

**Cast In Order Of Appearance:****Narrator****Father****Mother****Gretel****Hänsel****Witch**

NARRATOR : Once upon a time there lived a poor woodcutter and his wife. They had two children, Hänsel and Gretel. A great dearth had fallen upon the land - dearth meaning famine - and the woodcutter could not find daily bread for his family.

Late one night, the father couldn't sleep due to worry and hunger.

FATHER : What am I to do? How can we feed the poor children when there is not even enough for ourselves?

MOTHER : Early tomorrow morning we will take the children deep into the forest. We will build them a fire, give them each a piece of bread and then go to our work.

They won't be able to find their way home and we shall be rid of them.

FATHER : I can't do that! The wild animals will eat them.

MOTHER : You fool! Then all of us shall die of hunger. Just start building our coffins then.

NARRATOR : The mother gave the father no rest on the subject until he finally agreed to her plan.

FATHER : But I'll still feel very sorry for the poor children.

NARRATOR : Now, Hänsel and Gretel were also awake from hunger during that night, and they heard the plan to leave them in the forest.

GRETEL : Whatever shall we do?

HÄNSEL : Hush, Gretel. Let them fall asleep. I have a plan.

NARRATOR : When their parents had fallen asleep, Hänsel snuck outside. The moon was shining brightly and there were white pebbles on the ground that glittered. Hänsel stuffed as many of these pebbles as he could into his coat pockets.

Then he went back inside and told his sister that all would be well. In the morning, their mother awakened them.

MOTHER : Get up, you sluggards! We must go and fetch some wood. Here is a piece of bread for each of you. It's your dinner, so don't eat it up before then because this is all you're getting.

NARRATOR : As they walked into the forest, Hänsel kept stopping and turning towards the house.

FATHER : What is it, Hänsel?

HÄNSEL : I am just looking at my little white cat. It's sitting on the roof, saying goodbye to me.

MOTHER : Fool! That is no cat. It's the sun shining on the roof.

NARRATOR : But Hänsel was not looking for a cat. He was discreetly dropping pebbles along the path, one by one, from his pockets.

When they reached the center of the forest, they all gathered up brushwood and the father lit a fire.

MOTHER : You children rest here. Your father and I will go and cut some wood further in the forest. We will fetch you when we are done.

NARRATOR : When noon came, the children ate a little bread. They thought they heard the strokes of their father's ax, but it was not an ax. Their father had tied a branch to a withered tree, and it was the wind blowing it back and forth that made the sound.

After a long while they became fatigued, so they closed their eyes and fell asleep. When they awoke, it was late and very dark.

GRETEL : What are we to do? How are we to get out of the forest?

HÄNSEL : Just wait a bit. When the moon has risen we will find our way.

NARRATOR : And when the moon came out, they followed the trail of Hänsel's pebbles home. They walked all night long, and arrived at their father's door at dawn.

They knocked on the door and the mother answered.

MOTHER : You naughty children. Where have you been? Why did you sleep in the forest? We thought you would never come back!

NARRATOR : The father, however, was joyous to see them. His heart had felt cut in two after leaving them in the forest the night before.

Not long afterwards, another great dearth spread throughout the land. Crops had failed everywhere. One night they heard their mother saying:

MOTHER : The food is all gone. We have only half a loaf of bread left and then nothing. The children must go! We must take them much farther into the forest, so they cannot find their way out. There is no other solution.

NARRATOR : The father was very sad. He wanted to say:

FATHER : It would be better to share the last of our food with our children.

NARRATOR : But he knew the woman would not listen. She always scolded and reproached him. And since he had yielded to her the first time, now he had to yield again.

Hänsel and Gretel, however, were still awake and heard their conversation. When all was quiet, Hänsel again got up to go and collect some pebbles, but the mother had locked the door.

Gretel was afraid.

HÄNSEL : Go to sleep, Gretel. All will be well.

NARRATOR : In the morning, the mother got them out of their beds, and gave them bread. These pieces of bread were even smaller than the ones given the day before.

On their way into the forest, Hänsel secretly dropped tiny pieces of his bread onto the path.

FATHER : Hänsel, why are you looking around so?

HÄNSEL : I am looking at my little pigeon, who is sitting on the roof of the house and wants to say goodbye to me.

MOTHER : Fool! That's not a pigeon. It is the sun shining on the chimney.

NARRATOR : Hänsel continued to discreetly drop crumbs of bread upon the ground. Farther and farther they all went. They went deeper into the forest than the children had ever been before.

Their parents made another great fire and told the children that they were going to cut wood and would return in the evening to take them home.

When noon came, Gretel shared her bread with Hänsel, who had scattered all of his bread along their way.

Then they fell asleep and evening passed with no one coming for them. When they awoke it was very dark and Gretel began crying.

HÄNSEL : It's alright, Gretel. When the moon rises we shall see the bread crumbs and find our way home.

NARRATOR : But when the moon rose, they could not find Hänsel's bread crumbs because the birds had eaten them all up.

HÄNSEL : Don't worry. We shall find our way.

NARRATOR : But they didn't find their way. They walked the rest of the night and all the next day and still, they did not get out of the forest.

And they were very very hungry. All they had eaten were two or three berries they had found by accident. Finally, they could go no more and fell asleep beneath a tree.

