

= Skin Deep ( Once Upon a Time ) =

" Skin Deep " is the twelfth episode of the American fairy tale / drama television series Once Upon a Time . The series takes place in the fictional seaside town of Storybrooke , Maine , in which the residents are actually characters from various fairy tales that were transported to the " real world " town by a powerful curse . In this episode , Emma Swan ( Jennifer Morrison ) suspects Mr. Gold ( Robert Carlyle ) is planning to seek vigilante justice when a cat burglar ( Eric Keenleyside ) robs his house . Meanwhile , Mary Margaret ( Ginnifer Goodwin ) plans a special girls ' night out on Valentine 's Day with Ruby ( Meghan Ory ) and Ashley ( Jessy Schram ) , and a fateful deal made between Rumpelstiltskin ( Carlyle ) and Belle ( Emilie de Ravin ) is revealed ? in which she gives up her freedom to save her village from the horrors of the Ogre Wars .

The episode was written by consulting producer Jane Espenson and directed by Milan Cheylov . It featured the first appearance of de Ravin , who was cast as Belle in November 2011 after being approached by series co @-@ creators Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz . Espenson created a love @-@ themed episode ; initially its main theme was to focus on Rumpelstiltskin choosing power over love , but during the writing process Espenson decided to make him instead believe that he was not worthy of love at all .

" Skin Deep " first aired in the United States on ABC on February 12 , 2012 . The episode received mixed reviews from television critics . Several reviewers felt that the Belle @-@ Rumpelstiltskin relationship resembled Stockholm Syndrome and was not developed enough to make it believable . Others , however , praised the complex characterization of the episode 's female characters , as well as Carlyle 's performance . A novelization of " Skin Deep " was released in 2013 .

= = Plot = =

= = = Opening Sequence = = =

A straw spinning wheel is shown in the forest .

= = = In the Characters ' Past = = =

In The Enchanted Forest , the Ogre Wars continue but are not going well for the lands controlled by Sir Maurice ( Eric Keenleyside ) . Rumpelstiltskin ( Robert Carlyle ) arrives and agrees to aid the battle in exchange for Maurice 's daughter , Belle ( Emilie de Ravin ) . Belle 's fiancée , Gaston ( Sage Brocklebank ) , and her father are against the terms but Belle agrees . At his castle , Rumpelstiltskin gives Belle a list of tasks , including skinning the children that he hunts for their pelts . At this Belle drops and chips a teacup in shock , but he explains that it is a joke and doesn 't mind about the chipped cup . As time goes by , Rumpelstiltskin and Belle develop a strong bond with each other . After a few months of living with him , Belle asks the dark one why she found children 's clothing upstairs . Rumpelstiltskin tells her it belonged to his son whom he unfortunately lost along with his wife . Gaston arrives to take Belle back but Rumpelstiltskin turns him into a rose and presents it to her as a gift . When asked about Gaston , Belle says that it was an arranged marriage , not one of love . She left him because she wanted to be heroic and there are not many chances for women to be heroic . Rumpelstiltskin asks Belle to go into town to buy more straw , and she cannot believe he trusts her to come back . Rumpelstiltskin says he does not expect to see her again .

As Belle is walking down the road , she runs into The Evil Queen ( Lana Parrilla ) , who asks her if she is running from someone . Belle admits the man she is leaving is overcome by evil yet she loves him . The Evil Queen offers the solution : true love 's kiss will break the curse . Belle returns to Rumpelstiltskin 's castle and the Dark one asks why she came back to him . She replies that she wasn 't going to return but something changed her mind . After a moment of silence between the two , they both share true love 's kiss , the magic starts to turn him back into an ordinary man , but becomes furious and shakes off the magic , accusing Belle of conspiring with The Evil Queen .

Rumpelstiltskin yells in a rage that no one will love him , and The Evil Queen will never take away his power . He throws Belle in his dungeon and smashes every cup against the wall but he cannot bring himself to destroy the chipped one . Once he has cooled off , he tells Belle to leave because his powers are more important to him than she is . Belle admonishes him for not believing she can love him . She warns him that he will regret his actions when all he has is an empty heart and a chipped cup .

