



The Spider That Could Spin the Golden Thread

A new Highland Perthshire Wonder tale created in May 2012 by the children of Pitlochry, Kinloch Rannoch, Kenmore, Breadalbane, Grandtully and Logierait Primary Schools in collaboration with storyteller Claire Hewitt.

Once upon a time there lived in a small village called **Moulin**, a mother and her two children, Jack and Mary. They were very poor and one day their father said 'I am going to look for gold in the mountains' and he left and never returned. So the children did their best to look after their mother and she to look after them.

One May morning Jack and Mary caught a fish and brought it home to their mother, who said 'I am so lucky to have two children like you who care for their old mother' and she cooked up a fine feast. And when the sun went down, she told them a story about a spider that she had heard could spin a golden thread, but she knew not where it might live.

That night the children thought hard about the story. If only they could find that spider, it might bring wealth to their family. So next morning they said goodbye to their mother - who gave them half a bannock and a blessing for their journey - and down the hill they went, with hope in their hearts they walked.

And on they journeyed and long they journeyed, following the path of the sun as it goes from East to West along the shores of **Loch Tummel**. As the sun began to set, hunger and weariness was upon them, so they decided to rest under

an ancient oak tree. They ate some of the bannock, curled up in the arms of the oak's great roots and fell fast asleep. But the frosty night chilled them to the bone and they woke shivering in the full moon light that shone across the water. A dog fox barked as the geese honked their lullabies all night on the loch below.

Morning dawned in the glen as the sun began to wake up over the hill and stretch his fingers across the loch. Jack was awoken from his dreams by a 'crawk... crawk... crawk!' It was a mother crow up in the tree calling down to her young baby who had fallen out of the nest. But the young crow couldn't fly yet. Jack didn't think once or twice, he picked up that wee bird, and with the help of Mary, put it back in its nest.

Suddenly a deep booming voice spoke. It seemed to be coming from the trunk of that great Oak tree. 'Thank you children for your great kindness' it said.

'Where do you go and what do you seek?'

'We seek the spider that spins the golden thread' they said.

'Oh. That is far and a long way from here' said the oak. 'But if you need help ask my friends the crows. And maybe this riddle will help you on your way -

**' I have the sharpest teeth and the blackest fur,
And when I run I am just a blur'**

And the old wise man of the oak gave his blessing for the children's journey.

On they journeyed and long they journeyed past waterfalls and ancient hazel and alder trees whose twisted limbs stretched out over the dark waters of **Loch Rannoch**, till they came to a place where the paths parted. Which way should they go? The path ahead would lead them to a dark and lonely moor where giants were said to throw their great boulders at one another. Or, were they to take the path that went through the **Black Wood of Rannoch**? Just as they were wondering what to do, a dark cloud hid the sun and the children shivered as the wind began to howl.

'Mary, I think it would be best if we went through the forest. Maybe we will find shelter there tonight' said Jack, so round the loch they walked and into the forest they stepped, along a track that wove its way like an adder through the pines. The trees seemed to gently whisper to the children, calling them on, until in the gloom they saw the glimmer of a light coming from a wee bothy.

'Maybe we can ask for shelter' said Mary. But just as they approached the house the door flew open and an old woman ran out, an iron frying pan in her hand. The children heard a terrifying howl and caught sight of a creature with the blackest fur and sharpest teeth flashing as it chased a young calf, its mother crying out to her frightened child.

Mary didn't think once or twice. She took the pan out of the old woman's hands, and threw it at the wolf. It caught the wolf's back leg, and the wolf slunk into the shadows of the great endless forest howling 'You will see me again!'

'Thank you children with hearts of gold for saving my calf. Come in and take shelter.' And the old woman gave them food and a warm bed by the peat fire and they slept a long dreamless sleep.

The next morning she asked them 'Where do you go and what do you seek?' 'We seek the spider that spins the golden thread' they said. 'Ah' said the old woman. 'That is far and a long way from here, but if you need help just call and my cow will be there. And maybe this riddle will help you on your way:

**'Swift like the wind through the trees I run,
from burning fire and the hunters gun.'**

And the children walked on in the direction the old woman had pointed.

