

5-6-2016

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Recommended Citation

Ekimyan, Nazeli, "Hansel and Gretel: A feature and study on how fairy tales have changed" (2016). *Honors Thesis*. 134.
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Hansel and Gretel:

A feature and study on how fairy tales have changed

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

Nazeli Ekimyan

May 6, 2016

Naz Ekimyan

Not So Happily Ever After How Fairy Tales Have Changed

Abstract

Once upon a time, the Little Mermaid watched her Prince marry another woman, the Sleeping Beauty was raped by a Prince and woke up from her deep slumber to find out she was the mother of twins, the Little Red Riding Hood never made it out alive, and Goldilocks broke her neck jumping out of a window. This project examines original fairy tales and how they have changed over the years through various adaptations in media and film. The purpose is to find an answer to the question of why these sugarcoated changes have been made over time. In order to answer the question, several earlier versions of fairy tales will be examined, along with how they have been adapted into popular culture and how their modern day interpretations differ from the original source. Research should show that popular culture turns fairy tales into stories with happy endings that will be easier to monetize, straying away from the original sources that were intended to teach young children a lesson. The project will conclude with the research being used to write an adaptation of a fairy tale into a feature-length film that stays as true to the story of the source material. This adaptation is intended to depict that fairy tales can still be monetized and appeal to general audiences, even if they are strict adaptations of the original source in all of its gruesome glory and hard-to-swallow truth.

Previous Fairy Tales With Not-So-Happy Endings

The following are a few fairy tales that were filled with more morbid details in previous versions than are commonly known today.

The Sleeping Beauty

To give a very brief summary of the main points in Giambattista Basile's version of the story: A King finds the Sleeping Beauty (whose name is Talia in this version) and falls in love with her. He proceeds to rape her while she is unconscious. She becomes pregnant with twins. She gives birth. Talia wakes up when one of the twins sucks the flax from her finger. Naturally, she is confused as to how she is suddenly the mother of two. The King returns and tells her what happened. Unfortunately, the King has a wife back home. When she finds out about Talia and the children, she tries to have them all killed, but fails.

Cinderella

In the Grimm brothers' version of the tale, the following quote can be found:

And when her wedding with the Prince was appointed to be held the false sisters came, hoping to curry favor, and to take part in the festivities. So as the bridal procession went to the church, the eldest walked on the right side and the younger on the left, and the pigeons picked out an eye of each of them. And as they returned the elder was on the left side and the younger on the right, and the pigeons picked out the other eye of each of them. And so they were condemned to go blind for the rest of their days because of their wickedness and falsehood. (13)

Not only were the stepsisters blinded by pigeons, but they also cut off their toes in order to get the glass slipper to fit on their feet. However, it seems they had not thought the toe-cutting plan all the way through, since the copious amounts of blood seeping out from the space where a toe used to be gave them away.

Snow White

In the Grimm brothers' version of the tale, the following quote can be found:

Then she railed and cursed, and was beside herself with disappointment and anger. First she thought she would not go to the wedding; but then she felt she should have no peace until she went and saw the bride. And when she saw her she knew her for Snow—white, and could not stir from the place for anger and terror. For they had ready red-hot iron shoes, in which she had to dance until she fell down dead. (226)

Though the popular Snow White story that most know today includes a punishment for the Evil Queen, it is nowhere near as brutal as dancing to her death in a pair of red-hot iron shoes.

The Little Mermaid

In Hans Christian Anderson's version of the tale of the beautiful mermaid, the following two quotes can be found:

1. "Once more she looked at the prince, with her eyes already dimmed by death, then dashed overboard and fell, her body dissolving into foam." (201)
2. "The little mermaid perceived that she had a form like theirs, it gradually took shape out of the foam. "To whom am I coming?" said she, and her voice sounded like that of the other beings, so unearthly in its beauty that no music of ours could reproduce it. "To the daughters of the air!" answered the others" (201)

Unfortunately, Ariel did not get her wish and her Prince chose to marry another woman. She did not take this news very well and chose to jump overboard off a ship, becoming sea foam.

The Little Red Riding Hood

In Charles Perrault's version of the tale, which was published in 1697, the wolf not only eats the grandmother, but eats the child too. With that, the story ends. Thus, in this version, the Little Red Riding Hood dies at the end of her own story.

How have fairy tales changed over the years

Nowadays, it seems as if fairy tale films are focused only on what has the most entertainment value. Marketers, writers, and filmmakers think about what is going to sell the most, and target audiences that way. They are less about having stories that might be more difficult to hear and more about stories with a "happily ever after" ending. There is less violence and cruelty in today's fairytales, as the target audience for these films becomes increasingly younger. This is mainly due to the fact that most fairy tales are commonly animated and often musicals. Lastly, as movie makers do not want to leave children in theaters heartbroken, the hero or heroine in the film always triumphs in the end.

It is important to note that lately, more and more live-action fairy tale films are being made, featuring the villain's side of the story. These films have an older, adult audience in mind and do display scenes of violence and cruelty. However, the most important thing to consider is that these films are all speculative. No versions of these tales were written in the past. Thus, it is another way for the film industry to be monetizing fairy tales, by creating an entirely new story that was not in the past versions of these loved fairy tales. It is interesting that movie makers have not considered remaking live-action fairy tales with the original disturbing details included, seeing as how they clearly have an audience who wants to see the darker side of things.

Now what?

The purpose of my project is to show that fairy tale films can still be monetized while remaining true to the original story that they are adapted from. This can be seen through the popularity of the suspense thriller and horror genres today. For some reason or another, people like to see things going wrong and are okay with not every hero winning in the end.

Hansel and Gretel

The tale of Hansel and Gretel is the perfect example of a horrific tale that can be monetized while remaining true to the Grimm brothers' version of the story.

The logline states: Gretel and her brother Hansel must fight for their lives and find their way back home from the woods, after being abandoned by their parents and captured by a blind witch who is trying to eat them.

The moral of the story is not to stick your nose where it doesn't belong.

Recent adaptations of the film include *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013) and *Hansel and Gretel* (2013). The first is the tale of Hansel and Gretel as adults, going back to hunt down the witch years after the original incident. This is another example of filmmakers creating additions to stories that were not in the original version being adapted to the screen. This also strays from the story, since at the end of the fairy tale, the children kill the witch. Thus, there would be no need for them to have to go back and kill the witch. The second, is just an all-around terrible film that is borderline pornographic. What both of these films have in common is that they feature Hansel and Gretel as adults. But why? Is it

not more interesting to know that these horrific things happened to two very young children?

My Plan:

Step 1: Do research on fairy tales.

Step 2: Find a fairy tale with a moral and horrific details.

Step 3: Adapt the fairy tale into a feature film that stays true to one of its originally written versions.

Why will this work?

I believe that this will work because people are attracted to what they fear. There is a constant battle for fear vs. desire in the human mind. We are afraid to know what is going to happen, but we desperately want to know.

The success of past suspense thrillers and horror films featuring children as main characters also prove that having child protagonists put in awful circumstances can be appealing to audiences. Some past examples include *The Shining* (1980), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *The Others* (2001), and *The Babadook* (2014).

Thus, there should be an audience for the film despite it being a fairy tale with child protagonists. Not every story has a happy ending. Sometimes the best stories are the ones that are the most difficult to hear.

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HANSEL AND GRETEL

Written by

Nazeli Ekimyan

Based on, the fairy tale
Hansel and Gretel
by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

HANSEL (12), dressed in a white shirt, brown vest and dark brown shorts, stands over a small log that rests on a tree stump. He raises a small hatchet over his head and swings it down. He misses the log and the blade of the hatchet gets lodged in the stump.

He is frustrated and wipes the sweat off his brow, as he presses one leg down on the stump and pulls at the hatchet with both hands. He can't get it unstuck.

GRETEL (9), a sweet, little girl with her blonde, wispy hair in two braids, wears a blue dress and a white apron. She sits on the back steps of the cottage. Gretel holds a stick and plays with a small white kitten as she watches her brother.

GRETEL

You're going to hurt yourself, Hansel. You should wait for Papa to come home so he can pull the hatchet out.

Hansel is visibly annoyed, but beads of sweat form across his forehead as he concentrates on the task at hand.

HANSEL

Go back to playing, Gretel. I'm not a child anymore. I know what I'm doing.

GRETEL

I didn't say you were a child.

Hansel's face grows red as he pulls with all his strength. He is going to hurt himself.

HANSEL

I have to learn to cut wood if I want to go to work with father soon.

GRETEL

Work? But what about lessons? And your studies? Hansel, I don't think Papa would like that.

HANSEL

I don't need lessons. Real men go to work.

The hatchet begins to wiggle slightly. Gretel eyes it cautiously.

GRETEL

Hans, you really need to be careful.

The hatchet dislodges from the stump and flies backward, out of Hansel's hands and straight for his face. It flies by his ear, just barely misses him. It lodges into the ground, right between a pair of men's feet in working boots.

PAPA (40s), with messy hair and a beard, wearing dark pants and suspenders. He looks tired from a long day at work.

Gretel runs into Papa's arms.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

Papa! How was your day?

She doesn't wait for him to answer.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

You should have seen the way I climbed up the tree today, Papa! I almost got to the top, too. But then I fell. And even though I got a cut I didn't cry at all. I think I'll try again tomorrow. I think I'll get all the way to the top.

PAPA

Slow down there, darling. Slow down. I'm not going anywhere. You can tell me all about your day over supper.

He lifts her up and sets her on his shoulders. He bends over, grabs the hatchet and flings it towards the log. It splits the log in half.

Hansel looks at it, mouth open in shock. He looks defeated, but in awe of his father.

Papa tousles Hansel's hair and gently nudges him towards the door. Hansel walks ahead and looks back at the split log.

INT. COTTAGE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Inside, the house looks very poor. The furniture is mismatched and worn. There are four cracked bowls on the table.

HILDA (mid 30s), the children's stepmother, young but weathered, wears a long dress and an apron similar to Gretel's outfit. She stands near the fire where a pot of stew hangs cooking.

Hansel and Gretel sit at the table and watch. Hansel's stomach growls and Gretel lets out a small giggle.

Papa walks up to Hilda and kisses her cheek. She doesn't smile.

PAPA

Oh! My eyes! They've just seen the most beautiful creature!

Hilda doesn't look convinced. Still, she lovingly embraces her husband. A small smile creeps behind her frown.

HILDA

Right. What a beauty I am in these dirty rags. There's nothing beautiful left in this place.

PAPA

Anyone who wants to find beauty, will. Look at the world through joyful eyes and you will find happiness where there seems to be none.

HILDA

Philosophizing again, are we?

PAPA

Maybe if I say it enough, you'll actually listen to me someday.

HILDA

Oh will you never learn? This is real life. It's hunt or be hunted in this world. Everyone must fight for their own survival.

PAPA

But if we stick together, we will have no trouble at all making it through these difficult times.

HILDA

There won't be an end to these difficult times if we don't do something to solve the problem.

On the last word, she turns to look at the children. Papa follows her gaze and sees his hungry children, who stare at the pair with anticipation.

He strides to the table and sits with his children.

PAPA

We can discuss that later, Hilda. Right now, let's get Grettie and Hansel fed. They're shrinking and disappearing into thin air by the minute.

He squints his eyes at he looks at Gretel.

PAPA (CONT'D)

Oh no! Grettie has completely disappeared. Do you see her Hansel?

