



HANSEL AND GRETEL

A Tale from Germany

Retold by Dianne de Las Casas

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Once upon a time, there was a woodcutter who lived with his wife and two children, a brave boy named Hansel and a sweet girl named Gretel. The woodcutter's wife was their stepmother and she did not like the children. They were poor and had barely enough food to feed the four of them.

The woodcutter cried, "What are we to do? I can scarcely put food in my children's mouths!"

The wife answered, "If we did not have children, it would not be a problem. We would have plenty enough food for the both of us."

The woodcutter said, "But I do have children and I must feed them."

The wife said, "If we don't do something soon, we will all die of starvation. Let us take the children into the woods and leave them there. They will never find their way back and we will have enough food for our mouths alone."

"I cannot do that!" cried the woodcutter.

But the evil woman had a way of persuading the woodcutter to follow her fiendish plan. Neither the woodcutter nor his wicked wife knew that Hansel and Gretel heard the entire conversation. Gretel began to cry. "What is to become of us, brother?"

Hansel answered, "Do not fret, dear Gretel. I have a plan." He stole out the back door and filled his pockets with white pebbles that glittered like silver pieces in the moonlight.

The next morning, before the sun rose, the wife awoke the sleeping children. "Get up you lazy things. We are going into the forest to chop wood with your father." She gave each of them a piece of bread. "This is for your supper. Do not eat it before then. You shall receive nothing else."

Gretel filled her apron with the bread while Hansel filled his pockets with the pebbles. As they traveled further into the forest, Hansel dropped the white pebbles along the way. When they came to the middle of the wood, the woodcutter built a fire.

The wife said, "Children, you stay here and rest while we go into the forest to chop wood. When we are ready, we will call for you." The woodcutter and his wife left Hansel and Gretel alone.

When it was time, the children ate their bread and then fell asleep. When they awoke, the fire was burned out and the moon rose high in the sky. Gretel began to cry, "They have left us and we are all alone."

Hansel comforted his sister. "Do not fret, dear Gretel. We have a way back home." He pointed to the white pebbles that glittered like silver pieces in the moonlight. They followed the pebbles and found their way home.

When they knocked on the door, the wife answered. She cried, "There you are, you wicked little children! We called and you never came. We thought you were never coming home again." But their father was glad because it broke his heart to leave his children all alone in the woods.

Soon after, bread was again scarce in the household. The woodcutter cried, "What are we to do? I can barely put food in my children's mouths!"

The wife answered, "If we did not have children, it would not be a problem. We would have plenty enough food for the both of us."

The woodcutter said, "But I do have children and I must feed them."

The wife said, "If we don't do something soon, we will all die of starvation. Let us take the children into the woods once more and leave them there. We will take them deep into the forest, where they have never been. They will never find their way back and we will have enough food for our mouths alone."

"I cannot do that!" cried the woodcutter.

But the evil woman had a way of persuading the woodcutter to follow her fiendish plan. Neither the woodcutter nor his wicked wife knew that Hansel and Gretel heard the entire conversation again. Gretel began to cry. "What is to become of us, brother?"

Hansel answered, "Do not fret, dear Gretel. I have a plan." He tried to sneak out the back door to collect pebbles but found that the door was barred tight.

The next morning, before the sun rose, the wife awoke the sleeping children. "Get up you lazy things. We are going into the forest to chop wood with your father." She gave each of them a piece of bread, even smaller than the pieces she had previously given them. "This is for your supper. Do not eat it before then. You shall receive nothing else."

Gretel filled her apron with one piece of bread while Hansel filled his pockets with the crumbs of the other. As they traveled farther into the forest, Hansel dropped the bread crumbs along the way. They traveled even farther into the woods to a place the children

had never been. When they came to the middle of the dark forest, the woodcutter built a fire.

The wife said, "Children, you stay here and rest while we go into the forest to chop wood. When we are ready, we will call for you." The woodcutter and his wife left Hansel and Gretel alone.

When it was time, the children shared the single piece of bread and then fell asleep. When they awoke, the fire was burned out and the moon rose high in the sky. Gretel began to cry, "They have left us and we are all alone."

Hansel comforted his sister. "Do not fret, dear Gretel. We have a way back home." He pointed to the trail of breadcrumbs. But there was no trail for thousands of birds had pecked and picked them up.

Hansel said, "I will find a way, Gretel. Follow me." The two children walked through the night and into the day when finally they came upon a cottage. What a wondrous cottage it was for its walls were made of gingerbread, its roof was made of frosted cake, and its windows were made of clear sugar.

"There," Hansel pointed. "We shall have a glorious feast!"

The children ran to the house and began nibbling. Hansel grabbed a handful of the gingerbread wall. Gretel bit into the clear sugar window.

A sweet voice called from inside the house,

"Nibbling, Nibbling like a mouse
Who is nibbling at my house?"

The children answered,

"The wind, the wind blows at your house
Blowing north and blowing south."

Hansel and Gretel continued eating. This time, Hansel bit into the clear sugar window and Gretel grabbed a handful of the gingerbread wall.

The sweet voice called again from inside the house,

"Nibbling, Nibbling like a mouse
Who is nibbling at my house?"

The children answered,

"The wind, the wind blows at your house
Blowing north and blowing south."

The sweet voice belonged to an old woman and she came outside to see Hansel and Gretel nibbling at her house. The children were frightened but the old woman was kind.

“Come inside for a bite to eat
Pancakes and milk are such a treat.”

They followed the old woman inside the house. They ate until they were stuffed and fell asleep in soft beds, thinking they were in heaven. Ah, but they were terribly deceived for the old woman was really an old witch with wicked intentions. She built her house of sweets to entice children inside. Once she trapped the children, they became her... dinner!

When Hansel and Gretel awoke, she locked Hansel in a cage and ordered Gretel to fetch some water to cook something good for her brother to eat.

The old witch said,
“The little boy will eat, eat, eat
He’ll grow fat and be MY treat!”

Gretel cooked a fine meal for Hansel but she herself was fed nothing but crab claw shells. Each morning, the witch came to the cage and had Hansel stretch out his finger saying,

“By now you should be growing fat
You’ll be my meal and that is that!”

But Hansel was clever. The witch had poor eyesight and each time she came to the cage, he stuck out a chicken bone for her to feel.

After a long month passed, the witch grew impatient.

“Be he skinny or be he fat
I’ll eat him NOW and that is that!”

She ordered Gretel to put on a pot of boiling water. Intending to cook Gretel too, she said,

“Into the oven place your head
Is it hot enough for my bread?”

But Gretel was a clever girl. She answered,

“I am a simple child now
Please take me there and show me how.”

So the witch took Gretel to the oven and opened it up. She placed her head inside the oven and as soon as she did, Gretel pushed the witch inside and then locked the door tight. How the witch screamed. How the witch howled. But it was no use. Turning to ash, she met her fate in the heat of the oven.

Gretel unlocked Hansel's cage and the two embraced. With the witch now gone, they searched the house and found pearls and jewels. Gretel filled her apron with the pearls while Hansel filled his pockets with the jewels.

They broke off pieces of the sweet cottage for their supper and began their journey home. Soon enough, they saw a familiar house in the distance. They ran and knocked on the door. Their father answered. Filled with joy, he embraced his children saying he would never, never again leave them alone. As for their wicked stepmother, like the evil witch, she too met an awful fate and died when a pile of wood fell atop her head.

Gretel shook her apron and the pearls rolled out onto the floor. Hansel emptied his pockets and the jewels sparkled on the table. All their sorrows were ended and they lived together in great happiness.

Little mouse, little mouse, run, run, run
This story's over; my tale is done.