



# HANSEL AND GRETEL

By Madeleine Francis

Illustrated by Margeaux Lucas



Once upon a time there was a family. The boy was named Hansel. The girl was named Gretel. The father was a farmer. The mother had died long ago.

One day, the father married a new wife.

The new wife was the stepmother of Hansel and Gretel.





Times were hard. For many months, there was no rain. The crops did not grow. Without crops, there was no food. There was not enough to eat.

Now, the family was hungry and poor.

One night, the father asked, “Wife, what will we do? We do not have enough to eat.”

“Don’t worry,” the stepmother said. “I have a plan. Tomorrow morning, we will take the kids to the forest. We will go on a picnic.”

“A picnic!” the father said. “How will that help?”

“We will leave the kids in the forest,” said the stepmother. “Then we will sneak away. The kids will be lost. And we can have more food at home.”

“That is a terrible idea. What kind of father would do that to his children?” the father asked.

“A poor one,” the stepmother answered.

“I don’t like it, but I’ll do it,” the father said sadly.





Little did the parents know that Hansel and Gretel had heard every word.

“Don’t worry, Gretel,” Hansel whispered. “I have a plan.”

The very next day, Hansel got up early. He collected lots of bright blue pebbles. He put them in his pocket.

After breakfast, the stepmother said, “Let’s have a picnic!” Then, the family went to the forest.

As the family walked into the forest, Hansel dropped a bright blue pebble every few steps.

“Now, children,” the mean stepmother said, “your father and I are going to collect some berries. We’ll be right back.”

The father kissed both of his children. Then he walked away with the stepmother. Gretel started to cry.

“Do not cry!” Hansel said. “We will find our way home. I dropped blue pebbles all along the way.”

Hansel and Gretel followed the pebbles all the way home.





A few hours later, Hansel and Gretel arrived home. The stepmother looked angry. The father looked happy.

“Thank goodness, you came home!” their father said.

“It was silly of you to get lost,” said the stepmother.

After Hansel and Gretel went to bed, the parents had a talk.

“We have to try it again,” the stepmother said.

“I can’t,” said the father. “I love them.”

“We are doing it again. Tomorrow,” the stepmother said. Her voice was firm. This time, Hansel and Gretel did not overhear them.

The next morning, the family went to the forest. The stepmother gave each of them a crust of bread. Hansel broke the piece into bits. He left the bits as he walked through the forest.

“Now, children,” the stepmother said, “your father and I are going to get berries. We will be right back.”



Of course, the parents did not come back.

“Do not worry,” Hansel told Gretel. “We will follow the bread crumbs home.”

But the bread crumbs had been eaten by birds. They were long gone. Now Hansel and Gretel were truly lost.

Hansel and Gretel kept walking. They tried to find a way home. Suddenly, they came upon a gingerbread house. It was made of gingerbread and candy.

The children ran to the house. They were so hungry. They started eating.



An old woman came out. “Why, children! How nice to see you.”

“We are lost,” Gretel explained.

“I can see that,” the old woman said. “Please come inside and have a good meal. I will take good care of you.”

Hansel and Gretel could not believe their luck.

As soon as they got into the house, the old woman changed. She was a witch. She threw Hansel into a cage. She made Gretel do all the housework.

“I will eat Hansel when he is fat enough,” the old woman said.

But Gretel tricked her. The old woman was almost blind.

Every day, she checked to see if Hansel was fat yet. “Let me touch your finger,” the old woman said.

Gretel gave Hansel a chicken bone. The old woman touched the chicken bone.

“I don’t understand it,” said the old woman.  
“I keep feeding the boy. But he stays so thin.”





“Well, I have had enough of waiting,” the old woman said. “Thin or not, I am going to eat him right now. Gretel, turn on the stove.”

Gretel opened up the stove. She had to think fast. “Can you help me?” Gretel asked the old woman. “There is something at the back of the stove.”

The old woman stuck her head in the oven.



“Where?” the old woman asked.

With all her might, Gretel shoved the old woman into the oven.

Then she unlocked Hansel’s cage.

“Quick! Let’s go!” Gretel cried.

They ran outside. A swan spoke to them. “You two look lost. I can take you home if you like. Hop on.”





So Hansel and Gretel hopped on. The swan carried them home. When they got home, they found that their stepmother had left. Only their father was at home.

“Can you ever forgive me?” he asked them. “I looked and looked for you. I know what I did was wrong.”

“We forgive you, Dad,” said Hansel and Gretel.

Soon the rains came again. The crops grew. There was enough food. Hansel and Gretel lived happily ever after.