Papa pretends not to see Gretel. Hansel rolls his eyes, but can't resist a slight smile. Papa looks under the table. Gretel is a mess of giggles.

PAPA (CONT'D)

Where has my little dove gone?

GRETEL

I'm right here Papa!

PAPA

There you are! I thought we'd lost you for a moment. What would I do without my little darling?

He plants a kiss on top of her head.

PAPA (CONT'D)

You both know that I love you very much, right? I would chop the entire forest down to protect the two of you.

HANSEL

Why do you always treat us like we're little children? We're capable of taking care of ourselves.

Hilda walks over with a plate of five rolls of bread and sets it down at the center of the table. She shoots Papa a look.

HILDA

You're ready to give your life for your children and look how they repay you. With unappreciative words.

She goes back to the fire and pulls out a handkerchief from the pocket of her apron. Another one falls out of her pocket, very close to the fire.

She uses the handkerchief to hold the handle of the stew pot and brings it towards the table.

The handkerchief on the ground catches fire from a nearby ember. The fire spreads quickly and the whole handkerchief is ablaze. A little burning ball.

Hilda ladles stew into each of the four bowls. There is barely enough to fill them.

The fire has spread to the surrounding straw and starts to burn quickly. It spreads further.

Hilda takes the stew pot back to the stove. She nonchalantly passes the fire, which grows by the second.

She sets the pot down, picks up a pail of water from the ground and tosses it on the fire, no panic in her eyes. This happens all the time. The fire sizzles and becomes a black mush of soot.

PAPA

So what did you all do today?

Hilda finds her seat next to Papa and the four of them start to eat. Gretel, Hansel and Hilda each take a roll of bread.

GRETEL

Well, I already told you I made it almost to the top of the tree before I fe--

HILDA

Before you tore a hole into your dress. Now I have to stitch that up on top of all the other work that I have to do around here.

A flash of fear crosses Gretel's face and her lips begin to quiver. Papa looks at Gretel apologetically.

Hilda takes another roll of bread from the plate at the center. There's one more left.

PAPA

And what about you Hansel?

HANSEL

I've been practicing chopping wood. I think I'm getting pretty good at it. Won't be long before I can come and work with you, Papa.

HILDA

Chopping wood and making a raucous all morning long. I can still feel the pounding in my head.

Papa holds back a laugh.

PAPA

Well next time you're chopping wood Hansel, remember to do it more quietly.

HILDA

Do you think this is funny? All day long these children drive me mad and misbehave. But what would you know?

Papa furrows his brows and looks at his children, more worried than angry.

PAPA

How else have they misbehaved?

Hilda looks at the children.

HILDA

Do you want to tell him or shall I?

Hansel and Gretel look silently into their empty bowls.

HILDA (CONT'D)

They left the pail of chicken feed out in the rain and it spoiled. The entire pail of food. Spoiled.

A look of relief crosses Papa's face.

PAPA

That's how they misbehaved? Hilda, they had no way of knowing that it would rain last night. It's not their fault.

He tousles Hansel's hair.

PAPA (CONT'D)

Besides, the chickens will eat anything you set before them. The feed will dry and it'll be just as good as new.

Papa takes the last roll from the center plate. The eyes of the children follow his hands. They're still hungry. Papa splits the roll and gives half to each of the children. They hesitate to take it, but he gives them a wink.

The children scarf down the bread. Hilda looks at her husband disapprovingly.

Hansel sneaks a small bite of bread to the little white kitten nuzzling at his feet under the table.

HILDA

You're going to get hungry in a few hours and we have nothing else for you to eat.

The children stop chewing.

PAPA

I'd rather be hungry myself than hear the empty bellies of my little ones.

He tickles Gretel and she giggles. Hansel holds back a smile.

HANSEL

I'm not little anymore!

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Papa tucks the kids into their beds and kisses them goodnight. He stands in the doorway of the bedroom.

PAPA

Goodnight my sweet children. May you dream happy dreams.

Gretel sits up, jumps out of bed, grabs the oil lamp from Papa's hand and runs through the door, outside. Papa looks back after her.

PAPA (CONT'D)

Grettie? Grettie where are you going? It's dark out there! Grettie!

He turns to Hansel with a questioning look. Hansel shrugs his shoulders.

Gretel comes back inside. She carefully holds the lamp in one hand and drags a bucket of chicken feed with the other. She sets it next to the doorway and looks up at her father.

GRETEL

Just in case it rains tonight, too.

Papa kisses her forehead as he tucks her back in. He blows out the lamp and walks out of the room.

INT. COTTAGE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Papa climbs into bed with Hilda. She is upset.

HILDA

We can't go on like this. We have no more food and no money.

PAPA

And what exactly do you propose we do?

HILDA

There's no way we can keep feeding ourselves and the children. It seems like the only solution is to cut the mouths to feed by half.

Papa looks shocked.

PAPA

What are you suggesting, Hilda.

HILDA

If we were to stay hungry and give all the food to the children, then we would starve and die. Without us, they would have no way of getting food, so they would eventually starve and die. So it looks like the only logical solution is to take the children into the woods and leave them there.

Papa is angry.

PAPA

To starve and die?

HILDA
Exactly. Better them than us.

PAPA
How could you even think such things? They are our children! I could never do something like that to them. I love them!

HILDA
They are *your* children.

PAPA
Hilda!

HILDA
Think about it. We can always have more children when we have enough money again.

PAPA
I can't even look at you right now. You are my wife and they are my children. I love you three just the same.

He turns away from her in bed.

HILDA
Then you might as well make four coffins while you're out chopping wood. Because if we do not do something, we'll all end up dying.

Papa's stomach grumbles.

HILDA (CONT'D)
See! What did I tell you! It won't be long now. You alone will be responsible for four deaths. I hope you're fine with having that on your conscience.

Hilda turns towards Papa's back. She gently puts a hand on his shoulder. He shrugs it off. She puts her hand on his shoulder again.

HILDA (CONT'D)
Darling. Just please listen to me. You need to do this if you love them.

PAPA

That's not something you do to someone you love.

HILDA

Would you rather have them starve before your very eyes, begging you for food you cannot supply them with? Do you want to watch them cry every night? Is that what you want?

PAPA

Hildy, please stop.

HILDA

If you love them, you will do this. It will be the quickest and easiest way. You'll be doing them a favor. They will understand that you are only doing this because you want what is best for them.

Papa is quiet. His shoulders fall slack. Hilda smiles. She has convinced him.

HILDA (CONT'D)

I'm only thinking of the children. We must only think of them and what is best for them. I love those children from the depths of my heart. I don't want to see them suffering.

A tear rolls down Papa's cheek. He mumbles under his breath.

PAPA

Okay. Tomorrow.

HILDA

What was that?

Papa raises his voice slightly, getting angry.

PAPA

I said we will take them to the forest tomorrow and leave them there.

Hilda turns away from him in bed with a smug smile.

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM

Hansel and Gretel stare at each other, wide-eyed. They just heard the entire conversation between their parents.

Gretel starts to cry. Hansel walks over to her bed and kneels next to it.

HANSEL
It's going to be okay, Grettie.
I'll make sure it is.

GRETEL
But you heard Papa. What are we
going to do?

HANSEL
I have an idea.

Hansel tiptoes to the door and inches it open. It is pitch black outside. He steps out and turns back to her.

HANSEL (CONT'D)
You coming?

A look of terror crosses Gretel's face.

GRETEL
But...it's dark out there and Papa
blew out the lamp.

HANSEL
Don't worry. I'll be right next to
you the whole time.

She does not look convinced.

GRETEL
I don't know...

HANSEL
It's alright. I'll go alone. You
just be on the lookout in case
Hilda or Papa wake up.

He turns and walks into the darkness. Gretel runs up to the window, looking out.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Hansel begins to pick up some stones glistening on the ground. He puts them in his pockets.

A pair of eyes begins to glisten in the bushes. Hansel gets closer and closer to the bush, as he picks up stones and fills his pockets.

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gretel, from the window, spots the pair of angry eyes outside and lets out a small yelp. She begins to panic as she sees Hansel get closer to the bush.

INTERCUT BETWEEN HANSEL AND GRETEL

Hansel reaches out a hand to the bush. Something catches his eye and he turns in the opposite direction. He leans over to pick up a glistening stone.

The pair of eyes glows bigger in the bush, as if getting closer.

Hansel turns toward the bush again and leans down to the foot of it, where there are a few stones. As he leans down, the head of a snow white wolf emerges from the bush. The wolf opens its mouth, its sharp teeth shining in the dark.

It slowly brings its head closer to Hansel's, who is still unaware of the creature. It opens its mouth wide, large enough to fit Hansel's entire head into it.

Gretel is about to yell, when a loud clatter is heard from the other bedroom.

Hansel whips his head towards the sound and pulls his hand back, just as the creature is about to lunge at him. He runs back to the house and the angry eyes retreat.

From the other room, the sound of Hilda's grumbling can be heard. Gretel eases the door open and Hansel runs inside.

HILDA (O.S.)

Who put the bucket of chicken feed
right in the middle of the hallway?
Which dimwit did this? And who's
going to be stuck cleaning all of
this? I am. Of course I am.

Hansel and Gretel both run to their beds and jump in.

HILDA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Whoever is responsible for this
better wake up bright and early to
wipe the floors.

PAPA (O.S.)
Hilda, it was me.

HILDA (O.S.)
What?

The children pull the covers up closer and turn towards each other in their respective beds.

PAPA (O.S.)
I brought in the feed in case it rained again tonight.

HILDA (O.S.)
Well that was a stupid thing to do.

PAPA (O.S.)
Next time I'll make sure to bring the bucket to bed with me so you don't carelessly knock it over and wake us all up.

Gretel smiles, but the smile quickly disappears and her eyes well with tears.

HILDA (O.S.)
No one appreciates the work I do in this house. No one!

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

The morning is still a little dark. The ground is wet with rain from the night before. The chickens walk around and a rooster crows.

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Hilda walks into the room, a huge smile on her face. She bangs a pot with a wooden spoon. She's in an exceptionally good mood.

HILDA
Wake up little devils! It's a beautiful morning! Up, up, up!

Hansel opens one eye and squints at Hilda. Gretel pulls the covers up over her head.

GRETEL
It's too early. Can we please sleep a little while longer? Pleaaaaase?

HILDA

Not even a minute. We've got a busy day ahead of us! Your father and I have a special surprise for you.

Hansel mumbles under his breath.

HANSEL

Right. A surprise.

Hilda loses her smile.

HILDA

You two better get moving. I don't want to hear another sound out of either of you.

Papa strides into the room and over to Gretel's bed. He tickles her as she still hides under the covers. She tries to stay still, but eventually gives in and pulls the covers off as she laughs.

PAPA

And how is the light of my life doing this morning?

GRETEL

Papa, why can't we sleep for a little while longer?

She wraps her arms around his neck and rests her chin on his shoulder.

PAPA

Because I love you too much!

He smothers her with kisses. Hilda rolls her eyes and storms out. She calls behind her.

HILDA (O.S.)

Hurry up! We're leaving in ten minutes!

Hansel and Gretel look at Papa.

HANSEL

Leaving? Where are we going?

Papa looks sad and uncomfortable.

PAPA

We're taking a trip to the woods. I had a few errands to run so I thought you all could come with me so I wouldn't miss you too much.

Gretel hugs her father tight.

GRETEL

I love you so much, Papa.

