARRATOR GOES ON
WITH HIS TALE.)

NARRATOR: As you see, someone did live in the forest. But the people
of the kingdom did not know about the strange little man.
He knew many spells and enchantments, and he could
appear and disappear – almost whenever he wished.
Although the little man knew many magical secrets, he
still had problems of his own – just as any ordinary person
has problems . . .

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (DISGUSTED.) AAAAGGGGHHHH! I'm
bored! Bored! Bored! Do you hear? Trees! Do you hear
me? Birds? Creatures, (TO THE AUDIENCE.) you
creatures of the night, do you hear me? I'm bored! (HE
STOPS SUDDENLY, THEN LAUGHS.) Heh – heh –
heh. I think I'll go home and mix up a little batch of
mischief. Heh – heh – heh. And then! Then I'll go into
town tomorrow and take the mischief with me! Heh!
Heh! Heh!

GRISELDA: (OFF.) Where are you?

NARRATOR: The little dwarf had another problem – he did not live
alone in his forest, no, he also had a wife . . . a wife named
Griselda . . .

GRISELDA: (OFF.) Where are you? (ENTERS.) Where did you go?
You miserable little dwarf! Where are you? (SHE
LOOKS UNDER ROCKS AND UP INTO THE TREES.)

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: Oh, fiddle-faddle, folderol, and flabber-dash!
Agghh! How did she find me?

GRISELDA: (LOOKING FOR HIM IN THE DARKNESS.) I know
you're around here somewhere! Where are you hiding?
WHERE ARE YOU?

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (To HIMSELF.) I wish you'd find a nice soggy

swamp, and take a nap in the quicksand –

GRISELDA: (SPOTS HIM.) There you are! What did you say?

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (OVERDOING IT.) Oh, nothing, my dear
Griselda. I just said I thought you were taking a little nap.

GRISELDA: Oh, you did, did you? Well, I wasn't. I saw you creep off
into the woods. I'll never understand why you have to go
digging around in the woods every night.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: Not every night, my dear Griselda.

GRISELDA: Almost every night. You can't stay at home with me once
in a while. No, you have to go digging for earthworms,
and catching dragonflies, and crawling under rocks.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: Only the best rocks, my dear.

GRISELDA: My mother warned me. I should've never married you! I
should've married some nice little troll, or that cute gnome
who lived down the road.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: Well, why didn't you?

GRISELDA: I heard that! It's not fair! I could've been a full-fledged
witch by now. Listen to this – (IN A "WITCH" VOICE.)
– "You'll get yours, my pretty!" Or I could've been a
beauty queen. (SINGS,) "Here I am, Miss Forest Tree."
Or I could've been a meter maid. But no, I had to marry
you! And we had to move to this awful forest. And live
in that awful cave – what a dump! I gave up my career for
you, and look at the thanks I get!

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (IN AN ECSTASY OF SARCASM.) Oh, I thank
you. I thank you. I thank you – from the bottom of my
feet – from the tips of my toes – from the ends of my hair
– I thank you. You'll never know what it's meant to me to
have your charming voice screaming and nagging all day
and all night.

GRISELDA: (FLATTERED.) Ohhh! Thank you!

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: – to see your bumpy face leering at me.

GRISELDA: (GIGGLES.) I told you I could've been a beauty queen.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: – And your little pointed teeth, snarling at me.

GRISELDA: (GIGGLES AND SNARLS COYLY AT HIM.) Grrr!

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: – and your scraggly hair –

GRISELDA: Oh? You like it? I just had it done last year.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: – falling into your beady eyes – and your flat feet,
stomping behind me, following me everywhere.

GRISELDA: (GIGGLES.) Maybe I could've been a ballerina.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: – And that ugly dress.

GRISELDA: Ohhh! Thank you!

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (CACKLES.) Why don't you give it back to your mother? She could make a spare room out of it!

