

THE WITHERED ARM

Written by

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Based on,

Thomas Hardy's eponymous short story

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One late middle-aged DAIRY WOMAN catches another YOUNGER DAIRY WOMAN up as they emerge from a farm track.

The first is standing, half waiting for the older woman, and holding the small of her back, stretching and groaning.

DAIRY WOMAN

Nancy. You be forgetting yer pail.  
Oi 'ung it up on the nail fer ye.

They both set off along the lane. There is another woman in her late thirties walking fifty yards ahead of them.

YOUNGER DAIRYWOMAN

Sorry, Effie. Thanks .....

The younger dairywoman nods her head in the direction of the other woman, RHODA BROOK, ahead

YOUNGER DAIRYWOMAN (CONT'D)

Yunno 'e brings his wife home  
tomorrow, ok 'ear.

DAIRY WOMAN

Anyone seen her, then?

YOUNGER DAIRYWOMAN

No, but ok 'ear she's a red-  
cheeked, tisty-tosty little body  
enough.

DAIRY WOMAN

Yeh, an' a couple of decades  
YOUNGER than him!

YOUNGER DAIRYWOMAN

Tis hard fer Rhoda, though.

DAIRY WOMAN

Nah... 'E 'ain't spoke to Rhoda Brook  
for years, now!

YOUNGER DAIRYWOMAN

'An 'er with his son, an all ...  
it's a shame.

The younger woman rubs her shoulders and groans, while moving her stiff elbow up, down and around.

The older woman nods, reflectingly and they walk on, moving off down another road which turns off from the main track.

2 EXT. BRIDLEWAY - DAY

2

Rhoda Brook then turns up another track, later on, and is joined, there, by a boy of twelve.

RHODA BROOK

They've just been saying, down in t' barton, that your father brings his young wife home from Anglebury, tomorrow. You'll probably meet 'em when oi sends you there for some food.

SON

Yes, Mother. ....Is father married, then?

RHODA BROOK

Yes ....You can give her a look and tell me what she's like, if you do see her.

SON

Yes, mother.

RHODA BROOK

If she's dark, or fair, tall or small .... an if she has marks of the lady upon her and has never done anything, as of expect she do.

SON

Alright.

They trudge on and the path opens up onto the top of a down, with a view over the fields.

3 EXT. NEAR A FARM ENTRANCE - DAY

3

The son is walking along the road, approaching a farm entrance, with a big load in a tied up sheet on his back.

He looks up and sees a well-dressed couple ahead of him, approaching the entrance, from the other direction.

The son stares at the young, pretty woman, GERTRUDE, and the young woman, blushes and gives a brief nod. The farmer, FARMER LODGE, ignores him.

The couple turns in and they walk up the farm drive, while the son walks on.

GERTRUDE

How that poor lad stared at me.

LODGE

Yes, dear. I saw that he did.

GERTRUDE

He is one of the villagers, I suppose.

LODGE

Um ....I think he lives with his mother a mile, or two off. You must expect to be stared at, at first, my pretty Gertrude.

4 INT. RHODA'S COTTAGE/KITCHEN - DAY

4

Rhoda is cutting up cabbage as her son comes in and throws down his big bundle.

Rhoda looks up and sniffs.

RHODA BROOK

Well ....Did ya see er?

SON

Yes, mother.

RHODA BROOK

IS she lady-like?

SON

Yes. A lady complete.

RHODA BROOK

Is she young?

SON

Yes, but she's quite growed up, though...Why don't you go to Holmstoke Church tomorrow to take a look and see fer yerself?

RHODA BROOK

Oi wouldn't go look up at her if she were to pass this window, this instant .....

(Sniffs)

What did Mr. Lodge do?

The son shrugs

SON  
Same as usual

RHODA BROOK  
What? Took no notice of you?

SON  
None... .. He never does.

RHODA BROOK  
No... .. His own flesh and blood!

5 INT. RHODA BROOK'S COTTAGE/BEDROOM - NIGHT

5

Rhoda is sleeping fretfully; turning over in bed.

