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*Dramatic Publishing*

# HANSEL AND GRETEL

by  
The Brothers Grimm

Dramatized  
by  
Charlotte B. Chorpensing



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# HANSEL AND GRETEL

A Play in Three Acts  
For 11-19 Actors

## CHARACTERS

ANGEL

ULVA ..... daughter of the hill dwarf

THORA ..... wife of the hill dwarf

OLE ..... the Danish sandman

OLGA ..... the Elfin Princess

ILGA ..... an elf

HELGA ..... another elf

WITCH

FATHER

MOTHER

HANSEL ..... a young boy

GRETEL ..... his sister

VIGO ..... son of a squire

SONJE ..... his sister

MAIDA ..... a peasant girl

JOHAN ..... a peasant boy

ASTRID ..... a ragged gypsy girl

DREAM FAIRY

A large cast may include: Dream Angels, Dream Fairies,  
Brownies, Dwarfs.

(Cast cuts may be easily made, and the play may be given  
effectively with 14 or 12 people. See Production Notes).

*HANSEL AND GRETEL* was first produced at the Goodman Memorial Theatre, Chicago, Illinois in October, 1941

### SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

#### ACT ONE

Before Hansel and Gretel's house, at the edge of a mysterious forest. Mid-morning.

#### ACT TWO

Deep in the forest. Three days later, towards sunset.

#### ACT THREE

On the far side of the forest, before the candy house.

## ACT ONE

SCENE: *The important thing is the forest. It stretches away in all directions, and the deeper you see into it in any direction, the more mysterious and glowing it is, but even at the edge, it is far from everyday, except right next to the house. The house, while it may be "picture book" if desired, does suggest everyday doing and thinking, and the forest just next to it partakes of that feeling. This common sense feeling shades away as the eye goes farther and farther from the house. Free acting space, front, requirement is small.*

AT RISE: *There is silence and stillness with a slow deepening of color, back. Then in some dim spot figures move to a fleeting snatch of music... DWARFS with pick-axes and bags. Then elsewhere, ELVES and OLE (the Danish sandman) and BROWNIES, each as lights come up and fade, and each to its own snatch of music. WITCH rides on, on her broomstick, from out the nearer trees. She wishes to stop at the sight of the house, but has to struggle with her broomstick which vaults, tries to throw her off, whirls, etc., turning very red as it does so. Finally she gets it still, and peers at the house. From out of nowhere, a just-seen ANGEL comes down a step or two, and gallops off, and ALL the figures "freeze" like animals that do not wish to be seen. The lights dim out on them, except the ANGEL*

*who plucks a coat from nowhere, throws it around her, and takes a step down before the light loses her.*

MOTHER (*within, very sharp*). Hansel! Gretel! Ha-a-nsel! Gr-e-t-el! Where are the shoes your father told you to mend? Where is the dress I told you to stitch?

(*FATHER enters carrying a basket and with bulging pockets.*)

FATHER. Now, now, now. That's not a proper mother-call. Even the birds and beasts call their young with cozy little calls.

MOTHER. Ours aren't nestlings or cubs. Hansel is a great lad. Gretel is a grown lass. Off playing like a pair of kittens! It's time they thought of earning what they live on.

FATHER. Not yet. It's such a bitter business counting coppers.

MOTHER. It wouldn't be bitter if you ever had any to count. Did you get work today?

FATHER (*beaming*). Two more pair of fine red shoes to make for the squire's boy and girl.

MOTHER (*eager*). How much did he give you to bind the bargain?

FATHER (*holding up the basket, triumphant*). Enough to buy a little feast for tonight.

MOTHER. Didn't you buy the leather?

FATHER (*startled*). Leather?

MOTHER. There's not one scrap of that red leather in the house. You used what was left last time to make Hans and Greta those foolish holiday shoes.

FATHER. It's hard for them to lack bright shoes when the neighbor's go so fine.

MOTHER. What *did* you buy?

FATHER. Bread, and meat, and a good hunk of cheese you like so well, and candy and ginger-cakes to make the children laugh.

MOTHER. Candies! And cakes! And not a copper left, I warrant!

FATHER. You're wrong, this time!

MOTHER. How much is left? (*He takes out his coins and jingles them.*)

FATHER. Five pieces!

MOTHER (*eager*). Silver?

FATHER (*his face falling as he examines them*). Only coppers.

MOTHER. Five coppers! Hardly enough to buy the salt I'm needing. And nothing left for tomorrow!

FATHER. Tomorrow will take care of itself, some way. They'll be happy today.

MOTHER. It's no wonder they go dancing off in work time! With such a father! It's going to stop. They shan't grow up to be like you!

FATHER. It's a rare comfort.

MOTHER. What is?

FATHER. To be like me—Except when you are by.

MOTHER. Yes, it's I who pays for it! They shall be different! I've made a plan.

