

FairyTale Theatre Presents

Sweet Misery

(A story of Hansel and Gretel)

By Craig and Heather Bitterling

(with contributions from Alicyn Newman, Nicholas Bitterling, and Daphanie Clopton)

CHARACTERS

ALISTAIR KOOK

HANSEL

GRETEL

STEPMOTHER

MRS. FEIGN

FATHER

BOY (WHO CRIED "WOLF")

TORTOISE

HARE

THE WOLVES (4)

GINGERBREAD MAN

THE BBW ("Big Bad Wolf")

(Lights come up on a small area of stage with a padded arm chair, where Alistair Kook is sitting with a book in his lap, and a pipe in his mouth. The "Masterpiece Theatre" theme or similar music plays for a moment and then fades)

Al: Hello, and welcome to another edition of Fairy Tale Theatre. I'm your host, as always, Alistair Kook. Is your life everything you could hope it would be? Perhaps it is! If you are one of those rare individuals who finds joy and contentment in every little moment of your life... well then jolly good for you! On the other hand, if you are like most of us who don't live in fairyland, you have probably found yourself wondering from time to time if there isn't something

better waiting for you out there: another land, perhaps, or another life – another world free from the disappointments and worries of your daily living. Or - just maybe - your situation is so bad that you spend your every moment dreaming of escape – running away from sorrow to find a new and happy life. Well, if this describes you to a tee, you will happily commiserate with our protagonists this evening. Meet the two most miserable children in fairyland, Hansel and Gretel.

(Al opens the book to read. Hansel and Gretel enter, holding hands and skipping along happily with a basket of berries. Al continues)

Hansel and Gretel were downtrodden and sorrowful children, without a glimmer of joy in their lives.

Gretel: *(eating a berry and giggling)* Ooh, Hansel. These are the most delicious berries we have ever found!

Hansel: *(giggling with her)* Ja, Gretel. Stepmama will be so pleased with us!

Al: *(Noticing the children's joy, but continuing anyway)*
Um... You see, Hansel and Gretel's father was forced to spend many hours away from home, leaving the youngsters alone most of the day with their cruel and heartless stepmother.

Gretel: Ja. I bet she will be so happy, she will dance for joy.

Hansel: Ja. Like this! *(He begins to dance ridiculously and sing)*
La, la, la, la... *(etc.)*

(Gretel joins Hansel in the dance and they continue in utter silliness until they bend over with laughter. Al looks on incredulously until he cannot contain himself any longer. He turns to speak to the characters)

Al: Your stepmother will most certainly not be happy!

(The children are startled by the sudden “appearance” of the narrator, and they cease their merriment instantly)

Hansel: She won't?

Al: No! She's never happy. She can't stand you children and she does everything she can to keep you away from the house.

Gretel: *(on the verge of tears)* What?! What is he talking about, Hansel?

Hansel: I don't know, Gretel. *(to Al)* You are mistaken, sir. Our stepmama loves us... *(suddenly unsure)* I think.

Al: Perhaps she only pretends to love you for your father's sake. *(consulting his book)* According to the author, she was just saying this morning that she wishes that you would just disappear all together. And when she sent you out to look for berries, she said she “hoped you would just get lost along the way.”

Hansel: She wants us to get lost? *(he begins to take in his surroundings, with a very troubled look on his face)*

Gretel: Hansel! Stepmama hates us! *(she begins to cry. Hansel comforts her)*

Al: That's better. *(turning back to the audience)* As I was saying... Hansel and Gretel were downtrodden and sorrowful children, without a glimmer of joy in their lives. AND, they were hopelessly lost in the forest.

Gretel: *(crying)* We're hopelessly lost, Hansel!

Hansel: Don't worry, Gretel. We can find our way home. *(he pulls a few pebbles from his pocket and shows them to Gretel)* You see? All the way to the berry trees, I was dropping these pebbles along the path. All we have to do is follow them home.

Al: *(He is caught off guard, and quickly begins consulting his book)* Oh yes, there was that. I had forgotten that part. *(reading directly now)* Hansel had wisely planned ahead, and so the two had a clear trail back to their home.

Gretel: You're so smart, Hansel.

Hansel: I know. Oh look, there is a pebble! This way Gretel.

(they exit)

Al: The children followed the pebbles all the way back to their home, a small cottage on the edge of the forest. As they approached, they found their stepmother waiting for them at the front door.

(Stepmother enters. Hansel and Gretel enter from the opposite side of the stage and cross toward her.)

Stepmother: There you are! It's about time. Can't you see it is already getting dark?

Gretel: But, Stepmama! We thought you would be pleased with us.

Stepmother: Pleased? I work all afternoon to cook for you and you don't even show up for dinner! Why would I be pleased with you?

Hansel: Because of the berries we have brought you! Aren't they wonderful?

Gretel: And so delicious too! Try one, Stepmama.

Stepmother: The berries were for a pie I had planned to make for your father. Now he has already had his dinner and is going to bed.

Gretel: A pie? Oh! May I please help you make it? I used to love to bake things with Mama.

Stepmother: No, you'll just make a big mess, and I've already cleaned up the kitchen.

