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Dramatic Publishing

HANSEL AND GRETEL

**A new adaptation
by
William Glennon**



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HANSEL AND GRETEL

**A Play in Three Acts
For Six Actors**

CHARACTERS

**THE BIRD
THE GNOME
THE WITCH
MOTHER
FATHER
HANSEL
GRETEL**

TIME: Long ago.

PLACE: In and near a deep forest.

SCENES

ACT ONE, Scene One:

A dark recess in the forest, night.

ACT ONE, Scene Two:

In front of the cottage, the next day.

ACT TWO, Scene One:

The recess in the forest, that night.

ACT TWO, Scene Two:

The Witch's Hut, the next morning.

ACT THREE:

The Witch's Hut, two weeks later.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *A dark recess in the forest, late at night. There is a "rock" on platform, center. The wind is howling, and there is occasional thunder.*

AT RISE: *After a moment, the white BIRD enters swiftly, darting about, seeking shelter, finally huddling against the rock. The BIRD is nervous and frightened. The GNOME enters, even more frightened and nervous and moves about. Finally they see and recognize each other.*

GNOME *(over the sound of the storm).* I've been to the town at the edge of the woods.

BIRD *(a mournful cry).* And I've gone further than that.

GNOME. I've failed! Oh, I've failed!

BIRD. And I have failed, too!

GNOME. She'll change me into a bat!

BIRD. Or a rat, or a gnat or a large ugly cat!

GNOME. She'll cut us to pieces.

BIRD. And fry us in fat.

GNOME and BIRD *(together).* We failed.

GNOME *(after a slight pause).* And the fence needs mending.

BIRD. Yes, that's what she said. The fence needs mending.

GNOME. That's what she always says, when she's hungry.

BIRD. And she's always hungry.

GNOME and BIRD (*together*). The fence needs mending.

BIRD. Well, we can't go back. We must hide somewhere!
We must hide!

GNOME. Hide? She'll find us. She'll put on her spectacles and ride on her broom and find us wherever we are.

BIRD. We're doomed, little Gnome, we're doomed!

GNOME. We're wrapped up and tied up and doomed!

BIRD. She'll thump us, and bump us, and cause quite a rumpus!

GNOME. She'll squeeze us, and tease us, and probably freeze us!

BIRD (*starting to cry*). I don't want to be frozen!

GNOME. And I don't want to be thumped!

(An enormous crash of thunder is heard, then a loud, horrendous cackling as the WITCH enters up on the rock over them. She laughs fiendishly, loud and long, and the BIRD and the GNOME are nearly struck dumb.)

WITCH (*unearthly, waving her broom*). The fence needs mending!

GNOME and BIRD (*panic*). The fence needs mending!

WITCH. Where have you been?

GNOME. To the edge of the woods...

BIRD. And I have been further than that...

WITCH. And you've failed!

GNOME and BIRD. Yes, we've failed...

WITCH. I can smell that you've failed...so I'll change you both into bats. Perhaps rats, little gnats or a couple of cats...

GNOME and BIRD. Oh, no!

WITCH. I'll grind you to powder and stuff you in vats...

GNOME. But we tried!

BIRD. Very hard!

WITCH. Then where are the children? I smell no children!

Speak, Gnome!

GNOME. Well, at the village near the edge of the woods,

I found some children playing hide and seek...

WITCH. My mouth's watering!

GNOME. They were all running about, laughing...

WITCH. Go on...

GNOME. So I danced out before them and told them I knew where they could find a house made of candy and cake.

WITCH. And...

GNOME. One cried out, "Where, little Gnome? Where is this house made of candy and cake?" So I said, "Follow me!" And skipped merrily away.

WITCH. And...

GNOME. No one followed.

WITCH. You skipped merrily away too fast.

GNOME. "Come!" I called back, "Follow me to the house of candy and cake!" But they all shook their heads and then one of them spoke, a very fat little boy. He said...

WITCH. I'm drooling!

GNOME. No, he didn't say, "I'm drooling," he said, "We can't follow you. Our mothers told us never to take candy from strange little gnomes."

WITCH. Mothers! Always mothers! Meddlesome, maddening mothers! I hate mothers!

GNOME. But if it weren't for mothers, there wouldn't be...

WITCH. Silence! You nervous gnome! You miserable failure! (*To the BIRD.*) And you? Do you come crawling back with such a story?

BIRD. I...I...I...

