

HANSEL AND GRETEL

A ONE ACT PLAY FOR CHILDREN

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SCRIPT AND SCORE BY

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Dramatis Personae

Father

Mother

Hansel

Gretel

Witch

Villager 1

Villager 2

Chorus of Villagers

The Good Elf

Elf 1

Elf 2

Elf 3

Elf 4

A Group of Crows

Chorus of Animals

Scene 1, In the Village

PROCESSIONAL MUSIC

The villagers process in to the music, carrying a maypole. It is a festival day and they are dressed in their finest clothes. Underneath these, however, the villagers are dressed in rags. The harvest has been poor, life in the village is tough and there is not enough food to go around. The people are miserable and starving. The maypole is held up by two children centre-stage and the village children dance around it during the song. After the song the maypole is taken up-stage.

SONG 1 **Join Together, Dance and Sing**

Chorus:

Join together, dance and sing,
On this happy festal day.
All our troubles leave far behind,
Joy and laughter drive them all away.

Verse 1:

Life in the village is so hard,
Many a tear is shed.
We need to work from dawn till dusk,
To earn our daily bread.

Chorus

Verse 2:

Not many sounds of joy are heard,
But for the girls and boys.
They run and skip and play their games
With sticks and stones for toys.

Chorus

Verse 3:

Around some corner there must be
A better life than this.
Where we would know for evermore
True happiness and bliss.

Chorus

VILLAGER 1 It's no good, I can't keep up this pretence.

VILLAGER 2 What on earth do you mean?

VILL 1 Pretending we are happy and that life in the village is normal. I'm starving, and look, my clothes are in tatters!

VILL 2 Why don't you get your wife to stitch them up?

VILL 1 She's sewn them so many times that there's none of the original fabric left. She's repairing the previous repairs.

VILL 2 We must take an example from the children and look on the bright side.

VILL 1 Well, what is the bright side?

VILL 2 I'll let you know when I've thought of it. *(He exits.)*
(Enter Hansel and Gretel's father.)

VILL 1 Ah, Anton, have you come to drown your sorrows with a mug of ale?

FATHER I would if there were any. That turnip brew really does not taste like the real thing – and it gives me a belly ache.

VILL 1 It can't be as bad as the ache I get from an empty stomach. It's so noisy it wakes up the whole family in the night.

FATHER Where is my wife? I have something to discuss with her.

MOTHER *(Off-stage)* Anty-Wanty dear! Anty-Wanty where are you? It's dinner time.

FATHER Oh no, she's doing that Anty-Wanty thing again. That means bad news. Here I am, Beatrice! What is it, my darling?
(Enter mother.)

MOTHER Oh there you are, Anton.

FATHER Beatrice, I have some bad news for you.

MOTHER Can things get any worse than they already are?

FATHER I have spent the day wandering the town looking for work.

MOTHER And?

FATHER There are no jobs to be found.

MOTHER But what shall we do? We are so poor.

FATHER I have had an idea. We must send the children into the forest to live. They can search for roots, nuts and berries. We simply cannot afford to feed them anymore.

MOTHER I suppose then we could eat every day, instead of taking turns. But....

FATHER That's settled then. We'll do it tomorrow.

MOTHER But ... but....

(Enter Hansel and Gretel.)

HANSEL Mother, father, did you call us for dinner?
MOTHER No, it's not your turn today.
GRETEL But mother, we are starving.
FATHER There is not enough to go around, Gretel my dear.
HANSEL But we thought you would find work in the town, father.
FATHER There is no work.
MOTHER Children, we have no choice but to send you into the forest to fend for yourselves.
GRETEL But mother, there are wolves there.
HANSEL And evil spirits.
FATHER We're sorry children, but our minds are made up. You must leave at once.
MOTHER Here is a basket with the last of the bread for the journey.
FATHER Farewell children! *(He gives them a quick hug and exits.)*
MOTHER *(She goes to speak but is too upset for words. She hugs them and then runs off weeping. The children cross downstage.)*
HANSEL Well, there's a fine thing! Our own parents have thrown us out.
GRETEL *(Weeping)* How could they?
HANSEL Don't worry, Gretel, I have a plan. Instead of eating the bread we will break it into small pieces and leave a trail through the forest. Then we will be able to find our way home.
GRETEL It's a good idea – but I don't think we will be welcome at home.
HANSEL Perhaps if we find plenty of food we can sell some and become rich.
GRETEL Come on then, we must find shelter in the forest before it gets dark.
(They exit.)

