

# The Story of Hansel and Gretel (1)

Once upon a time, Hansel and Gretel lived with their father, who was a woodcutter, and their stepmother, who was a wicked woman. They lived in a little cottage on the edge of a great forest. They were very poor and often there wasn't enough food for the family to eat.

One day, Hansel and Gretel overheard their stepmother say, 'We will take the children into the forest and leave them there so there will be more food for us.'

Their father said no, he couldn't do this, but the stepmother told him that they would all die of hunger if he didn't and she nagged at him, hour upon hour, until he agreed.

Hansel and Gretel were very sad when they went to bed that night.

'Don't worry, I know what to do,' said Hansel.

As soon as the adults were asleep, Hansel crept outside. The moon was shining brightly so that the white pebbles in the grass glittered like silver coins. Hansel filled his pockets until they were full with the tiny white pebbles.

The next morning before dawn, their stepmother woke them up. 'Get up, you lazybones! We are going to fetch some wood.'

Soon the family set off walking into the forest.

Hansel walked slowly behind the others, dropping the tiny white pebbles on to the path without them noticing.

They reached the middle of the forest at midday and their father used some of the wood they had collected to make a fire. He piled it up like a little mountain.

'You rest here while we get more wood,' said their

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stepmother.

Hansel and Gretel fell asleep in the warm glow of the fire. When they woke up it was dark already and Gretel began to cry.

‘How will we get home?’ she said.

‘Don’t worry,’ Hansel said. ‘When the moon is up we will find the way.’

The moon was full and bright that night and they were able to follow the pathway of pebbles that shone like silver coins.

At daybreak, Hansel and Gretel arrived home. Their stepmother was angry when she saw them, but their father was delighted because he hadn’t wanted to leave them.

A few days later, there was only a little food left, and the stepmother said, ‘We must get rid of these children or we will both die of starvation. We will take them deeper into the forest today so they won’t find their way back.’

Their father was heartbroken because he wanted to share the food they had with the children but the stepmother shouted and scolded until he finally gave in.

Hansel didn’t have chance to collect the white pebbles before they set off into the forest.

Their stepmother, however, had given them each a little piece of bread to save for later in the day, and as Hansel walked along, he dropped tiny crumbs on to the path. When they reached the deepest part of the forest their father collected wood to make a fire. Once again, he piled it up like a little mountain.

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‘Wait here while we get more wood,’ said their stepmother.

Gretel shared her bread with Hansel and soon they fell asleep in the warm glow of the fire. It was dark when they woke up and Gretel was afraid, but Hansel said, ‘When the moon is up we will find the way.’

Hansel was wrong this time. They couldn’t find the crumbs because the hungry birds had eaten them!

They walked all night and all the next day too. Their legs were tired and their tummies ached with hunger. They stopped to rest for a while and saw a dove, white like snow, sitting on a branch. It sang so beautifully that they decided to follow it.

The white dove led them to a little house. As they came closer they saw that the house was made from bread with a roof of cake and windows of sugar.

Hansel was so hungry, he broke off a piece of the roof and ate it. Gretel nibbled at the windowpanes. Suddenly the door opened and a woman, old like the hills, came out.

‘Come in and stay with me. No harm will come to you,’ she said.

She gave them milk and pancakes with sugar and nuts. But the old woman only pretended to be friendly. She was really a wicked witch.

The next day, the witch locked Hansel in a cupboard. She gave him the best food to eat because she was going to fatten him up to eat him.

Every morning she asked Hansel to stick out his finger

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so she could feel if he was fat enough yet. But Hansel stuck out a twig instead and the witch, who couldn't see very well, wondered why he stayed so thin.

Many weeks passed and the witch grew impatient. She decided she would eat him that day, fat or thin, so she lit a fire in the oven. 'Climb in and see if it is hot enough,' she said to Gretel.

Gretel said the oven wasn't big enough for her to climb into.

'Silly goose!' said the witch. 'See, I can fit in myself,' and she climbed into the oven.

Gretel seized her chance and closed the oven door. Then she ran to the cupboard and set Hansel free.

In every corner of the witch's house the children found precious stones and pearls. They filled their pockets with jewels to take home.

'These are better than pebbles!' said Hansel.

After walking for a long time they began to recognise the trees around them and finally they saw their home.

In the weeks that the children were away their stepmother had died, but their father, who had been unhappy since the day he left them in the woods, was overjoyed to see them again.

The children emptied their pockets and when their father saw the jewels he knew their worries were over at last and now they could live happily together.

*Retold by Nina Filipek*