WITCH. Speak! Tell me of *your* failure while I consider a suitable punishment.

BIRD. Well, I went searching for children beyond the village for miles and miles. Finally I came upon a little cottage. And in the yard, in front of the little cottage, I saw two children, a boy and a girl.

WITCH. Mmmmmmm. Yummy!

BIRD. The little boy was playing a pipe, a lovely tune, and the little girl was dancing and singing.

WITCH. Go on.

BIRD. So I limped into the yard and chirped winningly.
(*Chirps.*)

WITCH. What happened?

BIRD. The little boy and the little girl...

WITCH. Fat? A fat little boy and a fat little girl?

BIRD. No, not fat.

WITCH. Oh.

BIRD. They ran to me and the little boy said, "Look, sister, a little bird who cannot fly!"

WITCH. Yes, that usually gets them, soft-hearted creatures that they are.

BIRD. And the little girl began to cry.

WITCH. Good.

BIRD. Then she ran and got me a drink of water, and the little boy tried to smooth my feathers and told me not to be afraid.

WITCH. The fence needs mending!

BIRD. Yes...so I whimpered and said, "You are such good children. You should be rewarded. Come with me. I know where there's a house made of candy and cake."

WITCH. And...

BIRD. And they were ready to follow, when suddenly the door of the cottage opened and out came their...

WITCH. Mother!

BIRD. Yes! And their father.

WITCH. Fathers are almost as bad as mothers, but not quite. Mothers! Ugh!

BIRD. And they called the children by name and said they were all going to gather wood. So they placed me on a little blanket and gave me a crumb of bread and told me to rest, and off they went.

WITCH. What happened when they got back?

BIRD. I don't know.

WITCH. You don't know?

BIRD. I didn't stay. I left. I came here.

WITCH. You fool! They might have followed you!

BIRD. Yes, I know.

WITCH. *What!* You know?

BIRD. I...couldn't do it. (*A pregnant silence.*)

WITCH (*low and terrible and growing*). I'll boil you in oil...I'll de-feather you...you foolish, disobedient bird...you'll regret this...oh, yes, you'll regret this.

GNOME. Please. I'm sure the little bird only meant to...

WITCH. Silence! Under the rules of the charm, under the cast of my spell, under my eyes and my long bony nose, into my power you fell! I speak and you obey!

GNOME and BIRD. You speak and we obey.

WITCH. And now! We shall go to the little hut. Yes, we shall all go! I'll plot and I'll plan and I'll ponder...and I'll show you how to get that little boy and girl...and this time there will be no failure!

BIRD. Poor Hansel, poor Gretel.

WITCH. What's that? Hansel? Gretel? You know the names of the little dears! Excellent! The fence needs mending...the fence needs mending...

GNOME (*joining in*). The fence needs mending...the fence needs mending...

BIRD (*joining in sadly*). The fence needs mending...the fence needs mending...*(They repeat this in a growing chant. Thunder and wind.)*

WITCH (*above the din*). I'm coming Hansel! I'm coming Gretel! And you'll be sorry!

TOGETHER. The fence needs mending...the fence needs mending...the fence needs...*(The sound reaches a peak and the lights fade out as the WITCH laughs fiendishly.)*

SCENE TWO

SCENE: *In front of the cottage. The next day.*

AT RISE: *Gradually the sounds of the storm subside and we hear a melody on the pipe and see HANSEL, sitting on a stool playing, and GRETEL, nearby dancing. They are very happy. In a moment we see that GRETEL is getting very tired. Finally she sinks down, exhausted.*

HANSEL (*stops playing*). You tire of my tune, Gretel?

GRETEL. No, I tire because I'm hungry, Hansel.

HANSEL. Me, too. But playing music takes my mind off my stomach.

GRETEL. But dancing takes more energy, and you've just got to have food for energy. Everyone knows that.

HANSEL. Listen, another tune. A brand new one, one you've never heard before.

GRETEL. And one I don't care to hear now. I'm hungry, for food, not for music.

HANSEL. Well...

GRETEL. I should like a piece of gingerbread the size of a house...

HANSEL. A house?

GRETEL. Like the house the bird told us about yesterday.

The house made of candy and cake.

HANSEL. Imagine! Such a strange little bird.

GRETEL. I wish we had followed the bird, instead of gathering wood.

HANSEL (*cups his hands and elaborately peeks inside*).

Oh, my! Guess what I have here?

