

The Girl without Hands

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A miller fell slowly but surely into poverty, until finally he had nothing more than his mill and a large apple tree which stood behind it. One day he had gone into the forest to gather wood, where he was approached by an old man, whom he had never seen before, and who said, "Why do you torment yourself with chopping wood? I will make you rich if you will promise me that which is standing behind your mill."

"What can that be but my apple tree?" thought the miller, said yes, and signed it over to the strange man.

The latter, however, laughed mockingly and said, "I will come in three years and get what belongs to me," then went away.

When he arrived home, his wife came up to him and said, "Miller, tell me, where did all the wealth come from that is suddenly in our house? All at once all the chests and boxes are full, and no one brought it here, and I don't know where it came from."

He answered, "It comes from an strange man whom I met in the woods and who promised me great treasures if I would but sign over to him that which stands behind the mill. We can give up the large apple tree for all this."

"Oh, husband!" said the woman, terrified. "That was the devil. He didn't mean the apple tree, but our daughter, who was just then standing behind the mill sweeping the yard."

The miller's daughter was a beautiful and pious girl, and she lived the three years worshipping God and without sin. When the time was up and the day came when the evil one was to get her, she washed herself clean and drew a circle around herself with chalk. The devil appeared very early in the morning, but he could not approach her.

He spoke angrily to the miller, "Keep water away from her, so she cannot wash herself any more. Otherwise I have no power over her."

The miller was frightened and did what he was told. The next morning the devil returned, but she had wept into her hands, and they were entirely clean.

Thus he still could not approach her, and he spoke angrily to the miller, "Chop off her hands. Otherwise I cannot get to her."

The miller was horrified and answered, "How could I chop off my own child's hands!"

Then the evil one threatened him, saying, "If you do not do it, then you will be mine, and I will take you yourself."

This frightened the father, and he promised to obey him. Then he went to the girl and said, "My child, if I do not chop off both of your hands, then the devil will take me away, and in my fear I have promised him to do this. Help me in my need, and forgive me of the evil that I am going to do to you."

She answered, "Dear father, do with me what you will. I am your child," and with that she stretched forth both hands and let her father chop them off.

The devil came a third time, but she had wept so long and so much onto the stumps, that they were entirely clean. Then he had to give up, for he had lost all claim to her.

The miller spoke to her, "I have gained great wealth through you. I shall take care of you in splendor as long as you live."

But she answered, "I cannot remain here. I will go away. Compassionate people will give me as much as I need."

Then she had her mutilated arms tied to her back, and at sunrise she set forth, walking the entire day until it was night. She came to a royal garden, and by the light of the moon she saw that inside there were trees full of beautiful fruit. But she could not get inside, for there it was surrounded by water.

Having walked the entire day without eating a bite, she was suffering from hunger, and she thought, "Oh, if only I were inside the garden so I could eat of those fruits. Otherwise I shall perish."

Then she knelt down and, crying out to God the Lord, she prayed. Suddenly an angel appeared. He closed a head gate, so that the moat dried up, and she could walk through.

She entered the garden, and the angel went with her. She saw a fruit tree with beautiful pears, but they had all been counted. She stepped up to the tree and ate from it with her mouth, enough to satisfy her hunger, but no more. The gardener saw it happen, but because the angel was standing by her he was afraid and thought that the girl was a spirit. He said nothing and did not dare to call out nor to speak to the spirit. After she had eaten the pear she was full, and she went and lay down in the brush.

The king who owned this garden came the next morning. He counted the fruit and saw that one of the pears was missing. He asked the gardener what had happened to it. It was not lying under the tree, but had somehow disappeared.

The gardener answered, "Last night a spirit came here. It had no hands and ate one of the pears with its mouth."

The king said, "How did the spirit get across the water? And where did it go after it had eaten the pear?"

The gardener answered, "Someone dressed in snow-white came from heaven and closed the head gate so the spirit could walk through the moat. Because it must have been an angel I was afraid, and I asked no questions, and I did not call out. After the spirit had eaten the pear it went away again."

The king said, "If what you said is true, I will keep watch with you tonight."

After it was dark the king entered the garden, bringing a priest with him who was to talk to the spirit. All three sat down under the tree and kept watch. At midnight the girl came creeping out

of the brush, stepped up to the tree, and again ate off a pear with her mouth. An angel dressed in white was standing next to her.

The priest walked up to them and said, "Have you come from God, or from the world? Are you a spirit or a human?"

She answered, "I am not a spirit, but a poor human who has been abandoned by everyone except God."

The king said, "Even if you have been abandoned by the whole world, I will not abandon you."