End of Scene

Scene 2, In the Forest

When the lights go up a flock of crows are moving around the stage, pecking up breadcrumbs. As they exit, enter Hansel and Gretel with a basket full of nuts and berries.

GRETEL Do you think we have enough yet, Hansel? The basket is nearly full.

HANSEL Then it's time to return home. The wolves will soon be stalking the forest.

(A wolf howls somewhere nearby.)

GRETEL I'm frightened, Hansel. It's beginning to get dark.

HANSEL Let's follow the trail home.

(He looks for the crumbs.)

That's strange. I can't see any of the crumbs we dropped.

GRETEL What about over here? *(She searches.)* Oh no, I can't find any either. How can this be?

HANSEL There is only one explanation; they must have been eaten by the birds.

GRETEL Oh, those horrid creatures! Now we are lost. We'll never find the way home again.

(She sits down heavily and Hansel sits beside her. The lights begin to dim.)

HANSEL You must not blame the birds, Gretel. They are as hungry as we are - and they weren't to know we depended on the crumbs.

GRETEL No, I suppose not.

(The wolf howls again.)

Hansel, do you think the wolves are very hungry as well?

HANSEL I expect so, Gretel.

GRETEL What do wolves eat?

HANSEL Well, I...I...I expect they eat nuts and berries just like us. Come closer to me Gretel. The nights are cold in the forest. We will need to keep each other warm. *(She snuggles up to him.)*

GRETEL Hansel?

HANSEL Yes, Gretel.

GRETEL Do you believe in goblins?

HANSEL I'm not sure, Gretel. I've never actually seen one.

GRETEL I hope there are none in this forest. It would be simply awful if one came along now.

HANSEL I think we need to get some sleep and in the morning we can try to find our way home.

GRETEL I'm very sleepy. Will you tell me a story, Hansel?

HANSEL Of course. Once upon a time there was a little girl called Red Riding Hood. She lived in a palace with her wicked stepmother, the queen.
(Gretel's head lolls and she snores gently.)
One day the queen looked in her mirror and said mirror, mirror on the wall – who shall take me to ... the Ball?

(He falls asleep.)

DANCE The Crows' Dance
(During the dance the crows drop leaves onto the sleeping children to keep them warm and the chorus of forest animals gradually enter and watch. After the dance the crows fly off.)

SONG 2 Such Young and Innocent Children Animals

Verse 1:
It is so strange to see these poor children
Lying so helpless with no-one to care.
How could it be that someone could leave them?
Dangers are lurking everywhere.

Chorus:
Is there some way that we can help them,
Lead them far away from here?
Find some place where they can be happy,
Warm and safe from all danger and fear?

Verse 2:
They are such young and innocent children;
They have no knowledge of evil or good.
They must be hungry, soon they'll be starving.
How did they come to be lost in this wood?

Verse 3:
In this dark wood the dangers are many;
Strange shapes and shadows are watching us here.
Eyes in the blackness follow our movements;
But try to catch them, they disappear.

End of Scene

Scene 3, In the Forest, the Next Morning

Gretel wakes up, yawning and stretching in the morning sun.

- GRETEL *(Gently shaking Hansel.)* Hansel, wake up, it's morning!
- HANSEL Gretel, what a good idea of yours to cover us with leaves to keep warm.
- GRETEL It wasn't me. I thought it was your idea.
- HANSEL But, if it wasn't you, who was it? Wow, someone in the forest has been looking after us while we've been asleep!
- GRETEL Perhaps it was the wolves.
(Hansel looks around for a path.)
- HANSEL Let's take this path. It looks as if it ought to lead somewhere important.
(They start to follow the track.)
- GRETEL Hansel, look! There is a cottage in the mist. Perhaps whoever lives there can show us the way back to the village.

