

HANSEL AND GRETEL

Once upon a time a little boy named Hansel and a little girl named Gretel lived with their father and stepmother in a little cottage in the country. Their father loved them dearly but the stepmother was a very selfish person. They were very poor and soon there was very little money to buy food. One day Hansel and Gretel overheard their father and stepmother talking.

"There is not enough food to feed all of us through the coming winter," said the stepmother. "But if we did not have to feed the children, there would be plenty for both of us."

"What would you have me do?" asked the father.

The wicked woman revealed her plan.

"We must take the children into the forest and leave them there," she answered.

The father and stepmother argued for a long time but in the end he had no choice but to agree to the selfish woman's plan.

Gretel began to cry. "Oh, Hansel! What shall we do in the forest all alone?" she wailed.

"Don't worry, Gretel. I have a plan," comforted Hansel.

That night when everyone was in bed and the moon was bright in the sky, Hansel crept outside. He filled both of his pockets with small stones which shone brightly in the moonlight. Then he slipped back into bed and slept soundly until his father woke him the next morning.

"Come Hansel and Gretel. We are going into the woods today to gather firewood for the winter," said the cunning stepmother. She gave each child a piece of bread to save for their lunch.

They all started out down the path into the forest. As Hansel walked, he reached into his pocket and took out a pebble and dropped it onto the path. He did this all the while they traveled into the forest. Finally the stepmother spread out a blanket on the ground.

"Sit here and eat your lunch while we gather the firewood," she commanded.

Hansel and Gretel ate their bread and waited patiently for their parents to return. But they did not return and soon the sun began to set and the forest grew dark.

"Hansel, I am scared," wailed Gretel. "How will we find our way back home?"

"Wait until the moon comes up, Gretel, and we shall be able to find our way," soothed Hansel.

When the moon finally rose high in the sky, Hansel searched for the bright shiny pebbles. Sure enough, there they were glittering along the path they had taken into the forest. Grabbing Gretel's hand, he was able to find his way back to the little cottage.

Hansel and Gretel's father was overjoyed to see his children home again. But the selfish stepmother was very angry. Later Hansel heard her speaking to his father.

"Tomorrow we will take the children even farther into the woods so they surely will not be able to find their way out again," she said.

Although they argued bitterly, the stepmother prevailed and reluctantly the father agreed. That night when Hansel crept out of his bed to gather more stones, he found the door to the cottage locked. He had no choice but to go back to his room without the shiny pebbles. The next morning the stepmother gave Hansel and Gretel each a crust of bread instructing them to keep it for their lunch. However, as Hansel had no shiny stones, he dropped pieces of his bread along the trail into the forest. This time they went much deeper into the woods. Once again the stepmother spread a blanket and instructed Hansel and Gretel to eat their lunch while she and their father gathered wood. Gretel shared her bread with Hansel as he had dropped all of his

along the trail. Then they fell asleep. When they finally awoke, it was already dark and the bright moon was shining overhead. Hansel searched for the trail of bread but he could not find a single crumb to show him the way home.

“The birds must have eaten my bread trail,” sighed Hansel.

“What are we to do now?” asked Gretel.

“We will wait until morning and then maybe we can find our way back home,” replied Hansel.

So they wrapped themselves up in the blankets and fell into a sound sleep.

The next day Hansel and Gretel began to walk through the woods in search of the path back to the cottage. By the time the sun has risen high in the sky they came to a small clearing in the forest. Much to their delight there was a lovely little cottage. Upon closer inspection they found the cottage to be made of cake and cookies and candy! Hansel and Gretel were so hungry, they broke off sections of the house and began to eat it.

After a short time they heard a voice say, “Nibble, nibble like a mouse. Who is nibbling on my house?”

Hansel and Gretel were startled to see a little old lady standing in the doorway.

“We are sorry to have eaten your house but we were lost in the woods and were so very hungry,” explained Hansel as he finished munching a cookie shingle.

“Well, then you must come inside and have some good food to eat,” said the little old lady.

Hansel and Gretel were tired and hungry and so entered the house which smelled of hot soup and fresh bread. The old lady gave them plenty to eat and when they had their fill, she put them into soft beds with cozy quilts and downy pillows. They slept soundly all night.

When morning came, Gretel awoke to find that things were quite different than the night before. The old lady, who was really a witch, immediately put Gretel to work cleaning and scrubbing the floors and dishes. She had locked Hansel in a cage and had Gretel take plates of food for him to eat.

“When he is fat enough, I will cook him for my supper!” the old witch exclaimed gleefully.

Now it happened that the witch had very poor eyesight. Every day she would command Hansel to stick his finger out of the cage so that she could feel how fat he was getting. Gretel devised a plan to fool the old witch. She gave Hansel an old chicken bone which he would stick through the cage instead of his finger. As the witch could not see very well, she believed that Hansel was not getting fat enough to eat. However, she grew impatient and decided that she would eat Hansel whether or not he was fat enough.

“Today I will eat your brother,” she announced to Gretel.

Then the old witch built a fire in the oven. Poor Gretel was terrified and did not know how she could save her brother.

After the fire had been burning for awhile, the witch commanded Gretel, “Stick your head into the oven to see if it is hot enough.”

Gretel thought of a plan.

“I never did that before,” she wailed. “You will have to show me how?”

“Silly girl!” shouted the angry witch. “Come here and I will show you.”

The witch opened the oven door and stuck her head inside. Before she could say another word, Gretel ran up behind her. She pushed her as hard as she could into the oven and slammed the door shut. Then she grabbed the key to Hansel's cage and released him. The two children ate their fill of food and then searched the little cottage. They found jewelry and coins and stuffed their pockets with all of the treasures. Then they ran out of the cottage and back into the woods.

By and by Hansel and Gretel came to a lake. Swimming in the lake was a beautiful swan who came to speak to them. Hansel and Gretel told the swan of their adventure with the mean old witch and of their desire to return home.

“The place you describe is on the other side of the lake. Hop on my back and I will take you across the water,” offered the swan.

So Hansel and Gretel were taken across the lake to a very familiar area of the woods. Soon they were running down the path to their home. Their father came out to greet them. He told them how he was so sad when they were gone and that the stepmother went away and was never coming back again. He was so happy to have them back home but was also sad as he had very little money or food.

“Don't worry, father,” laughed Hansel and Gretel.

They told him of their adventure with the mean old witch and then emptied their pockets all of the treasures that they had found in the cookie cottage. Their father was astonished and vowed never again to be separated from them. Hansel and Gretel and their father never went hungry again and they all lived happily ever after.

The End