Hansel and Gretel: The Traditional Tale

Once upon a time a long, long time ago there lived a poor woodcutter with his two children and their step mother. The boy’s name was Hansel and the girl’s name was Gretel. Their cottage stood near to a thick wood, and each day the woodcutter would take the children with him as he worked. He would cut down the trees, and the children would help him carry home the logs and twigs.

Then one day a terrible famine came to the land and there was nothing to eat. The children held their rumbling tummies and were very sad, but their stepmother showed them the empty cupboards. The family could find nothing to eat.

Late one night as the moon rose and the owls in the forest hooted the woodcutter and his wife sat down to talk. “What is going to happen to us?” said the woodcutter in despair “How can we feed our children when we haven’t enough food for ourselves?” “I’ll tell you what” said the wife “early tomorrow morning we’ll take the children out into the thickest part of the forest. We’ll make them a fire and give them each a little piece of bread. Then we’ll leave them there. They will never find their way home and we will be rid of them.” The woodcutter looked at his wife in horror. “I can’t!” he cried “Then we will all die you fool” said his wife. And, although the woodcutter was dreadfully sad, he agreed. Little did he know that the children were secretly listening to their stepmother’s wicked plan. Gretel started to cry, but Hansel whispered, “Don’t worry sister. I’ll find a way to save us”

After their parents had gone to sleep, Hansel got up, put on his dressing gown and crept out of the front door. The moon was shining brightly and all around the cottage lay white pebbles which glittered like new coins in the moonlight. Hansel stooped and filled his pockets with as many as they would hold and then he crept back to his bed.

As the sun rose the stepmother came to wake the children. “Get up lazybones” she shouted “We must go into the forest to fetch wood.” She gave them each a small piece of bread and said “Don’t waste it. That’s all the food there is.”

Gretel put the bread inside her coat and Hansel put all the pebbles into his trouser pockets. Then the woodcutter, his wife and the children set off for the forest together.
As they walked on the forest grew thick and dark all around them. Soon their house grew faint in the distance. Hansel lagged behind and every now and then he dropped one white pebble down onto the path.

When they were deep in the forest their father said, “Hansel, Gretel, go and collect some wood and I’ll make a fire to keep you warm”. The children went off to gather the wood and when the fire was blazing the stepmother said, “Now lie down children and have a good rest. We are going further into the forest to chop wood. We’ll soon be back to fetch you” and off they went.. Hansel and Gretel sat by the fire, and at midday they ate their bread. After they had been sitting a long time they closed their eyes with weariness and fell asleep. When they woke up it was very dark. Gretel started to cry “How will we ever get out of the wood?” she wept. “Wait till the moon is up,” said Hansel, “we will soon find the way.”

Once the full moon had risen, Hansel followed the pebbles which shone in the moonlight. And Gretel followed her brother and in this way they made the journey all the way back home.

When they got to their cottage they knocked on the door and the stepmother opened the door and said, “Why you wicked children. Why did you sleep so long in the forest? We thought you were never coming home.”But their father was glad and he welcomed them in because it had broken his heart to leave them.

But later one night Hansel and Gretel crept from their beds and listened in secret as their stepmother talked to their father once more. “We have only half a loaf left and that is nothing. The children must go. This time we’ll take them even deeper into the forest. Then they’ll never find their way back”. Again the woodcutter was very sad but reluctantly he agreed.

Hansel knew what he must do and he ran downstairs to collect the pebbles. But the stepmother had locked the door and no matter how he tried he could not make it budge. Gretel cried and cried but Hansel said, “Don’t worry sister. I’ll think of a way to save us”.