A month later , The Evil Queen appears ; Rumpelstiltskin says that her deception with Belle failed , and that The Evil Queen will never be more powerful than him . She then tells him that she had nothing to do with Belle 's actions ( even though she prodded her , Belle 's feelings were real ) and informs him that upon Belle 's return to her home , she had been shunned by her village for her association with Rumpelstiltskin and Gaston 's disappearance and was subsequently imprisoned and tortured by her father . She eventually killed herself , leaping off the tower she was kept prisoner in . Rumpelstiltskin is devastated and replaces a treasured gold chalice with the chipped cup and weeps over his loss .

= = = In Storybrooke = = =

In the present day , Mr. Gold ( Carlyle ) repossesses florist Moe French 's ( Keenleyside ) van the day before Valentine 's Day . At Granny 's Cafe , David ( Josh Dallas ) and Mary Margaret ( Ginnifer Goodwin ) talk from separate tables , until Emma Swan ( Jennifer Morrison ) interrupts to ask about Henry ( Jared S. Gilmore ) . Ashley ( Jessy Schram ) arrives with her baby , noting how rarely she gets a babysitter or sees her boyfriend , Sean ( Tim Phillipps ) . Ruby ( Meghan Ory ) suggests a girl 's night out . Emma investigates a robbery of Mr. Gold 's home , who says he knows that Moe is responsible , seeking revenge for the repossession . Emma recovers the majority of Mr. Gold 's items but one thing is missing and he will stop at nothing until it is recovered . He kidnaps Moe , ties him up and beats him , demanding where it is . However , he soon starts saying " she 's gone , " referring to Belle , until Emma arrives to stop him . Mr. Gold believes Regina ( Parrilla ) put Moe up to the theft and she knows where the last stolen item is . Emma still has to arrest Mr. Gold for kidnapping and assault .

Elsewhere , during their girls night out , Ruby is trying to convince Ashley to find another guy since Sean is always working . Ashley tells Mary Margaret that all she wants is to be with Sean . Mary Margaret understands since her own romantic arrangement is not ideal . Sean shows up on a break from work and proposes to Ashley ; she accepts and they go out for a drive . David shows up next to give Mary Margaret her Valentine , but mistakenly gives her Kathryn 's . Mary Margaret says she thought if two people were meant to be together they would find a way , but maybe she and David need another way . She tells him he should probably go home .

At the sheriff 's office , Mr. Gold reminds Emma about the favor she owes him but he does not use it to ask for his freedom . Regina shows up and tells Emma that she can see Henry for only 30 minutes if she will allow her to visit Mr. Gold . He asks Regina if she has what he wants and she in fact does . Regina put Moe up to the robbery because she wants Mr. Gold to say his real name . After some prodding he admits his name is Rumpelstiltskin and addresses Regina as " Your Majesty , " confirming that both are aware of their alternate identities . Regina returns the chipped cup to Mr. Gold then makes a visit to the hospital . She goes to see Belle 's counterpart , who did not die in the Enchanted Forest , but is now being held prisoner in the hospital 's mental ward .

= = Production = =

" Skin Deep " was written by consulting producer Jane Espenson , while 24 veteran , Milan Cheylov , directed the installment . Knowing that they were going to recreate the story of " Beauty and the Beast " , series co @-@ creators Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz wanted its heroine , Belle , " to exude intelligence and strength and be someone you would immediately love , " which led them to approach Emilie de Ravin . Her casting was announced in November 2011 . The actress agreed after reading the script , believing that the character was " very courageous " with a playful side that

would endear her to Rumpelstiltskin . During their casting meeting , Kitsis and Horowitz told de Ravin that Belle is defined as a strong intelligent woman in a world that disapproves of those characteristics , and that de Ravin was going to be " tak [ ing ] the icon of Belle and mak [ ing ] her a woman . "

Espenson said that this was one of their most love @-@ centered episodes ; when they realized it was going to be airing near Valentine 's Day , they decided to " lean into " this theme . Unusual for Once Upon a Time , the theme of this episode changed during the writing process . It was initially meant to center on Rumpelstiltskin choosing power over love . However , as Espenson went through drafts and discussed them with others , she decided that Rumpelstiltskin might think he is doing this , but really his actions are motivated by not believing that he is worthy of love at all . In the interest of time , Espenson was forced to edit out many plot points , including a failed escape attempt by Belle . Despite this , she sought to trim down more time from the Storybrooke scenes and " preserve as much as we could of the fairy tale side , " as the Belle @-@ Rumpelstiltskin relationship was a love story that needed time to grow in order to be believable .

