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HANSEL AND GRETEL

Once upon a time, there were two brothers and sisters named Hansel and Gretel. They lived with their father and their stepmother in a small house near a great forest. Although their home was humble, Hansel and Gretel loved each other very much and always stayed close together.

As time passed, the family began to go through difficult days. There was less food on the table, and the adults were very worried. One night, while Hansel and Gretel were resting, they heard their stepmother speaking sadly and with concern.

—There is not enough food for all of us —she said—. We must do something.

Hansel stayed awake and thought about how he could protect his sister. Gretel was frightened too, but her brother tried to calm her.

—Do not worry —he whispered softly—. I will take care of you.

The next morning, they were taken into the forest. As they walked, Hansel dropped little white pebbles along the path without anyone noticing. The sun shone through the trees, and for a moment the forest seemed peaceful, but Hansel knew they had to be prepared.

After walking for a long time, the children realized that they were alone. Gretel looked around and felt how huge the forest really was.

—Hansel, what are we going to do? —she asked in fear.

Hansel took her hand and answered:

—Do not cry, Gretel. I marked the path so we can go back.

When night fell and the moon rose in the sky, the pebbles began to shine softly. Then Hansel and Gretel followed that little white trail and managed to return home.

For a while, they were with their father again, but the problems returned. Only a few days passed before the food became scarce once more. Again, the children were taken into the forest. This time, Hansel could not gather pebbles, so he dropped bread crumbs along the way instead.

But when they wanted to return, they discovered that the birds of the forest had eaten all the crumbs.

—They are gone —said Gretel, with tears in her eyes.

Hansel took a deep breath and tried to remain calm.

—We will keep walking together —he told her—. I will not leave you alone.

The two children walked for a very long time. They passed tall trees, dry branches, and unknown paths. Their feet began to ache, and the forest seemed endless. They were almost out of strength when, far away, they saw something surprising.

It was a very strange and beautiful little house. Its walls seemed to be made of sweets, the windows shone like sugar, and the roof looked covered with bread and candy.

—Hansel, look at that house —said Gretel in amazement.

—It looks like a dream —he replied.

Because they were very hungry, they went closer carefully. Hansel tasted a small piece of the roof, and Gretel took a little bit from the corner of the window.

—It is sweet —said Gretel.

—And very delicious —added Hansel.

At that moment, the door opened slowly, and an old woman appeared.

—Hello, little children —she said in a gentle voice—. What are you doing here?

The brother and sister were a little frightened, but the woman smiled.

—Do not be afraid. Come inside, poor children. You must be tired and hungry.

Hansel and Gretel entered the house. The old woman gave them delicious food, warm drinks, and a soft bed to rest in. The children thought they had found someone kind, and for the first time in a long while, they felt safe.

But that old woman was not as kind as she seemed. In truth, she was a witch who wanted to trap the children. The next morning, she showed her true nature and locked Hansel away, while forcing Gretel to do the work around the house.

—You will stay there —the witch said to Hansel—. And when you are nice and plump, I will eat you.

Then she looked at Gretel and ordered:

—And you will work for me.

Gretel felt very afraid, but she tried to be brave. Every day she went to see her brother and tried to give him courage.

—Do not lose hope, Hansel —she said—. We will find a way to escape.

Hansel also tried to stay strong.

—Keep being brave, Gretel —he replied—. We will make it.

The witch wanted to know if Hansel was fat enough yet, but because she could not see well, Hansel tricked her by showing her a thin little bone instead of his finger. The witch would touch the bone and become angry.

—You are still too thin —she would say—. I will have to wait longer.

Several days passed like that, until the witch finally lost her patience.

—I will wait no longer —she growled—. Today I will prepare everything.

Then she lit the oven and said to Gretel:

—Lean in and see if it is ready.

But Gretel, who had been thinking carefully, understood that this was her chance. She pretended not to understand.

—I do not know how to do it —said Gretel—. I cannot reach well enough to look inside.

The witch, annoyed, moved closer to the oven to show her. In that moment, Gretel gathered all her courage and pushed the witch inside. Then she quickly closed the door.

Her heart was beating very fast, but she knew she had to act quickly. She ran to free Hansel, and the two children hugged each other happily.

—We are together again! —said Gretel.

—And now we must leave this place —answered Hansel.

Before leaving, they saw that the house had chests and little boxes full of valuable things. They took some of them so they could help their father, and then they ran away from that place.

They walked for a long time through the forest, looking for the way home. Sometimes they felt tired, but they kept going, helping one another. At last, after so much walking, they found the right path and saw their house again.

Their father ran out when he saw them.

—Hansel! Gretel! —he cried with joy.

He hugged them tightly, so happy to have them back. From then on, the family left those sad days behind and was able to live much better. Hansel and Gretel never forgot how important it was to stay together, be brave, and never lose hope.

And so, after many hardships, the two children lived in peace, always remembering that the love between brother and sister can give strength even in the darkest moments.

THE END

