

Hansel and Gretel

Once upon a time a very poor woodcutter lived in a tiny cottage in the forest with his two children, Hansel and Gretel. His second wife often ill-treated the children and was always complaining to the woodcutter.

"There is not enough food in the house for us all. There are too many mouths to feed! We must get rid of the two children," she declared. She told her husband to abandon his children in the forest.

"Take them miles from home, so far that they can never find their way back! Maybe someone will find them and give them a home." Hansel heard the conversation and he filled his pockets with little white stones, then went back to bed.

Eventually the woodcutter led Hansel and Gretel away into the forest. But as they walked through the trees, Hansel dropped a little white pebble here and there on the ground. Their father was very sad but he left them alone and hoped that a rich family would find them.

The children slept under a tree and very early in the morning they followed the white stones back home. They crept through a half open window, without waking their parents. Cold, tired but thankful to be home again, they went to bed.

The next day, when their stepmother discovered that Hansel and Gretel had returned, she was very angry with her husband. The wicked stepmother kept Hansel and Gretel locked up all day and only gave them bread and water. Hansel didn't eat his bread.

In the evening their father sadly led them into the forest once more and Hansel left a trail of breadcrumbs behind him to mark the way. However, the birds ate all the breadcrumbs.

Hansel and Gretel were alone and frightened. Gretel was crying.

"Don't be afraid. I'm here to look after you!" Hansel said. The children fell asleep under a big tree and the next mornign they were cold and hungry.

They started to wander about the forest, looking for a path, when suddenly they came upon a strange cottage in the middle of a clearing. The house was amazing. It was made of chocolate and biscuits. The children broke pieces of the house off and ate them. Mmmmm the house tasted very good.

Suddenly the door opened and an old woman came out.

"Come in! Come in," said the old woman.

Unfortunately for Hansel and Gretel, however, the chocolate cottage belonged to an old witch. She was evil.

"You're very thin!" said the witch and she locked Hansel into a cage, "I shall fatten you up and eat you!"

"You can do the housework," she told Gretel, "then I'll eat you too!"

The witch had very bad eyesight, and when Gretel smeared butter on her glasses, she could see even less.

"Let me feel your finger!" said the witch to Hansel every day to check if he was getting any fatter. Now, Gretel had brought her brother a chicken bone, and when the witch went to touch his finger, Hansel held out the chicken bone.

"You're still much too thin!" she complained. When will you become plump?" One day the witch grew tired of waiting.

"Light the oven," she told Gretel. "We're going to have a tasty roasted boy today!"

A little later, hungry and impatient, she went on: "Run and see if the oven is hot enough." Gretel returned, whimpering: "I don't know if it is hot enough or not."

Angrily, the witch screamed at the little girl: "Useless child! All right, I'll see for myself." But when the witch bent down to look inside the oven, Gretel gave her a tremendous push and slammed the oven door shut. Gretel locked the oven door.

The witch died in the oven.

Gretel released Hansel and the children stayed for several days to eat some more of the house. They discovered a huge chocolate egg. Inside the egg was a big bag of gold coins.

The children walked through the forest looking for their house but soon, they saw their father walking through the trees looking for them. He was so happy to see his children.

"Your stepmother is dead. Come home with me now, my dear children!" The two children hugged the woodcutter.

"Promise you'll never ever desert us again," said Gretel, throwing her arms round her father's neck. Hansel opened the casket.

"Look, Father! We're rich now . . . You'll never have to chop wood again."

And they all lived happily together ever after.