



SpindleWorks 



A short story by Leo Schoof, Kelmscott, Western Australia

The Old Widow





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There was a small village in Cornwall in the Southern part of England where most of the men were fishermen. Every morning when many people were still in bed they sail out to sea. The night before they usually prepare all their nets and make sure there are no holes in them. If they find some holes they quickly fix it. Repairing their nets was an ongoing activity and they were all quite good at it. Even the young boys had to learn it. Sometimes these young boys were allowed to come along on the fishing trip. This trip was not, as you can imagine, a pleasure cruise. No way! The sea was often rough and the waves were high. The fishing trip was not at all without danger. And it happened sometimes that some of the fishing boats were lost in a storm. That was very sad because many of the fishermen lost their lives. Sometimes a boat hit the rocks as it was trying to find its way in the dark. In those days they did not have all the modern equipment that fishermen have nowadays.





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There was an old lady in this village, who was waiting for her husband to come home. He had left early in the morning together with the other fishermen.

“Why was he taking so long?” she wondered and deep down she knew the answer. It was because it was such a stormy night. It would no doubt take longer to find their way in the dark night. So she waited.....and.....waited. She became more and more impatient and after a while she could not bear it any longer and she went to the beach where she found a few more women waiting and looking into the distance. They were all waiting for the boats to return and for their husbands to come home. The weather was real bad and the waves were very high. It was quite dangerous to be out in this rough weather.

After a long wait most of the boats had returned safely and there was joy and thankfulness in their hearts. One boat had not come back, though. So they waited and waited. They were all becoming quite scared and worried.

“What could have happened?” one of the women asked.

There was fear in her voice. They waited another couple of hours but finally they all went home, cold and shivering. All were very, very sad and most of the women were crying. Even though years ago these things often happened in these fishing villages, they could never get used to it and sadness was in their hearts. Nobody spoke a word on the way home.

Some of the families were now without a husband and father.

The old lady also lost her husband. She walked home slowly together with the other women. She had no children either. So now she was left all alone. She slowly opened the door of her little cottage and stepped inside.



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It was cold and dark inside. She looked around for a candle and lit it. The fire had gone out and she felt cold and miserable. She had great difficulty lighting the fire especially because the wood was not very dry. Normally, of course, her husband took care of these chores but now it was up to her. She was not very good at it for bending over was not easy due to her aching back.

After a while the fire started to make crackling noises and soon it started to warm up the room.



She settled into her rocking chair close to the fire and her thoughts went back to those fearful moments on the beach with the other women. They had also lost their husbands. No doubt they were all getting a visit from their minister



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this evening to comfort and encourage them. But she was sure that she wouldn't get a visit from any minister because she and her husband had not been to any church for many years. They were bitter old people and angry with God because he had not given them any children. They had prayed and prayed for children and the Lord had not answered their prayer the way they wanted it. This had made both of them most unthankful and bitter, and even angry.

Understandably she could not sleep that night. No wonder with such bitter and angry thoughts in her mind. Of course she knew better. She could still remember many of the words from the Bible but now these words were of no comfort to her. Instead it made her even angrier. Now she was not only childless but she had also lost her husband. She was a poor old widow. She felt very sorry for herself.

"Who would look after her now?", she thought. On top of that in those days there was no social security, no government payments, and because she did not belong to any church she couldn't ask for help from the deacons either. She really felt very, very low.

The next morning she woke up with a bad headache, which did not improve her mood at all. She sat in front of her window like she did most mornings and watched the world go by. She hardly ever spoke to the people in the village and she was not going to change that either. She always kept to herself. She saw the men go to work with their lunch bags and a little later the children walked past on their way to school. Much later in the morning she saw the postman coming through the street. His bulging mailbag full of letters and postcards was slung over his shoulder. Here and there he put something in the letterbox. Everybody in her street usually received some mail but she never, ever had anything dropped in her mailbox. This grieved her very much. Wasn't there anybody who cared about her? Wasn't there anybody in this wide world, who loved her? This went on day after day. Everyone else received mail but she never got anything. And she just sat there sulking over it.

Then suddenly she got an idea. What if she wrote a postcard to herself and posted it? Yes, that sounded like a brilliant idea. She found an old postcard,



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wrote her own name and address on it and walked to the Letter box on the corner of the street to post it.



Then she waited. She had no idea how long the mail normally takes. The next day the postman walked past, put some mail into her neighbour's letterbox, but nothing in hers. The next day was the same. Nearly everyone got some mail but not her. This saddened her. She was sure she did everything right. The next day she sat in front of her window again and a little while later the postman came through her street as usual. The lady on the other side of the road got some mail, but not her. No, wait, the postman turned around. He was not used to putting mail in the old widow's letterbox. And sure enough, he dropped some mail in her letterbox. As soon as the postman had disappeared around the corner she walked and almost ran to the letterbox. And there was the postcard she posted to herself. Yes, it was addressed to her. She was so thankful and she was secretly hoping that all the neighbours would have noticed that she got mail. She was actually quite certain that the people on the opposite side of the road would have been watching from behind their curtains. But receiving this old postcard did not really make her happy. She continued to sulk and be miserable.