(Gretel grabs Hansel's hand and pulls him in the direction of the cottage. As they get nearer, they freeze in surprise. The cottage is made of sugar, honeycomb and sweets of all sizes and colours. The cottage is open one side so the audience can see inside.)

- HANSEL Oh do look! The cottage – it's made of sugar, chocolate, marzipan and sweets.
- GRETEL How lovely. Can we try a piece?
(She breaks off a piece and eats it.)
- HANSEL Gretel, I don't think we should. It doesn't belong to us.
- GRETEL Hm, delicious. I think we must have died and ended up in heaven. Here, have a piece. *(Gives Hansel a bite.)*
- HANSEL Gretel, it is very tasty but.....
(Suddenly, the door bursts open and a hideous witch jumps out. The children jump in alarm and grab one-another.)
- WITCH Who dares to eat my house?
- GRETEL Oh, I'm terribly sorry. I've just eaten your door knocker.
(Softening her tone.)
- WITCH Oh never mind. Why don't you come inside? There is plenty more.

HANSEL Why, thank you, sir, or is it madam? I can't tell. You do have a bit of a beard, after all.

WITCH Madam, of course. *(Aside)* The witch has to be a lady.

GRETEL What did you say?

WITCH Nothing, my dear. Now, come inside, won't you? *(She leads the way.)*

HANSEL *(Following)* Thank you.

GRETEL Hansel, no! You must not go inside.

(It is too late. The witch pushes Hansel roughly into a cage and locks the door.)

HANSEL Help!

GRETEL You wicked woman. What do you think you're doing with my brother?

WITCH You are such foolish children. Do you not recognise a witch when you see one? Now I have you in my power.

SONG 3 Now I Have Them in My Clutches Witch

Hansel, dear, you're much too thin,
A boy like you should have more fat!
Then you'd make a tasty supper;
Tell me, what you think of that!

Now I have them in my clutches,
Let me see what can be done.
I will make them do my bidding;
I will surely have some fun.

Oh, dear Gretel, you're a strong girl,
You can do the daily chores!
I can rest while you are working,
Washing, cooking, scrubbing floors.

Now I have them in my clutches
Let me see what can be done.
I will make them do my bidding;
I will surely have some fun.

(During the song Gretel cowers in a corner near Hansel's cage and shrinks with fear every time the witch approaches her. At one point the witch goes front of house to menace the children in the audience.)

GRETEL *(To audience)* A w...w...witch! Oh no, what have we done?

HANSEL Quick, Gretel, run home and get help.

GRETEL I'm not leaving you, Hansel. Besides, I don't know the way.

WITCH You shall stay and do chores for me, while I fatten your brother for the pot.

GRETEL No, you can't eat him, he is far too bony. Eat me, I'm fatter, look.
(She tries to make her belly stick out.)

WITCH Boys taste much better than girls. Didn't you know that? Now come over here and stir this cauldron while I go outside to pick some herbs. And when you've done that you can sweep the floor, clear the table and cook the dinner.

GRETEL I'm not your servant!

WITCH I'm afraid that's where you are wrong, my dear. And do you know what happened to my last servant? I ate her!
(Cackles with evil laughter and exits.)

HANSEL Oh Gretel, I'm so sorry. This is all my fault.

GRETEL I'm the one who ate some of the witch's house, not you.

HANSEL Yes, but I was greedy and wanted to see what was inside.

GRETEL Oh Hansel, I don't think we will ever see mother and father again...or our little cottage. It makes me so sad.

HANSEL Don't despair, Gretel. We will find a way to escape from here. There must be a way to beat this evil witch.

SONG 4 Dearest Gretel Don't Despair Hansel, Gretel and Chorus of Elves

Verse 1

Gretel:

Hansel, I wish I were not so afraid for us!
It's not the work I mind,
But the witch is so unkind;
There's no telling just what she might do.

Hansel:

Gretel, dearest, do not lose heart,
Someone soon will come to our aid;
Then we will run and be so – free from all care.
Please, don't look so mournful,
Dearest Gretel, don't despair.

Verse 2

Gretel:

Hansel, how can you be so sure of what will be?
The future looks so black,
If the clock could just turn back,
Then we would be wiser than before.

