



The Ballad of Hansel and Gretel

Once upon a time, they say,
There stood a humble house.
Inside it lived a woodcutter,
His children and new spouse.

Gretel was the smallest and
The sweetest of the two,
While Hansel, he was growing fast
As young boys seem to do.

The family, though happy, were
A poor and hungry group.
They spent their long days making do
With nought but bread and soup.

When fierce famine struck the land,
The household's plight did worsen.
It came down to their last stale loaf –
A single slice per person.

The children's father and his wife
Felt desperation growing.
They talked about their fears one night,
The last few candles glowing.

“What will become of all of us?”
The man asked with a sigh.
“We've barely food to feed us two –
The cupboard's bare and dry.”

The logger's wife then came upon
A wicked new idea.
“You and I could make it through,
Without the children here.”

“We'll lead them both away into
The forest, somewhere deep,
Then walk away and leave them there
Once they're both sound asleep.”



“How can you think of such a thing?”
The woodcutter protested.
His wife was quite persuasive, though,
And soon, he was invested.

The children stood and listened hard
Behind the bedroom door.
Hansel turned to Gretel as
Her tears began to pour.

“We’ll be OK,” he told her,
And he left her softly weeping.
He crept out to the garden
Once the grown-ups were both sleeping.

A cool breeze blew across the yard;
The moon was full and bright.
Upon the ground lay pebbles
Shining, big and round and white.

A clever plan was brewing now
Inside young Hansel’s head.
He filled his pockets with the stones,
Then sneaked back into bed.

Their stepmother was waiting
When they woke around sunrise.
“We’re all off to the forest to
Collect more wood supplies.”

Each child was handed, there and then,
A single slice of bread.
“Don’t eat it yet, for there’s no more,”
The cunning woman said.

Off they marched into the wood
And, clever as a fox,
Unbeknown to all, Hansel
Had left a trail of rocks.





As he pulled his last stone
From his coat and let it drop,
They entered a small clearing and
The group came to a stop.

The adults lit a fire and said,
“Don’t wander off or stray.
We’ll go to gather wood and then
Return later today.”

The children huddled by the fire
And stayed close to its flames.
With parents gone, they ate their bread
And passed the day with games.

As evening came, the children found
They had been left alone –
But Hansel hoped that his plan would
Lead both of them back home.

When night came and the rising moon
Shone down upon the clearing,
The children watched as, one by one,
The rocks started appearing.

The pair followed their moonlit path
Right through until the morning.
Their father ran to greet them
As they stumbled in, both yawning.

“How wonderful, you’ve made it back!”
He cried, and held them tight.
Their stepmother was glad, she claimed,
To see they were all right.

A few weeks passed and, every day,
The food and water dwindled.
The logger’s wife returned to him,
Her wicked plan rekindled.





“The children made it home, last time,
Just as I feared they would.
Tomorrow, we must take them back
And lose them both for good.”

Once again, the children heard
This awful conversation,
But Hansel smiled, for he knew that
The rocks were their salvation.

“We’ll be OK,” he said once more,
For Gretel looked quite shocked.
But when he tried the bedroom door,
He found it tightly locked!

Their stepmother was there again
When they woke at sunrise.
“We’re all off to the forest to
Collect more wood supplies.”

Each child was handed, like before,
A single slice of bread.
“Don’t eat it yet, for there’s no more,”
The awful woman said.

So out the door and off they trudged,
While Hansel lagged behind.
“Don’t dawdle, boy!” their father called,
But Hansel paid no mind.

For as he walked, behind his back,
Between fingers and thumbs
He held his single slice of bread
And ground it all to crumbs.

Bit by bit, young Hansel dropped
His breadcrumbs on the ground
In hopes that later, like before,
The path home might be found.





The adults walked far deeper than
They ever had before,
And left the children once again
Upon the forest floor.

Gretel shared her slice of bread
With Hansel, by the fire.
They ate, then slept till evening came,
The pale moon rising higher.

There was no sign of anyone
Returning to the place.
The children turned to find the crumbs,
The bread trail to retrace.

To Hansel's horror, not a single
Crumb was to be seen,
For through the day, the birds had come
And pecked the ground quite clean.

They walked and walked but could not find
Their path, and Gretel wept.
Exhausted, cold and hungry still,
The pair lay down and slept.

