

**"ALL WAS THE WAY IT SHOULD BE" ©2016**

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*Once upon a time, there was a miller and his wife. The couple had two children, a boy and a girl. All was the way it should be.*

*One day, the miller was working in the mill when his foot was crushed by the millstone. The foot became so infected, he soon died from gangrene. His wife became hysterical, ran off into the woods, and was never seen or heard from again.*

*The Brother, who was older, said to his sister, "You run the house, while I run the mill."*

*In time, the Brother came of age and took a wife who was as beautiful as she was evil. The Brother's new wife was jealous of her sister-in-law's power and authority. One day while the Brother was working at the mill, his wife broke all the furniture in the house.*

*When he came home, his wife groaned, "Look what your sister has done!"*

*"We can get new furniture," said the Brother calmly.*

*The Sister remained silent.*

*A couple of weeks later, while the Brother was away in the city, his wife cut off the head of the mule that pulled the millstone.*

*When the Brother returned, his wife lamented, "Look at what your sister has done!"*

*The Brother replied, "The mule was old anyway. I will get a new mule."*

*The Sister remained silent.*

*Then the Brother went on a long journey across the sea. He told his sister to be kind and gentle with his wife, for she was with child. The Sister promised she would. When his wife gave birth, she cut off her newborn's head.*

*When the Brother came home, his wife wailed, "Look at what your sister has done!"*

*The Brother looked upon the blood-soaked crib and went into a rage.*

*"You shall suffer for what you have done," thundered the Brother, and grabbing his sister by the hair, he dragged her to the mill.*

*There the Brother cut off both of her hands. The Sister remained silent.*

*The Sister, knowing that she was no longer safe, broke away from her brother's grasp and ran alone into the woods. There she rolled her stumps in dried moss and mud until they stopped bleeding. As her stumps healed, the Sister lived on the fruits and roots of the woods that she could gather with her mouth; she lapped water like an animal. She slept in hollow trees and covered herself with leaves under the starlit sky.*

*One day, the Sister came upon an apple orchard. She rushed forward to partake of the fruit. The trees bent their branches low, so she could grasp the fruit with her mouth. This orchard belonged to the King who happened to be walking through it and saw a young maiden eating his fruit.*

*Seeing that the Sister was so thin and gray, the King asked, "Are you real or are you a ghost?"*

*"I am real," she said.*

*The King fell in love with the Sister at that moment and took her as his wife. He commanded the best silversmith in the kingdom to fashion a pair of silver hands for his new bride and she wore the silver hands proudly. All was the way it should be.*

*Soon the King went to war and asked his mother to watch over his wife as she was with child. The King said he wanted to be notified as soon as the baby was born. When her time came, the Sister, now Queen, gave birth to a fine baby boy. The King's mother sent a messenger with the announcement to the King. The messenger stopped at the mill of the Brother and his wife and asked for water and rest. The messenger told the Brother's wife that the "Queen with No Hands" had a baby and he was carrying the announcement to the King. The Brother's wife was furious that her sister-in-law was now a queen. While the messenger slept, the Brother's wife wrote a new message and exchanged it for the original one.*

*The King read the new message, "Your wife has given birth to a changeling. What shall I do?"*

*He wrote a return message instructing his mother, "Take care of them both until I return."*

*The messenger stopped at the mill on his way back to the King's mother. Once again, as the messenger slept, the Brother's wife substituted a different message. When the King's mother read the message, she was aghast.*

*The message was boldly written, "Kill both and keep the hearts as proof."*

*The King's mother, having become fond of her son's wife, ordered a woodsman to kill a doe and its fawn and bring the hearts to her, which she placed in a gold box for safe keeping.*

*She showed the message to her daughter-in-law saying, "You and the baby must leave at once."*

*The King's mother bound the baby to the Queen's breast and sent them forth. The Queen and her baby wandered through the woods all night. At daybreak, they arrived exhausted at a small cottage. Written above the door were the words "Here All Dwell Free." Using her silver hands, she knocked on the door.*

*An old woman answered, "Welcome, dear Queen. I have been waiting for you."*

*"How did you know I was the Queen?"*

*"Oh," said the old woman, "The woods know all that is happening in this corner of the world."*

*The Queen entered the cottage and stayed there, while raising her child. Without servants, she fumbled with her silver hands as she cared for the baby. But soon, the Queen simply put the silver hands into a drawer and went about her daily chores using only her stumps. As the days went by, the Queen wondered about her missing hands. At night, she would wave her handless arms into the stream of moonlight that entered her room and, while in the moonlight, the shadow of her former hands appeared. But when the sun rose, the hands were missing again.*

*One morning the old woman smiled, "I see a bit of moonlight has entered the day."*

*The Queen looked at her stumps and saw the buds of fingers emerging.*

*"Oh," rejoiced the Queen, "Can it be true? Is it possible for me to grow back my hands?"*

*The old woman nodded, "With patience and hard work, all things are possible."*

*Day by day, week by week, the Queen measured her new fingers, and like her young son's hands, they grew. Both mother and son learned to use tools, pick berries, and plant flowers. All was the way it should be.*

*When the King returned from war, he asked to see his wife and baby. His mother showed him the message she received, and from the gold box she brought forth the two hearts.*

*The King said, "That is not the message I wrote."*

*It was then the King's mother informed him that the Queen and baby were sent into the woods.*

*For seven years, the King roamed the kingdom searching for the Queen and their child. His beard grew long and his royal clothing became dirty and torn. Finally, he arrived weary at a small cottage. Written above the door were the words "Here All Dwell Free" and he asked for a place to rest. The old*

woman let him sleep upon a cot. She told the Queen that her husband was in the next room. The Queen was alarmed for she had feared the King would kill her and their son if he ever found them. However, she knew she must confront him because she was no longer willing to live in fear of being hunted down.

The Queen woke the King with a touch of her hand. The King did not recognize her until she brought forth from the drawer the silver hands he had made for her so long ago. Words of truth poured forth. The Queen told the King of her sister-in-law's lies.

Then the old woman said in a soft, clear voice, "It was the miller's wife who meddled with the messages to and from the King."

"Come," the Queen said to their son. "Come and meet your father."

With joy and happiness, the three embraced and ate their fill for they were hungry.

"Now," the King said soberly, "we must deal with the miller's wife. Your brother must not be held by this lie any longer."

The King and Queen with their child traveled to the mill. There they told the truth to the Brother. He immediately ordered his strongest horse to be brought to him. Grabbing his wife by her hair, he tied her braid to the horse and sent it galloping across the field. When horse returned, all that remained was the braid.

The King invited the Brother to join them in the castle, which he did. The King and Queen renewed their marriage vows and ruled in peace and harmony for the rest of their days. All was the way it should be.