

## Hansel and Gretel

By the Brothers Grimm

Once upon a time there lived a woodcutter and his wife. Their early days were lived in bliss in a small wood cottage with their two children, Hansel and Gretel.

These two children grew up to be wise beyond their years. Hansel was smart, soft, and charming where Gretel was poetic, cautious, but quick-witted. The two children loved to skip stones in the lake half a mile over.

Hansel and Gretel spent most of their time finding the perfect, flattest skipping stones. Their collection of stones was large, as they spent more time collecting than actually skipping the rocks. Over time, they had acquired a strange companion – a bird, who would steal their stones and hide them in various places all over the land – though Hansel and Gretel knew not why.

At the peak of their childhood, a great famine struck the country where Hansel and Gretel lived. It left the rich secluded from the middling and poor classes; the merchant class fought to survive; and the poorest of the poor plummeted into utter starvation. The woodcutter and his wife, along with Hansel and Gretel eventually struggled to stay fed.

The reoccurring moments of starvation gradually caused the woodcutter's wife to go choose selfishness. One evening, after Hansel and Gretel had been tucked in bed, the woman approached her husband.

“We must survive the upcoming winter... We must...” she started. “We cannot feed everyone in this small house... We cannot...”

“Well, what are we to do?” the woodcutter asked.

“We must leave the children alone in the wooded forest. That way we will only have to feed ourselves,” she replied.

“If we leave them there, they will surely starve!” he cried.

“And if we keep them here, we will all surely starve,” she replied.

Little did the woodcutter and his wife know, Hansel and Gretel had been listening to their whole conversation.

“Our Mother does not want us anymore,” Gretel wailed.

“Shh, Gretel! Father will not allow her to get rid of us,” Hansel replied, attempting to calm Gretel down.

“Oh, but what will Father do once we are left alone with our Mother?” Gretel asked.

“I think it through,” he replied.

Now, Hansel was very smart. His plans of action were always calculated and efficient. The next day, before they were ordered to start on the household chores, Hansel ran half a mile down to the lake. He gathered dozens of skipping stones.

When he returned home, Hansel could see that his mother and sister were packing up for what looked like a normal journey into the woods – though Hansel knew that this time their mother had different plans for them.

He held his sack of skipping stones tight as he approached his mother.

“Times are tough, my dear children. We must venture into the forest to help your father with his work,” she declared.

“But –” both children started.

“No 'buts'!” their mother scolded.

And so, Hansel, Gretel, and their mother journeyed into the thick-wooded forest. It was as eerie as thick fog on a stormy night: the sky was a dark grey, and the trees were black and gloomy. Luckily, Hansel had remembered to drop the shimmering stones on the ground every few feet – so that they could follow them back on their return home.

“Hansel, what is it that you think you’re up to?” their mother shouted impatiently.

“Mother! Mother! Look at those squirrels in the tree. I swear they are dancing as if they are fit for the ball!” Gretel called, using her quick-wit in order to distract their mother.

Gretel knew exactly what Hansel was up to. She pieced it together as she watched her mother's face scrunch up.

“Where? I see no squirrels! I see no dancing!” their mother exclaimed, now confused and distracted, giving Hansel time to catch up. “Oh, hurry on up. We only need to travel a little bit further,” their mother grumbled.

“Where are we going, Mother?” Hansel asked. With no response, the children’s worst nightmares were confirmed. Their mother was going to leave them in the forest.

Hansel dropped another rock. Gretel heard it fall.

They traveled for a while, Hansel occasionally dropping stones, until they reached a small clearing. Their mad mother ordered Hansel and Gretel to sit on a dead log.

“I am going to gather wood. Stay here, and I will come back for you shortly,” she lied.

The children stayed seated, reluctantly. They waited and waited AND waited, but their mother never returned for them.

Hansel began to worry for their safety. He cried to Gretel: “What if we are attacked, or eaten? What about wolves? Bears? Cougars? Raccoons? Gretel, oh Gretel – what are we to do?”

“I will feel it out,” she replied, getting up from the dead log. She took Hansel’s hand, and the two followed his trail of stones. Their flat surfaces shimmered in the moonlit night.

Hansel and Gretel finally arrived back home at the break of dawn; however, they were so tired that both immediately fell asleep right in front of their cottage door.

They awoke tucked in their beds to the sounds of the woodcutter and his wife arguing.

“How could you leave our beloved children in the forest all alone?” they heard their father ask sadly.

“We will... We will all starve, if they stay here! There are too many mouths and NOT enough food. It is the only way... the only way...” she replied.

Now Hansel and Gretel surely knew their luck was over.