The morning brought some hope, though, when
Upon dry leaves they woke.
Rising above the treetops was
A single plume of smoke.

As they made their way towards
The chimney, tired and aching,
There came an overwhelming scent
Of something yummy baking;

Of icing, bread and sticky buns.
Towards the smell they raced,
And came upon a cottage which
Looked good enough to taste.





The walls were made of gingerbread;
The doorstep crumbly cake.
The children took a bite each to
Be sure it wasn't fake.

They stuffed themselves with morsels from
The house and all about.
"Nibble, nibble, little mouse!"
A high-pitched voice called out.

"Is someone eating from my house?"
And to their great surprise,
A woman, old and frail, appeared
And searched them with her eyes.

"We're sorry," pleaded Gretel,
"But we just had no idea.
We're lost and oh-so hungry, too –
Please could we both stay here?"

Each was invited to the house,
Handed a cake and blanket.
The kindly woman made some tea
And, gratefully, they drank it.

The house was filled with signs that this
Old woman liked to cook:
A huge oven, some saucepans and
A thick recipe book.

Among the objects, Gretel saw
Boxes and bags of gold,
And chests filled up with handsome gems:
All treasures to behold.

The strangest thing about the house,
Upon closer inspection,
Were piles and piles of dry, white bones –
A most bizarre collection.





The woman fed the children till
Their bellies both were full,
Then led them to a pair of beds
With sheets of softest wool.

But as she turned to close the door,
Her smile turned to a scowl.
For she was the most wicked witch,
Whose plan was truly foul.

“Two children both at once,” she said.
“This is my lucky day.
I’ll feed them till they’re nice and fat,
Then have a child buffet!”

When morning came, the wicked witch
Threw Hansel in a cage.
She flicked through a big cooking book
And stopped upon a page.

“You there!” cried the woman, and
Poor Gretel gave a squeal.
“Cook some food to feed him up –
He’ll make a juicy meal!”

So, day by day, our Gretel threw
More food into the oven:
Hot stew, meat pies and sticky buns
And pancakes by the dozen.

The witch tracked Hansel’s progress, though
Her eyesight was quite poor.
“Stick out your finger, boy!” she called
And squinted through the door.

But Hansel was one step ahead
And tricked the evil crone.
Instead of his own finger, he
Pushed out a chicken bone.





"Too skinny!" cried the witch to Gretel.
"Give him more to eat."
For weeks, the witch kept trying and,
Of course, Hansel would cheat.

"I've had enough!" she screamed at last.
"I can't wait any more."
She took Gretel and dragged her to
The massive oven door.

"Climb inside," the woman sneered,
Trying hard to shove her,
"And find out if it's big and hot
Enough to roast your brother."

"The door's too small," young Gretel said.
"I surely won't fit through."
"Nonsense!" said the witch. "I could,
And I'm larger than you!"

Gretel laughed. "I don't think for
A minute that you'd fit."
"Of course I would!" the woman snapped,
So Gretel said, "Prove it."

She stepped back from the oven and
The witch opened it wide,
Rolled up her sleeves, then stuck her arms,
Shoulders and head inside.

Feeling that her chance had come,
Gretel scanned the kitchen,
Summoned every ounce of strength
And pushed the wicked witch in!

She slammed the door, then rushed across
To set her brother free.
They hugged each other tightly
And were overcome with glee.





Carrying enough gold coins
To make their family rich,
They filled their pockets with the gems
Belonging to the witch.

The pair dashed from the cottage
And could feel their insides cheering;
It didn't take them long to find
A quite familiar clearing.

"My rocks are here!" said Hansel,
And the children hurried home.
They found their father chopping wood
And living all alone.

The woodsman was beside himself
And fell upon his knees.
He kissed them both, apologised and
Gave each one a squeeze.

The children asked about his wife
And saw their father wince.
"I told her she should pack her bags
And haven't seen her since."

The siblings turned their pockets out
And laughed, shouting, "Surprise!"
Upon seeing the coins and gems,
The woodsman wiped his eyes.

"Our trouble's at an end," said he,
His face aglow with pleasure.
"But you, my darling children,
Are by far my greatest treasure."

The trio went inside the house,
Now filled with love and laughter.
And thus Hansel, and Gretel, too,
Lived happily ever after.