On they journeyed and long they journeyed up the **goat track** beneath the shadow of the Fairy Mountain **Schiehallion** when a great mist wrapped itself around them and they couldn't see this way or that. Suddenly Jack lurched forward taking Mary with him, and they fell down, down, down a dark hole, and landed in the middle of the mountain.

There in front of them sat an old witch, her bony claw stirring a cauldron, her one beady eye upon them. 'Who are you and what do you seek?' she croaked.

'We seek the spider that spins the golden thread' they said.

'Ah that is far and a long way from here. The spider you speak of is guarded by a dark demon. But I am sure my son will be able to help you. Just sit awhile and wait 'till he returns' cackled the old crone.

The Earth began to shake and quake and into the mountain the witch's son came, and a great giant was he...and hungry! The children crept behind a boulder as he stopped, sniffing the air.

'Snouk butt and snouk benn, I smell the blood of a human. Be he alive or be he dead I'll grind his bones to make my bread.'

'Aaah' croaked his mother, 'I have a tasty treat for you here my boy!'

Mary and Jack knew they had to get away, and fast, so before the giant could wink or blink, the children crept onto the mossy hills that were his feet and hid. Sniffing this way and that, the giant strode out of the mountain, searching for the food he could smell but not see, and in three strides he was at **Kenmore**.

When they were there, the children jumped down from the giant's foot, and ran into the cover of some woods by a river. Suddenly a deer and faun jumped out in front of them, and in hot pursuit there were hunters with their dogs. Jack and Mary saw the deer leap across a burn but the baying dogs lost the scent. 'Did you see which way they went?' the hunters asked the children, and immediately Mary nodded and pointed away from the forest towards the loch. A horn was blown and the hunters rode on.

Out from the shadows of the birch trees stepped the deer and her faun. 'Thank you children with hearts that shine like gold' she said. 'Where do you go and what do you seek?'

'We seek the spider that spins the golden thread' they said.

'Oh that is far and a long way from here, but if you need help call and I will be there.'

On they walked and long they walked, until they found some trees to shelter under on **Drummond Hill**, and eating some bannock, they fell into a deep sleep. In the middle of the night Jack woke up thinking he heard something, but his eyes were heavy and he fell back to sleep. And when the dawn song awoke him, he saw Mary was gone. 'Mary' he called, searching this way and that, when to his horror he saw the tracks of a creature that could only be a wolf! He followed them in the damp earth, knowing that Mary had been carried off in the creature's great jaws. Fast as he could run, he knew he would never match the speed of the wolf. What was he to do? 'Crows, crows, I need your help' he cried.

And a great flock of crows flew down from the North and they chased the wolf as it ran with Mary up past **Castle Menzies** onto **Weem Rock**. The crows swooped at the wolf and finally with a howl it tossed Mary up into the sky so high that she began to fly over the moon. 'Help me gentle cow.' she called, and the cow flew over the moon as only a cow can, catching Mary on her strong back and brought her safely back to earth.

'Thank you' the children said to the crows and cow as they went homewards. But home was still a long way away for the children, and besides that, they still hadn't found the spider that could spin the golden thread, and to make matters worse Jack had hurt his leg and couldn't walk! They needed help so they called out 'deer, deer' and there magically she appeared with her fawn before them. 'Jump on my back and I will take you where you need to go' she said.

So on they travelled and long they travelled eastwards along the **River Tay**, when Mary saw in the grass a fluttering of red. It was a wee bird, a robin, its wing broken and unable to fly. 'Stop' she said to the deer and picked the bird up, and it looked as if it was dead. But she tore a piece of cloth from the bottom of

her dress and bound its wing and put it next to her warm beating heart. The robin slowly came back to life and as it did it sang a most beautiful song and then a riddle:

**' I have a mouth and I can not eat.
I have a bed but I can not sleep.'**

'Children' it sang ' If you can answer this riddle then you will find the place where the spider that spins the golden thread lives'

And in the distance they heard the roaring of water and they knew the answer to the riddle.