PAPA

I love you more than you know, Grettie. You too, Hansel.

A tear rolls down his cheek. He stands and begins to leave.

PAPA (CONT'D)

Now up! I want the both of you washed and ready in two minutes.

The children watch their father leave. Gretel's eyes fill with tears.

GRETEL

What are we going to do, Hansel?

HANSEL

We have no choice. We have to pretend we know nothing and go to the woods with Papa and Hilda.

GRETEL

But what if we're still out there when it gets dark?

Hansel pulls out a few of the stones from the night before out of his pocket, shows them to Gretel, then puts them back.

HANSEL

I have a plan, Grettie. Don't worry about a thing. We'll be back home in no time.

INT. COTTAGE - KITCHEN - DAY

Papa sits at the table, head in his hands and eyes closed. He is visibly upset.

Hilda hums as she takes a small loaf of bread out of the oven and cuts it into four slices.

PAPA

How can you be so joyful and be humming along on a day like this. Here I am wondering if my eyes will ever be able to see the sun again, if my heart will ever be happy...

He chokes up.

PAPA (CONT'D)

And you're here, happier than I've seen you in all the years that you have been living here.

HILDA

You need to stop being so hard on yourself. This is the only way we can survive. If we don't do this, we will all die. Is that what you want?

Papa puts his head in his hands. His elbows rest on the table. Hilda walks over to him and puts her arms around his shoulders.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Don't fret, darling. We're doing this because we love, remember? You only want what's best for them.

She gives him a kiss on the cheek and walks back to the bread on the counter.

Hansel walks in and takes a seat next to his father. As he does this, the pebbles in his pocket clang against the chair and make noise. His eyes open wide with realization.

Papa gives him a questioning look.

PAPA

Do you have stones in your pocket?

HANSEL

Yes.

PAPA

And why is that?

Hansel stammers as he comes up with an explanation.

HANSEL

Well, I had, uh, collected some pebbles for, um, a game that I was playing yesterday.

PAPA

A game?

HANSEL

Yes. I must have forgotten them in my pocket.

Hilda starts to mumble under her breath.

HILDA

Collecting pebbles for a game. All you nuisances do is play, play, play. God forbid they lift a finger to help me with some chores.

PAPA

Hansel, where is your sister?

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

Gretel kneels in front of a small chicken coop. Three chicks cluck around beside her. She strokes them and feeds them from the palm of her hand.

GRETEL

Birdie you have to make sure Billie doesn't get her neck stuck in the little hole on the side of the coop like last time, alright?

She picks up one of the chicks and brings it close to her face.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

Carla, you must make sure Birdie and Billie eat okay? They're looking a little thin and they always forget to eat when they're running off and getting into all sorts of trouble. I'm trusting you, Carla.

She puts down the chick and herds them all together as best as she can.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

I'm going to go away for a little while, okay? But I want you to know that I am going to miss each and every one of you so, so much.

One of the chicks jumps onto her leg and nuzzles her.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

I need you all to be on your very best behavior, you hear me? Or else Hilda will have your necks chopped off on the tree stump just like she did to Agnes. You know what she did after she killed her? She put poor little Agnes in our dinner.

Hilda's shrill voice can be heard yelling in the distance.

HILDA (O.S.)

Gretel! Get your bum over here or we're going to leave you behind.

Gretel picks up the chick that's on her leg and plants a kiss on top of its head.

GRETEL

Be good my little darlings! I'll be back soon.

She stands, brushes the dust off her apron and runs towards the house.

INT. COTTAGE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Gretel runs in through the doorway. Right as she is about to pass, Hilda sticks her leg out in Gretel's way.

Just as Gretel is about to trip on Hilda's outstretched leg, she spots the white kitty and changes her direction towards it.

GRETEL

Kitty! I've been looking everywhere for you!

Hilda rolls her eyes. She picks up the four slices of bread, walks over to the table and hands one to Papa, Hansel and Gretel.

HILDA

Make it last. That's all we have.

The three wrap their loaves and place them in the pockets of their clothes.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Well hurry up. Let's get moving.
Before we know it, it'll be dark
and we won't be able to go out into
the woods.

PAPA

Hilda, the dawn just broke a moment
ago. We have time.

Hilda looks at Papa, her eyes furious.

HILDA

The more we drag this out, the more
difficult it is going to be.

Hansel and Gretel exchange worried looks.

Gretel hands Hansel the white kitty. It meows and cries.
Hansel talks to it.

HANSEL

Why are you crying? We're just
going out for a walk in the woods,
kitty. We'll be back before you
know it.

Hilda scoffs as she moves about the kitchen.

EXT. PATH IN FRONT OF COTTAGE - DAY

The family walks along the path in front of the house. Hilda
leads with Papa close behind. The children trail back a
little bit.

After every few steps, Hansel takes out a small white stone
from his pocket and drops it onto the path. Gretel watches
him do so, confused. Hansel looks back constantly to check
that the stones are still there.

Papa looks back at the children lovingly. His eyes are full
of tears that won't seem to fall. The children do not notice.
They are too busy with the stones.

The house behind the family grows smaller as the distance
they walk grows. The patchy ground with occasional tufts of
grass becomes a meadow overgrown with weeds. The small path
from the house to the woods is still clearly visible.

Papa looks back at his children again and finds them with
their heads turned as they look at something behind them
while they walk. He looks puzzled.

PAPA

Hansel?

Both Hansel and Gretel whip their heads in the direction of their father's voice, their eyes wide. Hilda looks back at the three trailing behind her.

HANSEL

Yes Papa?

PAPA

What are you doing?

HANSEL

Nothing.

PAPA

But why do you keep looking back?
Is there something there? Gretel?
Is something wrong?

Gretel looks panicked, her eyes shifting from Hansel to Papa and back. Her eyes lock with Hilda's.

HILDA

I bet you anything they're up to no good again.

The four of them have stopped in the path. Hansel grabs one of Gretel's hands and pulls her along.

HANSEL

Oh, it's nothing, Papa. Grettie was just telling me that the kitty keeps looking at us. We were just hoping that he doesn't follow us out to the woods and get lost along the way.

Hansel, still pulls Gretel by the hand, as he passes by his father and Hilda while he continues to speak.

Hilda and Papa follow after the children.

PAPA

Is that true, Gretel?

Gretel nods her head, a little too eagerly.

GRETEL

Yes, Papa. I just don't want him to get lost. I would be so sad if we went home and kitty wasn't there.

PAPA

He's a smart little one. He'll know better than to leave the yard and follow us.

Hilda mutters under her breath.

HILDA

Or maybe if we get lucky that good-for-nothing cat will be gone too when we get back home. We don't need any extra mouths to feed.

Hilda walks on ahead of the group once more. She makes her annoyance and disapproval obvious.

Gretel lets go of Hansel's hand and walks to Papa's side. She slips her hand into his. He looks down at her big, brown eyes and beams at her.

Papa's smile quickly fades and he looks at the path ahead and the back of Hilda's swiftly moving figure.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The four rest in a small clearing in the middle of the woods. There are large trees towering above them.

Hansel uses his hatchet to cut twigs into smaller pieces. Gretel gathers small flowers from the bushes and tufts of grass around them.

Papa rests against the trunk of a tree and watches his children with admiration. He smiles behind the look of sadness and hurt on his face.

Hilda lies back against a different tree, her eyes closed. She uses a leaf to fan herself.

HILDA

The air is too hot today. Some cold water would be nice.

Everyone continues to do what they were doing and no one pays attention to Hilda's words.

Hilda shifts her position slightly and speaks a little louder.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Some nice cold water from the stream. Now that would be so great right now.

Once again, no one pays attention to Hilda. Papa is lost in thought as he stares at his children.

Hansel tries to cut off a larger branch of a tree. Gretel hums as she gathers more flowers. Gretel sits down in the middle of the clearing and begins to weave the flowers together.

Hilda opens one eye and then the other. She takes in the scene, disgruntled. She sits up straighter. This time, she speaks so loudly she is almost yelling.

HILDA (CONT'D)

I wish we could have some cold water right now. Wouldn't some cold water be great right now, darling?

Papa doesn't even look at her. No one responds.

Hilda seethes with anger. She grabs the nearest small stone and tosses it at Papa. When it hits him, he shakes his head and wakes up from his daydream.

Hilda stares at him, her eyes grow bigger and she clenches her jaw.

HILDA (CONT'D)

I *said* darling, don't you think some cold water from the stream would be nice right now?

She motions behind her with her head.

PAPA

I'm sorry my love. Were you saying something?

HILDA

Don't you think now would be a great time to go to the stream and get water? I bet the children are very thirsty.

A look of panic crosses Papa's face.

PAPA

I think we can wait a little while longer.

HILDA

I don't think that's such a great idea. It'll get dark soon.

(MORE)

HILDA (CONT'D)

Let's go get water now so that we can get back to the children and get on our way back home before the sun sets.

PAPA

Let's rest for a few more minutes.

HILDA

Darling.

Hansel and Gretel both look up from what they are doing. The two look at their parents and then exchange a look.

GRETEL

I'll come with you, Papa. We can pick more flowers for my crown along the way.

HILDA

Now, now. Sit back down. I don't think it's necessary for you to come along with us child.

GRETEL

Well why don't you stay.

HANSEL

Yeah, that's a great idea Grettie. You should stay here and rest Hilda. You look awfully tired.

Hilda gets impatient. She walks closer to the children, far enough away that Papa can't hear the conversation.

HILDA

Listen here. Your father and I are going to go and get water and you two will stay here like the good little children that you are until we come back. Do you understand me? You will be good little children for your father.

Hansel and Gretel stare at her wide-eyed and in shock. They nod quietly.

Papa looks on curiously. He furrows his brows and stands up. He brushes the dirt off his trousers and begins to walk over to the trio.

PAPA

What is all this whispering going on here?

Hilda whips around towards Papa. She paints on a fake smile and puts an arm around each of the children, who shift uncomfortably.

HILDA

Oh nothing, darling. We were just discussing our plan for the rest of the day.

PAPA

Can I know what this plan is?

HILDA

It's our little secret. Isn't it children?

She shakes the children by the shoulders and her fake smile grows larger and seems more forced.

HILDA (CONT'D)

We should get a move on then. The children will stay here while we go get the water.

GRETEL

Papa, why can't we come too?

Papa's eyes begin to fill with tears. He starts to speak, but stops, unable to form words.

Hilda looks into her husband's eyes, annoyed at his weakness.

HILDA

Oh Gretel, you two must stay here. If you walk all the way to the stream with us, you will be too tired to continue on the way home. Then we will have to stop and rest again and it will get dark.

HANSEL

We won't get tired. Honest.

Papa looks into Hansel's pleading eyes and replies weakly.

PAPA

Yes, you will my boy. And even if you didn't, Gretel will surely get tired.

HANSEL

I know for sure I won't get tired, Papa.

(MORE)

HANSEL (CONT'D)

If Grettie gets tired, I can carry her on my back. Or she can go on your back, Papa.

HILDA

Oh no. No, no, no. That's a silly idea. It is too long of a distance from here to home.

Gretel walks over to Papa and tugs at his hand. He looks down at her.

GRETEL

Please, Papa? I don't want Hansel and I to stay here alone. I'm afraid.

Papa lifts Gretel and plants a kiss on her forehead.

PAPA

You have nothing to be afraid of. Hansel will be here the entire time and he is practically a grown man. Right, Hansel?

