

The Maiden Without Hands
From The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm

Part I

A certain miller had fallen into poverty and soon had nothing left but his mill and a large apple-tree behind it. One day when he was fetching wood, a strange old man stepped out and asked him why he was bothering to cut wood. The stranger then offered to make him rich if he would just "give me what is standing behind your mill." The miller thought this must surely be the old apple tree so he willingly signed a written promise with the stranger, who informed the miller that he would come in three years to carry away what was his.

Soon great wealth started to flow into the house and the miller's wife inquired about it. The miller explained who it came from and what he had promised in return. "Ah husband," said the terrified wife, "that must have been the Devil! He did not mean the apple-tree. He meant our daughter, who was standing behind the mill sweeping the yard!"

After three years the Evil One came to fetch his prize. But the beautiful pious daughter had washed herself clean, and made a circle round herself with chalk so the Devil could not come near her. Angrily he said to the miller "Take all water away from her—otherwise I have no power over her." The miller did so, but the next day when the Devil came, she had wept on her hands and they were quite clean so again he could not get near her. Furiously he said to the miller "Cut off her hands, or else I have no power over her!"

After weakly protesting, the father cut off the hands of his daughter, begging her forgiveness the whole time (the Devil made me do it!). "Dear father, do with me what you will, I am your child" said the daughter, submitting. This time when the Devil came she had wept so profusely on her stumps that they were quite clean, so he lost all power over her--for the time being.

Part II

The miller--now rich from the Devil--offered to keep his daughter handsomely for as long as she lived, but the mutilated girl said "Here I cannot stay. I will go forth, compassionate people will give me as much as I require." She then set off with the stumps of her arms exposed, and walked until she came to a royal garden full of beautiful fruit trees laden with delicious-looking pears. The girl was starving with hunger, but the garden was surrounded by a moat so she could not enter.

She fell to her knees and prayed to God for help, whereupon an angel appeared, dried up the moat, and enabled her to eat one of the pears. All the while, the gardener was watching in the bushes and the next morning, when the King came to inspect his orchard, the gardener told him about the strange sight of the maimed girl and her guardian spirit. The King wanted to witness this so agreed to watch with the gardener the next night. He brought a priest with him to deal with the angel.

At midnight the girl appeared again with her angel and ate another pear as the King watched. "Then the priest went out to them and said: "Do you come from heaven or from earth? Are you a spirit, or a human being?" She replied: "I am no spirit, but an unhappy

mortal deserted by all but God.” The King said: “If you are forsaken by all the world, yet will I not forsake you.” He took her with him into his royal palace, and as she was so beautiful and good, he loved her with all his heart, had silver hands made for her, and took her to wife.

Part III

After the King had made his wife the silver hands, he had to go on a journey and left his now-pregnant bride in the care of his mother, along with instructions to inform him by letter when the child was born. When the "fine boy" arrived, the mother therefore wrote a letter announcing the joyful news. But the letter was intercepted by the same Devil who had tried to possess the young girl and then chopped off her hands. He exchanged the letter for another in which was written that the Queen had brought a monster into the world. When the King read this he was much troubled but admonished his mother to take great care of his Queen until his arrival. This letter the Devil also intercepted and instructions were given the mother to put the Queen and her child to death!

The mother refused to do so and instead sent the young Queen with her child into the forest bidding her never to come back again. The poor Queen tied her child to her back and went away with her eyes full of tears. She fell on her knees and prayed and again the angel of the Lord appeared and led her to a little house in the forest on which was a sign with the words: “Here all dwell free.” Another angel greeted the young Queen and told her that she had been sent by God to watch over her and her child. The Queen stayed for seven years in the little house and was well cared-for, and by God’s grace, because of her piety, her hands which had been cut off, grew once more.

Meanwhile the King returned, discovered the Devil’s plot with the switched letters and set off into the forest to find his Queen and her child. He also wandered for seven long years and neither ate nor drank, but God supported him until at length he came to the little house where he was welcomed by the angel. Here he found his lost wife, and to his amazement, discovered that her own hands had re-grown. A "heavy stone" fell from the King’s heart. Now re-united with his beloved and their new son, the King and Queen were married again, and lived contentedly to their happy end.