'It's the river' shouted Mary!

'Yes' sang the robin 'and across that great river you will see a dark cave where lives the spider who spins the golden thread. But beware of the dark creature that guards it.'

So by the roaring **Grandtully Falls** Mary and Jack stood. How were they to cross the river? Looking down, searching for a way, they saw a huge salmon stranded in a shallow pool, and without thinking once or twice, they picked up that great salmon and put it back into the river. The salmon swam away, then it doubled back, leapt out of the water and said:

'Kind children with hearts of gold, thank you for saving me. Where do you go and what do you seek?'

'We seek the spider that spins the golden web, and we know it's just over there, but how can we cross this river?' The salmon dove into the water and called to its brothers and sisters up and down the river and together they made a great bridge. And the children walked over the silvery backs of those fish to the other side.

And there was the dark cave and in they began to walk, their hearts beating like a great drum, leaving the roar of the river behind. The sun had gone down and the only light in that cave came from the spider spinning its golden thread.

'Who are you and what do you seek?' Came a voice in the dark. And as it spoke they could see the flashing of its white teeth.

'We seek the spider that spins the golden thread for our poor mother whom we love.' said the children.

The wolf growled 'I guard that spider and only those who endure a night of riddles can pass. If you can answer these riddles before the sun rises then the spider is yours, but in all these years none have ever succeeded!'

And so the night of riddles began, one riddle after the other the wolf barked out

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'I have the sharpest teeth, the blackest fur, And when I run I am just a blur. What am I?'

' You're a **wolf**' cried the children.

'Riddle me Ree, Riddle me Ri, tell tell me what am I? Swift like the wind through the trees I run, From the howling dogs and the hunters gun'

' You're a **deer!**' shouted Jack.

'I have a Mouth and I can not eat, I have a bed and I cannot sleep. Riddle me Ree riddle me ri, what am I?'

'You're a **river!**' screamed Mary

...and so it went on until the children heard the birds singing to the rising sun...and the wolf asked his last riddle -

'I make things live...I make things die, Look at me and I'll blind your eye.'

The children searched for the answer blindly. The Wolf took a step forward, teeth bared. They answered once. 'Wrong' snarled the wolf, moving closer. They answered twice 'wrong again' it cried. And just when all hope was lost, a single beam of sunlight shot like a golden arrow from the sky and lit the dark cave.

' **The sun**' they cried ' You are **the sun.**'

The Wolf howled, and the whole of the cave filled with a flash of light so bright that Mary and Jack couldn't see. Slowly, as they opened their eyes a figure appeared before them. It was not the wolf, oh no. As the children's eyes searched, they saw none other than their father standing before them. He opened his arms and embraced them both.

“Oh my children with hearts of gold, long you have journeyed but your quest has not been in vain for the spider who spins the golden thread is yours. But first a story I have to tell you. Do you remember when I left our home in search of treasures that the mountains might hold? I travelled many days until I came across a cave in the side of a great hill. There I saw a spider spinning her web with gold. This was what I had been searching for and just as I was about to reach out, a witch flew in shrieking *'That spider is mine and not yours for the taking. And for trying to steal it I will put a spell of enchantment on you. You will guard the spider for the rest of your life in the shape of a wolf. The spell*

may be broken, but only by a human with a heart of gold that can endure a night of riddles.'

And so it was that the witch turned me into a wolf and here I watched and here I waited until finally you came. I am blessed that it was my own children that broke the spell. The witch holds no power over me nor you and we are free to return home.”

So in they ran to rescue the spider who had served the witch for many years. But how were they to carry it and keep it safe from harm? The spider began to spin and weave a golden basket on wheels of shining gold turning like the sun. Homewards they journeyed carrying Grandmother Spider over the hills until they returned to the place where they had begun, and to their waiting mother.

They all lived a long and a good life, and sometimes on a cold night as their mother knitted fine shawls from golden thread, a lamp would be lit and placed in the window as their father spun a yarn or two to anyone who cared to listen!

So now our stories endit
And least you be offended
Tak' a needle and a thread
And put a piece at the end of it!