

1812

**GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES
THE MAIDEN WITHOUT HANDS**

Jacob Ludwig Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm

Grimm, Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) - German philologists whose collection "Kinder- und Hausmarchen," known in English as "Grimm's Fairy Tales," is a timeless literary masterpiece. The brothers transcribed these tales directly from folk and fairy stories told to them by common villagers. The Maiden Without Hands (1812) - A wizard tricks a miller into giving him his daughter and then forces the miller to cut off her hands. The girl runs away, has good fortune, but is again plagued by the malicious wizard.

MAIDEN WITHOUT HANDS

A MILLER, who had gradually become very poor, had nothing left but his mill and a large apple tree behind it. One day when he went into the forest to gather wood, an old man, whom he had never seen before, came toward him, and said, "Why do you take the trouble to cut down wood? I will give you great riches if you will promise to let me have what stands behind your mill." "That can be no other than my apple tree," thought the miller. "I possess nothing else." So he said to the old man, "Yes, I will let you have it." Then the stranger smiled maliciously, and said, "In three years I will come again to claim what belongs to me," and after saying this he departed.

As soon as the miller returned home, his wife came toward him and said: "Miller, from whence have all these riches come so suddenly to our house? All at once every drawer and chest has become full of gold. No one brought it here, and I know not where it came from." "Oh," replied her husband, "I know all about it. A strange man whom I met in the wood promised me great treasures if I would make over to him what stood behind the mill. I knew I had nothing there but the large apple tree, so I gave him my promise."

"Oh, husband!" said the wife in alarm, "that must have been the wizard. He did not mean the apple tree, but our daughter, who was behind the mill sweeping out the court." The miller's daughter was a modest and beautiful maiden, and lived in innocence and

obedience to her parents for three years, until the day came on which the wicked wizard was to claim her. She knew he was coming, and after washing till she was pure and clean as snow, she drew a circle of white chalk and stood within it.

The wizard made his appearance very early, but he did not dare to venture over the white circle, therefore he could not get near her. In great anger he said to the miller, "Take away every drop of water, that she may not wash, otherwise I shall have no power over her!" The frightened miller did as he desired, but on the next morning, when the wizard came again, her hands were as pure and clean as ever, for she had wept over them. On this account the wizard was still unable to approach her; so he flew into a rage, and said, "Chop her hands off, otherwise I cannot touch her." Then the miller was terrified, and exclaimed, "How can I cut off the hands of my own child?" Then the wicked wizard threatened him, and said, "If you will not do as I desire you, then I can claim you instead of your daughter, and carry you off."

The father listened in agony, and in his fright promised to obey. He went to his daughter, and said to her, "Oh, my child, unless I cut off your two hands the wizard will take me away with him, and in my anguish I have promised. Help me in my trouble, and forgive me for the wicked deed I have promised to do." "Dear father," she replied, "do with me what you will: I am your child." Thereupon she placed her two hands on the table before him, and he cut them off. The wizard came next day for the third time, but the poor girl had wept so bitterly over the stumps of her arms that they were as clean and white as ever. Then he was obliged to give way, for he had lost all right to the maiden.

As soon as the wizard had departed the miller said, "My child, I have obtained so much good through your conduct that for your whole lifetime I shall hold you most precious and dear." "But I cannot stay here, father," she replied; "I am not safe; let me go away with people who will give me the sympathy I need so much." "I fear such people are very seldom to be found in the world," said her father. However, he let her go. So she tied up her maimed arms and went forth on her way at sunrise.

For a whole day she traveled without food, and as night came on found herself near one of the royal gardens. By the light of the moon she could see many trees laden with beautiful fruit, but she could not reach them, because the place was surrounded by a moat full of water. She had been without a morsel to eat the whole day, and her hunger was so great that she could not help crying out, "Oh, if I were only able to get some of that delicious fruit! I shall

die unless I can obtain something to eat very soon." Then she knelt down and prayed for help, and while she prayed a guardian fairy appeared and made a channel in the water so that she was able to pass through on dry ground.

When she entered the garden the fairy was with her, although she did not know it, so she walked to a tree full of beautiful pears, not knowing that they had been counted.

Being unable to pluck any without hands, she went quite close to the tree and ate one with her mouth as it hung. One, and no more, just to stay her hunger. The gardener, who saw her with the fairy standing near her, thought it was a spirit, and was too frightened to move or speak.

After having satisfied her hunger the maiden went and laid herself down among the shrubs and slept in peace. On the following morning the King, to whom the garden belonged, came out to look at his fruit trees, and when he reached the pear tree and counted the pears, he found one missing. At first he thought it had fallen, but it was not under the tree, so he went to the gardener and asked what had become of it.

Then said the gardener, "There was a ghost in the garden last night who had no hands, and ate a pear off the tree with its mouth." "How could the ghost get across the water?" asked the King; "and what became of it after eating the pear?"

To this the gardener replied, "Some one came first in snow-white robes from heaven, who made a channel and stopped the flow of the water so that the ghost walked through on dry ground. It must have been an angel," continued the gardener; "and therefore I was afraid to ask questions or to call out. As soon as the specter had eaten one pear it went away." Then said the King, "Conceal from every one what you have told me, and I will watch myself tonight." As soon as it was dark the King came into the garden and brought a priest with him to address the ghost, and they both seated themselves under a tree, with the gardener standing near them, and waited in silence. About midnight the maiden crept out from the bushes and went to the pear tree, and the three watchers saw her eat a pear from the tree without picking it, while an angel stood near in white garments.