FATHER. I don't like the sound of that.

MOTHER. You'll help carry it out, whether you like it or not. From this day, the children shall learn what it means to get a living, quite by themselves.

FATHER. How can that be?

MOTHER. We're going to take them deep into the forest and lose them there.

FATHER. I couldn't bear to frighten them, even for a little.



MOTHER. It won't be for a little. We'll carry this bread and meat you bought instead of leather and give it to them. They must think we've gone nearby to gather berries. We'll never come back.

FATHER. Leave them alone?

MOTHER. They'll be together.

FATHER. With no one to feed them?

MOTHER. They know how to gather berries and nuts.

FATHER. They'll perish in the wildness!

MOTHER. There's an end to the forest somewhere. Let them come out on the other side and make their own way in the world.

FATHER. The folk say there's a witch beyond, if you go far enough.

MOTHER. Do you believe such rubbish?

FATHER. I've never seen very far in, myself. I like to look at it. I like to sit and dream about it. But to go deep in—They say it's quite another sort of world, once you're really in.

MOTHER. An old granny's tale.

FATHER. What if it's true? Sometimes I feel as if it were. I say to myself, it might be so. I like to think it might be. But really to act as if it were—to send our Hansel and Gretel in to find out about it for themselves—Oh, no, Mother. I can't do that.

MOTHER. You must.

FATHER. I won't.

MOTHER. You don't work enough or earn enough to say what shall be done.

FATHER. I earn all I can. Work is scarce, Mother.

MOTHER. It's scarce for men like you! I don't mean Hans and Greta to go from door to door, begging for work like their father! They've wit and will enough to

make a fortune, but they'll never do it, with a feast today and hunger tomorrow, as things go in this house! And you ready to laugh with them, whatever they've done, if they but look in your eyes.

FATHER. It's no more than you do yourself!

MOTHER. I?!

FATHER. Let them give you a little surprise, and you open your arms and laugh no matter how cross you were.

MOTHER. Yes, truly, you've taught them to think they've only to hang one of their foolish baskets of leaves on the door and knock and hide to make me forget how idle and like you they are! And you ready to take their part whenever I chide them!

FATHER. I'll never do it again, Mother! Only keep them with us.

MOTHER. To learn your shiftless ways! To spend for a feast today what they will owe for leather tomorrow! To offer whoever happens by for a sip sup and a bite, as if they had only to whistle and money for more would fall into their hands! To scatter gifts like a king today, though it take the very clothes from our backs tomorrow!

FATHER. I'll change all that! I'll make no one a gift, not even when I tingle to be friendly, not even when there's darkness in his eyes, not even to make the children laugh! No! I'll count every copper and save every crumb. I'll be like a squirrel with its nuts. I'll be like a dog with its bone! And I'll teach the children the same.

MOTHER. You promised that the last time we went hungry for three days.

FATHER. I'll remember this time! Try me once more! For their sakes.

MOTHER. It's for their own sakes I do this—Perhaps—if you could ever learn to be a proper father—

FATHER. I will! Try me!

MOTHER. I'll make a bargain with you. As long as you keep your word, we'll keep Hans and Greta. The first time you fall into your old ways, we'll set off for the forest.

FATHER. Agreed! Agreed! (*Music off, and laughter.*)

MOTHER (*turning to go in*). There come those idle ones now, and a troupe of neighbor children at their heels, of course—What! Dressed in their best! The only decent things they have! The moment my back was turned!

FATHER. Now, Mother, don't be sharp with them. (*She wheels on him, but he is too eager for the coming of the CHILDREN to note it, and she goes on in, shaking her head.*)

*(FATHER falls into the rhythm of the dance as it draws nearer, so that when CHILDREN enter, dancing, he joins them, beaming. It ends in great merriment, partly in the open, partly around the trees. There are five other children besides HANSEL and GRETEL. VIGO and SONJE, a Squire's boy and girl, markedly well dressed, with red shoes, MAIDA and JOHAN, peasant children, neat and prosperous, and ASTRID, ragged and starved looking. HANSEL carries a small basket made of leaves. Filled with berries.)*

VIGO. I'm hungry. Give us those berries in your basket, Hansel.

HANSEL. They're for Mother.

SONJE (*with a toss of her head*). We should have gone home to the hall. The servants would give us currant buns and butter and jam.

MAIDA. Or to the cottage. Mother would give us curds and cream.

VIGO. Go in and ask your mother for something to eat.

GRETEL (*very uneasy*). It wouldn't be any use.

SONJE. Is she too stingy to give you anything?

HANSEL. No, she isn't! But there isn't anything. We didn't even have breakfast. (*CHILDREN stare at HANSEL and GRETEL.*)

FATHER. Now, now, now. Look what I've brought home for you. (*He takes parcels from the basket, beaming.*) Candies and gingerbread cakes.

