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The Golden Arm

While Erv Kaisen was known for the most power equip craft shop he also was a story teller and on occasion would tell a campfire story. The ones That I remember are "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Golden Arm". While "The Fall of the House of Usher" is well known in literature, Erv is the only one that I know who told "The Golden Arm".

It was in the mining county of Colorado that a Mrs. Ralph Moore was widowed when a mine caved in on her husband. She was left with two young sons, Mike and Joe, to raise on her own. The family continued to live on the mountain side claim that Ralph had filed for. He had been sure that it would only be a matter of time before a rich gold vein could be found on the claim.

So it was that Sue Moore held on to the claim and made ends meet by hunting, sowing a small garden, doing laundry for miners and mending their clothes. Each day she would rise early and go into the mine shaft that had killed her husband to work for a couple of hours. When she returned to the cabin she would begin a day of drudgery; tending the garden, washing clothes, mending, cooking and caring for her sons. As the boys grew they began to help their mother in the mine and the work progressed faster. "Some day we'll find your Daddies gold and we'll be rich," Sue would tell the boys. Each day all they would find was more quartz rock.

To loosen the rock they would use a stone drill to make a hole in it and then stuff the hole with dynamite and light the fuse. One day either the fuse was too short or it burned too fast. Sue was caught in the mine and a large boulder came down on her left arm crushing it. When the boys pried the rock off her arm they could see that it was crushed beyond mending. It would have to be cut off.

Mike ran to the nearby miner's town to get a doctor. Joe stayed with his mother to give her what comfort he could. The doctor came and cut off the crushed left arm. Now it was up to the boys to make money so that the family could survive. Mike took a job cleaning our the horse stables and Joe worked a soloon cleaning up the floor and spittoons. Every hour that they could they worked the mine that had killed their father and maimed their mother. All the mine produces was piles of quartz rock.

One day Mike and Joe decided to blast one more hole in the mine and if it did not produce any gold they would tell their mother that they would have to move. One more blast, one more ton of rocks to remove, and most likely another disappointing day.

Mike may have put an extra stick of dynamite in the hole that day because the blast seemed to shake the hole mountain. When the dust cleared and they began to remove the rocks small flecks of gold appeared in the rocks. As the removed the rock the flecks began to get bigger. At the end of the hole was a vein of gold a foot thick. The Moores were rich.

With the first gold discovered the Moores bought mining tools and hired miners to work the mine. Mike and Joe became wealthy and moved away to find the excitement of city living. Sue had a nice home built near where the cabin had stood and continued to live near the mine.

One day Mike and Joe were discussing what they could give their mother for a birthday present. She could buy anything she wanted so it was difficult. Joe came up with the idea to have an arm fashioned from gold from the mine to replace the one that Sue had lost. "A golden arm," Mike said, "Yes. That is the least we can do for all she has done for us."

So on her birthday the boys presented their mother with an arm of gold. Sue was very proud of it and wore it even when she was sleeping. And a few years later when she died the arm was buried with her.

As mines do, the gold mine played out. Mike had anticipated this would happen and invested his money wisely. Joe on the other hand had learned to love gambling, endless parties, and never ending high living. Joe was soon broke.

Mike had tried to help his brother, but it was of no use. Joe would take what ever money Mike would give him and spend it foolishly. Joe found that he was without money and without friends. Even Mike refused to give him more than shelter and food.

In desperation Joe plotted how he could regain his wealth. When their mother was alive the price of gold was low because there was so much of it from the mines. Now the price was high. "Ah, yes the arm," thought Joe. "It must be worth a fortune. My mother's golden arm will be my salvation."

Each year at their mother's birthday the boys would go to the home on the side of the mountain and hold a solemn birthday party at the site of her grave. After attending to their mother's grave the men would spend the night in the old home.

Joe waited until he was sure that Mike was sound asleep, then he left the house. In an old shed he found a lantern and a shovel. Joe was trembling as he made his way to his mother's grave. The sweat pored from him on the cold night as he dug into the earth that covered his mother's remains. At last the shovel hit the lid of the coffin and he began to scrape the earth away more carefully. With the cover exposed Joe lifted the lid. He could not look at the face of his long dead

mother so he felt around in the coffin until he found the golden arm. With a jerk he pulled the golden arm from the coffin. Joe closed the lid carefully and recovered the grave with earth.

It was near midnight when Joe came back to the cabin. He hid the golden arm under the bed and laid down to sleep. The wind picked up outside of the house. The wind howled and screamed as it came toward the house from the grave. Loose windows and siding rattled and woke Mike.

Joe was trying to hide, like a child, by covering himself with a blanket. Then the wind stopped almost as suddenly as it began. There was a knock on the door and Mike went to answer it. As the door was open, Sue Moore stood there as in life, but without her golden arm.

"Whoooo's got my golden arm? Whoooo's got my golden arm? Whoooo's got my golden arm?", she asked as she entered the room. Mike backed away too surprised to speak. "Whoooo's got my golden arm? " Joe tried to pull more covers over himself as the ghost of his mother moved straight to his bed. With a scream that could be heard through out the mountains she cried, "You got my golden arm".

(At the end of the story the teller would repeat, "Whoooo's got my golden arm?" as he moved around the Horseshoe. The last line of the story would be delivered in the face of one of the campers.)