Hansel frowns as he tries to hide how upset he is.

HANSEL

Right.

PAPA

Grown men can still embrace their fathers, can't they?

Hansel hesitates, then walks over to his father and hugs him.

Hilda watches on, the frown on her face getting deeper.

HILDA

Time to go.

She pushes Papa along and pries him free of Gretel's hands which hold him tightly.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Let's get a move on before it gets dark. Your father and I will be back in no time children. Just scurry along and play some games until we're back.

Papa continues to look back at his children as Hilda pushes him forward.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Papa stands over a small, wooden hand-carved crib. Inside is a sleeping infant wearing a tiny knitted bonnet. It is Gretel as a baby. He stares at her with admiration, like she is the most beautiful creature in the world.

A toddler stands on a stool next to him. It is Hansel. He peers over the edge of the crib, down at the baby inside. He speaks with a childlike lisp.

YOUNG HANSEL
Papa, she's so pretty.

PAPA
Yes, yes she is. That's your little sister Hansel. You must always look after her.

YOUNG HANSEL
What about Mama? When will she come back.

Papa's eyes well with tears.

PAPA
Mama has gone to be with the stars in the sky.

YOUNG HANSEL
But when will she come back?

Papa stoops down to eye-level with Hansel and holds him by the shoulders.

PAPA
Mama will be gone for a very long time, my strong little man.

Hansel's lip begins to quiver.

PAPA (CONT'D)
But I want you to always remember that I will never leave you. I will always be there for you when you need me. I love you and your sister very, very much. Always remember that. Okay?

Hansel peers at his father with big round eyes. He throws his arms around his father's neck and hugs him tightly.

YOUNG HANSEL

Okay, Papa.

Papa picks Hansel up and the two stare at the sleeping baby in the crib.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Papa struggles to hold his ground as Hilda pushes him forward. He looks back at his children.

Hansel and Gretel stand side by side, frowns painted onto their faces. Gretel's bottom lip lightly quivers. Hansel takes her hand and holds it.

Papa calls out to the children as he struggles to look away and continue on the path. He stumbles. Hilda holds back a branch to give Papa room to pass.

PAPA

I love you both very, very much.
Always remember that. Everything I
do, I do because I love you.

HILDA

We'll be back soon, children. Don't
go anywhere!

She gives Papa one final push onto the path and the branches she had been holding snap back into place. They can no longer be seen.

Gretel turns to look at Hansel. She shakes her head in disbelief.

GRETEL

I never thought Papa would actually
leave us, Hansel. They're never
coming back.

Hansel gives Gretel a hug and squeezes her.

HANSEL

Don't worry about a thing, Gretel.
We'll give them some time. If they
don't come back for us, We'll still
be able to find our way back home.

GRETEL

How would we do that?

HANSEL

Don't worry, Grettie. Right now
let's just sit and wait.

EXT. FOREST PATH - DAY

Papa continues to look back. Hilda is a few yards ahead of him. Papa slumps down and sits on a large rock.

PAPA

I can't do this, Hilda.

Hilda turns around to face Papa. The smile on her face drops.

HILDA

What?

PAPA

I said I can't do this. I can't
just leave my children behind like
this.

Hilda takes in a deep, annoyed breath. She slowly walks over to him and scoots next to him on the rock. She puts a hand on his knee.

HILDA

Remember what we talked about,
darling? This is the right thing to
do. This is our only option.

PAPA

How can a father just leave his
children behind. I can't go through
with this.

Hilda takes Papa's face into her hands and gives him a long kiss. Papa seems taken aback.

HILDA

Stop thinking about this and don't
make it harder on yourself. It's
time to move on, move forward.

She jumps up and pulls Papa along.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Now up. We need to get a move on
before it gets dark. I'll make us a
nice supper when we get home.

PAPA

I thought we had no food. Isn't that the reason we have to leave the children behind.

HILDA

I have something I've been saving for a special occasion.

Papa shakes his head, distraught.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Gretel sits at the base of a tree, her eyes worried. Hansel paces back and forth before her.

An owl hoots in the tree above them. Both children are startled and look up.

The night is getting darker. The branches of the trees hide the sky and the stars from view. Small beady eyes can be seen in the branches of the trees.

A cold wind blows. Gretel shivers and rubs her arms with her hands. Hansel scans the tree for any animals.

GRETEL

I'm cold, Hansel.

Hansel stops his examination of the tree and looks at Gretel. He walks over to where she sits and plants himself next to her. He puts an arm around her and tries to warm her up.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

Hansel, do you think Papa and Hilda are going to come back?

HANSEL

No, Grettie. I don't think they are anymore.

GRETEL

What are we going to do.

HANSEL

Not to worry. I told you I had a plan, didn't I?

GRETEL

But what plan?

Hansel jumps up and walks over to the edge of the clearing. He scans the ground around one of the openings to a path and then whips his head up towards Gretel as if he's found what he's looking for.

HANSEL

Are you ready to go back home?

Gretel stands and brushes the dirt from her apron. She beams. Then her smile drops.

GRETEL

But what if we see animals along the way?

HANSEL

The quicker we get to moving, the less likely that is to happen. And even if we do...

He holds up his hatchet, as if the action is self-explanatory.

Gretel runs towards him.

INT. COTTAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Papa and Hilda sit across from each other at the table. Before them are two plates, each filled with rice and a small cooked chick.

Hilda eats quickly, using both her fork and her hands with the food. She talks incessantly. Papa uses his fork to move things around in his plate, but never takes any food to his mouth. He looks at Hilda in disbelief.

HILDA

And then I'll take one of the chickens out to the market and see if I can trade it for two chicks. That way, all it takes is a few months and we'll have two full grown chickens instead of one. We can get by with just one chicken for now. With less mouths to feed now, we don't need as many eggs to get us by.

Papa uses his fork and a finger to turn over the small cooked chick in his plate. His face gets sadder.

HILDA (CONT'D)

And with the money that you make from the wood cutting, we should be able to make enough to get back on our feet again in no time.

The little white kitten comes into the kitchen and rubs up against Papa's foot. Papa picks it up and strokes its fur. He takes a grain of rice from his plate and feeds the kitten.

HILDA (CONT'D)

See I knew we had to cut down the family size by half. I think we made the right decision. Yes, I really do think so.

Papa puts the kitten up on the table and allows it to eat from his plate. Hilda tries to swat the kitten away, but Papa blocks her hand.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Well are you just going to feed the cat the food I prepared for you? I could be eating that. If you're going to start feeding the animals the food we should be eating ourselves, then there really is no point to what we did today. You have to be smart.

Papa stares at Hilda blankly for a long time.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Well? What is it? Why are you just staring at me like that?

PAPA

I really wish you'd asked me before you cooked these little chicks.

HILDA

Is that all you have to say?

PAPA

They were Gretel's chicks, Hilda, not ours. She cared for those chicks like they were her children. She never left their side. God, I'm such a horrible father. How could I have done what I did. How could I have let you talk me into this?

He stands up and leaves the room, his face in his hands.

Hilda looks on after him then shrugs. She picks up the cat and tosses it to the floor.

She uses her fork to take the cooked chick from Papa's plate and plops it into her own plate. She uses her fingers to tear up the pieces and toss them into her mouth.

EXT. FOREST PATH - NIGHT

Hansel and Gretel hold hands as they stumble through the path.

It is dark and tall trees loom overhead in what seems like every direction. Beady eyes appear and disappear in the branches overhead.

Slivers of the moon can be seen slightly between the branches, but there is no light to guide the children.

The sounds of crickets and owls can be heard. A wolf howls in the distance and Gretel's eyes open wide with fear.

GRETEL

Hansel, I'm so scared.

HANSEL

You have no reason to be, Grettie.

GRETEL

I can't see where I'm going. How do you know we're not going to get lost?

HANSEL

Here, look at this. Do you see this little white pebble?

He points to a glistening pebble on the ground.

GRETEL

Is that one of the stones you were throwing onto the path when we were walking here?

Hansel smiles and nods.

HANSEL

Yes.

GRETEL

I don't understand. Why were you doing that?

Hansel points a few more feet up ahead where another stone glistens in the dark.

HANSEL

There's another one right there.

Gretel squints as she looks at the stones and sees that there are several of them down the path they are on.

GRETEL

Did you drop stones the entire way to the clearing?

Hansel beams brighter.

HANSEL

Mhmm.

GRETEL

Do you really think we'll be able to follow these home?

HANSEL

We should be able to.

Gretel stops and gives Hansel a big, tight hug that startles him. He hugs her back then pats her on the back.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

Let's go. Let's get moving. I want to get home as soon as possible.

There is a rustle in a bush a few yards away. Hansel's head turns towards the sound quickly. Gretel heard it too.

GRETEL

What was that?

HANSEL

Oh it's probably nothing. Let's just walk faster.

They move quickly as they make sure not to stumble over bigger rocks in the path. Hansel scans the ground for stones. He points them in the right direction every time they get off course.

The beady eyes appear to follow them, no matter how quickly they walk. They pick up the pace and begin to run.

There are more rustles in the bushes. The rustling begins to follow them. The bushes beside them move around as if something runs through them.

Hansel and Gretel cast worried eyes on the bushes as they continue to run soundlessly. Gretel trips. Hansel stops in his tracks to help her.

The bush now moves more frantically than ever before. Gretel's eyes open wide with fear as if ready for something to jump out and strike.

INT. COTTAGE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Papa is in bed, facing the wall. Hilda stands in the opening of the doorway in a long, white night dress. She watches him for a bit and her eyes appear to soften. She's not all bad all the time.

She walks over to the bed slowly and climbs atop it. She scoots over to where Papa is. He doesn't even turn to look at her.

HILDA

Darling?

She touches his shoulder and he shrugs her hand off. A frown appears on her face and she looks genuinely hurt. Then, as if in a flash of anger, a firey look appears in her eyes.

She grabs Papa's shoulder and turns him towards her.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Darling, what's the matter?

Papa looks at her incredulously.

PAPA

How could you ask me that? Don't you already know?

HILDA

So are you going to sulk around for the rest of eternity because you did what was best for your children?

Papa looks away from her and tries to turn away, but she keeps him from being able to.

PAPA

Hilda, just let me be.

Hilda throws a leg over Papa's chest and sits on top of him, over the covers while he is under them.

She kisses his chest and makes her way upward. He looks anywhere but at her, clearly uncomfortable by what is happening.

PAPA (CONT'D)

Hilda...

HILDA

Yes?

PAPA

Please stop.

HILDA

Why?

She continues to kiss him, slowly and seductively.

PAPA

Hilda, please stop.

HILDA

I just want to make you happy.

PAPA

Nothing you do could ever make me happy.

Hilda looks hurt by this comment. She stops and looks at Papa with pained eyes.

HILDA

What do you mean?

PAPA

I just want my children back.

HILDA

They're gone. We can't bring them back.

PAPA

I'm going to go back for them in the morning.

HILDA

Even if you did go after them, they probably moved from the clearing. There's no way you'd be able to find them. The forest is terribly large.

PAPA

But I know it like the back of my hand.

Hilda is very annoyed.

HILDA

I don't think you should go looking for them.

PAPA

Why not?

HILDA

I don't want to say it.

She looks at Papa out of the corner of her eye, as if encouraging him to ask. She obviously wants to say it.

PAPA

Say it.

HILDA

I don't want to.

Papa sits up in bed and scoots Hilda off of him. He grabs her by the shoulders and looks her squarely in the eyes.