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The next day she decided to sit on the bench at the front of her cottage. She looked over the rugged and majestic coastline but she did not even see all the beauty of God's wonderful creation. It was such wonderful scenery but she had no eye for it. She just sat there on her garden bench and sulked. She was so deep in thought that she did not even hear the footsteps approaching her.

"Good morning, lady", said a cheerful young voice. And there in front of her stood a young boy of about nine or ten years. "Are you having a good day?", he asked. What a question! A good day when your husband did not come home from a fishing trip? A good day when your husband has most likely drowned? But she did not tell this young boy what was worrying her and why she was so sad and bitter. He would not understand anyway, she thought.

"Isn't it a most wonderful day?", the young boy asked as he stood there with a smile on his face.





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“What is so good about?”, asked the bitter old widow in a gruff voice. The boy completely ignored her unfriendly voice and answered her in a pleasant voice.

“Well, for a start, the sun is shining and my mother always taught me to count our blessings. And when the sun is shining then that is the first blessing”, he responded to her.

“Did God send this young boy to her to give her this lesson, to remind her to count her blessing? But how could she even begin to count her blessings when her husband had just drowned at sea?” In her bitter mood she did not even want to think of blessings.

“Why don’t you just go away and stop bothering me?”, she said to the boy, again in a gruff voice.

“OK, lady, have a nice day and don’t forget the sun is still shining”, he said. And with that he left and the old widow was left with her bitter thoughts.

“Why doesn’t anybody like me or care about me?” she thought. “And nobody ever buys me flowers”. She did not even realise that this young boy showed care and concern for her.

She was not well liked in the village and nobody ever spoke to her. It never occurred to her that it could be her own fault, because she was always unfriendly, bitter and when she spoke it was always in a gruff manner.

The following day the young boy came through her street again and in a cheery voice he asked her: “Did you see that wonderful rainbow yesterday?”

“It was absolutely wonderful”, he added.



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“What has that got to do with me?”, the bitter old widow asked him.

“Don’t you know what the rainbow means?”, the boy asked her gently. “My mother always called me to come outside whenever there was a rainbow in the sky and she would tell me that the rainbow is a sign and reminder of God’s faithfulness”.

Right now the old widow did not want to be reminded about God and His faithfulness. She still had these awful bitter thoughts on her mind. But when the boy had disappeared she was left to herself again and the bitter feeling did not leave her either. The night before she thought of praying to the Lord but she quickly gave up that idea. How could she pray while she was so angry and bitter. She knew very well that this was wrong of her and very sinful. Sometimes her husband would pray with her but he was no longer with her. Now she was a widow, a poor old widow. She felt very sad. At times the words of Psalm 23 about the Shepherd came to mind but she did not want to dwell on it too long.



Again she didn’t sleep well that night and the next morning she got up early. She just could not stay in bed any longer. After breakfast she went outside again and sat on the garden seat in front of her little cottage. It was a wonderful day but she hardly noticed. Close by some sparrows were picking up some seeds and sang their early morning song. And a blackbird also made his



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presence known. But she did not notice that either. She could only think of awful things and sad things.

Did she hear footsteps again? “I hope it is not that boy again”, she mumbled to herself. And sure enough she heard him whistling to the birds already, and there he was. He suddenly stood in front of her producing the biggest grin ever.

“Isn’t it a glorious day?”, he said to the lady.

“I had not noticed”, the old lady replied.

“Did you see those sparrows in the grass?” And did you hear that robin in the bushes?”, he asked with such a happy tone in his voice.

This time this happy chatting cheered her up a little and she asked the young little chap why he was so happy.

“I am happy because I can see the blue sky. Blind people can’t see that. I am also happy because I can hear the song of the birds. Deaf people can’t hear at all and miss out on such wonders of God’s creation”, he responded.

Hearing all this the old widow got tears in her eyes and her heart melted. She asked the boy to sit down next to her on the garden bench. He quickly sat down next to her and the lady asked him where he lived.

“I live not far from here with my uncle”, he said. “I have no father. He was a fisherman and drowned at sea a few years ago and so did my big brothers”, he continued.

“What about your mother?”, the old lady asked.

“She died a few years ago”, he responded.

“That’s very sad”, the lady responded.

“Yes and no”, the boy reacted. “It’s sad because I miss her but it’s happy because she is now with the Lord in heaven. She is now also with my Dad”.

The old lady got tears in her eyes when she heard this story from the young boy. Suddenly she was no longer sad. Instead she was happy and thankful that



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the Lord had brought this boy to her to cheer her up. She was sorry that she had been so unfriendly to him at first and she told him.

“Don’t worry”, he responded, we all have our bad days and that’s why I rejoice in the wonders of creation, the beautiful flowers, the sound of the birds and a lovely rainbow in the sky. Then all my worries disappear and I remember what the Bible says: “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice”.

That night before she went to bed the old widow prayed to the Lord. That was something she had not done for a long time, and it was hard for her to find the right words. But she hoped the Lord would understand.

She asked the Lord to forgive her sins, particularly her bitterness. She also thanked the Lord for guiding this young boy to her to remind her to count her blessings.



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