

Hansel and Gretel

A traditional story
In Intermediate English
The Stories First Foundation

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By Stephen Clarke



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Once upon a time, there was a woodcutter who lived close to a large forest with his family. His son was called Hansel and his daughter was called Gretel. Their mother was dead but their father got married again, so they had a stepmother. The family was very poor and when a famine came to their land, the man could not buy enough bread for them all to eat.

One night he was at the table, worrying over his troubles when he sighed and looked at his wife. "What is going to happen to us? How are we going to feed our children when we have nothing for ourselves!"



“Do you know what we should do?” said the woman. “Tomorrow morning let’s take the children into the thickest part of the forest. We will light a fire and give each of them a piece of bread. Then we will leave them alone and do our work. They won’t be able to find the way back home. We won’t have to care for them anymore.”

“No, we can’t do that!” said the man. He loved his children. He could not imagine leaving them alone.

“You are a fool! All four of us will die of hunger!” cried his wife.

“Leaving them in the forest would break my heart,” said the man. “Wild animals would soon kill them and eat them.”

The wife nagged and nagged. “Do what I say or start making our coffins!” she shouted angrily. Finally, the man agreed but said, “I feel sorry for the poor children.”

The two children could not go to sleep that night because they were hungry. They heard everything their father and stepmother said. “Leave us in the forest?” said Gretel sadly. She started to cry. “That is the end of us!”

“Be quiet, Gretel!” said Hansel. “Don’t cry. I will find a way out of this.”

When everyone had gone to sleep, he got up, put on his little coat, opened the door and went outside. Hansel picked up some pebbles and put as many as he could into his pockets.

Then he went back to Gretel and said, “Don’t worry, sister, I have a plan.”

The next day, before the sun had risen, their stepmother came into their room. “Quick, get up, lazy children! Today we are going to the forest to fetch wood.”

Hansel and Gretel walked into the forest with their father and stepmother. Every few minutes, Hansel stopped and dropped a pebble on the ground.

Soon they reached the middle of the forest. Hansel and Gretel picked up many sticks, then their father lit a fire. “Now lie by the fire while we fetch more wood,” said their stepmother.

Hansel and Gretel sat by the fire. They sat there for such a long time. “They have left us alone,” said Gretel. “How can we get out of the forest?”

Hansel took his little sister’s hand, and they walked. They were guided by the pebbles that glittered in the moonlight like coins.

Soon they found themselves back at their father’s cottage. Their father was delighted. It broke his heart to leave them.



However, soon there was still no food to eat. One night, the family was in bed. “We have eaten everything,” said the woman. “The children must go away.”

The man said quietly, “We must share our last piece of bread with the children.”

The children heard their father and stepmother. When everyone had gone to sleep, Hansel went to the door. He wanted to fetch more pebbles. But the woman had locked the door. He was annoyed, but he told his little sister, “Don’t cry, Gretel. I have another plan.”



In the early morning, the woman made the children get up, and gave them each a piece of bread, but it was smaller than last time.

On the way into the forest, Hansel crumbled it in his pocket. Every few minutes, he stopped and dropped a crumb onto the ground.

The woman led the children far into the forest, to where they had never been before. They were scared.

Again, they made a big fire. “Lie here by the fire, children,” said their stepmother. We are going to cut wood, and we will come back for you in the evening.”

At dinnertime, Gretel shared her bread with Hansel. Then they went to sleep. The evening came, but nobody came to fetch them.

It was dark when they woke up. “Wait a little, Gretel” said Hansel. When the moon rises, we can see the breadcrumbs that I dropped on the ground. They will show the way to go home.”

When the moon rose, they looked around, but there were no breadcrumbs. “Where are they?” asked Gretel. The birds in the forest had eaten them.

There were tears in Gretel’s eyes again. “Don’t worry, sister. We will soon find the way.”



Hansel and Gretel walked all night and all the next day. The next night, they still could not find their way out of the forest.

The children could only find a few berries to eat and were very hungry. They were so tired that their legs would not move anymore, so they lay down under a tree and went to sleep.

When they woke in the morning, they started to walk again. It was now the third day since they left their father's cottage.

Suddenly, they saw a beautiful snow-white bird sitting on a tree. It sang so beautifully that they stopped to listen to it.

“What a pretty song!” said Gretel. She stopped crying and she followed the bird. Hansel followed it, too.

They followed the bird to a little cottage. The children had never seen such a strange cottage. The walls were made of bread, the roof was made of cake and the windows were made of sugar!

“Now we can have a good meal!” said Hansel. He broke off a piece of the roof and tasted it. It was so delicious.

Gretel went to the window and started to eat a piece. It was so good that she pushed out the whole window. Then, she sat down on the ground to enjoy it. Hansel and Gretel couldn't believe how lucky they were.



Suddenly the door opened and an old woman with a crutch came out. Hansel and Gretel were so frightened that they dropped what they were holding in their hands.

But the old woman smiled. “Ah, dear children. Who brought you here? Come in and stay with me.” She took them by the hand and led them into the little house.

Then the door to the cottage closed. The children were now prisoners.

Although the old woman seemed to be friendly, she was really an old witch. She had built the bread house to lure children to her. Whenever she found a child, she cooked it and ate it. It was a great feast for her.

The witch gave Hansel and Gretel some dinner and then told them to sleep in two little beds. She got up early next morning, before the children were awake, and when she saw them sleeping, with their beautiful rosy cheeks, she said to herself, “They will taste really good!”