They awoke the next morning and this was now the second morning to start since they had been led into the forest. If they did not find help soon they would die of hunger and fatigue.

At noon, they saw a beautiful snow-white bird singing a delightful song on a branch. They stopped and listened, and when it flew away they followed it until they reached a little house.

When they reached the house, they saw it was made out of bread and covered with cakes. The windows were made of sugar.

Windows made of sugar shouldn't surprise anyone, because regular window glass is a combination of sand and other minerals that are melted together at very high temperatures. At room temperature, glass is so viscous or "sticky" that it looks and feels like a solid.

HÄNSEL : Look, Gretel! We shall have a meal at last! I'll eat the roof and you can eat the windows.

NARRATOR : Hänsel broke off a bit of the roof to taste, and Gretel nibbled on one of the sugar-glass panes.

WITCH : Nibble, nibble, gnaw,  
Who is nibbling at my house?

NARRATOR : The children looked at each other in fear.

HÄNSEL and  
GRETEL : The wind, the wind,  
The heaven-born wind.

NARRATOR : The children could not stop themselves. Hänsel tore down more of the roof and Gretel pushed out an entire round windowpane. They both sat down and continued eating.

Suddenly, the door opened and an old woman on crutches pushed herself out.

The children were so frightened they let the food fall from their hands.

WITCH : Oh, my. Dear children, who has brought you here? You look tired. Do come inside and stay with me. No harm shall come to you here.

NARRATOR : She took them inside and gave them milk and pancakes, with sugar and apples and nuts. When they were finished eating, they were put into two little beds with clean white linen.

Hänsel and Gretel thought they were in heaven.

But the old woman only pretended to be kind. In reality, she was a witch. A wicked, wicked witch who had only built the house to lure in little children so she could cook and eat them.

Early the next morning, the witch seized Hänsel and locked him behind a grated door in the stable. He could scream, but no one could hear him.

Then she went and shook Gretel awake.

WITCH : Get up! Get up, you lazy child. Fetch some water and cook something good for your brother. I've put him in the stable and he needs to be fed and made fat. And when he is fat, I will eat him.

NARRATOR : Now, anthropophagy, or, I should say, the eating of human flesh, is, at best, an acquired taste - and one that witches seem to acquire more often than not.

Gretel began to weep, but it didn't matter. She still had to do what the witch wanted. So now the best food was cooked for Hänsel and poor Gretel got nothing but crab shells.

Every morning the old witch hobbled to the stable.

WITCH : Hänsel, stretch out your finger so that I can feel if you are getting fat.

NARRATOR : But Hänsel was clever and instead stuck out one of the leftover bones from his last dinner. The old witch had poor eyesight, as most witches do. Their eyes are red and they rely on their sense of smell more than their vision.

The bone fooled her into thinking that Hänsel was not getting fat at all. When four weeks had passed and Hänsel remained thin, she could no longer stand it.

WITCH : Get some water, Gretel. Fat or lean, I don't care. Tomorrow I shall kill and eat Hänsel.

GRETEL : Oh, if only the wild beasts had killed us instead. Then we would have died together.

WITCH : Quiet, you wretched child! Keep your noise to yourself. Nothing will help you now.

NARRATOR : The next morning, Gretel went out to hang up the cauldron and light the fire.

WITCH : First, we will bake some dough. I have already begun heating the oven.

NARRATOR : She pushed Gretel outside the door and towards the oven. It was a huge brick oven, the size of a small shack. Flames from its fire were darting out the sides.

WITCH : Creep into the oven and see if it's ready for baking the bread.

NARRATOR : The witch wanted Gretel to go inside the oven so she could shut the iron door on the girl and bake her inside. Then she would eat her also.

But Gretel sensed this trick.

GRETEL : I don't know how to do it. How do I get in the oven?

WITCH : You silly goose! The door is big enough. Just look and see how I can get inside myself.

NARRATOR : The witch put her head in and Gretel pushed her so hard that she fell far into the oven. Gretel closed the door quickly behind.

She fastened the bolt and oh! how the witch howled and screamed as she was burnt to death in the oven.

Gretel ran straight to Hänsel and opened the grated door in the stable.

GRETEL : Hänsel! Hänsel! The witch is dead! We are free!

NARRATOR : The children hugged each other and cheered and danced for joy. They went back into the dead witch's house and found chests full of pearls and jewels.

They filled their pockets with all they could.

HÄNSEL : Now we must leave and get out of the witch's forest.

NARRATOR : After two hours, they came to a great stretch of water.

HÄNSEL : We cannot cross. There is no foot plank or footbridge or ferry.

GRETEL : But there is a white duck over there. I will ask her if she will help us over.

Little duck, little duck, dost thou see,  
Hänsel and Gretel are waiting for thee?  
There's never a plank, or bridge in sight,  
Take us across on thy back so white.

NARRATOR : The good duck came and carried them across the water one by one, for two together would have been too heavy for the little duck.

Once across, they walked for a short time and the forest began to look more and more familiar. And soon, they saw their house.

They began to run, and they burst into the parlor and hugged their father as hard as they could. The father was overjoyed to see them. He had not had one happy moment since he had left them in the forest. Their mother was dead.

The children emptied their pockets of all the pearls and jewels and they all danced about the room. And from then on, they lived together in perfect happiness.