(She snatches the berries from Gretel and begins to examine them. Gretel's head drops. Hansel puts his hand on her shoulder to comfort her)

Stepmother: Is this all you found? I should have gone myself.
You've probably been eating them all the way home.

Hansel: May we go in and see Papa now?

Stepmother: Not until you have washed yourselves up. Just look at what filthy creatures you are! You're not coming in my house until you are decent children.

Hansel: Yes, ma'am. Will you tell him that we are home?

Stepmother: *(begrudgingly)* Of course. He's been worried sick about you not being home. Because of you two, he didn't even taste my roast potatoes. Hurry and wash up. If you're not at the table in five minutes, I'm giving your dinner to the chickens. *(she turns and exits into the house)*

(Hansel and Gretel turn and walk a few paces from the house to a well or large bucket of water. They wash themselves through the following dialogue.)

Gretel: Oh, Hansel. She makes me so angry! She won't let us do anything.

Hansel: Ja. And yet she blames us for everything.

Gretel: I think it must be true. She really does hate us!

(Mrs. Feign enters. She is dressed in a simple black gown covered in bright colored sashes that give her a very cheerful look. With each scene she appears in, she removes a few of them, so that by the end she is dressed totally in black. She sees that the children are distressed stops to listen in for a moment.)

Hansel: Well, at least she doesn't seem to like us very much, does she?

Gretel: What should we do?

Hansel: Perhaps we should talk to Papa about it. He will know what to do. *(Gretel nods in agreement)*

Mrs. Feign: *(approaching the children)* What to do about what, dear children?

Gretel: *(a little startled)* Oh, Mrs. Feign! We didn't hear you coming.

Mrs. Feign: I'm sorry dear. I was just bringing these herbs over for your mother... oh, how silly of me! I mean... for your stepmother of course. *(overly sympathetic)* Your mother isn't here, is she?

(Hansel and Gretel hang their heads)

Mrs. Feign: Well, perhaps I can help you. What sort of trouble are you having?

Hansel: Well.. *(he and Gretel look at each other and silently agree to trust Mrs. Feign)* It's Stepmama – we don't think she likes us very much.

Gretel: She hates us.

Mrs. Feign: Oh... well, now, I wouldn't worry your father about that, children. I am sure it is not as bad as it seems. Anyone would have to be a monster not to love two children as adorable as you. Here, have a bon bon to cheer you up.

(She pulls candies out of her pocket and gives them to the children. They instantly cheer up and hug her)

Hansel & Gretel: Thank you, Mrs. Feign!

Mrs. Feign: It is nothing. I always have treats for children that are so precious to me!

(The Stepmother enters)

Mrs. Feign: Oh, there you are, dear! I've brought you some more of that rosemary you've been wanting!

Stepmother: Mrs. Feign! You've come all the way through the woods just to bring me this? Thank you so much! You are always such a balm to a weary heart.

Mrs. Feign: (*blushing*) Nonsense. Tell me about your day, dear. Was it really that bad?

Stepmother: Worse. Why don't you come inside and have a cup of tea?

Mrs. Feign: That sounds wonderful! These old bones could really use a rest.

(*They exit into the house*)

Hansel: She certainly seems to like Mrs. Feign well enough.

Gretel: (*still chewing her bon bon*) Ja. Just not us. Is there something wrong with *us* Hansel?

(*Father rushes out of the house and runs to greet them, wrapping his arms around them into a passionate group hug*)

Father: Children! Oh, I have missed you so!

Hansel: We are sorry we are so late, Papa. We were trying to find the best berries for Stepmama.

Father: It is okay, my children. I am just happy that you are home with me now, and that you are safe.

Gretel: Papa? (*she looks at Hansel for approval*)

Father: Ja? What is it Gretel?

(*Hansel nods to Gretel hesitantly*)

Gretel: Why does Stepmama hate us so?

Father: What?! Where did you get such an idea?

Hansel: It is true, Papa. We cannot do anything to please her.

Gretel: She said she wishes we would just disappear.

Father: She said this to you.

Hansel: Well, no, not exactly. (*He glances over to the Narrator*)

Father: Listen to me, my children. You must be patient with your stepmama. She has a good heart. If she did not, I would not have chosen her to take care of you. (*They look unconvinced*) Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in me. Okay?

Gretel: Okay, Papa.

Hansel: Yes, Papa.

Father: Now, come inside, you who are so weary. It is time to rest.

(*They exit into the house together*)

Al: So ended many a day for poor Hansel and Gretel, (*as he continues, Hansel and Gretel reenter and begin working in a garden*) working hard and doing their best to please their Stepmother, yet feeling the brunt of her anger time and time again. Still, the two chose to trust the father. For his sake, they were willing to endure much – but as time passed even their confidence in him began to fade.

Gretel: (*to Al*) What, are you saying that we no longer trust Papa?

Al: Well...

(*Mrs. Feign enters unseen, and pauses to listen in again*)

Hansel: You have to admit that he doesn't make much sense most of the time. He doesn't even listen to us.

Gretel: But he's still Papa, Hansel!

Hansel: Of course he is, Gretel. I'm just saying that when I am a papa, I will do things much differently.

Mrs. Feign: Oh, Hansel, I think you will make a wonderful papa! So wise for your tender age. It is terrible when