

# The Master's Hand

*RT CROSSING*

(circa 1992)

It was a new bike - his new bike. Adam had worked and saved for a year in order to buy it, and now it was his. He thought back over the year with satisfaction as he rode to his friend's house...

"Well, well, Adam... come in. Come right in, Adam. It has been a long time since I've seen you."

"Thanks, Bill," Adam replied, "but I'll just be a minute. I was wondering if you have any jobs I could do. I'm saving up for a bike and need all the money I can get."

"A job is what you want, huh? You're looking for work, is it? Well, you have been an excellent, hard-working person in the past. Yup, you're a wonderful worker. Hmm...No...No, I don't have any odd jobs for you. Nope, no odd jobs available."

"Oh. Well, thanks, Bill," Adam said disappointedly. "I'll see ya later."

"Wait! Wait just a minute. I said there weren't any odd jobs. Didn't say there wasn't work. No, sir. There's work all right. Lots. Just need someone who'll do it."

"I'll do it. What is it?" Adam grinned.

"Well, Saturdays, I'm a carpenter. Don't need any help there. Every other day, though, I'm a ship mechanic and net mender. This time of year I get pretty busy and could use some help. Sure could... And it would be good experience. Real good experience. Mending nets isn't too bad a job. Nope, not bad at all. And I could teach you the workings of an engine. That could come in handy sometime. You never know. No, sir, never do."

"Well, that sounds pretty good, Bill," said Adam. "When can I start?"

"Thursday at six. Six AM."

"Okay, I'll be here."

And he was. Every day except Sunday. He would work from six to noon and from one to six. It was hard, but it was worth it...

"Hi, Adam," said Bill, as he sat down on the bench and took out a sandwich from his toolbox. He began eating it slowly, obviously enjoying every bite. Parts of his hands seemed to shimmer in the sun, but it was just oil. It didn't appear to bother him to have dirty hands; in fact, he seemed proud of it. He had been born without the ability to control his right arm and hand. He had struggled and

practiced, and by the age of fourteen, he could use both hands. The next year he was involved in an automobile accident and lost the use of both arms. Both his parents died that same moment. With, as he put it, "determination and God's help," he overcame obstacle after obstacle, and by the age of twenty, he was working as a mechanic. He had graduated at seventeen, regained the use of both arms, and learned a trade. As Adam thought of all this, he marveled and wondered what had kept his friend going through all the years.

"Well," said Bill, breaking into Adam's thoughts, "I guess school will be starting next week. Yep, it will start next Monday. You won't be able to work during the day. No, sir. So Monday I expect you here at three. Yeah, three's a good time. I'll help you with any homework, and I'll give you a raise. No, don't argue. You do good work - real good work. Plus I'm getting more jobs than ever before, and I don't know what to do with all that money. Just don't know what to do with it. So, don't argue about it; just obey."

"Yes, sir," said Adam happily, as they got up to go back to work...

HONK!! Adam jerked back to the real world as he realized that the light was green. He started across the street and smiled as the new bike responded to his foot. He had been able to buy it earlier than he had planned. As he arrived at the wharf, he saw his schoolmate, Joe, at the far end and waved. At Bill's house, he stopped and entered. His friend wasn't there, and neither was his toolbox. Adam left the house and headed over to the boats. He saw Bill in one of them and jogged over to him.

"Hi, Bill."

"Hi. Oh, hello, Adam."

"Whatcha doing?"

"The propeller's jammed. Won't turn. I need you to watch her while I go down and see what I can do. I don't think it's serious. Nothing major. I'll just be a minute, but make sure nobody turns her on until I say. Pay attention. Don't get distracted."

"Okay, Bill. I'll watch."

Bill dropped below the water. Normally it was pretty clear, but today the sky was overcast, and it was necessary to use a light to see more than a foot underwater. For awhile, Adam watched the men working on the other boats. Bill had taken about fifteen minutes of air with him, so, depending on how bad the problem was, he could be some time.

"Hey, Adam." Adam started from his reverie. Joe was on the wharf calling to him. "Catch," he yelled as he tossed a rubber ball at him. Adam caught it easily and, smiling, tossed it back. Joe did the same. This went on for a minute. Then Joe threw a wild one. Adam lunged for

it, and his hand hit a lever on the dashboard. He was horrified as the engine roared to life. Quickly he turned it off and raced to the stern to look over the side. All was quiet.

Leaping over the side onto the wharf, he yelled to Joe. "Get help! Bill is down there." As Joe ran to a nearby boat, Adam raced to the wharfside phone and called an ambulance. When he returned, Bill was lying down in the boat with blankets around him. The sailors were doing what they could. Bill was still, but he was breathing. His right hand was wrapped in a red towel. Then Adam realized that the red was blood.

"Bill?" Adam said uncertainly as he entered the room. On the bed lay his friend. His black skin seemed to emphasize the whiteness everywhere else. Slowly Bill's eyes opened, and he regarded Adam quietly.

"Hello," he said, forgetting to echo himself.

They regarded each other. Then Adam cried, "I'm so sorry, Bill."

Bill was silent. Then he smiled tiredly. "I forgive you." He paused. "Now I have a reason to keep you working for me."

"What?" asked Adam. "I thought you'd fire me."

"Why?" said Bill. "You ought to know me better than that."

"Well... because of what I've done to you," stammered Adam.

Bill smiled. "What you have done to me doesn't even begin to compare to what Jesus has done for me."

"Aren't you angry?"

"Well, I regret that it happened, but I'm going to make the most of it." There was silence. Then he said, "It's kind of ironic. I came into the world without the use of this hand, and it looks like I'll go out the same way."

The nurse peeped in and said that it was time to go. As Adam left the hospital, he marveled once again as he thought over what Bill had said. Then he smiled.