Hansel:

It's no use regretting the past,
Let us think of what we should do.
At home our worried parents will not find rest
Until they have brought us
Safe and sound back to our home.

Chorus of Elves:

Children, your mournful song has reached the elfin realm.
Somewhere, not far from you
Friends are faithful, friends are true;
Help is never very far away.

(Enter the witch, carrying some fresh herbs.)

WITCH What was that noise? I thought I heard singing.

HANSEL We didn't hear anything, did we Gretel?

GRETEL What? Oh no, nothing at all.

WITCH Good, because I don't like to hear children singing. *(Advancing on Gretel)* And if I do – I cut their tongues out. Is that clear?

GRETEL Y... y... yes!

WITCH Now girl, go and fetch some firewood from the forest. I need to prepare a stew.

GRETEL Don't be afraid, Hansel, I'll return soon.

(Exit Gretel, into the forest. We see her weeping as she gathers some firewood. As she wipes her eyes on the hem of her dress she fails to see the elves creeping out of hiding and surrounding her. Suddenly, she opens her eyes.)

Ah, no, don't eat me, don't eat me!

ELF 1 Calm down, little girl! We have no intention of eating you, we are here to help you.

GRETEL You've got a cheek calling me little. You're dwarves.

ELF 2 Elves actually.

GRETEL But how do you know I need help?

ELF 3 It's the elf magic. We know everything.

GOOD ELF Let me explain: I am the Good Elf and these are my elfin friends. We roam the forest righting wrongs and battling evil.

GRETEL Then I'm pleased to meet you, Good Elf.

ELF 4 You could say we are the National Elf Service.

GOOD ELF Do be quiet Sparrow Legs.

ELF 4 Don't mock my legs. They're long enough to reach the ground, aren't they?

(Elves laugh. Elf 2 is scratching himself.)

ELF 3 Hey, Brambleberry, why are you scratching yourself?

ELF 2 'Cos I'm the only one who knows where I itch.

(Elves laugh and so does Gretel.)

ELF 1 You think that's funny, you should watch us play hide and seek with these bells on our shoes.

GRETEL It must be fun being an elf.

ELF 3 Not when you always have to work on Christmas day.

GOOD ELF Now Gretel, we have ways of dealing with evil witches.

GRETEL *(Aside)* He even knows my name.

GOOD ELF Elf magic is the most powerful in the whole forest. A witch is no match for our powers.

ELF 1 We have magic words the witch would never even dream of.

ELF 4 We can make her powers melt like butter on a fire.

GOOD ELF Listen and we'll explain.

SONG 5 The Elves' Song

Chorus:
Shashtakh is a magic word
And with such a word you will find that
Joy will come to you.
Rishtakh is a magic wish
And with such a wish you will find
Your dreams will all come true.

Versel:

It could be so very easy to cast a spell
Upon that wicked witch.
And such a spell would make her good
And no more would she frighten you so.

Chorus

Verse 2:

If we were to creep up to her house
And wait for her to walk through the door,
Then we could say our magic words
And the witch would be under our spell.

Chorus

(The elves grab Gretel's hands and drag her off towards the witch's house.)

End of Scene

Scene 4, Outside the Witch's House

Gretel and the elves stealthily approach the witch's cottage. We hear her taunting Hansel inside.

WITCH It won't be long, boy, and you'll be fat enough for the pot.

GRETEL Poor Hansel, he'll need stress counselling after this.

HANSEL Stop teasing me you stupid, ugly, old bag. I'm not frightened by your feeble threats. If I could get out of this cage I'd ram your broomstick down your throat!

GRETEL Or perhaps the witch will need the counselling.

GOOD ELF Show yourself, Esmeralda. Your time of reckoning has come.

WITCH Who dares to use my name? *(She peers out of the door.)*
(Aside) Why, it's those stunted cub scouts again. What do you want this time?

GOOD ELF We want your powers, you wicked witch.

WITCH Why don't you leave me alone? Go and audition for Snow White at the *King's Theatre (or similar)*. They are looking for seven dwarves.

ELF 1 We're not dwarves, we're elves, and you know it.

WITCH It's the same thing isn't it?

ELF 2 Unluckily for you it's not. Dwarves do not have magical powers and we do!