GRISELDA: (IN A SUDDEN RAGE.) Ohh! Now don't you talk about my mother! She never liked you anyway! Come here, you miserable little runt!

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (CACKLES AND HIDES FROM HER.)

GRISELDA: Now where did he go? Where are you? My mother warned me! (SHE GOES OFF.) Where are you?

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: (REAPPEARS.) She'll never catch me. She never can. (CACKLES.) Heh-heh-heh! I'm going to mix up a little batch of mischief! Hee, hee, hee! (HE GOES OFF.)

GRISELDA: (RE-ENTERS, STILL LOOKING FOR HIM.) Now, where did you go? Come back here, you little runt! (SHE GOES OFF, TOO)

(MUSIC PLAYS. THE LIGHTS CHANGE – DAYLIGHT. THE ROAD, SOMEWHERE NEAR THE FOREST.)

NARRATOR: Every year King Reginald Rex traveled through his land, collecting taxes from his people. The young king did not like collecting taxes, because he was kindhearted, and he knew that most of his subjects were very poor.

(KING REGINALD REX AND HIS COMPANION, COUNT EDGAR OF EGBERTON, APPEAR. THE COUNT CARRIES A LARGE LEDGER OF ACCOUNTS, WHICH HE FREQUENTLY CONSULTS, AND THE KING CARRIES A LARGE MONEYBAG, WHICH APPEARS TO BE ALMOST EMPTY. BOTH OF THEM ARE VERY TIRED.)

EDGAR: Your Majesty, this entire situation is becoming ridiculous. We have been out collecting taxes for three days now, and we have collected absolutely nothing!

REGINALD: Why, Edgar, that's not true. (HE LOOKS INTO THE BAG.) We've collected (REACHES INTO BAG.) some flowers. (PULLS THEM OUT.) Of course, they're a little wilted now. (REACHES INTO BAG AGAIN.) And we collected this handmade rug. (LOOKS AGAIN— NOTHING ELSE.) And remember, those kind people down the road gave us some chicken sandwiches. Of

course, we ate those, so we can't very well say that we collected them permanently. Still, I would say that we've collected a few things, wouldn't you? Your Majesty, I meant to say that we have not collected any gold. Ah, yes, gold. It seems we must always have gold.

EDGAR: Chicken sandwiches and wild flowers will not repair the castle, and they will not pay the kingdom's debts, and –

REGINALD: I know, Edgar, I know. If we don't pay the debts, we'll have a war on our hands.

EDGAR: You must be firm, Your Majesty.

REGINALD: Yes, I suppose, I must. I hate wars even more than I hate collecting taxes.

EDGAR: You are the King. Collecting taxes is your duty.

REGINALD: (SIGHS.) All right. What's the next stop?

EDGAR: (CHECKS THE BOOK.) Just up the road. A miller.

REGINALD: Is he poor?

EDGAR: Of course.

REGINALD: Let's go.

EDGAR: Yes, Your Majesty.

REGINALD: (ON THE WAY OUT.) I wish we still had some of those chicken sandwiches.

EDGAR: (FOLLOWING KING.) Yes, Your Majesty. So do I.

(THEY GO OFF. THE LIGHTS CHANGE, AND RUMPLESTILTSKIN ENTERS, AND SKIPS AND LEAPS MADLY ACROSS THE STAGE.)

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: Hey, diddle-diddle, tee-hee-hee, I've made a spell, clever old me. Causing trouble is fun, you see, when Rumplestiltskin's here – that's me! (HE GIGGLES.) I'm not only a dwarf and a magician – I'm a poet too! Well, off to work! Heh-heh-heh. (AS HE SKIPS OUT, HE STARTS TO REPEAT HIS RHYME.) Hey, diddle-diddle, tee-hee-hee . . .