Hansel tried to think of a way to get the two of them out of this mess. He looked all over in search of their skipping rocks. Since they were nowhere to be found, Hansel figured the mischievous bird had stolen them all.

Hopeless, Hansel and Gretel went back to their beds and waited for their mother to come and take them to the forest.

Sure enough, the woodcutter’s wife made her way up to their room to retrieve them. She ordered Hansel into his walking boots and Gretel into her washing clothes.

Off they went once more.

Before they left, however, the woodcutter secretly slipped Hansel a small loaf of bread. Hansel saw the look of despair on his dear father’s face.

Hansel slipped the bread in his pocket, crushing it into mostly crumbs and sadly followed behind his mother and beloved sister. Every few feet, he dropped these breadcrumbs on the ground.

Soon their mother grew suspicious of Hansel.

“Hansel, what is it that you think you’re up to?” she shouted.

Gretel, hearing this, quickly came up with a way to distract their mother:

“Mother! Mother! A wild forest fairy just flew into your hair!”

Panicked, Hansel and Gretel's mother began to shake and squirm; she disheveled her hair and screeched with fear.

This gave Hansel time to catch up.

"You children will be the death of me. Hurry along NOW," their mother grumbled.

They travelled for a few more miles until they came to a very small clearing – even smaller than the previous.

"I am going to find a good place to chop wood. Both of you, STAY PUT! I will come back for you shortly," she commanded and declared. So, the children waited and waited AND waited, but their mother never returned for them.

Hansel offered Gretel what little bread was left.

"This is not what you have been dropping on the ground," Gretel remembered.

"I dropped most of our skipping stones last time. Mother led us down a different route today and that stupid bird must've stolen all of those stones. The breadcrumbs will be here in the morning and we can follow them on our return home," Hansel replied.

"In the morning? Hansel! I will not stay here overnight," Gretel stated. Then thinking about Hansel's panic last night, Gretel began, "What about wolves? What about –"

"Okay. No wolves, bears, cougars, raccoons, muskrats, or squirrels will get us. I get. Lets just promise we will get out of here," Hansel said, interrupting his sister.

They promised each other and then relaxed in the very small glade, resting their feet and playing guessing games. Suddenly, their noses were filled with an oddly sweet aroma. The children followed the wonderful scent – it grew stronger and more delicious.

Mouths dripping with drool, Hansel and Gretel finally reached it.

In front of their eyes and noses sat a house made entirely out of the most delicious looking sweets.

The roof was coated with fluffy white icing; pink, sticky syrup drizzled and dripped along the sides of the dark chocolate exterior; a gum drop door frame was sopping with sparkling icing sugar; a frothy milk chocolate river flowed under a gingerbread bridge that led to a gingerbread door; and a lollipop garden sat in front of a large crystallized sugar window.

Hansel and Gretel stood stunned for a moment, and then, without caution or hesitation, they ran to the house and began stuffing their faces full of candy.

"What little pretties have come to my house today?" screeched an odd voice.

Hansel and Gretel stopped short and stared at one another – each was messy and covered in candy.

"Ugh!" they whisper-shouted in unison.

"Oh, two little ones to enjoy!" the voice screeched again. Hansel and Gretel turned and stared at a very small woman with scraggly hair wearing a long pink dress. She was very strange looking and smelled quite funny – a little too sweet.

The old woman then invited Hansel and Gretel into her house.

"There's more candy in here! Fresh candy, my sweets!" she called to them, motioning them inside her house.

Hansel immediately ran into the candy house despite Gretel's cautious protests. After a while of standing outside, the old woman popped her jagged-toothed head out from the little house and beckoned Gretel:

"Come in, come in. My, my, you are very pretty!"

With this, alongside her idea of Hansel stuffing his face in the interior of the house, Gretel eventually followed inside.

When Gretel entered the house, she immediately heard the gingerbread door shut heavily behind her. She turned around and noticed that the entire inside of the candy house was made of solid steel. Inside the house were bags and bags of brilliant gold coins.

Gretel whipped her head back around to see that Hansel was locked up in a cage hanging directly overtop of a boiling pot of water! This woman was no woman at all - she was an EVIL WITCH!

"Now, go sit at the table, little pretty," the evil witch commanded Gretel. "Help me slice up those chops. We are going to fatten him up!" she exclaimed excitedly, pointing over to Hansel.

Now Gretel understood the evil witch's plan: she had used her candy house to lure them inside so that she could eat them up for dinner!

Gretel thought all hope was lost as she sat at the large metal table slicing meat. She sobbed and sliced; she sliced and sobbed. Gretel filled three large buckets full with the fatty food for the old woman to cook in her large boiling pot. Poor Hansel sat anxiously thinking of a way to escape. He watched as Gretel threw the scraps and bones into a separate pile beside the buckets of sliced meat.