Next morning the stepmother made Hansel and Gretel get up early and gave them each a piece of bread even smaller than before. The woodcutter, his wife, Hansel and Gretel set off for the forest but Hansel lagged behind. He crumbled his bread in his pocket and let the crumbs trickle to the ground. The children were led very deep into the forest where the trees stood very closely together. Their father lit a fire and the stepmother said “Stay by the fire. You can sleep if you’re tired. We are going deeper into the forest to cut some wood and we’ll come back and fetch you later”
At midday Gretel shared her bread with Hansel who had left his in crumbs all along the path. Then they went to sleep. When they woke it was very dark and Gretel was afraid, but Hansel said “Wait till the moon comes up Gretel, then we will see the crumbs I scattered and they will lead us home”

But little did Hansel and Gretel know that while they had been in the forest all the birds had flown down and pecked up the crumbs, eating up every last one. Hansel and Gretel could not find the way.

Hansel and Gretel walked all through the night and the next day. They were tired and hungry and their feet were sore. At last they were so weary that they lay down and went to sleep. When they awoke they saw a beautiful snow white bird perched on a branch which sang so sweetly they had to listen. After a while it flew away and they followed it until they came to a little house where the bird perched on the roof. When Hansel and Gretel went closer they could see that the house was made of gingerbread, the roof was cake, and the windows were made of clear sugar.

Hansel and Gretel could not believe their eyes. “Look!” said Hansel “A feast! I’ll try a piece of roof, you eat a piece of window” They both broke off a piece of the house and gobbled it up. It was the most delicious food they had ever tasted. They broke off more and more, a piece of sugar cane, handfuls of sweets, slabs of cake and ate and ate and ate. Suddenly the children stopped in their tracks, the front door opened and an old woman hobbled out. They dropped the food in alarm but the woman said, “Don’t be afraid my dears. Come in and stay with me, no harm will come you” And she took them by the hands and led them indoors.

Inside the cottage a there was a table laid with a meal of pancakes and sugar apples and nuts. The children ate it all up and then the kind lady shown them to two soft beds where they lay down and fell fast asleep, full and happy.

But sadly the old woman’s kindness was all a pretence. The next morning she showed her true self. She was really a wicked witch who wanted to trap children so that she could eat them. Before the children were awake she watched them and muttered to herself, “That will make a tasty dish”. She grabbed Hansel in her skinny hand and dragged him outside to a little cage and locked him in with an enormous key. Hansel screamed and screamed but it was no use. Then the witch went to Gretel, shook her awake and shouted “Get up lazybones, fetch some water and cook something nice for your brother. He needs fattening up. And when he’s fat enough I will eat him!” Gretel began to cry but it was all in vain – she had to do what the wicked witch told her.
For weeks and weeks Hansel stayed locked in his cage. Gretel had to bring him all the best food while she got nothing but scraps to eat. And every morning the witch would go out to the cage and call out, “Hansel, put out your finger so that I can feel if you are fat enough. But every day Hansel held out a little bone and the witch whose eyes were poor thought it was his finger and was surprised that he grew no fatter. When four weeks had passed and Hansel was still thin, she lost patience and shouted, “Gretel! Be quick and fetch water. Thin or fat, Hansel will be killed and cooked tomorrow.”

Early next morning Gretel had to get up, light the fire and fill the kettle. The witch said, “First we’ll bake. I’ve heated the oven and made the dough”. She pushed Gretel towards the oven saying “Crawl in and see if it’s hot enough to put the bread in” She meant to push Gretel inside, roast her and eat her too but Gretel could see what the witch was planning, “I don’t know how to do it. How do I get in?” she said. “Stupid girl!” shouted the witch “Look the door is big enough. I could get in myself!”

And the witch climbed up and put her head in the oven. Then Gretel gave her a great push, which sent her right in, banged shut the iron door and locked it.

Gretel ran straight to the cage where Hansel was trapped. She opened the door and cried “We’re free. The old witch is dead!” The children ran into the cottage. In every corner were chests full of gold and jewels. The children crammed their pockets full and they ran from the house as quickly as they could.

The children went through the forest and gradually the trees looked more familiar to them until at last they saw their father’s house in the distance. They rushed inside and threw their arms around their father. He was so happy to see them. He told them that their stepmother had died. Hansel and Gretel took the pearls and the jewels and the gold from their pockets and scattered them all over the room. Their worries were over, and they lived together happily ever after.

The End