

## A Brand New Me – Eu Ming, Year 6, WA

I peered up the hole but could only catch sight of the intricately painted ceiling of the tower. There was a hidden pathway just beside me in the dark.

“I can never go back up there. Everyone probably knows who I am now,” I muttered. I could hear the queen alerting the guards. “I must quickly make haste through this hidden passageway before it’s too late. But where will it lead me to?”

The smell was atrocious and I could feel the murky water seeping through my worn-out shoes as I clambered along in the darkness. I walked for what seemed like hours. Alas, I spotted a manhole cover and opened it. I popped up in the middle of a town square.

I wandered around the dilapidated town and discovered that this place was different to the others that I have visited in many ways. The townspeople were indifferent to my appearance and treated me like I was one of them.

“People are so kind to each other here,” I thought.

Dusk soon approached and I huddled up in the corner with a ragged blanket around me. I had nowhere to go and the temperature was chilling. A family in a ramshackle house signalled for me to come over. I saw a child behind the curtain.

“Yes, that’s what I’m looking for,” I hissed.

They asked if I had any food or shelter. I shook my head and stepped out into the light. They welcomed me into their home. My appearance did not deter them from extending their invitation.

“Are you new to this town?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Help yourself to the food. We do not have much but we get by. Also, we have a spare bed and you can spend the night here.”

The kindness and openness from the family towards a stranger surprised me until I had completely forgotten about my ill intentions towards the child. I waved at the little girl and she replied with a sweet smile in return. She was not perturbed by my appearance in the least. I slept soundly after such an arduous day underground. Truth be told, this was the first time that I did not feel lonely but felt warmth and loved instead. It was a strange feeling.

I liked it.

I woke up just before the sun rose and silently stepped out into the yard.

“Where are you going?” asked the mother.

“I’m leaving. I don’t want to bother your family. Thank you for the care and warm bed. I really appreciate it,” I replied, my voice slowly breaking.

No one ever cared for me as much as that family did. I would never forget that day.

I ventured through the town and met more kind and friendly strangers. It was soon midday and my stomach growled in discontentment. I scavenged behind the market stalls for any discarded food. As I was doing this, I made eye contact with a stall vendor and he waved at me. I waved back at him and he beckoned for me to come over. I walked over and saw his store. It was bustling with customers.

“Would you like some food? It’s on the house,” the owner asked. “No thanks. I’m fine,” I replied.

“Have a bowl, I insist. Hope you like it!” the man said cheerfully.

“Thank you so much. I don’t know how to repay you.” Tears welled up in my eyes. The townspeople had been nice and caring. I sat down and started gulping down the food. It has been many moons since I last tasted something this good.

“I promise to repay you in the future,” I said.

“No problem. I hope you have a good day!” the owner of the stall replied.

I explored the town further and everywhere I went, I was greeted by warm and cheery smiles. The townspeople were not rich but were always kind and forthcoming to me. Every day, there would always be someone who would offer me a warm bed for the night. That day, I ran into the same family that I had met the first night I was here.

“Would you like to stay with us tonight?” the mother invited me once again.

“I don’t want to be a bother.”

“It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it. Come on, let’s get you in bed,” the mother responded.

I followed the mother back home and saw the child again. She waved at me.

“No, that’s not what I’m here for. This town and this family had been good to me. I will not cause them any grief.”

I slept like a baby that night and snuck out in the morning before anyone was awake. This time, I left a note to make sure they wouldn’t worry.

“I will be back in three days, hopefully with some good news and good fortune.”

I immediately put my plan in motion. With my magic, I disguised myself and made my way back to the kingdom where I had escaped from. I climbed back up the abandoned tower to find the sewing machine and mountains of rotting straw, just as how I last remembered them. I reverted into my imp self and channelled all my magic into my work. I laboured for two days and two nights without any rest. I heaved a sigh of relief when I was done.

I had transformed the long and flaky straws into shiny golden strands of gold, again.

I stuffed the strands of gold into a ragged bag and lugged them down the tower. It was heavy but I did not mind. This would be a gift to the kind townspeople who had welcomed me with open arms.

I decided to take the shortcut through the forest, unbeknownst to me that there was a group of soldiers up ahead.

Suddenly, I was yanked by the collar and lifted into the air. “Didn’t think I’d see you here again. Remember me?”

“What is he talking about? I’ve never seen him before in my life,” I wondered. “Wait, he must be the one who revealed my name to the queen and ruined my plan.”

“What do you have there, goblin? Are you off to cause more mischief?”

“I am no longer who you think I am. I have turned over a new leaf.” I stomped hard on his foot and knocked him to the ground.

I sped off in the darkness. The townspeople were in deep slumber when I reached the town. I placed strands of gold at the stall of the food vendor who had given me sustenance during my time of need. Next, I rushed to the home of the family who had welcomed me into their home without any prejudice. I hung the shiny strands of gold on the doorknob and quickly departed. Surely, they would be elated to receive the gift.

My final stop was the home of the mayor. I knocked gently on the front door. The mayor was surprised to see me this early in the morning. It was not every day that an imp would pay him a visit.

“Young goblin, what are you doing here?” he asked.

“I am here to make a request. Here in this bag are riches beyond your imagination. I would like to ask you to repair this township and give everyone a better life. I wished for the kind townsfolk to live comfortably,” I responded.

The mayor gasped when he saw the strands of gold in the bag.

“Thank you so much. This town has been suffering from hardship for many years. This will change our lives forever. Thank you, young lad.”

I was joyous with what I have done. I would no longer cause mischief with my magic. “What might your name be?” he asked.

“Rumpelstiltskin,” I replied with a smile on my face.