(AS HE GOES OUT, THE SETTING CHANGES TO THE MILLER'S HOME, A SMALL COUNTRY COTTAGE PERHAPS. AS THE NARRATOR SPEAKS, FILLBURT ENTERS, CARRYING A LARGE BASKET IN HIS ARMS. HE CANNOT SEE WHERE HE IS GOING.)

NARRATOR: The miller up the road was named Milton Millbourne. He lived in a small cottage with his daughter, Roxanne, and his apprentice, Fillburt . . .

FILLBURT: (ENTERS SINGING TO HIMSELF AS HE CARRIES HIS BASKET. HE STUMBLES, AND ALMOST DROPS THE BASKET.) Oooops! Almost dropped it. (GIGGLES.) Good thing I didn't. I sure wish I could see where I'm going. My feet! I lost my feet! Oooops! (STUMBLES.) Almost did it again. (TRIES TO SEE OVER THE BASKET.) Well I guess my feet are there. They always are. (HE STUMBLES AGAIN.)

MILTON: (ENTERS, CARRYING A SMALL BENCH.) Fillburt, what do you think you're doing? (SETS DOWN THE BENCH.)

FILLBURT: Well, you see, Master Millbourne, Sir, I'm trying to – (HE TRIPS.) That is, you told me – I mean, well you see Master Millbourne, sir, I just wanted to – (HE STUMBLES.)

MILTON: Be careful, stupid one. That's the last of the flour in that basket. If you drop it, we'll have no bread.

FILLBURT: Yes, sir. I'll be careful, sir. (HE TRIPS AND FALLS BACKWARD.)

MILTON: Fillburt, you have the biggest feet in the world. You never seem to know where they are.

FILLBURT: (GIGGLES.) No sir, I mean, yes, sir, I mean (TRIES TO GET UP.) Oooops! (STUMBLES.)

MILTON: Will you put that basket down before you drive me out of my mind? Put it down!

FILLBURT: Oh, yes, sir. Right sir. Put it down, yes sir. Put the basket down. (STARTS TO PUT IT ON THE GROUND.)

MILTON: Not there, witless, over here.

FILLBURT: Oh, over there. Yes, sir. (PICKS UP THE BASKET.) Right away sir, Master Millbourne, sir. Yes, sir. (HE TRIPS.) Take the basket over there.

MILTON: I'm afraid to watch.

FILLBURT: (FINALLY REACHES THE RIGHT SPOT – PUTS BASKET DOWN.) See? I did it! (HE ALMOST STEPS RIGHT INTO THE BASKET.)

MILTON: WATCH OUT!

FILLBURT: (YELLS.) What! What is it, sir!

MILTON: That was close.

FILLBURT: Hey, I did that pretty good, didn't I, didn't I, didn't I, huh?
MILTON: Oh, you were wonderful. Quite wonderful indeed. You managed to carry the basket all the way over there without spilling it.

FILLBURT: (VERY PROUD OF HIMSELF.) Gosh, thanks, sir. Hey, maybe I'm not so dumb after all. Huh? Maybe, huh? Huh?

MILTON: Maybe.

ROXANNE: (ENTERING.) Papa! Papa!

MILTON: What is it, Roxanne?

ROXANNE: I saw the King. He's coming up the road.

MILTON: Oh, no. Oh, dear. Oh, my goodness. What can we do? You say he's on the way?

ROXANNE: Yes, Papa.

FILLBURT: (HE HAS COME UP BEHIND ROXANNE, AND STANDS SHUFFLING HIS FEET, TWISTING HIS HANDS BASHFULLY. HE STARES AT HER ADORINGLY.) Gosh, you're pretty, Miss Roxanne. You sure are.

ROXANNE: Why, thank you, Fillburt.

FILLBURT: Oh, you're welcome, Miss Roxanne.

ROXANNE: Papa, shall I –

FILLBURT: Because I really think you're pretty, Miss Roxanne. Gosh, yes.

ROXANNE: Yes, Fillburt. Thank you – again. Now, Papa –

FILLBURT: I mean I really, truly do, Miss Roxanne.