He took her home with him to his royal castle, and because she was so beautiful and pure he loved her with all his heart, had silver hands made for her, and took her as his wife.

After a year the king had to go out into the battlefield, and he left the young queen in the care of his mother, saying, "If she has a child, support her and take good care of her, and immediately send me the news in a letter."

She gave birth to a beautiful son. The old mother quickly wrote this in a letter, giving the joyful news to the king.

Now on the way the messenger stopped at a brook to rest. Tired from his long journey, he fell asleep. Then the devil came to him. He still wanted to harm the pious queen, and he took the letter, putting in its place one that stated that the queen had brought a changeling into the world. When the king read this letter he was frightened and saddened, but nevertheless he wrote an answer that they should take good care of the queen until his return. The messenger returned with this letter, but he rested at the same place, and again fell asleep. The devil came again and placed a different letter in his bag. This letter said that they should kill the queen with her child.

The old mother was terribly frightened when she received this letter. She could not believe it, and wrote to the king again, but she got back the same answer, because each time the devil substituted a false letter. And the last letter even stated that they should keep the queen's tongue and eyes as proof.

The old mother lamented that such innocent blood was to be shed, and in the night she had a doe killed, cut out its tongue and eyes, and had them put aside.

Then she said to the queen, "I cannot have you killed as the king has ordered, but you can no longer stay here. Go out into the wide world with your child, and never come back."

The old mother tied the queen's child onto her back, and the poor woman went away with weeping eyes. She came to a great, wild forest where she got onto her knees and prayed to God. Then the angel of the Lord appeared to her and led her to a small house. On it was a small sign with the words, "Here anyone can live free."

A snow-white virgin came from the house and said, "Welcome, Queen," then led her inside. She untied the small boy from her back, held him to her breast so he could drink, and then laid him in a beautiful made-up bed.

Then the poor woman said, "How did you know that I am a queen?"

The white virgin answered, "I am an angel, sent by God to take care of you and your child."

She stayed in this house for seven years, and was well taken care of. And through the grace of God and her own piety her chopped-off hands grew back.

The king finally came back home from the battlefield, and the first thing he wanted to do was to see his wife and their child.

Then the old mother began to weep, saying, "You wicked man, why did you write to me that I was to put two innocent souls to death," and she showed him the two letters that the evil one had counterfeited. Then she continued to speak, "I did what you ordered," and showed him as proof the eyes and the tongue.

Then the king began to weep even more bitterly for his poor wife and his little son, until the old woman had mercy and said to him, "Be satisfied that she is still alive. I secretly had a doe killed and took the proofs from it. I tied your wife's child onto her back and told her to go out into the wide world, and she had to promise never to come back here, because you were so angry with her."

Then the king said, "I will go as far as the sky is blue, and will neither eat nor drink until I have found my dear wife and my child again, provided that in the meantime they have not died or perished from hunger."

Then the king traveled about for nearly seven years, searching in all the stone cliffs and caves, but he did not find her, and he thought that she had perished. He neither ate nor drank during the entire time, but God kept him alive. Finally he came to a great forest, where he found a little house with a sign containing the words, "Here anyone can live free."

The white virgin came out, took him by the hand, led him inside, and said, "Welcome, King," then asked him where he had come from.

He answered, "I have been traveling about for nearly seven years looking for my wife and her child, but I cannot find them."

The angel offered him something to eat and drink, but he did not take it, wanting only to rest a little. He lay down to sleep, covering his face with a cloth.

Then the angel went into the room where the queen was sitting with her son, whom she normally called "Filled-with-Grief."

The angel said to her, "Go into the next room with your child. Your husband has come."

She went to where he was lying, and the cloth fell from his face.

Then she said, "Filled-with-Grief, pick up the cloth for your father and put it over his face again."

The child picked it up and put it over his face again. The king heard this in his sleep and let the cloth fall again.

Then the little boy grew impatient and said, "Mother, dear, how can I cover my father's face? I have no father in this world. I have learned to pray, 'Our father which art in heaven,' and you have said that my father is in heaven, and that he is our dear God. How can I know such a wild man? He is not my father."

Hearing this, the king arose and asked who she was.

She said, "I am your wife, and this is your son Filled-with-Grief."

He saw her living hands and said, "My wife had silver hands."

She answered, "Our merciful God has caused my natural hands to grow back."

The angel went into the other room, brought back the silver hands, and showed them to him. Now he saw for sure that it was his dear wife and his dear child, and he kissed them, and rejoiced, and said, "A heavy stone has fallen from my heart."

Then the angel of God gave them all something to eat, and then they went back home to his old mother. There was great joy everywhere, and the king and the queen conducted their wedding ceremony once again, and they lived happily until their blessed end.