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I heartily recommend it’

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A  
TALE DARK  
& GRIMM

ADAM GIDWITZ

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To my family. Obviously.



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# Hansel and Gretel

Once upon a time, two children left their home and walked out into the wide, wild world.

The land was dark as Hansel and Gretel made their way across the flat fields beyond the castle moat. They had never left the castle by themselves before, and they knew little of the great world beyond its walls. But they had been frightened by what their father had done. And they believed firmly in their little hearts that parents should not kill their children, and they were resolved to punish theirs by going out and finding a family that was as nice as a family should be.

How to find such a family, though? They had no option but to walk, and walk, and walk, until they came across one.

So they did walk, on and on and on, until the firm ground became softer under their feet. Soon they found themselves in the midst of a boggy marsh, where will-o'-the-wisps danced and bullfrogs croaked. They became frightened. But on they went.

When the sun came up the next morning, and the



marsh still showed no sign of coming to an end, Gretel began to worry. 'I think we'll be lost forever!' she said.

Hansel said, 'And there's no food anywhere.'

But Hansel was wrong. For just then, the two children saw a marvellous sight. There was a house, right in the centre of the marsh. Its walls were the colour of chocolate cake, and its roof glittered under the rising sun like icing. Slowly, the two hungry travellers approached it.

'I'm hungry,' Hansel said.

'Me too,' Gretel agreed.

'It looks like cake,' Hansel said.

'It smells like cake,' Gretel agreed.

'Let's eat it!' Hansel cried.

'Mmmggrgmmm!' Gretel tried to agree, but her mouth was already full of fudgy, moist chocolate cake.

Just then, the door to the house flew open, and a woman in a baker's apron appeared on the front step. 'Who's eating my house?' she bellowed. Hansel hid a handful of cake behind his back. Gretel had chocolate all over her face.

'No one,' Hansel said. Gretel nodded, swallowing.

But the baker woman's face softened when she saw the two children. 'You must be lost, to be in the middle of the marsh all by yourselves! Are you hungry?'

Gretel nodded and tried to sneak another handful of cake from the wall of the house.

'Well, don't eat my house!' the baker woman laughed. 'Come in and I'll give you a proper breakfast!'

So the children went in, and she made them goose eggs and wild boar bacon and good thick brown German

bread with butter. They were so full after breakfast, and so exhausted from having walked all night, that the kindly baker woman put them in her bed and let them sleep all day.

When they woke, a wonderful meal of sausages and potatoes and cold milk was laid out before them.

‘But I’m not hungry,’ Hansel said.

‘Oh, you must eat up and regain your strength!’ the baker woman told him.

So the children ate. The food was delicious.

The baker woman asked the children what their names were.

‘This is Gretel,’ Hansel said as he shovelled a disgustingly large amount of potatoes into his mouth. ‘And I’m her brother, Hansel.’

Then the baker woman wanted to know how they had come to her house. They were careful not to let her know that they were royalty, lest she return them to the castle and their murderous parents. But they did tell her that their parents had cut off their heads (which the baker woman didn’t believe). And that they were looking for a kind family where no one would ever do that to them again.

‘And where we can eat cake whenever we want?’ Gretel added hopefully.

The baker woman smiled and brought forth an enormous chocolate cake.

‘Hooray!’ Hansel cried. Gretel shovelled a fistful into her mouth.

\*

The two children stayed with the baker woman for many weeks. Every day, they ate three enormous meals, plus a snack between lunch and supper, and one before bedtime. They could eat whatever they wanted, and they did. Gretel shovelled chocolate cake into her mouth continuously, smearing it onto her pink cheeks like war paint. Hansel wasn't much better.

One night, as the children lay in bed with horrible stomach aches, Hansel said to his sister, 'Do you think this is Heaven? The baker woman does all the work, we can eat as much as we like, and we never have to do anything.'

'It must be Heaven,' Gretel said.

Then Hansel said, 'Gretel, do you miss our parents?'

Gretel tried to think if she did or not. But she couldn't tell. She was too busy eating the wall.

It wasn't Heaven, of course. For, as you well know, the baker woman was planning to eat them.

But she wasn't a witch. The Brothers Grimm call her a witch, but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact she was just a normal woman who had discovered, sometime around the birth of her second child, that while she liked chicken and she liked beef and she liked pork, what she really, *really* liked was *child*.

I bet you can work out how this happened.

When I was little, my mother used to say, 'Oh, you're so sweet! Look at those little arms! Look at those little legs! Look at that little tookie!' (That was my mother's

word for my bottom.) And then she'd say, 'I'm going to eat you up!' And she said it like she meant it.

Have your parents ever said something like that to you? Most parents say that kind of thing all the time, you know. It's totally normal. Just be careful not to let them actually *taste* you.

Well, the baker woman's children tasted so good to her that she decided to spend the rest of her time trying to find others to devour. She liked them nice and plump, so she always made sure to fatten them up before she ate them. Which is why she was treating Hansel and Gretel as she was.

