

# CDSS Sings—“Jenny Jenkins”

by Kim Wallach

One of my favorite children’s songs is Jenny Jenkins. I have always liked the challenge of rhyming colors, as have the children I sing with. When my daughter was three, she went through a period of rejecting clothing of all colors, and finally, one morning, I had to take her to school wrapped in her “blankie”—a blue quilt appliquéd with yellow moon and stars. From that time on, that is how I picture Jenny’s “roly-poly fiddly foly seek a cause a use a double roll a find me.” (Kentucky traditional singer Jean Ritchie sang “seek a double use a cause a”—I don’t know if I learned it the other way, or changed it because it sounded better to me).

My students today tend to simplify the verses to “I won’t wear red it’s the color of my bed”/“Won’t wear green it’s the color of my jeans”—or beans, or greens. Jean’s verses say there’s something wrong with the color—“I won’t wear green, it’s not fit to be seen.” The inappropriateness of the colors appears to hark back to the days when Jenny Jenkins was Jenny or Janie Jones, and the song was a longer play party game for children. Jenny would sit or slump behind a “mother” or “parents” while a larger group of children would join hands and step forward to ask to see her, and retreat when rejected. At first the parents say Jenny is doing laundry, then they admit she is dead and the questions involve what color they should dress Jenny in, or what color the guests should wear to the funeral. After rejecting other colors as inappropriate, white is accepted and they begin to go to the funeral. “Jenny” jumps up and chases the others either as a ghost or having come back to life.

Versions of the game are known in England, Scotland, Ireland, Jamaica, and all over the United States, north, south, east and west. The rhymes change with accents and traditions, and the nonsense refrains are tongue-twisting symphonies of alliteration. Here are some great examples:

- “tally wally aye sir”, “tallawalawise”,
- “So double rose Dillevally, Sukey, Dicky, white bands appear”
- “Singin’ buy me a turley whirl, A double double early whirl, A rucker sucker rye, A ground turley oh, A brown buck berry to my lovely Jenny jin-ki-o!,” appears in Vance Randolph’s *Ozark Folksongs*, Volume III.
- In the version recorded by Janet Russell on her Bright Shining Morning CD (Harbourtown Records, Cumbria, UK), she sings: “And I’ll buy ye a rolypoly sugar alley hokey pokey whoops corduroy, Jeannie Jenkins, oh, whoops corduroy, Jeannie Jenkins, oh.”
- Alan Lomax, in the *Penguin Book of American Folksong*, includes the refrain: “I’ll buy me a twirley-whirley, sookey-lookey, Sally-Katty, double-lolly, Roll-the-find me, roll, Jenny Jenkins, roll.”

I have found wonderful threads on the Mudcat website with multiple references: *The Singing Game* by Iona and Peter Opie, and *Games and Songs of American Children* by William Wells Newell; both describe the early game versions. Although I searched every other volume in my own collection, the only other version I had in print was a picture book of Jenny Jenkins as sung by Jerry Garcia and David Grisman. Illustrated by Bruce Whatley, it uses what is essentially Jean Ritchie’s version of a timeless song.

*Kim Wallach is a music teacher, singer, songwriter, mom, camp counselor, Short Sister, Children’s Music Network board member, avid reader, and gardener living in Keene, New Hampshire. Her most recent project was a grant funded recording of songs written and sung by students at the Warwick (Massachusetts) Community School, “Sing a Song of Warwick.” Kim has more than a dozen other recordings available.*

Watch Pete Seeger and Jean Ritchie singing and laughing their way through the song at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iCkCIBDRyE>.

**Web extra!** <http://www.cdss.org/cdss-news.html>. Hear Kim sing “Jenny Jenkins,” from her 1982 recording, “2 Dozen Children’s Songs.” (Recording available from [kimwallach@myfairpoint.net](mailto:kimwallach@myfairpoint.net).)

# Jenny Jenkins

as sung by Kim Wallach

Will you wear red, oh my dear, oh my dear? Will you wear red Jen-ny Jen-kins? No I  
won't wear red, it's the co - lor of my bed! I'll buy me a ro - ly po - ly  
fid - ly fo - ly seek - a cause - a use a doub - le roll a find me. Roll, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Jen - ny Jen - kins, roll. \_\_\_\_\_

Will you wear pink oh my dear, oh my dear?  
Will you wear pink Jenny Jenkins?  
No, I won't wear pink, it's the color of my sink (ink, link)  
I'll buy me a roly poly, fiddlely foly seek a cause a use a double roll a find me  
Roll, Jenny Jenkins, roll.

red - head, bed  
white - kite, fright, bite  
brown - town, gown, frown  
blue - shoe, view  
maroon - balloon, tune  
orange - porridge  
green - beans, jeans, teen  
purple - gerbil  
turquoise - porpoise, her toys  
black - backpack, rack, sack, track

Well, what will you wear, oh my dear, oh my dear?  
What will you wear Jenny Jenkins?  
Oh there's nothing I will wear, so I'll have to go bare  
Or buy me a role poly fiddlely foly, seek a cause a use a double roll a find me  
Roll, Jenny Jenkins, roll.

*Tune typeset by Peter Barnes*