

Hansel and Gretel

On the edge of a forest lived a lumberjack and his wife. They had two children: Hansel and Gretel. The family was very poor and often there was not enough to eat. One evening, the wife said to her husband: "Tomorrow morning, we will take the children and leave them deep in the forest. They won't be able to find their way home and we won't have to feed them." The husband wailed and did not want to cooperate with the plan, but his wife finally persuaded him.

Hansel and Gretel had heard this. "What shall we do now, Hansel?" the girl asked. "Wait, little sister, I have a plan," said Hans with confidence. And when his parents were asleep, he sneaked out of the cottage and stuffed his pockets full of white pebbles. The next morning their parents did indeed take Hansel and Gretel into the forest. They walked for a long time, but Hans secretly dropped a white pebble every few metres. Deep in the forest, the lumberjack built a fire for his children and said he would come back to collect them later. But the day passed and no one came back. The children finally fell asleep and when they woke up it was the middle of the night.



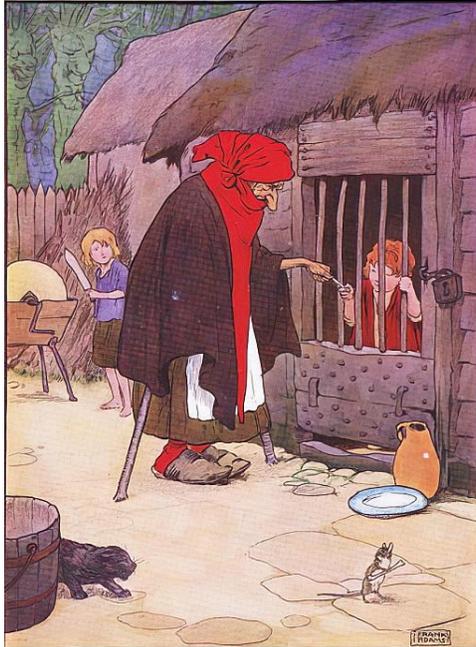
Gretel was scared, but Hans told her about the white pebbles. He took his sister by the hand and so they returned to their home early in the morning. Their father was overjoyed. But not much later the food was almost gone and his wife again wanted to leave their children in the forest. And again, the man finally agreed. Hans wanted to go and collect pebbles again, but the woman had locked the door. So this time he had to go without pebbles.

However, Hans always threw small crumbs of his last piece of bread on the ground. Again the children were left by a fire and again they woke up alone in the middle of the night. But when Hans looked for the trail of breadcrumbs, he could not find them. The little birds had eaten all the crumbs. So the children wandered around the forest for hours. They were hungry and thirsty and were about to give up, when they suddenly saw a very special little house.

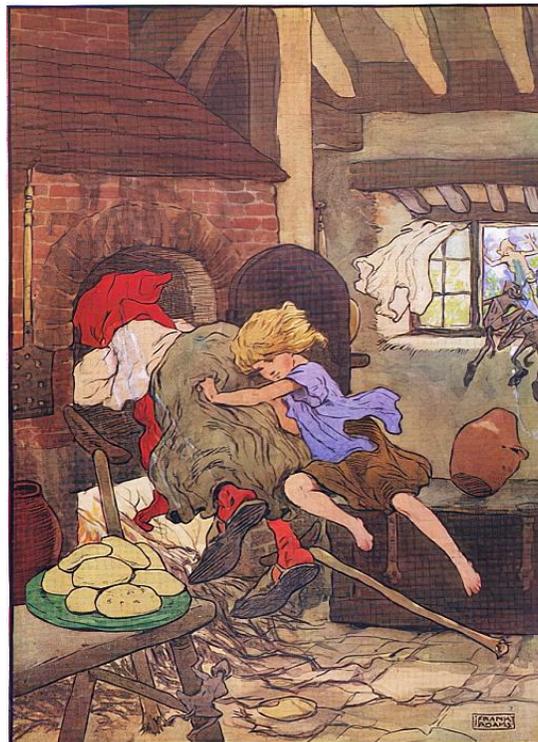
The house was made of bread, the windows of sugar and the roof of pancakes. The children immediately started eating them. Suddenly, a voice sounded from the house: “Nibble, nibble, nibble. Who is nibbling my house?” and the children answered: “The wind, the wind.” and they continued eating undisturbed. Then suddenly the door opened and a very old woman stood in the doorway. Come in, children. I won't hurt you. Inside, Hansel and Gretel were given more delicious food and were allowed to sleep in soft beds.



But the old woman was actually a wicked witch and children were her favourite food. The next morning, she locked Hans in a cage. Gretel had to constantly make good food for him so he would get fat. But Hansel was clever, and every time the witch asked if she could feel his finger, he put out a stick. The witch could no longer see very well and thought it was his finger.



Four weeks passed. One day, the witch had had enough and decided to eat Hans, fat or not. She turned on the oven and, after a while, asked Gretel to feel if the oven was hot enough. But Gretel understood what the witch wanted to do and pretended not to understand. "Stupid child," cried the witch, "look, you have to put your head in the oven like this. At that moment Gretel pushed the witch and closed the oven door.



Gretel immediately freed Hansel. The children were overjoyed. Now that the witch was dead, they took a good look around her house. It was full of precious stones and pearls. They filled their pockets and went looking for the way home. After walking for a while, they suddenly recognised the forest path. They ran as fast as they could to their father's cottage. The lumberjack was overjoyed that his children were back. He had missed them so much! His wife had died in the meantime. With all the pearls and gems from the witch's cottage, Hansel, Gretel and their father never had to worry about food again for the rest of their lives. And they lived happily ever after!