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THE CANDY HOUSE

Once upon a time, there were two little siblings named Hansel and Gretel. They lived with their father in a humble little house near a great forest. They were good children, loving and very close to each other. Even though they did not have many things, they loved one another very much and always tried to help each other.

One day, the two children went into the forest and, without noticing it, wandered farther and farther away from the path. At first, they thought they could easily find their way back, but the

trees were very tall, the paths all seemed the same, and soon they no longer knew which way to go.

—Hansel, I think we are lost —said Gretel in a worried voice.

Hansel tried to stay calm.

—Do not be afraid —he answered—. I am sure we will find a way out.

The two of them kept walking among the trees. Little by little, the sun began to go down, and the forest became quieter. The birds were no longer singing as much, the air felt colder, and the shadows grew longer and longer.

Gretel looked around and moved closer to her brother.

—I am a little scared —she said softly.

—I am here with you —Hansel answered—. I will not leave you alone.

They walked for quite a while longer. They were tired, and they were also hungry. Just when they were thinking about stopping to rest, Gretel lifted her hand and pointed ahead.

—Look! —she said—. There is a little house over there.

Hansel looked carefully and saw that, in the middle of the forest, there was a small and very strange beautiful house. Its walls were made of sweets, its roof looked like chocolate, and its windows shone as if they were made of sugar.

The children's eyes opened wide in amazement.

—It looks like a dream —whispered Gretel.

They moved closer very slowly. The closer they came, the more delicious everything smelled.

—The house is made of food —said Hansel in surprise—. It really is made of food!

Hansel carefully broke off a little piece of the roof.

—It is chocolate —he said.

Gretel tasted a small piece of the window.

—And this is sweet sugar —she answered happily.

Because they were very hungry, they began to eat a little bit of the house. They tasted here and there with care, amazed by such a strange place.

But suddenly they heard a voice from inside.

—Who is nibbling at my little house? —asked a soft voice.

The door slowly opened, and an old woman appeared. She was smiling and walking slowly, leaning on a cane.

Hansel and Gretel stood still.

—Do not be afraid, little ones —said the old woman kindly—. If you are hungry, come inside. There is more food in here, and you can rest.

The children looked at each other. The woman seemed kind, and since they were tired and hungry, they agreed.

Inside the house, there was bread, sweets, cookies, and fruit. Everything smelled delicious. The old woman served them hot food and spoke to them gently.

—Eat peacefully —she said—. You will be safe here.

Hansel and Gretel ate until they felt better. Then the old woman showed them soft beds where they could sleep.

—Rest, little ones —she said—. Tomorrow will be another day.

The children lay down, and because they were so tired, they fell asleep right away.

But that old woman was not good as she seemed. In truth, she was a witch who lived alone in the forest and had built that little house to attract children with the smell of sweets. Her smile was false, and her plans were very cruel.

The next morning, when Hansel opened his eyes, he got a terrible fright. The witch had locked him behind a cage.

—Hansel! —cried Gretel.

Gretel was frightened too, but the witch grabbed her by the arm.

—You will stay here and work —she said in a harsh voice—. And you —she said to Hansel— will eat well and grow fat.

Then the children understood that they were in danger.

Hansel held tightly onto the bars.

—Let us go —he said.

But the witch gave a dry laugh.

—No —she answered—. Now you will do as I say.

From that day on, Gretel had to sweep, cook, and bring water. The witch ordered her around with bad manners. Hansel, meanwhile, stayed locked up, and the witch came to see him every day.

—Stick out your little finger —she would say—. I want to see if you are fatter now.

But Hansel was very clever. Instead of showing his finger, he showed her a little bone he had found. Because the witch could not see well, she thought he was still very thin.

—How strange —she said angrily—. You are still not getting fat. Several days passed, and the witch began to grow impatient.

One morning she said angrily:

—I do not want to wait any longer. Gretel, light the oven.

Gretel felt terribly afraid, but she tried to obey without crying.

The witch came close to the oven and said:

—Look inside and see if it is hot enough.

But Gretel, who was clever, answered:

—I do not know how to do that. I do not understand.

The witch frowned.

—Foolish girl —she said—. Look, this is how it is done.

Then she bent down to look into the oven.

At that moment, Gretel gathered all her courage and, with a quick push, shut the oven door.

The witch could not come out.

Gretel breathed quickly. Her hands were shaking, but she ran at once to where her brother was.

—Hansel! —she cried—. It is over! Let us get out of here!

She opened the cage, and Hansel ran out. The two children hugged each other tightly, very happy to be together again.

—I knew you could do it —said Hansel.

Before leaving, they saw that inside the house there were chests and drawers full of precious stones and valuable things. They took some with them, thinking of their father and the hard life they had.

Then they ran out of the little house and hurried through the forest.

This time they walked carefully, paying attention to everything. They crossed paths, passed huge trees, and walked for a very long time. At last, after much walking, they found the road back home.

When they arrived, their father saw them from far away and ran to embrace them. He was full of joy and also relief, because he had missed them deeply.

—My children! —he said with emotion—. I thought about you every day.

Hansel and Gretel hugged him tightly and told him everything that had happened in the forest, the candy house, the witch, and how they had managed to escape.

Then they showed him the precious stones they had brought.

From that day on, the family no longer lived in need. But the most important thing was not the treasure. It was that Hansel and Gretel had returned home safe and sound after facing a great danger.

And so, the two little siblings learned that even in the hardest moments, courage, intelligence, and the love between brothers and sisters can help us move forward.

THE END

