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THE MAIDEN WITHOUT HANDS

Once upon a time, there was a poor miller who lived with his wife and daughter in a small house near the forest. They did not have many things, but the young girl was good, hardworking, and pure of heart. She helped in every way she could, spoke gently, and never complained about their simple life.

One day, the miller went into the forest to cut wood. While walking among the trees, he met a strange man dressed in fine clothes, with a smile that did not inspire trust.

—If you give me what stands behind your mill —said the stranger—, I will make you rich.

The miller thought that behind the mill there was only an old apple tree.

—That is no great thing —he answered—. I accept.

The man smiled in an unsettling way and disappeared.

When the miller returned home, he found his wife deeply frightened.

—What have you done? —she asked him—. Behind the mill there was not only the apple tree. Our daughter was there, sweeping the yard.

Then the miller understood with horror that he had promised away his own daughter.

Soon after, riches began to come into the house. Coins appeared, sacks of food arrived, and many valuable things were brought there. But that abundance brought no joy, only fear. The miller understood that he had made a terrible bargain.

When the young girl learned what had happened, she did not shout or fill herself with anger. She only felt a deep sadness and placed her trust in God. She was so good and so pure that the strange man, who was in truth the devil, could not come near her.

One day, the devil returned and said to the miller:

—Give me your daughter.

But when he tried to touch her, he could not.

—She is too pure —he said angrily—. You must make it so that she can no longer protect herself.

The poor miller was filled with fear.

—I do not want to harm my daughter —he answered, trembling.

—If you do not obey —said the devil—, I will take your soul.

The father was trapped between terror and despair. Crying, he went to his daughter and told her what was happening.

The young girl looked at him with compassion, although her heart was full of pain.

—Father —she said softly—, do what you must do. I will trust in God.

The miller wept even more. With great sorrow, the father made a terrible decision, and from that moment on, the young girl no longer had her hands. She bore that suffering with great courage and kept her heart pure.

When the devil returned, he still could not take her away.

—I still cannot touch her —he said in rage—. She remains pure.

And he disappeared, full of fury.

From that day on, the girl understood that she could no longer live there as before. She did not want her father to go on suffering or for evil to return to the house because of that bargain.

One morning, she said goodbye to her parents.

—Do not cry for me —she said—. I will go away, and God will help me on the road.

Her mother embraced her through tears. Her father lowered his head, full of guilt and sorrow.

The young girl went out into the world alone. She walked through fields, roads, and forests. She felt hunger, tiredness, and sadness, but she did not lose hope. Sometimes she rested under the trees, sometimes she drank water from a stream, and she kept moving forward with patience.

After walking for a long time, she came to a beautiful garden surrounded by a fence. Inside were trees full of fruit and ripe

pears. The young girl was very hungry and stood looking in silence.

Then an angel appeared, or so it seemed to her, and opened the way so that she could enter. The young girl took a pear humbly and ate enough to regain a little strength.

The gardeners saw her from a distance and ran to tell the king.

—Your Majesty —they said—, a strange young woman has entered the garden.

The king ordered that she be brought before him. When he saw her, he noticed at once her sadness, her goodness, and the calmness in her face. The young girl told him her story simply.

The king listened with great attention and was deeply moved.

—You may stay here —he said kindly—. You shall not lack food, shelter, or respect.

The young girl was grateful for those words. In the palace, everyone began to treat her kindly. In time, the king truly came to love her.

One day he said:

—You are noble in heart, and that is worth more than any wealth. I want you to be my wife.

The young girl was surprised and also afraid, because her life had been full of pain. But the king spoke to her with sincerity and tenderness.

—I do not want your sorrow —he said—. I want to walk beside you and care for you.

Then the young girl accepted, and they were married. Everyone was happy to see her smile at last after so much suffering.

As time passed, one day the king had to leave on important business. Before going, he left his wife well cared for and asked to be sent news of anything that happened in the palace.

Soon after, the queen had a son. He was a beautiful and healthy child. Everyone celebrated with joy, and at once they wrote to the king to give him the news.

But on the way, the message fell into the devil's hands, for he had not yet given up trying to do harm. He changed the words of the letter to spread confusion.

When the king received the false message, he was greatly troubled. Even so, he answered calmly and asked that his wife and son be well cared for until his return.

However, the devil changed that letter as well. This time, he made it seem as though the king had given a very cruel order.

Those who read the message in the palace could not believe it.

—This cannot be true —they said—. The king would never speak in such a way.

But the letter bore his seal, and all were filled with anguish.

The king's mother, who was good and wise, did not want to harm the queen or the child. So she decided to act with compassion.

—I will not allow an injustice —she said—. We will send them far away, where they may be safe until everything is made clear.

So the queen went out into the world once again, this time carrying her little son in her arms. She wept when leaving the palace, but she accepted her fate with patience. She held her child close, covered him carefully, and kept walking.

It was a long and difficult journey. Sometimes the road was hard, and at other times it seemed that sadness would never end. But the mother cared for her son with great love and kept going without giving up.

After a long time, she came to a little house in the forest where kind people lived, and they received her with compassion. There she was able to rest, raise her son, and find a little peace. The years passed, and the boy grew cheerful and loved.

Meanwhile, the king returned to his palace and discovered with horror what had happened. When he learned of the false letters and of the disappearance of his wife and son, he felt a deep sorrow.

—I never gave such an order —he said in grief—. I must find them, even if it takes my whole life.

Then he went out to search for them. He traveled roads, crossed hills, visited villages, and asked in many places. He did not rest, because his love for his wife and son still lived in his heart.

A long time passed until one day he came near the little house in the forest where the queen and the child were living. There he saw

a small boy playing and stopped to look at him. The child had something familiar in his face.

Soon after, the queen came out. When the king saw her, his heart beat strongly. She recognized him too.

For a moment, neither of them could speak.

Then the queen stepped toward him.

—Is it truly you? —she asked with emotion.

—Yes —answered the king—. I have come to find you. I never stopped loving you.

Then they embraced with tears in their eyes. The child watched in silence, and then the king lifted him tenderly, happy to have found his son as well.

The queen told him everything she had lived through, and the king told her how he had discovered the deceit. Both understood how much they had suffered because of evil and lies, but they also understood that goodness, patience, and love had helped them reach that moment.

In time, they returned together to the kingdom. There they were welcomed with great joy. The queen was never alone again, and the king did everything he could so that she would never again lack peace or care.

And so, after much sorrow, the maiden without hands found a new life beside her husband and her son. Her story remained as a memory of strength, patience, and hope.

Because sometimes the road is very hard and seems unfair, but a good heart can keep going even in the midst of suffering.

THE END