PAPA

Say it.

She shakes her head. He shakes her by the shoulders. Papa begins to fill with rage as Hilda enjoys the moment and looks smug while doing it.

PAPA (CONT'D)

Hilda. I'm going to ask you one last time. Why don't you think I should go out looking for the children tomorrow. Did you do something to them?

Hilda feigns surprise and shock.

HILDA

Me? Do something to the children? I would never!

PAPA

Then what is it?

HILDA

I didn't lay a finger on your children, but it's not me you should be worried about.

Papa's eyes widen with fear.

HILDA (CONT'D)

It's the wolves.

EXT. FOREST PATH - NIGHT

Gretel sits on the floor and Hansel has his hand extended to help her up. There is fear in both of their eyes as they stare at the bush.

It continues to shake, harder and quicker.

Hansel coarsely whispers, the panic evident in his voice.

HANSEL

Gretel, take my hand.

Gretel takes his hand and stumbles up. Her eyes never leave the bush.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

We have to go.

Gretel is frozen in place. Hansel looks at her and yells.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

Gretel! We *must* go. Now!

Hansel takes her by the hand, ready to run. Gretel stares uncomfortably at the bush, frozen in her tracks. She speaks, her voice barely audible.

GRETEL

I can't move, Hansel.

Suddenly, the bush erupts, a mess of leaves and twigs everywhere. Gretel screams, her shrill voice echoes in the darkness.

A small white bunny hops out stands in front of the bush and stares at Gretel. Gretel stares back. The bunny takes off running.

Hansel lets out a deep sigh of relief and shakes his head.

HANSEL

Come on. Let's go. We can't be out here for much longer. It's too dangerous.

INT. COTTAGE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Papa is asleep in bed. He faces the wall. Hilda is next to him, facing the door.

The sound of shuffling can be heard. Hilda pulls the blanket up closer around her neck. She is groggy with sleep but slightly awake. She speaks without opening her eyes.

HILDA

What are you doing up, darling?

No one answers. More shuffling is heard.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Come back to bed.

The shuffling is over by the doorway.

Hilda throws an arm over to Papa's space as if motioning for him to come back to his spot. She feels Papa's arm, already in the bed next to her.

She opens her eyes and sees that the door is open. She sits up in bed and shakes Papa awake.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Darling!

Papa does not wake. She shakes him more.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Darling, I think there's something in the house.

Papa yawns as he gets more comfortable.

PAPA

You're imagining things.

She forces him to open his eyes and look at her.

HILDA

The door is wide open. I heard noises.

Papa sits up in bed and picks up the lantern that is on the ground beside him.

PAPA

I'm sure you're imagining things,
but if it'll make you feel better,
I'll turn on a light so you can see
for yourself.

He picks up a match and strikes it. The small light illuminates his face. He brings the match close to the lantern and it lights up, illuminating the room and casting shadows.

Hansel and Gretel stand hand in hand at the foot of the bed, covered in twigs and leaves and looking like a mess.

Hilda screams bloody murder.

INT. COTTAGE - KITCHEN - DAY

Hilda walks around the kitchen. She opens drawers then slams them shut as she mutters under her breath.

Papa sits at the table, Gretel on his lap and Hansel next to him.

HANSEL

When it took you too long to come
back, we just started walking home
ourselves.

GRETEL

It was so dark, Papa. I was so
scared.

PAPA

I'm so sorry you had to do that, my
loves. We got lost and ended up at
home. I was going to come looking
for you as soon as the sun rose.

GRETEL

We know, Papa. We know.

PAPA

I'm so glad to have my little
babies back with me.

HANSEL

Papa, we're not babies.

PAPA

Oh, of course not.

GRETEL

Did you miss us, Papa?

PAPA

Just miss you? Grettie, I was getting so worried about you both. I couldn't imagine if something were to happen to either of you.

Hansel looks at his father and shakes his head. He is still bitter over his father's decision to listen to Hilda.

HANSEL

You don't need to worry about us anymore father. I can watch over Gretel and we can find our own share of the food for the day on our own.

GRETEL

Maybe we can plant a garden!

Papa looks over at Hilda.

PAPA

Sweetheart, is there absolutely nothing?

Hilda turns to stare at him, her eyes wild with rage.

HILDA

No. There is nothing. Not even a scrap.

PAPA

Not even any of the rice from last night? Or a bit of chicken?

GRETEL

Chicken?

Papa looks pained. He knows he shouldn't have mentioned that before his daughter.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

You ate one of the chickens? Which one?

HILDA

We didn't eat a whole chicken, child. We would never be able to eat all of that. We ate two of the chicks instead.

Gretel looks from Hilda to her father. Papa looks ashamed.

GRETEL
The chicks? *My* chicks?

PAPA
I'm so sorry, darling.

GRETEL
But why? Wasn't there anything else to eat? Why did you have to eat my chicks?

She begins to cry and runs out of the room. Papa shifts in his seat uncomfortably. Hansel looks at him with judging eyes. Hilda mutters under her breath, but loud enough for everyone to hear.

HILDA
Well, we weren't going to starve.

She mimicks Gretel's voice.

HILDA (CONT'D)
Why did you have to eat my chicks?

PAPA
Hilda. Are you sure there is nothing to eat in the house.

HILDA
Do you think I'm lying to you or something? Of course I'm sure. There's absolutely nothing to eat in this place.

PAPA
Well then I guess we will have to go berry-picking today.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

Hansel and Gretel dig small holes in the ground. The little white kitten sits a few feet away. It licks its paws and stares at them.

Gretel wipes sweat off her brow and walks over to where the small chicks are in their pen.

Hansel watches after her.

GRETEL
Can you believe she cooked Birdie and Carla? How could someone do such a thing?

Hansel looks around then whispers to Gretel.

HANSEL

We can never trust her with anything, Gretel. Nothing. We must always be careful with her. She doesn't like us in this home any more than we like her.

The sounds of arguing can be heard from inside the house. Hansel and Gretel both look in the direction of the noise.

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hansel and Gretel lie in their beds. The sounds of muffled arguing can be heard once again.

HILDA (O.S.)

Are you happy now? Is this what you want? You want to watch your children starve to death?

PAPA (O.S.)

That's not going to happen.

HILDA (O.S.)

Yes, it is.

INT. COTTAGE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hilda's brows are furrowed as she looks at Papa. She looks ready to snap. Papa is upset, a pleading look on his face.

HILDA

If we all continue to live together, there is no way that we will have enough to feed four mouths.

PAPA

The children are planting a garden and we can pick berries.

HILDA

That garden will take a long while to grow. And who even knows if anything will grow in that godforsaken soil. Besides, we cannot just live off berries for the rest of eternity.

(MORE)

HILDA (CONT'D)

Can you imagine how many berries we'd have to pick. We'd have to be picking berries the entire day.

PAPA

Well, we can just eat another chicken.

HILDA

Darling, you're not thinking straight. Yes, we can eat another chicken. But what about after that? There will be no more chickens left to eat. What will we do then.

PAPA

I don't know. I don't know, I don't know, I don't know.

HILDA

Listen to me, darling. I don't know how many times I must tell you this to get it through to your head.

She puts her hands around his face.

HILDA (CONT'D)

If you love the children as much as you say you do and if you really truly care about them, leaving them behind in the forest is the best thing that you could possibly do for them.

PAPA

How is there no other solution?

HILDA

You just have to think about the positive side. You are doing this for *them*. Not for yourself, but for them.

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gretel looks at Hansel and frowns once again. Hansel shakes his head in disbelief.

HILDA (O.S.)

We will take them into the woods again tomorrow, further this time, so they have no way of finding their way back.

PAPA (O.S.)
Alright, Hilda. Just sleep for now.

Gretel climbs out of her bed and lightly runs over to Hansel's.

GRETEL
We have to do something.

Hansel sit up.

HANSEL
Stones?

Gretel nods.

GRETEL
I'll help you.

HANSEL
Okay, but we have to be quick.

He climbs out of bed and walks over to the hall. He listens for a few moments. Then nods at Gretel.

Gretel walks over to the door and tries the knob.

GRETEL
It won't open.

HANSEL
What do you mean it won't open.

GRETEL
Exactly that. The knob won't turn.

Hansel rushes over to her side and tries it himself.

HANSEL
You're right. It's locked.

Gretel looks worried. Hansel furrows his brows as he thinks.

GRETEL
What are we going to do now.

HANSEL
We have to try to get out through the kitchen.

GRETEL
She'll hear us!

HANSEL

We have to be very, very quiet.

Hansel leads the way to the hallway between their bedroom and their parent's bedroom.

INT. COTTAGE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Hansel slips through the hallway into the kitchen, followed by Gretel. The pair tiptoe quietly across the space.

The room is pitch black and the only light coming in is from the small crack under the door.

Gretel accidentally bumps into a chair which makes a loud sound. Hansel turns back to look at her. He puts a finger across his lips and motions for her not to make a sound.

Hansel gets to the door and tries it. It doesn't budge. He wiggles the knob around.

HANSEL

This one is locked too.

Gretel begins to panic. She breathes heavily and bumps into a broom. Hansel catches it before it can fall to the floor. He places it back in the corner. Gretel frantically backs away from the broom corner and stops suddenly.

She whispers, her voice laden with fear.

GRETEL

Hansel? Is that you?

HANSEL

What is it? I'm over here.

Gretel slowly turns around, unable to see what is behind her. All of a sudden, there is the sound of a match being struck and a small glow illuminates Hilda's face.

Gretel screams and backs away from her. Hansel grabs a hold of her shoulders.

HILDA

Well, well, well. What do we have here. What are you devious little devils trying to do? Are you trying to escape and leave the house.

GRETEL

No!

HILDA

Then? What is it? Out with it?

HANSEL

Gretel wasn't feeling very well.
She was worried about the chicks.
We were just going to go check on
them, that's all.

HILDA

You will do no such thing. Now back
to bed, the both of you!

The children hurry out of the kitchen.

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hansel and Gretel climb into their beds.

GRETEL

What are we going to do. If we
can't get the pebbles, we won't be
able to find our way back home
later.

HANSEL

Maybe Hilda and Papa will choose to
take us down the same path as last
time. If they do that, the stones
will still be there from the other
day.

GRETEL

You think so?

HANSEL

They have to be.

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - DAY

A rooster crows and the room is filled with light. Both
Hansel and Gretel are awake. Neither of them slept a wink the
night before.

Papa walks into the room.

PAPA

My darlings are up!

The children don't smile or run to hug him. Papa frowns, but
doesn't say anything about it.

PAPA (CONT'D)

You should get up and get dressed.
We're going back into the woods
again for a walk today.

Hansel looks Papa square in the eyes.

HANSEL

Are you going to forget us there
again today?

Papa looks hurt.

PAPA

No, of course not, son. Why would
we do that?

HANSEL

I'm just checking.

GRETEL

You won't leave us there alone
again, will you Papa?

PAPA

Not a chance.

INT. COTTAGE - KITCHEN - DAY

Hilda is in an usually happy mood again. She hums as she cuts a loaf of bread into four pieces, cutting one piece to be significantly larger.

The children sit at the table, their eyes downcast. Papa looks at his children and senses that something is wrong. His eyes well with tears but he rubs them before he can get too emotional.

Hilda walks over to the table with the three smaller pieces and places them there.

HILDA

You might want to save these for
later. It's all we have.