GRETEL. I don't want to guess.

HANSEL. Unbelievable!

GRETEL. I don't care.

HANSEL. Large and small, all at once!

GRETEL. How can something be large and small all at once?

HANSEL. Strange, but true!

GRETEL. What is it?

HANSEL. Want to peek?

GRETEL. No.

HANSEL. It's wet.

GRETEL. I don't care.

HANSEL. And it's long, and rough, and sometimes smooth.

GRETEL. That's impossible.

HANSEL. Want to peek?

GRETEL. No.

HANSEL. Deep and shallow, too. Want to peek?

GRETEL. I guess.

HANSEL. Just a little peek. (*She peeks.*) See? It's a river.

GRETEL. A what?

HANSEL. A river. It's large where it ends at the ocean, and small where it starts in the hills, and it's wet, and rough and sometimes smooth and deep here and shallow there: a river! (*He makes the gurgling sounds of water.*) A long, wet river! Swoosh... (*GRETEL begins to laugh. HANSEL takes his pipe and plays again and for a moment GRETEL dances. She stops.*)

GRETEL. It's no use, Hansel. No matter what we do, I can't forget I'm hungry.

HANSEL. Poppa should be here soon. Perhaps he sold his wood in the village and bought food for us.

GRETEL. He wasn't able to sell any yesterday.

HANSEL. I know.

GRETEL. We should have gone with the bird. A house made of candy and cake.

(*MOTHER enters from the cottage carrying some mending.*)

MOTHER. No sign of Father?

HANSEL. Not yet, Mother.

MOTHER. I shall finish my mending out here with you in the sunshine.

HANSEL. And you shall have a merry tune, to speed the needle on its way! The merriest tune I know. (*He plays.*)

MOTHER (*singing*). I push the needle in, I push the needle through, the hole will vanish in a twinkling and leave the cloth like new. (*HANSEL continues to play. MOTHER laughs. Suddenly GRETEL bursts out weeping and rushes away. HANSEL stops playing.*) Gretel!

Gretel dear, what is it? (*MOTHER starts to follow and GRETEL turns back*)

GRETEL. You know what it is...I'm hungry. (*MOTHER stops and GRETEL goes off.*)

HANSEL. I'll go.

MOTHER. Oh, Hansel dear, what am I to do?

HANSEL. Never mind.

MOTHER. But I do mind. Watching my dear children, knowing they're hungry.

HANSEL. I'm not hungry. Well, only a little bit.

MOTHER. Hansel...

HANSEL. I'll look after Gretel. Don't worry, Mother. (*He goes.*)

MOTHER. How can I help but worry? (*She sinks down on the stool and weeps. The lights suddenly darken and a long low roll of thunder is heard. MOTHER looks up, startled. Another rumble of thunder and the lights go down more.*) How could we have a storm so suddenly? Am I dreaming?

(Another crash of thunder... this time piercingly loud, is heard, and the WITCH enters, wearing a black shiny costume with an elaborately big headdress and veils over the face. The scene should be in "slow motion" or at least "dream-like.")

WITCH (*using another voice*). Wait, good woman!

MOTHER. Oh! Who...who are you?

WITCH. Come closer, good woman.

MOTHER. I...I must get my children. There's going to be a storm.

WITCH. Closer! (*MOTHER comes slowly toward her.*)
You are the mother of dear Hansel and Gretel.

MOTHER. How did you know?

WITCH. I know many things, good mother, many things.

MOTHER. Who are you?

WITCH. I come from...away. In the village they told me about your family. Your dear, sweet family.

MOTHER (*beginning to fall under the spell*). They told you...what?

WITCH (*her hands now moving in front of the MOTHER's face*). They told me, you want for food.

MOTHER. We do. My children are almost always hungry.

WITCH. What a pity! I can't bear the thought of a hungry child. But your worries are ended. I shall see that you suffer no more.

MOTHER (*a little sleepily*). You are kind, whoever you are.

WITCH. Indeed I am, and very rich.

(She signals. Another crash of thunder and howling winds. The GNOME enters, carrying a tray of food. He, too, is now wearing a black metallic outfit.)

WITCH. You see! A sample of my bounty. And there will be more, much more.

MOTHER. I can't believe my eyes. I *must* be dreaming.

WITCH. Taste your dream, good mother.

MOTHER. No! I must call the children.

WITCH. Taste your dream.

MOTHER. Just a taste.