

## **The First Thread: Rumpelstiltskin's Beginning**

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"Oy! Rumpel! Get to the market!" Rumpel started at his mother's voice. He dashed out of his tiny, dirty room. His mother was waiting for him in their dusty kitchen, tapping her foot impatiently. Her wild, brown hair was a bird's nest, and her raggedy dress was so filthy that Rumpel could barely make out the flowery print. Thoughts of poverty stung his heart and mind.

"Pears. Apples," She barked as she counted off on two fingers. She dropped four coins in his hand. Knowing not to argue, Rumpelstiltskin quietly grabbed a coarse basket and slipped out the door.

Rumpelstiltskin looked exactly like his name. He was small for an 8-year-old boy. His skin was pale and sickly, and he was thin as a twig. His father died when he was three, leaving his family in deep poverty. His mother only earned a penny twice a month for scrubbing floors at the castle. She never wanted children, and she gave them the worst names in her disdain. His brother was "Stubbystiltskin", and his sister was "Frumpystiltskin." He hated their names. They were teased and tormented by the other kids in the town.

When he arrived at the market, the place was bustling with maids shopping for their mistresses' suppers. As Rumpel plodded over to the fruit vendor and picked through the pear selection, he felt a yank on his collar and turned around to face some of the bigger, meaner kids from the town. With a quick lunge, a bully shoved Rumpel against the stand and snatched all of the coins out of his basket. Then the group ran

away, triumphant. Rumpel just stood there, dumbfounded in the hot sun, watching the bullies go. Hot tears of shame began to burn in his eyes.

As Rumpel turned, he faced a hooded figure in a cloak striding toward him across an alley. The stranger flipped back their hood to reveal a woman with long, dark hair and mysterious gray eyes. The woman touched Rumpel's shoulder.

"My name is Lynn," she said in a silvery voice, "and I belong to the Guild of Magic." A smile flickered on her lips. "I saw how those boys treated you, and I felt pity. I was once like you – vulnerable and sickly. But I became unstoppable when I joined the guild."

"I'm... Rumpel...stiltskin," he said, warily. "What do you want with me?"

She tilted her head and narrowed her as she looked at him. "I don't WANT anything, but ...would you like to learn how to get back at those who hurt you? You would never be brawny and strong," she pursed her lips, "but I could teach you how to be clever, swift and sly." Rumpel stood in thought for a moment.

"Why would you want to help me?" He couldn't understand.

"Who else can you trust in life? I see you – obviously born into poverty. Abused by others in the market square. Taken advantage of. I've been where you are." A smile crept back on her face. Rumpel stood in thought for a moment.

"This is a stranger," he thought. "Should I trust her? If I join her, maybe I could finally be treated as someone. Maybe I can finally be important. Mother won't care. It'll be good for her – one less mouth to feed." He came to a decision.

"I'll do it," he said.



So, Rumpel joined the Guild of Magic. Under the guidance of Lynn, he became one of the most powerful magicians in the land. His strongest power was the ability to turn anything into gold. But even with all this power, he was missing something. He was lonely. People invited him in when they wanted him to do magic for them but never spoke to him about anything else. They didn't want to know anything about him – they just wanted his magical gifts. He became reclusive, not wanting to be used by others for what he could do. A hundred years passed. People forgot about him as he stowed away in caves. He would often ponder what it would be like to have a friend. Someone who understood him. Someone who didn't treat him like a pile of dirt or use him for his abilities. He daydreamed about plans to get himself a friend. He had heard whispers of a peasant girl in a nearby town who could spin straw into gold and wanted to see this for himself. Perhaps she could be a friend?