She walks back over to the counter and wraps the larger slice in a small handkerchief. She places it in her pocket. She goes about the kitchen, still humming as she does this and that.

The children reluctantly begin to wrap the slices into handkerchiefs and put them in their pockets.

Papa breaks off a small piece and pops it into his mouth before he wraps the rest and puts it away.

EXT. PATH IN FRONT OF HOUSE - DAY

The four walk down the path in front of the house. They end up at a fork in the path. On one side is the path they went down the day before.

Hansel sees the stones that are still there and turns to look at Gretel. They both smile.

They begin to walk down that path, happily and smiling.

Hilda notices the look and furrows her brows.

HILDA

Where do you two think you're going?

GRETEL

Aren't we going this way? To the same place we went the other day.

HILDA

No.

Papa looks confused.

PAPA

Then where are we going Hilda?

HILDA

We're going to go down this way.

PAPA

Hilda, we've never gone down that way before. You know what they say about that path.

HANSEL

No one who ever goes down that path ever comes back.

HILDA

Well then it'll be a challenge now, won't it? We can make it back children. Don't you think?

Hansel and Gretel exchange worried glances. Papa looks defeated.

Hilda walks ahead into the second path. She looks back and motions for them to follow her.

HILDA (CONT'D)
Come along now.

EXT. SECOND PATH - DAY

The path is overgrown, the grass as tall as their knees in some places and the trees more gnarly than the ones in the other path.

All four pick their footing carefully. Hansel and Gretel intentionally fall behind.

GRETEL
I have an idea, Hansel.

HANSEL
What is it?

GRETEL
I've been leaving a piece of bread on any open space I can find on the path.

HANSEL
A piece of bread?

GRETEL
Yes. That way, since we don't have the stones, we can follow the bread home.

Hansel realizes what Gretel means.

HANSEL
That's brilliant!

Gretel nods, proud of her idea.

GRETEL
There's only one small problem.

HANSEL
What is that?

GRETEL
We won't be able to see them in the dark. We would have to start making our way back while there's still light out.

HANSEL

That's alright. We can do that.
We'll leave right after they do.

GRETEL

You don't think they'll see us?

HANSEL

We'll keep enough of a distance
that they won't.

Gretel is quiet for a while, then speaks.

GRETEL

Hansel?

HANSEL

Yes?

GRETEL

Do you think Papa and Hilda will
try to bring us back to the woods
again a third time? If we make it
back home again this time.

HANSEL

First, let us say when. *When* we
make it back home.

GRETEL

Oh right. When.

HANSEL

And second, I don't have an answer
to your question, Grettie. I didn't
think Papa would agree to bring us
back a second time.

GRETEL

Me either. I thought he'd be happy
to see us back home.

HANSEL

Oh, he was.

GRETEL

Then what happened?

HANSEL

She happened.

He motions towards Hilda.

Gretel is quiet again and then speaks hesitantly.

GRETEL
Hansel?

HANSEL
Mhmm.

GRETEL
Do you think Papa loves us?

Hansel stops in his tracks.

HANSEL
Gretel, what are you saying?

Gretel continues to walk.

GRETEL
Sometimes I think that he might not love us anymore. That he loves Hilda more and will do what she asks him to do. Even if that means giving us up.

Hansel holds Gretel's hand.

HANSEL
Papa loves us. He always will. Sometimes he's just not very good at showing it.

GRETEL
I wish he was.

HANSEL
I wish he was, too.

They both look forward at their father, who turns around to look at them at that moment. A smile plays on his lips, but a pained look enters his eyes and he looks away again.

EXT. CLEARING #2 - DAY

The four enter from a path into a clearing, smaller than the last one. There are thorned bushes around and the grass is full of weeds.

Hansel takes his hatchet out and begins to chop at small branches. Gretel watches him as she takes a long stick and uses it to draw patterns in the muddy ground.

Hilda motions to Papa.

HILDA

Darling, why don't we go get some firewood.

PAPA

Let us rest for a few moments and we will.

HILDA

Don't you think we should get the fire going as quick as possible?

PAPA

What's the rush?

HILDA

Well, the longer we wait to get a fire going, the more difficult it will be to start it. The wind might pick up.

PAPA

Why don't you gather some twigs for now and then we can go get larger branches with my axe in a moment.

Hilda begins to get impatient.

HILDA

We should go now.

Papa sighs. Then stands. He walks over to the children.

PAPA

Hansel, watch your sister. Hilda and I are going to get some firewood. We will be back before you know it.

HANSEL

Why can't I come with you? I have my hatchet. I can always use that to help you.

PAPA

I don't think that's such a wise idea.

HANSEL

Why not?

PAPA

If we both go and I take my axe and you take your hatchet, then Hilda and Gretel are going to have to stay here all by themselves with no protection.

HANSEL

They will be fine.

PAPA

But do you want to take that chance?

Hansel hangs his head, defeated. Papa tousles his hair.

Papa carries Gretel and plants a kiss on top of her forehead before he puts her down.

PAPA (CONT'D)

Be good okay?

GRETEL

Yes, Papa.

Papa walks over to the edge of the clearing and follows the path out. Hilda smiles with a malicious look on her face, waves at the children and calls behind her.

HILDA

Goodbye, little devils.

Hansel angrily flings his hatchet at a tree trunk.

GRETEL

It's going to be okay, Hansel.

HANSEL

How could father do this to us? How can he just listen to her like that and leave us behind. It's her that we should be leaving behind. She's the one who eats the most and is good for nothing. She has never been a mother to us. Never. I hate her!

He sinks down and begins to cry. Gretel walks over and hugs him, patting his back to comfort him.

GRETEL

I hate her, too. But we can't do anything about it now except try to get home before it gets too dark.

(MORE)

GRETEL (CONT'D)

As long as we have each other,
everything will be okay.

HANSEL

They didn't even wait a few
minutes. They just left us here and
went on their way like we were
nothing.

GRETEL

Come on now.

Gretel walks over to Hansel's hatchet and picks it up. She
walks back to where he now stands and hands it to him.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

I'll lead the way.

They walk over to the opening of the clearing and start on
through it.

EXT. SECOND PATH - DAY

Gretel walks ahead of Hansel. She scans the ground and looks
for the pieces of bread that she had placed there.

GRETEL

Do you think we're far enough away
from them now that they won't hear
us?

Hansel looks around him carefully.

HANSEL

Yes, I would think so.

Gretel stops suddenly.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

What is it? What did you see?

She points. He follows her finger.

A bird sits on top of a rock, pecking away at the piece of
bread that had been placed there.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

Oh no.

Gretel begins to run, her hair whipping behind her. Her
breathing gets heavy as she scans the ground and the area.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

Gretel don't! We're going to get lost!

Gretel doesn't listen. She continues to run, her eyes searching. Hansel follows close behind.

Gretel comes to an abrupt halt.

GRETEL

Hansel.

HANSEL

What is it?

GRETEL

They're gone. They're all gone.

Hansel touches her shoulder lightly as he tries to comfort her.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

The birds must have eaten them all.

Hansel looks around. Trees loom overhead and thorn-covered bushes are all around. Nothing about this place seems the least bit friendly.

He looks up at the bits of sky that can be seen through the gnarled branches that cover the view. The sky is turning a pinkish gray. It is almost sunset.

HANSEL

We have to get moving.

GRETEL

I don't know where we are. Do you?

HANSEL

No. But it's okay. We will find our way back.

EXT. SECOND PATH - NIGHT

The children have been walking for some time now. Gretel's shoulders are slumped and defeated. Hansel walks with his head held high, on complete alert.

GRETEL

Hans, I'm so tired. Can we please sit for a bit.

HANSEL

No. We can't. It's too dark out here. We have to keep moving or we're bound to run into some animals.

GRETEL

What?

She shrinks smaller in fear and walks closer to Hansel. The owls hoot and the crickets chirp.

HANSEL

What was that?

They stop.

GRETEL

What was what?

HANSEL

That sound.

GRETEL

I didn't hear anything.

The sound of a twig snapping is heard a few hundred yards away.

HANSEL

There it is again.

GRETEL

Hansel, you're scaring me.

HANSEL

I think something is following us.

There is the sound of another twig snapping, this time closer.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

We have to keep moving. Follow me close, okay?

Hansel walks quickly and Gretel follows.

GRETEL

Say something. All this quiet makes me so scared.

HANSEL

But we must keep quiet in case whatever it is can hear us.

GRETEL

But Hans...

Hansel rolls his eyes and whispers.

HANSEL

Fine.

GRETEL

Thank you.

HANSEL

I don't know what to say.

GRETEL

Anything.

They continue to walk. Hansel spots a pair of red eyes in the dark behind them. He tugs at Gretel and urges her to move faster.

HANSEL

Keep up.

GRETEL

I'm trying.

HANSEL

Don't look around. Just look straight ahead and follow me and we'll be out of here in no time. We'll be back home with Papa and we will have our warm beds and we can play with kitty in the morning.

GRETEL

That would be very nice.

HANSEL

Yes, yes it would be.

The pair of red eyes appears again. A distant snarling sound can be heard.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

Gretel?

GRETEL

Yes?

HANSEL

Do you think it would be alright if we ran for a little bit?

(MORE)

HANSEL (CONT'D)

Just to see if we can try to find
the path with the pebbles again?

GRETEL

Do we really have to?

HANSEL

Yes, I think we do.

GRETEL

Are you sure.

HANSEL

Positive.

GRETEL

I guess I could run for a little
while.

Hansel keeps checking for the red eyes. They appear and
disappear behind branches, still at a safe enough distance.

HANSEL

Okay. When I say so, I want you to
start running.

Gretel is oblivious to what is happening.

GRETEL

Will you count to three?

HANSEL

Sure. I can count to three if you
want.

GRETEL

Yes.

HANSEL

Okay on the count of three. Are you
ready?

GRETEL

Mhmm.

HANSEL

Don't make too much noise though,
Gretel. We must still do our best
to keep quiet.

GRETEL

I know, I know.

HANSEL

One.

The red eyes appear again. Hansel gulps.

Gretel looks at him quizzically.

GRETEL

Hans, is everything okay?

HANSEL

Two.

A second set of red eyes appears. Hansel's eyes widen in fear.

Gretel follows his gaze and sees the two pairs of red eyes a distance away. Her eyes get so big they look as if they are going to pop out of her head.

GRETEL

Ha-

HANSEL

Three.

He takes off running and pulls Gretel behind him. They keep looking back.

The eyes have disappeared, but the pair keeps running.

GRETEL

Do you think we lost them.

HANSEL

Maybe. But don't slow down. We have to be sure.

Howling is heard very near. One pair of red eyes appears again.

Gretel gasps.

GRETEL

They're back.

HANSEL

Don't look back. Don't look back.
Just run. As fast as you can.

They quicken their pace, panting and out of breath.

The red eyes begin to move, running after them, the distance between them slowly closing.

GRETEL

Hansel they're getting closer!

At this point, the pair can see the wolf. It runs in their direction at a quick pace, too fast for the children to stay ahead for much longer.

HANSEL

We have to think of something.

GRETEL

But what?

HANSEL

We have to find somewhere to hide.

GRETEL

Hansel! It's catching up!

EXT. TREE - NIGHT

The wolf is just a few hundred yards away. Hansel gets to a tree, stops and flings his hatchet into the trunk.

GRETEL

What are you doing?

HANSEL

We're going to climb.

