

The Tale of the Handless Maiden

- I. A miller has fallen into poverty.
- II. One day he meets an old man in the forest. The old man says, "I will make you rich if you promise to give me what is standing behind your mill." The miller assumes the old man means the apple tree, so he gives his promise to the old man. The old man then says, "I will return in three years and take what you have promised to me," and then vanishes.
- III. When the miller returns home, his wife asks about his newfound wealth. She then tells him that the old man must have been talking not about their apple tree but about their daughter, and that the old man must have been the devil.
- IV. The miller's daughter is a beautiful, pious girl, and she spends the next three years in devout worship. At last the day arrives when the devil comes to claim the girl. That day, she washes and then draws a circle around herself with chalk. The devil appears, but he cannot come near her. Angered, he snatches the water away from her so she cannot wash herself again. When he returns the next day, the girl has wept on her hands, and they are now quite clean. She uses the tears in her palms to clean herself, and the devil still cannot come near.
- V. Furious, he orders her father to cut off her hands. The miller is shocked and tries to refuse. However, the devil threatens him by saying that, if he does not sever his daughter's hands, his own life will be endangered. So the miller goes to the daughter and begs her to allow him to cut off her hands. She replies, "Dear father, do with me what you will, for I am your child." Then she allows her father to cut off both of her hands. However, when the devil returns, she has wept so much on the stumps where her hands once were that they are still clean. Thus he gives up his intention to seize her for himself.
- VI. The girl's father wants to continue to provide for her, but she refuses. She has her arms bound behind her back and then sets out on a journey.
- VII. The daughter walks all day and stops at nightfall. She has arrived at a royal garden, and in the moonlight she sees that the trees there are covered with fruit. However, she cannot enter because the garden is surrounded by water. She is very hungry, so she begins to pray. Suddenly an angel appears before her and makes a dam in the water. After a short while, the moat dries up, and the girl is able to enter the garden. There, using only her mouth, she eats a pear. However, the king who owns the garden knows exactly how many pears he has on each tree, and when he realizes the next day that one is missing, he questions the gardener. The gardener tells him that a spirit without hands had been led to the garden by an angel and that she ate the now-missing pear with her mouth. That night the king decides to watch and takes a priest with him. As on the night before, the maiden comes out of the thicket and begins to eat a pear. The priest comes forward and says, "Do you come from heaven or Earth? Are you a spirit or a human being?" She says that she is an abandoned human. Hearing that, the king says that he will not forsake her, and he takes her with him into his royal palace.
- VIII. He loves this beautiful, pious girl with all his heart, and he has silver hands made for her and then makes her his wife. After a year, the king has to go to war. Because his young wife is with child, he asks his mother to come and care for her and to send him a letter when his wife gives birth. When she delivers a beautiful son, the king's mother immediately sends him a letter with the good news, but the messenger falls asleep by a brook along the way.

- IX. While the courier is sleeping, the devil, who is still angry about losing the young woman, exchanges the real letter for another one that states that the young wife has given birth to a monster. When the king receives the letter, he is shocked but sends a message back saying, "Please take care of my wife until I return." However, the messenger—once again fatigued from the journey—falls asleep in the same place while on his way back to the palace. The devil once again exchanges the king's letter with a message that orders, "Kill my wife and child." The king's mother does not believe the letter and sends another letter to the king. However, the devil plays the same trick again. Finally the king's mother receives a letter ordering her to save the queen's eyes and tongue to prove to the king that she has been killed. The elderly mother pretends to have killed the queen and her baby son by killing a deer, removing its tongue and eyes, and saving them. She then tells the queen that she and her baby son have to leave the castle.
- X. And so, with the baby bound to her back, the young queen weeps piteously as she departs from the castle.
- XI. The young queen goes into the forest.
- XII. She prays.
- XIII. An angel appears and leads her to a little cottage, over the door of which was a shield inscribed with the words: "Here may everyone live freely."
- XIV. A young virgin, as white as snow, comes out of the house to meet the queen and the child, and she sees to their every need.
- XV. Seven years pass.
- XVI. Eventually, and by the grace of God, the hands of the trusting and pious young queen grow back. Soon after the young queen has left the castle, the king returns from the war, but he is quite surprised to find that his wife and baby are not there waiting for him, so he asks his mother where they are. The elderly woman replies, "You are such a terrible person. I did exactly as you ordered me to do," and she shows him the two letters that the devil had sent her. The mother is shocked when she sees the anguished expression on the king's face; she realizes that the letters are not from him. She then tells him that his wife and baby are still alive. The king decides to go looking for his wife and offspring and says, "I will not eat or drink until I find my wife and child."
- XVII. The king spends seven years looking here and there for his wife and child. Finally he comes upon a forest, and there he finds a cottage.
- XVIII. A white angel comes out of the house and invites the king inside. Deciding to rest there, he lies down and covers his face with a handkerchief. The angel calls the queen and her son, named Sorrowful, and they look upon the king where he is resting. The handkerchief falls off of the king's face, and the queen tells her son to pick it up. "Sorrowful, pick up your father's handkerchief and cover his face again." Upon hearing these words, the king wakes up and says to the young queen, "Who are you?" "I am your wife, and this is your child, Sorrowful," she answers. The king sees the young woman's hands and cannot believe what she has said. "Thanks to the grace of God, my hands have grown back." When the angel brings the silver hands that the king had made for the queen, he finally believes that he has found his long-lost wife and child and is overcome with joy.
- XIX. The three of them return to the home of the king's elderly mother, and the king and his wife are married once again. They live happily ever after.