Why else would she allow them to wallow around all day, giving them nothing to do, nothing to work for, nothing to learn? Why else trap them in a house of chocolate cake and let them eat to their hearts' content, never warning them that they would become fat and lazy, like pigs in a sty?

Parents are supposed to help their children to grow wise and healthy and strong. The baker woman was doing the opposite, plying the children with so much food and giving them so little to do that they could not help but become weak and heavy and dull instead.

Dull enough that Gretel didn't question when the baker woman asked her to clean out the large, mysterious cage in the back of the house, and then slammed the door shut on her. Heavy enough that Hansel didn't feel like going outside to see where his sister had gone. Weak enough

that, when the baker woman told Hansel that they would be fattening Gretel up for just one more week, and that then they would eat her, Hansel could do nothing about it.

And then the day came to eat Gretel. ‘I think we’ll roast her,’ the baker woman said. ‘A little rosemary, some salt, and we’ll put her in the oven for three or four hours. Then her meat will positively fall off the bone.’

She brought the fat Hansel down to her basement, where there stood an enormous oven. ‘I need you to check if this is hot enough, sweetheart,’ the baker woman said. ‘I’m going to start heating it, and you get inside. When I can smell your skin roasting, I’ll know it’s ready for your sister.’ She shoved Hansel inside and closed the oven door.

The oven became hotter and hotter, and Hansel began to sweat. Then a delicious smell wafted to his nostrils.

Oh no! he thought. I’m cooking! He sniffed at the air. And I smell delicious!

But he wasn’t cooking. It just was the remainder of a leg of goose that he’d hidden in his trouser pocket from last night’s supper and had forgotten to eat before he fell asleep. It was so hot in the oven that the skin was crinkling. The baker woman smelled it, too. She came down and opened the oven door. ‘Are you cooking yet?’ she asked. But Hansel shook his head and took another bite of the goose leg. The baker woman frowned and closed the oven door.

I probably should have said yes, he thought. Oh well.

He finished off the goose leg and continued to sweat. Soon, another delicious smell rose to his nostrils.

Oh no! he thought. Now I'm cooking for certain! He sniffed at the air. And I smell delicious!

But he wasn't cooking. It was three strips of bacon that he'd tucked into his socks at breakfast. It was so hot in the oven that the fat was sizzling and popping. The baker woman smelled it, too. She came down and opened the oven door. 'Are you cooking yet?' she asked. But Hansel shook his head and ate the second strip of bacon. The baker woman frowned and closed the door.

I probably should have said yes, he thought. Oh well.

Hansel finished off the bacon and continued to sweat. Soon, yet another delicious smell rose to his nostrils.

Oh no! he thought. I must be cooking now! And I smell delicious! Just like chocolate cake!

This time, he was right. He was cooking. And he did smell just like chocolate cake, because he had eaten so much of it since arriving at the baker woman's house. The baker woman smelled him cooking, came downstairs, and opened the oven door. 'Are you cooking yet?' she asked.

But Hansel shook his head. 'I don't think it's hot enough in here,' he shrugged. 'That smell was just some chocolate cake I'd stuffed in my underpants.'

'Not hot enough in there!' the baker woman huffed. 'Let me see!' She crawled into the oven, pushing Hansel out of the way. 'Feels plenty hot to me!' she said.

Hansel had crawled out of the oven while the baker woman was crawling in. He looked at her – pink and mean and sweating, sitting in the enormous oven.

‘Hey!’ she shouted at him. ‘What are you doing?’

Something dim flickered in his food-addled brain. ‘I’m saving myself and my sister,’ he said, ‘from another terrible parent.’ And then he closed and locked the oven door.

‘Hey! Let me out!’ the baker woman shouted at him. ‘Hey, you stupid little boy, let me out!’ Hansel stared through the grate on the oven door at her.

The baker woman began to sweat more. Her face was burning. ‘I’m sorry!’ she cried. ‘I’m sorry for what I’ve done. I don’t want to die! Just let me out! Let me out!’

Hansel’s face softened.

‘Please? Please! I could die in here! I could die!’

Hansel began to feel sorry for her. But he certainly wasn’t going to let her out.

He walked upstairs and out to the back of the house, where he found Gretel sitting in the dirty cage. ‘Are you hungry?’ he asked.

She looked up.

‘Dinner’s in the oven,’ he added.

But Gretel wasn’t hungry.

And besides, he was only joking.

# IN A GLASS GRIMM

ADAM GIDWITZ

What really happened when Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water? Well, yes, Jack did break his crown and, yes, Jill did come tumbling after. BUT, they also went on a quest to find a looking glass, which really turned out to be a quest to find themselves. They challenged giants to an eating competition, were drowned by mermaids and were captured by goblins.

Did they ever find the looking glass? Well, you'll just have to read this book and find out.

'Imagine Lemony Snicket does Fairy Tales. Great stuff'

*Peters Books*



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