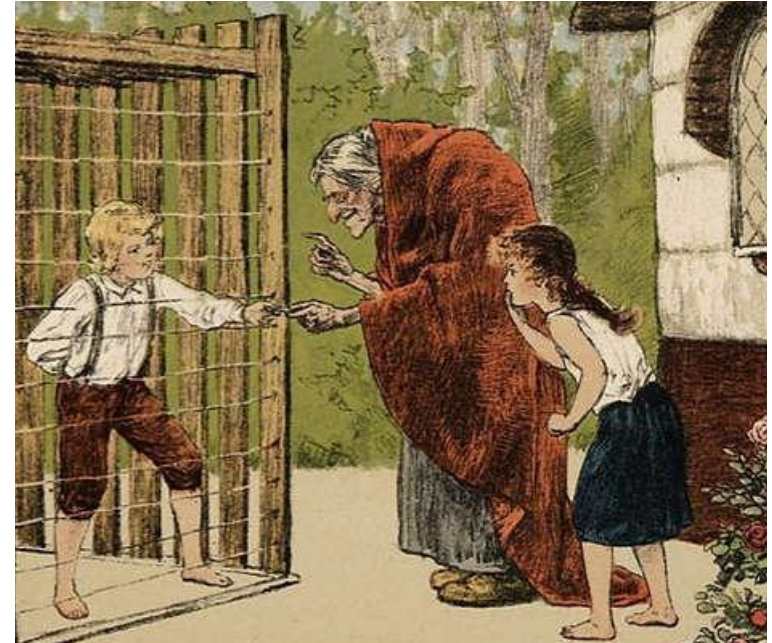
She picked up Hansel, took him outside and put him in a little cage. Hansel screamed and screamed but the witch didn’t listen. Then she went back to Gretel and shook her until she woke up. “Get up, lazy girl! Fetch some water and cook something for your brother. We have to fatten him. When he is nice and fat, I will eat him!”

Gretel was shocked but she had to obey the witch’s orders. The best food was now given to Hansel. Gretel only got bread.

Every morning the old witch went to the cage. “Hansel, put your finger out for me,” said the witch. “I want to feel how fat you are.”

The old woman had very weak eyes, so Hansel did not put out his finger. Instead, he put out a little stick. When she felt the stick, she thought that it was his finger. “He isn’t fat yet? He must eat more!” she cried.

Four weeks passed, and Hansel was still thin. The old lady became very impatient. One day, she couldn’t wait any longer. She called for Gretel. “Girl, fetch the water. Tomorrow, I am going to kill Hansel and eat him!”



Gretel was so sad. As she fetched the water, tears rolled down her cheeks. “It would have been better if we had died together in the forest,” she said to herself.

Early the next morning, Gretel had to fill the kettle with water, then light a fire and hang the kettle over it. “What can I do? I must put an end to this witch.” Suddenly, Gretel stopped crying and an idea came to her.



Quickly, Gretel fetched wood for the oven. The oven was quite hot when the witch arrived. “It is time to eat the boy!” said the witch.

“But don’t you want to make some bread first?” said Gretel. “I have heated the oven and prepared the dough.”

“Yes,” she said. “That is a good idea.” Hansel would be even more delicious with some fresh bread. But the witch had another thought.

She pushed poor Gretel toward the oven. “Creep in and see if it is hot enough for the bread.” Actually, she wanted to put Gretel in the oven first and roast her.

But Gretel wasn’t that stupid. “I don’t know how to get in,” she lied. “What should I do?”

“You foolish thing!” said the witch. “The door is big enough. Even I can get in.” Then the old woman went up to the oven and put her head in it. At that moment, Gretel gave the witch a strong push and sent her right into the oven. Then Gretel closed the door and locked it.

“Aagghh!!!” cried the witch. She started to howl horribly. But Gretel ran away and left the wicked witch to die.

Gretel ran as fast as she could to the cage. She opened the door. “Hansel, we are saved! The old witch is dead.”

Hansel rushed out of his cage like a bird that is finally free. How delighted they were! They kissed each other and danced for joy.

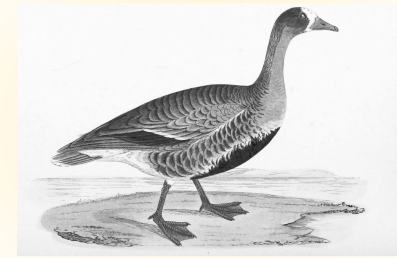
As they had nothing more to fear, they went into the witch's house and looked around. They found chests in every corner full of pearls and precious stones.

"These are better than pebbles!" said Hansel, as he filled his pockets. "I must take something home, too," said Gretel and she filled her apron. "Now we must go and get out of this enchanted wood."

Before they had gone very far, they reached a large lake. "We can't get across," said Hansel. "I can't see a bridge."

"And there are no boats, either," replied Gretel. "But there is a duck swimming. It will help us over if we ask it." So they called out to the duck:

"Little duck, that cries quack, quack, quack, Quickly, take us on your back."



The duck came swimming towards them, and Hansel got on its back and told his sister to sit on his knee.

"No, we will be too heavy for the duck," said Gretel. "It must take us one after the other."

The kind duck first took Hansel across, then came back for Gretel. When the children both got safely to the other side, they started walking through the forest again.

There, the woods seemed to grow more and more familiar. At last, they saw their father's cottage in the distance.

"Father!" cried Hansel and Gretel. They began to run. The door of their cottage opened.



The children hugged their father. The man had been overcome with sadness since he left his children in the forest. “Your stepmother is now dead,” he said softly.

Gretel shook her apron and Hansel emptied his pockets. Pearls and precious stones scattered all over the floor.

In this way, all their troubles came to an end, and they were as happy as could be.