GOOD ELF Now, please be kind enough to step outside so I can finish you off without wrecking your cottage. It would be a shame to spoil all those lovely sweets.

GRETEL Yes, come out, you cowardly woman, and meet some superior magic.

WITCH Why you.....
(She storms out of the cottage looking for Gretel, who hides behind the elves.)
Where is she? Where is that impudent upstart?
(The Good Elf makes a motion towards the witch with his hand and a flash of lightning [and thunderclap] stops the witch in her tracks.)
That's not fair; I wasn't ready!
(Gretel sneaks around the back and into the cottage to free Hansel.)

GOOD ELF Now boys – it's time.

ELVES *(Chanting) Shashtakh, Rishtakh, Shashtakh, Rishtakh.....*
(This increases in volume and speed until)
there is an enormous flash of lightning and thunderclap and the witch lets out an ear-piercing shriek before falling onto the ground. The onlookers watch in awe. After a few seconds the witch gets up and brushes herself off.)

WITCH *(In the voice of a harmless old granny.)*
 Oh...Oh my goodness me. What an experience. I hardly know where I am. *(Noticing the elves.)* Oh hello, can I help you?

ELF 3 No, thank you, we are quite alright.
(Hansel and Gretel emerge from the cottage.)

WITCH Oh hello, what sweet children, and what a lovely cottage. Whose is it?

GOOD ELF Oh, it used to belong to an evil witch.

WITCH Goodness gracious.

GOOD ELF I suppose you can have it if you wish.

WITCH But it appears to be made of sweets. Children like sweets, don't they?
 Children, would you like some sweets from this cottage? Help yourself – they are yours to take.

GRETEL What's happened to her? She's completely changed.

ELF 3 It's the elf magic. She's lost her powers and her memory.
(The witch crosses to Hansel, who shies away at first.)

WITCH Come on, young man. Oh, aren't you shy! *(She grabs his hand.)*
 Come on, come with Granny and have some sweeties.
(She helps him break some pieces off the cottage and they both start to eat.)

GRETEL How can we thank you, Mr Elf?

GOOD ELF No need; we're just doing our job. National Elf Service, remember?

GRETEL Oh yes.

WITCH You'll never manage to eat this whole house. We need some more children! What about those down there.
(Pointing towards front of house.)

HANSEL Gretel and I will take some and share it. Come on, Gretel.

(They go FOH.)

GRETEL *(To the Good Elf)* And what about the children from the village? Can they come and share the food with us?

GOOD ELF Consider it done.

(He waves his hand, there is a flash of lightning and the villagers enter at once.)

VILLAGER 2 Hey, look at that cottage; it's made of candy!

WITCH Come on, there's plenty for everyone. This is a magic house; the more you eat, the more there is.

GRETEL Wow, that's fantastic!

HANSEL We can sell these sweets in town and use the money to buy food. The village will never go hungry again.

VILLAGER 1 Hooray for Hansel and Gretel!

ALL Hooray!

(Enter Mother and Father and Hansel and Gretel run into their arms.)

SONG 6 Joy and Happiness Everywhere (leading to SONG 1, Reprise)

Verse 1:

Joy and happiness everywhere,
Children's sweet laughter fills the air.
There's good news we must celebrate
The witch is evil no more.

Chorus:

Once we were just so poor,
But now we have ample riches.
No clothes no food to eat,
But now life is so complete.
Evil has yielded to good.

Once we were cold at night,
But now we are just so warm.
So sick we could not work,
But now we will never shirk.
Evil has yielded to good.

Verse 2:

Join with us as we dance and sing,
And banish ev'ry wicked thing.
Good has triumphed and that is why
We celebrate today.

Chorus:

Once we were just so poor,
But now we have ample riches.
No clothes no food to eat,
But now life is so complete.
Evil has yielded to good.

Once we were cold at night,
But now we are just so warm.
So sick we could not work,
But now we will never shirk.
Evil has yielded to good.

Song 1, Verse:

Life in the village is just fine;
No better life than this.
Here we will know for evermore
True happiness and bliss.

Chorus (twice):

Join together dance and sing
On this happy, special day.
All our troubles leave far behind,
Joy and laughter drive them all away.

The End