De Ravin was a fan of the series before being cast and was happy to be able to view the costumes up close , describing her character 's gold dress as " absolutely stunning . " The casting of her former suitor , Gaston , was announced in December 2011 with Psych actor Sage Brocklebank . De Ravin described the episode 's version of Gaston as " maybe not as cocky as the animation [ version of him ] , but it ? s funny . " Rumpelstiltskin 's castle was shot almost entirely on greenscreen , with only a few real props being used . It was de Ravin 's first time working with this technology , which caused her to become " quite nervous . " The physical props helped her with the scenes , and " they ha [ d ] a fantastic set up of a couple of monitors that you can see a markup of basically how it ? s going to look . "

The episode was included in Reawakened : A Once Upon a Time Tale ? a novelization of the first season ? which was published by Hyperion Books in 2013 .

= = Cultural references = =

There are multiple references made to Disney 's Beauty and the Beast . The chipped tea cup that Belle accidentally drops is a reference to the character Chip in the film . Also , Belle 's fiancée in the show is named Gaston , the Disney antagonist , and he was turned into a red rose , which featured prominently in the film . In addition , most of Belle 's clothing in the fantasy world appears to be directly inspired by clothing worn by Belle in the Disney film , such as her yellow ballgown and her blue and white plainclothes . Mr. French 's flower shop is called " Game of Thorns , " a reference to Game of Thrones , a popular fantasy show and book series . The name and a logo can be seen on the side of his van at the start of the episode . David is seen reading Anna Karenina , another story about an affair that ends tragically . In the end of the episode , a reference to One Flew Over the Cuckoo 's Nest is shown , when Regina meets a nurse , who looks like nurse Ratchet and the janitor mopping up bears a striking resemblance to the Chief in the novel and film adaptation .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

Ratings and viewership for " Skin Deep " were down from the last episode . It had an 18 @-@ 49 rating of 3 @.@ 0 and was seen by 8 @.@ 65 million viewers , down 14 percent , but still came in second overall for the night . This was partially due to the fact that the episode aired in the same time @-@ slot as the 54th Grammy Awards , who had their best numbers ever since the 1984 telecast and the sudden news of Whitney Houston 's death the day prior to the event . In Canada , the episode finished in sixteenth place for the week with an estimated 1 @.@ 55 million viewers , a slight decrease from the 1 @.@ 58 million of the previous episode .

== = Reviews == =

" Skin Deep " received mixed reviews from television critics .

Amy Ratcliffe , writing for IGN , rated the episode with an 8 out of 10 . She expressed her love of Robert Carlyle , opining that " I especially liked him in the episode . He managed to show true emotion in spite of his silly Rumpelstiltskin accent , and he improves every scene he 's in . I feel like this episode will start something bigger . At least , I hope it will . " Laura Prudom of The Huffington Post felt Espenson was a " perfect fit for this episode ? when she 's firing on all cylinders , the Buffy alumna is one of the best in the industry at writing layered , empowered women , even when circumstances conspire against them . " The A.V. Club 's Oliver Sava graded the episode with a C + . He felt that because Belle did not come from " humble beginnings " like the Disney version , she was a " much less interesting character . " In addition , to Sava another major failing was that the Belle @-@ Rumpelstiltskin relationship resembled Stockholm Syndrome and " doesn ? t develop organically . " He did however love Regina 's final scene with Rumpelstiltskin , and expressed the wish that the other characters would begin remembering their pasts soon .

Hillary Busis of Entertainment Weekly opined that Espenson 's attempt to tell a " nightmarish , twisty tale of obsession and loss " was " decidedly mixed " due to the lack of development in the relationship between Belle and Rumpelstiltskin . Busis explained , " Yes , people fall in love quickly in traditional bedtime stories . But at least in the animated version of Beauty and the Beast , we could understand why Belle and her hairy paramour were meant to be . ' Skin Deep ' didn 't bother to explain that attraction . " In a contribution for Tor.com , Teresa Jusino defined " Skin Deep " as an " amazing retelling of the Beauty and the Beast story that contained some wonderful character moments and some great one @-@ liners ... Funny , charming , and at times harrowing , the script takes us into the depths of Rumpelstiltskin ? s soul , showing us this character both at his most warm and at his most dark . " Jusino was critical of the subplot with David and Mary Margaret , however , saying that " it didn ? t seem necessary as it didn ? t really move much forward . "