She then remains on her back, asleep.

There is a gentle hissing, and, in her dream, she awakens to see a slight, female figure sitting half way down her bed, on the edge.

Rhoda sees the figure turn around and stare at her. It is dressed in a bridal costume complete with bonnet and white veil.

Rhoda then sees the face and it is that of a hideous, elderly, almost corpse-like face, grinning and hissing at her.

Rhoda shrinks back in her bed and pulls the covers up to her nose, as the figure thrusts its left hand, with the marriage ring, out for Rhoda to see.

The incubus then inches its way up the bed, mockingly exhibiting its ring finger at Rhoda.

As it gets right up to Rhoda, Rhoda dives entirely under her blanket.

When Rhoda emerges from the blanket, she sees the incubus, standing at the bottom of the bed, at one side, still hissing.

The incubus then sits at the bottom of the bed wagging its fourth ring finger at her.

The incubus then works its way up the side of the bed, again: sitting/standing, then sitting/standing; grinning, all the while.

When the incubus has arrived nearly up to Rhoda's face, Rhoda, in a panic, sits up, grabs its left forearm, and wrestles with this arm, holding tight to it.

Suddenly, Rhoda manages to whirl the incubus away from herself, against the nearest wall.

When she looks again, it is gone.

Rhoda looks at her own hand that grasped the incubus.

She remembers the arm wrestling and the way that her own right hand held tight onto the withered old left forearm.

6

INT. RHODA'S COTTAGE - DAY

6

Rhoda is exhaustedly washing up the pots and standing facing the window.

Her son is finishing his breakfast.

SON

Did you fall out of bed last night,  
Mother?

RHODA BROOK

What time?

SON

Just after the clock struck two.

RHODA BROOK

No. Finish yer breakfast.

Rhoda sees a pretty young woman approaching the gate.

Her son also sees her, through the window.

SON

Oh! ..... Mrs Lodge said she would  
come and bring me some boots  
because she saw me in town with a  
big bundle and mine were cracked.

RHODA BROOK

Humph! ...Charity to the poor, is  
it?!

SON

She gives away other stuff to  
people in the meads asides us.

There is a knock at the door.

Rhoda goes to answer it and there is Mrs. Lodge, a pretty, young woman, in a printed summer gown and carrying a basket containing some boots and a small package.

Rhoda's son comes to join her at the door.

Mrs. Lodge smiles at him.

GERTRUDE

Good Morning. I'm glad to see that  
I managed to find the right house.

Rhoda nods, and embarrassedly shows her in.

7 INT. RHODA'S COTTAGE/KITCHEN - DAY

7

Montage: Mrs Lodge visits three times, each time wearing a different costume.

She has the door opened to her

She is sitting at the table drinking tea.

She is unloading a couple of parcels from her basket.

On the third visit, as Mrs. Lodge has got up and is leaving, Rhoda says to her

RHODA BROOK

I hope that you don't suffer from  
the damp of the water meads, Mrs.  
Lodge.

Mrs. Lodge is tying on her bonnet.

GERTRUDE

No, but I have a tiny ailment that  
does puzzle me.

She rolls up the sleeve of her left forearm and exhibits the bruising marks of four fingers grasping it.

Rhoda is shocked, as she fears it seems like the grasp of her own fingers.

RHODA BROOK

When did this happen?

GERTRUDE

A fortnight ago, on the morrow .....  
at, at 2.00 a.m .....I awoke with a  
strong pain in my arm.

RHODA BROOK

Two o ..... Yes, well ... it's probably just marks from something you did to yourself, during the day, without noticing.

Mrs. Lodge smiles, rolls down her sleeve and picks up her basket.

GERTRUDE

Yes, of course .... Thank you for the tea.

She nods and leaves.

8

EXT. WOODLAND TRACK - DAY

8

Rhoda is returning from work with her shawl tied around her shoulders and she sees, as she approaches her, Mrs. Lodge, in a pretty, printed cotton gown, picking blackberries, with her right hand. She puts the berries in a basin, down on the ground.