GRETEL. You shall all share.

HANSEL. Shan't they, Father?

FATHER. Of course! There's enough for all. Here are gingerbread boys for Vigo and Johan, and gingerbread girls for Sonje and Maida and—Who is this new friend?

GRETEL. This is Astrid, Father. She lives with the gypsies who camped near last night.

SONJE. She doesn't belong here.

FATHER. Where do you belong, Astrid?

ASTRID (*coming to him slowly*). Nowhere.

FATHER (*looking into her eyes*). Now, now, now. What dark thoughts I see in those young eyes. Here's an extra cake to show you belong with us—That's better. I like to have children laugh. (*She eats cake voraciously.*)

GRETEL. Here's some of my candy, Astrid.

HANSEL. And some of mine. (*VIGO winks at OTHERS and puts half his cake in his pocket.*)

VIGO. Those cakes are really good. Give me another.

HANSEL. Take two. Sonje? Maida?

GRETEL. And Johan? And Astrid? (*They help themselves.*)

ASTRID. I'm saving it.

SONJE. What for?

ASTRID. So I won't be hungry in the dark.

JOHAN. How can you when you've just had supper?

ASTRID. I'm always hungry when I go to bed.

VIGO. You don't eat cakes when you're really hungry.  
You eat bread and meat.

MAIDA. And milk and cheese. (*ASTRID shakes her head.*)

SONJE. Don't you eat bread and meat?

ASTRID. When I'm asleep I do. But it isn't the same,  
then. You're just as hungry when you wake up.

FATHER. Now, now! Here's wide awake bread for you,  
little one. And meat to put on it.

ASTRID (*mouth full*). Oh-h-h-h.

HANSEL. Want some, Vigo?

VIGO (*helping himself to cakes*). I like gingerbread better.  
(*SONJE refuses, taking some more candy. JOHAN takes a slice and passes one to MAIDA. HANSEL and GRETEL each take a piece from FATHER, who is handing it out with shining eyes on ASTRID.*)

ASTRID. I have to go. I should have been dancing.

MAIDA. We were dancing.

ASTRID. I have to get money for it. I pass my cap around  
when I'm done.

VIGO. What made you dance with us, then?

ASTRID. It looked so fine to be dancing together, just for  
fun. I couldn't help it when she beckoned to me. It's  
time I was back. I haven't earned a copper. He'll beat me.

FATHER. What!

ASTRID. They beat me when I come home without any coins. (*FATHER takes out his coppers and jingles them.*)

FATHER. Now, now, now. Dance for us, little one. You shall have no beating.

SONJE. You have silver in your pocket, Vigo.

ASTRID (*eyes on coins*). I'll dance Ole, squirting sleep into children's eyes. You all know the song about him?

GRETEL. Of course. He shows dreams in his umbrella.

HANSEL. Good ones to good children and bad ones to bad.

*(OLE the Sandman, appears with his umbrella, in a spotlight upstage in forest, and moves in unison with ASTRID who, in a downstage position, pantomimes the song.)*

ASTRID. If you sing it I shall dance better. I'll have more breath if I don't have to sing it for myself. (*FATHER leads off with might and main. ASTRID dances and passes her cap. See Music Notes.*)

### "Ole's Song"

The little Ole with his umbrella,  
The children love him, the friendly fellow.  
He comes unseen and he makes no noise;  
He puts to sleep the girls and boys.

His strange umbrella he spreads above them.  
It's full of pictures, the children love them.  
And when a child to dreamland sails,  
He tells him wondrous fairy tales.

He tells of beautiful stars that guide us,  
Of lovely angels that walk beside us,  
Of fairies dancing so merrily,  
That all the children would like to see.

And all the children that love their mothers,  
And always share their joy with others,  
Shall under Ole's umbrella hear,  
Sweet angel voices, so soft and clear.

SONJE. Put in your silver, Vigo. Father'll give you some more.

VIGO (*doing so*). He'll scold me, but he'll give it to me.  
(*ASTRID counts what's in her cap, her eyes shining.*  
*FATHER laughs softly. MOTHER's voice makes him start, violently.*)

MOTHER (*within*). Father! (*He catches his breath, looking from the door to HANSEL and GRETEL, terror flooding his face.*)

FATHER. Yes, Mother.

MOTHER (*within*). Bring me the bread and meat. Then go as fast as you can and buy me salt with your five coppers. (*ASTRID clutches her coppers tight and slips away. The FOUR grin at each other, putting their candy and remaining cakes out of sight, in pockets, pouches, under an apron.*)

FATHER. You'd better scamper. All of you.

HANSEL. We'll hang our basket for her.

GRETEL. And hide.

FATHER. Fine a new place, then. Don't come out right away when she comes. (*He goes in, bowed with apprehension.*)

JOHAN. She'll be mad.

MAIDA. I'm glad my mother isn't cross.