Suddenly, Hansel was struck with a brilliant idea: he started to cough violently - in an attempt to attract Gretel's attention.

"Oh, quit your hacking! You best not be sick if I am going to snack on you!" the evil witch shrieked. All the commotion caused Gretel to look up in Hansel's direction. He motioned her to distract the evil witch. Seeing her poor brother's desperation, Gretel scoured her brain for a way to distract the evil witch.

After a moment of thought, Gretel cried and dropped her knife:

"Oh my!" she cried.

"What do you think you're doing? Get back to work!" the evil, selfish witch shrieked once more.

"I think I saw a... I think I saw a... A DRAGON outside!" Gretel cried, convincingly. Hansel held back laughter since Gretel's claims were getting a little more and more ridiculous.

"A DRAGON you say?" the evil witch questioned.

"Oh, goodness. That was most definitely a dragon I saw! It will surely burn down the forest with its fiery breath and then your candy house will be revealed to all the grown ups in the land!" Gretel declared. "How will you ever catch children if your candy house is not secret to the grown ups – who can no longer smell the sweetness of the candy?" Gretel questioned with her voice sweet as the syrup that dripped from the roof.

With this, the evil witch unlocked the steel and/ or gingerbread door and ran outside in search of the supposed dragon.

Hansel quickly motioned Gretel to hand him one of the bones lying in the scrap pile. Gretel held up a large bone, but Hansel shook his head; she held up a thick bone, but Hansel shook his head; and then, from the bottom of the pile, Gretel found the thinnest bone of all and brought it over to Hansel's cage for she knew what he would be using it for.

He told her his plan just in time for them to hear the evil witch hustling back.

Just as Gretel sat down at the large metal table, the evil witch stormed in the house looking puzzled.

"Well, no dragon in sight! Not even the tip of a tail or the smell of smoke!" she exclaimed.

"Perhaps he smelled you coming," Gretel replied frankly, continuing to slice the chops. "Dragons have a sharp sense of smell, you know," she said curtly.

"Hmph... Chop larger! The larger the better, little pretty!" the evil witch demanded, closing the steel door but forgetting to lock it.

As the evil witch focused on Gretel's slicing, Hansel quietly maneuvered the thin bone around in the keyhole of his cage:

CLINK! CLICK!! DING!!!

Slowly and quietly, Hansel removed the bone and waited patiently for his plan to unfold.

Once Gretel had finished her slicing, the evil witch walked it over to the pot located directly underneath Hansel.

"Well? What are you waiting for, little pretty? Help me get this food in the pot!" the evil witch ordered Gretel.

"Hmm. That pot doesn't look quite hot enough," Gretel said.

"I will dip your little feet in and we can check," the evil witch sneered.

"How can you trust that I will say it is hot enough? I will surely lie and then the food will never be cooked for my brother to eat," Gretel replied.

The evil witch furrowed her brow and looked from the pot to Gretel and back again. "Oh, I suppose you're right. Stay there. I will check to see if the water is almost at a boil," the evil witch huffed.

Gretel remained behind as the evil witch approached the pot. Gretel waited for Hansel's signal.

Just as the evil, selfish witch brought the tip of her long, crooked nose to the boiling water, Hansel kicked his cage door open. This gave Gretel the signal to push the evil witch into the boiling pot of water. The evil witch toppled over into the pot just in time for Hansel to land right on her head, avoiding the hot water beneath his feet. The heat from the water melted the old witch into sweet, gooey syrup.



The children ran out of the house once they had gathered the sacks of gold that the evil witch had stolen over the years from the other children that came by her candy house.

Hansel and Gretel followed the path from which they first smelled the candy until they reached the very small glade where Hansel had last dropped bread crumbs; however, the children found that their bread crumbs had been eaten and replaced by their favourite stolen skipping stones by none other than the rascal bird that had stolen them. The bird chirped happily as it finished its last breadcrumb.

Apparently, the bird had been hungry too!

Hansel and Gretel gathered their skipping stones in the bags of gold and made their way home.

When they arrived, they ran into the embrace of their father, who had become a widowed man after their mother had, ironically, died from food poisoning.

Their father welcomed them home and apologized for letting their mother's selfishness overcome him. They took care of him with pity until his death from a slower, more subtle, and unfortunately more painful food poisoning shortly after.

The two siblings lived in happiness together for the rest of their days sharing their newfound wealth with the land and, of course, skipping stones in the lake half a mile over while feeding their naughty bird breadcrumbs.