She carries her left arm crookedly and somewhat bent.

Mrs. Lodge looks up and smiles at Rhoda.

RHODA BROOK

Good Morning, Mrs. Lodge.

GERTRUDE

Good Morning, Mrs. Brook.

RHODA BROOK

I hope your arm is well again, Ma'am?

Mrs. Lodge smiles sadly and shakes her head

GERTRUDE

It's rather worse. It pains me dreadfully, sometimes.

RHODA BROOK

Perhaps you had better go to a doctor, Ma'am?

GERTRUDE

He said to bathe it in hot water, but it makes no difference.

Rhoda steps forwards



RHODA BROOK  
 Could oi see it?

Mrs. Lodge exhibits her arm and Rhoda inspects it.

The four finger marks are quite purpled, now and the arm is withering and becoming wrinkled.

GERTRUDE  
 My husband says that it looks as if some witch had taken hold of me there, and blasted the flesh.

Rhoda shivers

RHODA BROOK  
 That's silly! ..... Oi wouldn't mind him.

GERTRUDE  
 Yes, but it makes him love me less. Men think so much of personal appearance....

She looks down, sadly

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)  
 ...and he was so proud of my appearance, at first.

She rolls down her sleeve

RHODA BROOK  
 Oh, just keep your arm covered. 'E'll not notice.

GERTRUDE  
 He knows that the disfigurement is there.

Her eyes start to fill with tears and Rhoda nods, in embarrassment, and starts to hurry away.

RHODA BROOK  
 Well, Ma'am I'm sure it will go away, soon....Good day to you.

GERTRUDE  
 Good day, Mrs.Brook.

Mrs. Lodge puts her hand up to her eyes and turns back to the bush to hide her tears.

9 INT. RHODA'S COTTAGE - DAY

9

Rhoda is tidying some pots on the dresser, and there is a knock at the door.

She goes to answer it and it is Mrs. Lodge.

Rhoda gestures her in, but Mrs. Lodge refuses.

GERTRUDE

No, I won't come in. I've just popped by to tell you I've decided to see that Conjurer Trendle ...that 'wise man', and to ask you if you will come with me, on Saturday morning, when my husband will be away at market.

Rhoda turns pale and looks apprehensive

RHODA BROOK

Who told 'e of him?

GERTRUDE

My servants..... Why? Is he no good?

Rhoda shrugs

RHODA BROOK

Well, he's certainly an original.

Mrs. Lodge clutches at Rhoda's arm, in appeal.

GERTRUDE

WILL you come?

Rhoda smiles, uncertainly, and then, nods.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

Thank you ... Thank you. I'll call earlyish morning.

She hurries away.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

Thank you!

10 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

10

Montage:

The women leaving Rhoda's cottage

The women hurrying, silently, along a track between fields

The women talking as they cross a glade in a wood.

The women, picking up their skirts and crossing a stream, by some flat stones.

The women ascending a hill.

The women looking down at a cottage in a little, deserted valley.

11 INT. TRENDLE'S COTTAGE - DAY

11

TRENDLE, a wiry old man, in outdoor clothes, opens the door to the women and nods, enquiringly at them.

GERTRUDE

Sorry to bother you, Conju .....er,  
Mr. Trendle, but I've come about  
my..

Trendle waves Rhoda away.

TRENDLE

No companions! ... No companions.  
Thee can sit outside, a minute!

He ushers Mrs. Lodge in and closes the door on Rhoda.

Conjurer Trendle turns to Mrs. Lodge

TRENDLE (CONT'D)

Well?

Mrs. Lodge bares her arm and Trendle looks

TRENDLE (CONT'D)

Medicine can't cure it. 'Tis the  
work of an enemy.

GERTRUDE

Who?

TRENDLE

Oi don't know, but oi can show  
thee.

He sits her at the table and puts a small glass bowl of water before her.

Trendle then breaks the white of an egg into the water and they both peer at it.