He hoists Gretel up onto his shoulders and she climbs, using the hatchet as a step to get onto a branch. She sits on a branch and scoots down, leaving enough space for Hansel.

Hansel jumps up and catches hold of the hatchet, pulling himself up and standing on its handle. He reaches to the branch, but his feet begin to slip.

GRETEL

Hansel!

The wolf is closer now, almost at the tree.

Gretel scrambles to try and pull Hansel up as he struggles to keep his footing.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

Take my hand! Take my hand!

The wolf reaches the tree and snaps at Hansel's feet right as he is able to climb atop the branch, just narrowly missing getting bit.

He leans against the tree and pants as he tries to catch his breath.

HANSEL

We did it. We're safe now.

The wolf snarls at the two from the ground below. It paces back and forth on the ground below them.

GRETEL

What are we going to do now?

Hansel looks down at the wolf.

HANSEL

Well, it doesn't look like it's going to leave anytime soon.

GRETEL

We have to stay up here?

HANSEL

Looks like it?

GRETEL

For how long?

HANSEL

I don't know, Grettie. I really don't know.

Gretel's lips begin to quiver.

Hansel takes out his slice of bread from earlier and gives her a piece. They eat in silence, the grumbling of their stomachs joining the chorus of animal sounds emanating from the forest.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

We should try to get some rest.
We'll take turns. You sleep and
I'll keep watch.

Gretel tries to get as comfortable as possible on the branch and closes her eyes.

GRETEL

Be careful.

HANSEL

I will. Now get some rest. We have
a lot of walking to do.

EXT. TREE - DAY

Hansel opens his eyes. It is morning. There are birds chirping and sunlight wafts in through the branches.

He looks down. The wolf is gone.

HANSEL

Gretel.

She doesn't wake up. He lightly touches her shoulder and she starts awake.

GRETEL

What? What is it?

HANSEL

Nothing. Everything is alright. We should get to moving.

GRETEL

Is it gone?

HANSEL

Seems like it.

Hansel climbs down, using the hatchet's handle as a step again. He helps Gretel down.

A small white bird appears before them and stares right at them.

GRETEL

Wow, Hansel, look how white it is.
Like snow!

HANSEL

Maybe it's a sign.

The bird begins to hop away. It looks back and the children and continues to hop.

GRETEL

Do you think we should follow it?

HANSEL

We don't have any other clue where to go. Maybe we should.

EXT. THIRD PATH - CONTINUOUS

They begin to follow the bird down a path. The grass begins to get greener and the trees appear less scarier.

Hansel and Gretel smile at each other.

HANSEL

I think we've almost found the first path.

GRETEL

Do you think the pebbles will still be here?

EXT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE- CONTINUOUS

They stop in their tracks.

Before them is the largest and most beautiful house that either of them has ever seen. They stare at it, dumbfounded and with their mouths open.

It is brown and friendly, with flowers of every color planted all along the sides. The grass is a dark, crisp green. The windows are made of colorful glass, with flowered designs. The entire thing looks edible and wonderful.

It is like a scene out of a fairy tale. Smoke billows out of the chimney and butterflies fly about.

Hansel walks closer to it and touches the outer wall.

HANSEL

I think...

He smells it.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

I think it's made of gingerbread.

GRETEL

Could that even be possible?

HANSEL

I'm not sure.

He carefully breaks off a chunk from the windowsill. He slowly takes a bite.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

Gretel! You have to try this.

Gretel stands at a window, her tongue to it.

GRETEL

Hansel, the windows are made of sugar.

HANSEL
Really?

GRETEL
Yes!

The children eat and chomp away at the house, filling their stomachs.

HANSEL
Do you think someone actually lives here?

At this, the door swings open wide. The two children gasp and run to each other.

In the doorway stands an OLD WOMAN. She is very old, with wrinkles covering her entire face and her hands. Her eyes are clouded over and she cannot see very well. She uses a cane to walk.

OLD WOMAN
Who is there? Who is eating my house.

HANSEL
We..we're very sorry. We didn't know anyone lived here.

OLD WOMAN
Children? Are you children?

HANSEL
Yes, we are.

OLD WOMAN
Tell me your names.

HANSEL
Well...

OLD WOMAN
Go on. I won't bite.

HANSEL
My name is Hansel.

OLD WOMAN
And who is that with you.

She uses her cane to point in Gretel's direction. Gretel hides behind Hansel.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
Don't worry, child. I'm not going
to hurt you.

HANSEL
That's my sister, Gretel.

OLD WOMAN
How did you two find my house?

HANSEL
You see, we got lost in the forest
and we were very hungry.

OLD WOMAN
Where are your parents?

HANSEL
We don't know.

The old woman stands there saying nothing for a few moments.

OLD WOMAN
Well. What are you waiting for? Why
don't you come on in.

HANSEL
Oh, I don't think so. We really
need to get home.

OLD WOMAN
Come in and have some supper. You
can rest a little bit before you go
on your way.

Gretel looks at Hansel questioningly.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
Besides, it's going to get dark
again soon. You don't want to be
out in the forest in the dark.
There are many dangers out there.

Gretel whispers to Hansel.

GRETEL
Do you think it's safe?

Hansel shrugs.

HANSEL
Better than being out in the woods
in the dark.

The two follow the woman inside.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

The kitchen table is covered in foods and sweets of every kind. The children stare, wide-eyed.

There are dishes of soups, and decorated plates filled with potatoes, meats of all kinds, sausages. There are bowls of cheese and pitchers of sweet drinks.

There are also pastries of all colors and types. Dried and candied fruits, glazed buns, anything you can imagine.

The old woman hands each of the children a plate.

OLD WOMAN

Well. Dig in children.

HANSEL

We can't possibly take all this food.

OLD WOMAN

You don't have to worry about a thing.

GRETEL

Everything looks so delicious.

OLD WOMAN

It is. You must try one of everything. I insist.

The children hesitate for a while longer.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Go on.

They each load their plates with food, trying everything they can. They eat so quickly it is as if they have not seen food before in their lives.

The old woman looks on, her eyes clouded.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to go prepare beds for you two.

HANSEL

You don't have to do that. We can just rest on a chair or on the floor.

OLD WOMAN
Nonsense. No guest of mine will
sleep on the floor.

She exits and the children continue to eat.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

The old woman leads the children into the room. There are two
small beds made up with blankets and soft pillows.

She ushers them into the beds. She sits on the edge of the
bed Gretel is in and tucks her in.

Gretel is stiff and quiet. The old woman looks at her
quizzically.

OLD WOMAN
What is it, darling?

GRETEL
I shouldn't ask.

OLD WOMAN
It's quite alright. You can ask me
whatever you wish.

GRETEL
What happened to your eyes?

OLD WOMAN
Oh, darling. That is what happens
when you get to be as old as I am.
I can't see your pretty little face
like I would have been able to
years ago. Now all I see are shapes
and shadows.

GRETEL
Really?

OLD WOMAN
Yes, but I get along just fine. I
know where everything is.

Hansel clears his throat and speaks up.

HANSEL
Thank you so much for taking us in.
You are very kind.

OLD WOMAN

Oh don't worry about a thing,
darling.

She gets up slowly and walks to the edge of the room where
the door is.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Now you two get some rest and I'll
send a letter to town with the post
boy. Hopefully he can notify the
officer and we can get you out of
here and back to your parents as
soon as possible.

HANSEL

Oh that's not necessary. We were
just lost. If you show us the path
back to town, we'll be able to find
our way home on our own just fine.

OLD WOMAN

You really think so?

GRETEL

Yes, of course. Our Papa taught us
the way home from town.

OLD WOMAN

Well alright, dears. You just rest
up for now. We can talk about this
when you wake.

She leaves the room and the children turn to face each other,
whispering.

GRETEL

Why is she being so kind to us?

HANSEL

Some people are just kind, I
suppose.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hansel wakes to find himself trapped beneath bars. He is in a
square cage at the corner of the room. He screams.

HANSEL

Help! Heeeelp!

He rattles the bars of the cage, but cannot get it open. The
huge lock on the door to the opening won't budge.

HANSEL (CONT'D)
Gretel! Wake up! Somebody help me!

Gretel stirs in bed.

HANSEL (CONT'D)
Wake up!

She wakes up and sees Hansel in the cage. She jumps out of bed and looks down. She has a metal bracelet around her foot attached to a very long chain.

GRETEL
Hansel! Who did this to us?

HANSEL
It must have been the old woman.
Quick. Get me out of here!

Gretel rushes over to him, pulling the chain behind her. She tries to get the lock open, but fails.

GRETEL
It won't open.

HANSEL
Get something to smash it with.

Gretel runs around the room looking for something. She finds an unlit metal lantern and uses it to hit the lock. It clangs but doesn't make a difference. The lock won't break.

GRETEL
It's not working.

HANSEL
Heeeeeellllllppppppp!

GRETEL
Somebody please help us!

The door swings open. The old lady stands in the doorway.

OLD WOMAN
My, my. I see you've woken up. But why are you making such a raucous.

GRETEL
Why are you doing this to us?

OLD WOMAN
Doing what?

HANSEL

Why have you locked us up?

GRETEL

I thought you were going to help us get back home to our Papa.

OLD WOMAN

Oh you stupid little child. Hasn't anyone ever taught you not to talk to strangers?

HANSEL

But you gave us food and told us to get rest.

OLD WOMAN

Never accept the kindness of a woman who lives in a house made of gingerbread. Everyone knows that.

GRETEL

What are you going to do to us?

The old woman walks over to the children. She extends her hand and cups Gretel's chin. Gretel has a disgusted look on her face.

OLD WOMAN

I'm not going to do anything to you, my dear.

She lets go of Gretel and points her cane at Hansel.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

It's your brother you should be worried about.

GRETEL

Noooooooooooo.

Gretel tries to lunge at the old woman, but the woman turns and knocks her over using the cane in her hands.

OLD WOMAN

You try doing something like that one more time and I'm going to put you in a cage right next to your brother's.

HANSEL

But what are you going to do to me? Why won't you just let us go?

(MORE)

HANSEL (CONT'D)
We'll leave. We won't tell anyone.
Just please let us go.

OLD WOMAN
Let you go?

The old woman begins to laugh hysterically.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
Oh dear, you're a funny one, aren't
you?

GRETEL
Please.

OLD WOMAN
Here's what I'm going to do with
you. I'm going to fatten you up,
little boy. And then, when the time
is right, I'm going to put you into
the fire, roast you up real nice
and hot, and then I'm going to eat
you up.

She licks her fingers.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
I can almost taste it.

Gretel looks on horrified.

HANSEL
You wouldn't do that.

OLD WOMAN
Don't test me boy. Why do you think
I put you in that big cage? You
need all the space you need to get
nice and fat.

GRETEL
Why are you doing this?

OLD WOMAN
And you.

She turns to Gretel.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
You will obey every one of my
commands, or you will be put into a
cage of your own. Do you
understand?

Gretel nods.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
Good. Now go fetch your brother
something to eat.

HANSEL
I'm not hungry.

OLD WOMAN
You must eat. I don't care if
you're hungry or not.

Gretel does not move. She stares from the old woman to Hansel and back. The old woman looks at her impatiently.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
I said go!

Gretel promptly exits the room.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Gretel scrubs the floors, on her hands and knees. She hums a sad little song while she does so.

OLD WOMAN (O.S.)
Gretel! It's time for another
feeding!

Gretel stops working and calls out.

GRETEL
I *just* gave him food a few minutes
ago.