MILTON: Fillburt, stop blabbering!

FILLBURT: Yes, sir, Master Millbourne, sir.

MILTON: Make yourself useful. Go watch the road. Watch for the King.

FILLBURT: Watch for the King? Oh, good! I get to watch for the King. (TO HIMSELF AND TO THE AUDIENCE AS HE STUMBLES OFF.) I get to watch for the King. I get to watch for the King. (HE IS GONE.)

MILTON: (SITS GLOOMILY ON THE BENCH.) Oh, my.

ROXANNE: Don't worry so much, Papa. The King is very kind, and he'll understand if we can't pay our taxes for a while.

MILTON: Roxanne, my child, I'm afraid we can't pay the taxes at all.

ROXANNE: Not right away, perhaps, but you've always managed to pay the taxes somehow, Papa.

MILTON: Not this year. We have no money at all. I've sold

everything except the house, and the mill – my wonderful mill that my father left me –

- ROXANNE: Papa! You aren't going to sell the mill, are you?
MILTON: No, not yet. But I'll have to sell it soon. I have no choice.
ROXANNE: Oh, this is terrible, Papa. Why didn't you tell me before?
MILTON: What good would it do? You'd only worry. There's no solution – except perhaps a rich husband for you, Roxanne.
ROXANNE: But, Papa, no one in the kingdom is rich anymore.
MILTON: I know. So you see, if the King insists that we pay all the taxes, we'll lose everything we own. I'll go to prison. And you, Roxanne, I don't know what will happen to you.
ROXANNE: We'll ask the King to be generous, Papa. You'll see, everything will be all right.
MILTON: (SMILES.) Go comb your hair, and make yourself pretty, Roxanne. Perhaps you can soften the King's heart.
ROXANNE: Yes, Papa. (SHE GOES AND TAKES THE BASKET OF FLOUR WITH HER.)

(AS MILTON STANDS PREOCCUPIED WITH HIS TROUBLES, REGINALD AND EDGAR ENTER.)

- REGINALD: Is this the place, Edgar?
EDGAR: (CHECKS THE LEDGER.) This is it. (READS.) Milton Millbourne, Miller.
REGINALD: Doesn't look as though we'll collect much here.
EDGAR: Probably not.

(THEY CONTINUE TO CONSULT THE BOOK, AND WHILE THEY ARE DOING SO, RUMPLESTILTSKIN ENTERS, STILL CAVORTING GLEEFULLY AT THE PROSPECT OF CAUSING TROUBLE.)

- RUMPLESTILTSKIN: Hey, diddle-diddle, tee-hee-hee, I've made a spell, clever old me . . . (STOPS SUDDENLY.) Hmmmm. This looks like place to work a little mischief. Just the right combination of people. All the ingredients for TROUBLE. (HE GIGGLES.) I can hardly wait to start. The question is – where to begin? (THROUGHOUT THIS SCENE HE REMAINS INVISIBLE TO THE CHARACTERS ON THE STAGE, ALTHOUGH, OF COURSE, THE AUDIENCE CAN SEE HIM.)

EDGAR: Well, Your Majesty, it looks as though all we'll collect here is straw.

REGINALD: It's a pity that straw isn't gold.

EDGAR: If all the straw in the kingdom were gold, Your Majesty, you would be the richest king in the world.

REGINALD: There's a lot of straw, then?

EDGAR: Baskets and barrels and tons of it, Your Majesty.

REGINALD: (MARVELS TO HIMSELF.) Well, what do you know about that?

RUMPLESTILTSKIN: Now the trouble begins! I'll let them make their own mischief for a while, then I'll throw in some of mine! (HE CACKLES WITH PLEASURE.)

(REGINALD AND EDGAR APPROACH THE MILLER, WHO STILL APPARENTLY DOES NOT SEE THEM.)

– END OF E-MAIL SEGMENT –

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