Rhoda can be seen, peering in at the window and then walking away, in impatience.

12 EXT. TRACK OUTSIDE OF TRENDLE'S COTTAGE - DAY 12

The women start to climb back up the track away from trundle's cottage.

RHODA BROOK  
Did he charge much?

Mrs. Lodge looks embarrassedly and almost furtively at Rhoda.

GERTRUDE  
He wouldn't take a farthing.

RHODA BROOK  
And what did you see.

GERTRUDE  
Oh, nothing!...Nothing!

Mrs. Lodge hurries ahead and Rhoda has to hurry to catch up with her.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)  
How strange you should recommend him!

RHODA BROOK  
I didn't! ...Your people did!

Mrs. Lodge steals at look at Rhoda.

GERTRUDE  
Oh! ....Did they?

She hurries off, again and Rhoda hurries to catch up.

The two women crawl, slowly, back up the big hill.

13 INT/EXT. VARIOUS - DAY/NIGHT 13

MONTAGE:

Rhoda being met on the road home, by her twelve year old son and walking on with him.

Mrs. Lodge, coming up behind her husband, at the table, smiling and laying her hand on his shoulder. Farmer Lodge irritably shaking it off.

Rhoda and her son walking away from their home carrying bundles and the boy wheeling a barrow. Rhoda stops for a few seconds and looks back at the cottage.

Mrs. Lodge, in her bedroom, rolling up her sleeve and looking worriedly at her withered arm. Her husband comes in and she hurriedly hides it.

Rhoda is laying the table for supper, when her, now eighteen year old son comes in at the door, kisses his mother, and sits down at the laid place.

14 INT. LODGE'S HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

14

Gertrude is sorting through her medicine and herbs cupboard, when her husband comes into the kitchen. He sees the assortment of remedies.

LODGE

Damned if you won't poison herself with those witch mixtures!

GERTRUDE

Sorry, Henry. I'll throw them out.

LODGE

You need somebody to distract you ...I thought of adopting a certain boy at some time, but he's grown up and moved away, now.

GERTRUDE

Was that, was that your so....

LODGE

....I'll not have words spoken as don't concern you, Gertrude!

He stamps out.

GERTRUDE

(To herself, sadly)  
Six years of marriage, but only a few months of love!

She sighs and starts to remove her herbs from the cupboard.

15 INT. TREADLE'S COTTAGE - DAY

15

Treadle lets Gertrude into his kitchen and she smiles and shows her arm to him, again.

He looks and nods, seriously.

TRENDLE

There's only one remedy as will  
work with this blight.

GERTRUDE

What is that?

TRENDLE

You must touch with your arm, the  
neck of a man who has just been  
hanged, but ain't cold, yet.

Gertrude steps back, with her mouth open, in horror.

16 EXT. COUNTRY TRACK - DAY 16

Gertrude walks back home and strokes her sore arm.

GERTRUDE

What came by a spell, will go by a  
spell, surely.....

17 INT. LODGE'S HOUSE/SITTING ROOM - NIGHT 17

Lodge and Gertrude are sitting by the fire.

He gets up.

LODGE

Gertrude, I'm going to the fair, at  
the assizes, tomorrow, for a few  
days. Oi'm sorry, oi'm busy and so  
can't take you with me.

Gertrude nods

GERTRUDE

Oh, that's alright, Henry.

18 INT. LODGE'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY 18

Mrs. Lodge is busy packing a few clothes into a bag. She  
pauses and addresses her arm.

GERTRUDE

If it had not been for you, this  
terrible ordeal would have been  
spared me.

The MAID comes in.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)  
I'm just staying over at a friends,  
but I'll be back, tomorrow. Ask,  
Alan to bring the horse around  
would you, please?

The maid smiles, nods and goes out.

19 EXT. OUTSIDE OF HANGMAN'S HOUSE - EVENING 19

Gertrude is wandering around, uncertainly, outside a country cottage.

A woman comes towards her along the lane.

Gertrude accosts her.