OLD WOMAN (O.S.)
Well give him more! He needs to get
fat!

Gretel rolls her eyes and gets to her feet. She takes a tray from the counter and begins to load it with food from the table.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Gretel walks into the room with the loaded tray. She slides it under Hansel's cage. He sits in the corner, sad and covered in food. He has gained some weight.

HANSEL
I can't eat anymore, Gretel.

GRETEL
She says you have to.

HANSEL
How are we going to get out of
here? We're going to be trapped
here forever.

GRETEL
I won't let that happen, Hansel.
I'll make sure we get out. I'll do
whatever it takes.

A cold wind blows and Hansel shivers. Gretel walks over to
the window to close it.

HER POV THROUGH WINDOW

The grass outside the house has faded. The trees in the area
are bare, no leaves on their branches. The flowers are all
dying. It is autumn.

BACK TO SCENE

HANSEL
We've already been here so long.

GRETEL
Do you think Papa misses us?

HANSEL
I don't know, Gretel.

GRETEL
I do. I think he misses us
terribly.

The old woman walks in.

OLD WOMAN
What are you two yapping away
about?

GRETEL
Nothing.

She comes closer to Hansel's cage.

OLD WOMAN
Let me feel your finger. I want to
check and see if you're fat enough
to eat yet.

Hansel takes a small bone from the pile of food around him and sticks it between the bars of the cage.

The old woman feels the bone and gets a disgusted look on her face.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Gretel, go bring your brother more food.

GRETEL

I just brought him an entire tray a few moments ago.

OLD WOMAN

I said go bring more.

Gretel huffs and leaves to go get more food.

HANSEL

I have no more room left to eat.

OLD WOMAN

You will eat all day if you have to. You are not getting fat enough. You have to hurry up and get fat. I've been waiting months already.

She storms out of the room and slams it shut. Hansel angrily picks up some of the food in the tray in front of him and throws it at the door.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Gretel walks through the doorway, bundled up in clothes but still shivering. She is holding firewood. She dumps the firewood on the ground by the door.

Snow blows in through the door behind her. She struggles to close the door against the wind.

Gretel takes pieces of firewood and throws them into the stove, rekindling the fire.

She blows at her icy fingers.

The old woman walks in.

OLD WOMAN

Oh, there you are.

GRETEL

I was out getting more firewood.

OLD WOMAN

Good, good. Take another tray of food to your brother.

GRETEL

Yes, ma'am.

OLD WOMAN

Fill it nice and full.

GRETEL

Yes, ma'am.

Gretel walks over to the table with a tray and begins to fill it.

OLD WOMAN

Put one of everything.

GRETEL

Yes, ma'am.

OLD WOMAN

He needs to enjoy his last meal and get every bit more fat as I could get him before tomorrow.

GRETEL

What?

OLD WOMAN

Tomorrow, you will help me cook him.

Gretel drops the tray of food and splashes of soup fly everywhere.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Look what you've done! Clean this all up.

GRETEL

Tomorrow? You're going to cook him tomorrow?

OLD WOMAN

I have waited far too long. I can't help it if he's not gaining weight fast enough. I cannot wait another day.

GRETEL

But why don't you wait one more week.

OLD WOMAN

No.

GRETEL

I'll make sure he gets nice and fat.

OLD WOMAN

I said tomorrow.

GRETEL

Please.

OLD WOMAN

When you're done cleaning this mess and getting more food to your brother, make sure you go out and collect some nice thick pieces of food. We need a hot and blazing fire to get him cooked all the way through.

The old woman exits. Gretel begins to cry.

GRETEL

What am I going to do?

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Gretel walks into the room with more food. Hansel is in the cage, playing with a pile of bones from meals past. He looks up when he hears Gretel.

HANSEL

Is everything alright, Grettie?

Gretel looks down, ashamed to look at her brother.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

What is it? Tell me?

She breaks down in tears.

GRETEL

I couldn't do it. I couldn't get us out of here on time. She's going to do it tomorrow.

HANSEL

What is she going to do tomorrow?

GRETEL

She's going to cook you tomorrow.

The color drains from Hansel's now-plump face.

HANSEL

There's nothing you could have done, Gretel. It's okay.

GRETEL

It's not okay. I can't let her do that!

HANSEL

Come here.

Gretel walks over close to the bars of the cage. Hansel sticks his hand out and holds hers.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

We are going to make it through this. We will think of something before tomorrow. Don't you worry about a thing.

GRETEL

I can't help it, Hansel. I'm so worried. I can't stay here without you. I can't let her hurt you.

HANSEL

She can't hurt me. I'm stronger than her.

They try to hold each other as best as they can through the bars of the cage.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Gretel stacks firewood by the door. The old woman walks in, a huge smile on her face. She sings.

OLD WOMAN

Today is the day! Today is the day!
La da day, today is the day!

She walks over to the oven, opens the door and puts her hand up in front of it.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

This fire isn't hot enough yet. Put some more wood.

Gretel complies and puts more wood in the fire. The old woman continues to sing.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
I've got the key. I've got the key.
Yummy yummy for me.

She takes out a single key and holds it up as she sings. The old woman furrows her brows then gets an evil look on her face.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
My dear, can you help me with something?

GRETEL
Yes, ma'am.

OLD WOMAN
I'm getting too tired. Will you check and see if the fire is hot enough?

Gretel tenses up. She knows what the witch is asking her to do. She will not go down without a fight.

GRETEL
I'm not sure I understand what you mean.

OLD WOMAN
I want you to check if the oven is hot enough yet.

GRETEL
How do I do that?

OLD WOMAN
Climb up very close to it and see how hot it is.

GRETEL
I don't know how to do that. Can you show me?

The old woman gets frustrated. She sets the key down on the table and walks over to the oven.

OLD WOMAN
You children are useless. You didn't do anything to help me. I will eat you both and will no longer be bothered by you.

GRETEL

I'm sorry, ma'am. I just don't know how to check if the oven is hot enough.

OLD WOMAN

Here. I will show you.

The old woman climbs atop the oven and stands before it. She turns around to face Gretel.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

See. It's really quite simple. All you do is climb here and put your hand out in front of the fire to check.

GRETEL

Let me see. Am I doing it correctly?

She gets close to the old woman and pushes her with all her might. The old woman struggles to find her balance, then falls backwards into the flames.

OLD WOMAN

Ahhh! You stupid child! Look what you've done! Help me! Help meee!

Gretel struggles with the weight of the oven door then pushes it shut. The sound of the old woman's screams are muffled.

Gretel runs over to the table and takes the key. She undoes the chain around her foot then runs out of the kitchen.

The old woman's screams fade then stop.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gretel runs into the room, eyes wide and out of breath. She shuts the door behind her then slumps against it.

Hansel, seeing her state, gets close to the bars and grabs hold of them.

HANSEL

Gretel? Is everything alright? What did you do? What were those screams?

Gretel slowly turns to look at her brother.

GRETEL
I killed her.

HANSEL
You did what?

GRETEL
I...I killed her.

HANSEL
How did you do that?

GRETEL
I pushed her into the oven and
closed the door.

HANSEL
Are we going to be able to get out
of here?

Gretel remembers that she has the key in her hand. She runs over to Hansel's cage and opens the lock.

Hansel climbs out and hugs his sister tight.

HANSEL (CONT'D)
You did it, Gretel. You saved us!
We're free!

GRETEL
Let's get out of here.

The children run out of the room.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The children are on their way out of the house when they see a large chest in the middle of the living room.

GRETEL
Wait, Hansel.

HANSEL
What is it?

GRETEL
Do you think the key opens this
chest?

HANSEL
Try it.

Gretel tries the key and the chest opens to reveal thousands of gold coins and an assortment of jewels.

GRETEL
Take as much as you can.

HANSEL
Here, I'll fill my pockets. You
fill yours.

They fill their pockets and make their way out of the house.

EXT. OLD WOMAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hansel breaks off a gingerbread windowsill.

GRETEL
What is that for?

HANSEL
In case we get hungry on the way.

They see a clearly paved path and run towards it.

EXT. FOURTH PATH - CONTINUOUS

The path is clear and has evidence of being used frequently.

HANSEL
I think we're on the right track,
Grettie.

GRETEL
I think so too.

HANSEL
It feels so good to be outside
again.

GRETEL
I can't wait to get home to Papa!

The two follow the path, holding hands and smiling, as they run happily.

EXT. LAKE - CONTINUOUS

The two get to the body of water and stop. Their smiles fade.

HANSEL

I knew this was too good to be true.

GRETEL

Don't give up, Hansel. We've come all this way. We can't just give up now. Let's figure out a way to get across.

HANSEL

Well we have nothing to build a boat with.

Gretel looks up at the sky. The sun is low in the sky.

GRETEL

It's going to get dark very soon. We must find a way now.

At that moment, a large white swan, bigger than any swan the children had ever seen, swims up to the shore.

GRETEL (CONT'D)

Do you think we could...

HANSEL

We have to try. We have no other way.

Hansel gets close to the swan and pets its head. He puts one foot around the body of the swan and sits on it. The swan does not react.

HANSEL (CONT'D)

I think we should be fine. Here let me help you, Grettie. Just be careful not to fall in the water.

Hansel helps Gretel climb on top of the swan.

As soon as Gretel sits down, the swan begins to glide across the lake. The children hold on top it.

GRETEL

Do you think it knows where it's going?

HANSEL

We don't even know where we're going. Anywhere is better than here.

The swan swims until it reaches the opposite shore. Then it stops and waits for the children to climb off.

Gretel hugs the swan.

GRETEL
Thank you big birdie!

EXT. FINAL PATH - CONTINUOUS

The children look at the slowly darkening sky as they run down a path. Hansel stops in his tracks.

HANSEL
Gretel look!

Gretel looks to where he is pointing and sees the path of glistening pebbles.

GRETEL
We're going to get home, Hansel!
We're going to get home!

They follow the path of pebbles until the cottage comes into view.

EXT. COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

The children come up the path to the house. Beneath a tree in the yard they see a large stone.

GRETEL
What is that?

Hansel shrugs.

They walk over to it and see that it is a headstone. On it reads "Hilda".

The children exchange a look and smile.

HANSEL
She's gone.

GRETEL
She is!

They run into the house.

INT. COTTAGE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The children run in smiling.

GRETEL
Papa?

HANSEL
Papa where are you?

GRETEL
We're home!

Papa is not in the kitchen.

INT. COTTAGE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The children run into their parents' room, but it is empty.
They exchange worried glances.

HANSEL
Papa?

GRETEL
Where is he Hansel?

INT. COTTAGE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

They run into their own bedroom and find Papa sleeping on one
of the beds. Hansel breathes a sigh of relief and Gretel runs
onto the bed and into her sleeping father's arms.

GRETEL
Wake up Papa! Wake up!

Papa opens his eyes and begins to cry.

PAPA
I'm losing my mind. What is this
cruelty? I'm imagining my children
in my arms again.

GRETEL
Papa this isn't a dream!

Papa sits up. Hansel walks over too.

PAPA
Grettie? Hansel? How?

HANSEL

We finally found our way back home,
Papa!

Papa hugs his children tight as he sobs loudly. The three lie in bed, hugging and crying.

PAPA

I will never let you go ever again.
You don't know what you have until
it is taken from under your nose. I
love you so much my little doves.

The three hold each other tight for hours until they drift off to sleep.

FADE OUT.

THE END