Then the priest went toward her, and said, "Art thou come from Heaven or earth? Art thou a spirit or a human being?" Then the maiden answered, "Ah, me! I am no ghost, only a poor creature forsaken by every one but God." Then said the King, "You may be

forsaken by all the world, but if you will let me be your friend, I will never forsake you.”

So the maiden was taken to the King’s castle, and she was so beautiful and modest that the King learned to love her with all his heart. He had silver hands made for her, and very soon after they were married with great pomp.

About a year after, the King had to go to battle, and he placed his young wife under the care of his mother, who promised to be very kind to her, and to write to him.

Not long after this the Queen had a little son born, and the King’s mother wrote a letter to him immediately, so that he might have the earliest intelligence, and sent it by a messenger.

The messenger, however, after traveling a long way, became tired and sat down to rest by a brook, where he soon fell fast asleep. Then came the wizard, who was always trying to injure the good Queen, took away the letter from the sleeping messenger, and replaced it by another, in which it was stated that the little child was a changeling.

Knowing nothing of the change, the messenger carried this letter to the King, who, when he read it, was terribly distressed and troubled. However, he wrote in reply to say that the Queen was to have every attention and care till his return.

The wicked wizard again watched for the messenger, and while he slept exchanged the King’s kind letter for another, in which was written to the King’s mother an order to kill both the Queen and her child.

The old mother was quite terrified when she read this letter, for she could not believe the King meant her to do anything so dreadful. She wrote again to the King, but there was no answer, for the wicked wizard always interrupted the messengers, and sent false letters. The last was worse than all, for it stated that instead of killing the mother and her child, they were to cut out the tongue of the changeling and put out the mother’s eyes.

But the King’s mother was too good to attend to these dreadful orders, so she said to the Queen, while her eyes streamed with tears, “I cannot kill you both, as the King desires me to do; but I must not let you remain here any longer. Go, now, out into the world with your child, and do not come here again.” Then she bound the boy on his mother’s back, and the poor woman departed, weeping as she went.

After walking some time she reached a dense forest, and knew not which road to take. So she knelt down and prayed for help. As she rose from her knees she saw a light shining from the window of a little cottage, on which was hung a small sign-board, with these words: "Every one who dwells here is safe." Out of the cottage stepped a maiden dressed in snowy garments, and said, "Welcome, Queen wife," and led her in. Then she unfastened the baby from his mother's back, and hushed him in her arms till he slept so peacefully that she laid him on a bed in another room, and came back to his mother.

The poor woman looked at her earnestly, and said, "How did you know I was a Queen?" The white maiden replied: "I am a good fairy sent to take care of you and your child." So she remained in that cottage many years, and was very happy, and so pious and good that her hands, which had been cut off, were allowed to grow again, and the little boy became her great comfort.

Not long after she had been sent away from the castle the King returned, and immediately asked to see his wife and child.

Then his old mother began to weep, and said, "You wicked man, how can you ask me for your wife and child when you wrote me such dreadful letters, and told me to kill two such innocent beings?" The King, in distress, asked her what she meant; and she showed him the letters she had received, which were changed by the dreadful wizard. Then the King began to weep so bitterly for his wife and child that the old woman pitied him, and said, "Do not be so unhappy; they still live; I could not kill them. But your wife and child are gone into the wide world, never to come back for fear of your anger." Then said the King, "I will go to the ends of the earth to find them, and I will neither eat nor drink till I find my dear wife, even if I should die of hunger."

Thereupon the King started on his expedition, traveling over rocks and valleys, over mountains and highways, for seven long years. But he found her not, and he thought she was starved to death, and that he should never see her again.

He neither ate nor drank during the whole time of earthly food, but Heaven sent him help. At last he arrived at a large forest and found the little cottage with the sign-board, and the words upon it: "Every one who dwells here is safe." While he stood reading the words the maiden in white raiment came out, took him by the hand, and led him into the cottage, saying, "My lord the King is welcome; but why is he here?" Then he replied, "I have been for seven years traveling about the world hoping to find my wife and

child, but I have not yet succeeded. Can you help me?" "Sit down," said the angel, "and take something to eat and drink first." The King was so tired that he gladly obeyed, for he really wanted rest. Then he laid himself down and slept, and the maiden in the white raiment covered his face.

Then she went into an inner chamber where the Queen sat with her little son, whom she had named "Pain-bringer," and said to her, "Go out together into the other chamber; your husband is come." The poor Queen went out, but still sorrowfully, for she remembered the cruel letters his mother had received, and knew not that he still loved her. Just as she entered the room the covering fell off his face, and she told her little son to replace it.

The boy went forward and laid the cloth gently over the face of the strange man. But the King heard the voice in his slumber, and moved his head so that the covering again fell off.

"My child," said the Queen, "cover the face of thy father." He looked at her in surprise, and said, "How can I cover my father's face, dear mother? I have no father in this world. You have taught me to pray to 'Our Father, which art in heaven,' and I thought my father was God. This strange man is not my father; I don't know him." When the King heard this he started up and asked who they were. Then said the Queen, "I am your wife, and this is your son." The King looked at her with surprise. "Your face and your voice are the same," he said; "but my wife had silver hands, and yours are natural." "My hands have mercifully been allowed to grow again," she replied, and, as he still doubted, the maiden in white entered the room, carrying the silver hands, which she showed to the King.

Then he saw at once that this was indeed his dear lost wife and his own little son; and he embraced them, full of joy, exclaiming, "Now has a heavy stone fallen from my heart!"

The maiden prepared a dinner for them, of which they all partook together; and, after a kind farewell, the King started with his wife and child to return home to the castle, where his mother and all the household received them with great joy.

A second marriage-feast was prepared, and the happiness of their latter days made amends for all they had suffered through the wicked demon who had caused them so much pain and trouble.

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