GERTRUDE  
Excuse me, madam, but is this the  
hangman's cottage, please?

WOMAN  
It be that, Ma'am.

GERTRUDE  
Thank you ... Thank you.

The woman nods and walks on.

Gertrude plucks up courage and goes towards the front gate.

20 INT. HANGMAN'S COTTAGE/LIVING ROOM - EVENING 20

The hangman lets Gertrude in and she stands, nervously, a little way in from the door.

The hangman rubs his hands on his apron and smiles.

HANGMAN  
I can always find a spare minute  
for such a neat body as thee,  
Ma'am.

GERTRUDE  
Er, thank you.

HANGMAN  
Dost 'ee want to sit?

He gestures to the chairs near the fire.

Gertrude shakes her head

GERTRUDE

No ...Um, thank you ...but, but what time is the execution, tomorrow, please?

HANGMAN

Twelve, Ma'am... 'Tis a young man who was near a rick when they fired it. 'E's to 'ang fer 'arson.

Gertrude gets out a ten pound note and offers it to the hangman.

GERTRUDE

Well, I, I'd like to offer you this for your allowing me to touch his neck, after ..... after he's dead.

Gertrude is now trembling.

The hangman refuses the money with a shake of his head and a hand held up.

HANGMAN

No, no. But what fer do you want to touch the corpse?

GERTRUDE

I need to touch him for my arm .....for, for my affliction.

She rolls up her sleeve and shows the arm.

The old hangman looks and is appalled.

HANGMAN

Why, 'tis all a-scam! ..... Yes, yes, I've had people come afore fer such a cure...Very well, I'll get 'ee a touch o' the corpse.Ye remind me o' my daughter as was.

GERTRUDE

Thank you, thank you. Where shall I come to?



HANGMAN

Go in at the side door near the main entrance o' the jail and go into the room on the right, there. The body will be there, on a trestle after quarter past the twelvth hour, Ma'am....I wish 'ee luck with the charm.

Gertrude feels a bit sick and dizzy and puts her hand up to her head.

She totters to the door.

GERTRUDE

Thank you....Thank you Sir.

HANGMAN

(Concernedly)

You be alright, Ma'am?

Gertrude fumbles at the latch and opens the door.

GERTRUDE

No.I'm fine, fine....thank you.

She goes out.

21 INT. JAIL ANTE-ROOM - DAY

21

Gertrude, dressed in black, come into the room. The hangman stands by the corpse which is covered by a white cloth and is lying on a trestle table.

The hangman nods and beckons her to the corpse.

HANGMAN

Ma'am.

Gertrude totters forwards, reluctantly.

The hangman pulls back the cloth from the young man's head.

It is Rhoda and Lodge's son, but Gertrude, of course, does not recognise him as he moved away from her village several years ago.

The hangman take her arm, rolls up the sleeve and lays her arm across the neck of the boy.

GERTRUDE

Agh!!

Suddenly there is another even louder female cry from behind her and her arm is grabbed.

Gertrude is snatched away from the corpse and she stands, shocked and swaying.

Lodge stands there, a little behind a furious Rhoda.

RHODA BROOK

Hussy! To come between us and our child, now!

Rhoda shakes her, and, then, as she lets go of Gertrude, Gertrude slides, unconscious, to the floor.

Lodge rushes up to Gertrude who lies there, dead, with unseeing eyes.

He crouches down and raises her head onto his lap, he gently tries to shake her awake.

LODGE

She dead! ...She's dead! .....

Lodge looks up at Rhoda

LODGE (CONT'D)

....Damn you, woman! WHY did I ever get involved with you?

He strokes his dead wife's face.

RHODA BROOK

With me?!.....

(Heavy sarcasm)

Oh yes! You regretted consorting with a dirty dairymaid! You regretted 'aving 'ad to avoid yer own bastard son!.....

She jabs a finger and advances towards him

RHODA BROOK (CONT'D)

....Well, ye can now regret yer own dead wife!

Lodge looks up, in horror, from Gertrude to the face of Rhoda.