

Hansel and Gretel: After the Escape

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The children raced away from the witch's candy cottage, hand in hand. Gretel had fought back against the evil crone and rescued her trapped brother who had been fed and fattened up for the witch's feast. As the cottage smoked and burned behind him, the sickly-sweet smell of burnt cake and chocolate wafted through the air. It was a reminder to the children as they fled that they had been lured into danger by the witch's delicious trap – a house made of treats. How could a child resist? Many had not; only Hansel and Gretel had been able to escape.

After much time wandering through the unfamiliar woods, they came upon a lake too large to swim across. They fretted about what to do.

“Don't worry, Gretel,” assured her brother. “We will find a way. Look now! Here comes a large white duck; perhaps she will help us.”

Indeed, a sizable duck was calmly paddling her way toward them. She agreed to carry them across the lake to the other side. Gretel worried they might sink, so they convinced the duck to make two trips with only one child on her back. The duck agreed and in exchange, they told her she could find toasted cake and bread for herself and her ducklings at the burnt cottage.

On the other side of the lake, the trees and paths seemed more familiar. The brother and sister continued until they finally saw the smoke from the chimney of their father's house in the distance. “We are safe at last,” cried Gretel. “Let's hurry!” She was eager to be home again.

“Not so fast,” warned Hansel. “We must remember that it was Papa who agreed with our stepmother to lose us in the woods because they were too poor to provide for all four of us.” Hansel nearly cried at the memory. “We may not be so welcome when we arrive.”

So they walked carefully toward their old home. As they got closer, they saw the front door swing open, and there was their beloved Papa, arms outstretched toward them. “My children,” he cried, “I thought you were lost forever! Can you forgive me? I am so very sorry and so very glad to lay my eyes upon you again!” He rushed to them and picked them up, squeezing them both in a tight hug that left them breathless and laughing.

As they settled inside with cozy blankets and warm milk, they told their father of their misadventure. He cried as he listened, so deep was his remorse at his poor decision.

“My dear children, please know I have always loved you. I should never have listened to that fiendish woman. She did not care about anything but her own comfort. In the end, her own wicked heart killed her. She is gone, and I will never leave you again. Sadly, our situation is no better, and we are still very poor.

There is no food for our supper tonight.”

Brother and sister exchanged glances. Silently they turned out their pockets and made a small pile of the jewels and coins they had removed from the witch’s cottage before they left. It was a small fortune, and it glittered with possibilities. “I think this will help us, Papa,” smiled Gretel.

“It will be enough to keep us in comfort for some time,” agreed her brother. “You will not have to work yourself to the bone cutting wood from morning to night any more.” He kissed his grateful father on the cheek. “But I have been thinking of something bigger.” Hansel explained his plans to his little family.

It wasn’t long before they had purchased new equipment and fertilizer for their fields. They bought a horse and a pair of oxen to help. Hansel and Gretel worked happily side by side with Papa, planting new crops. At the first harvest, the family built a large stand at the side of the road and began giving away baskets of delicious fresh vegetables to all their poor neighbors.

People flocked to the vegetable stand every day, and with every basket they gave, Hansel and Gretel warned the children of the dangers of eating sweets. “Vegetables are much safer!” they would laugh. “We know firsthand how hazardous eating candies and cakes can be.”

Questions

1. What is a “crone”?
2. Why does Papa call the stepmother a “fiendish woman”?
3. Explain what is meant when the pile of jewels and coins is said to have “glittered with possibilities”?
4. In this story, what do Hansel and Gretel mean when they talk of “the danger of eating sweets”?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. crone
2. wafted
3. misadventure
4. fiendish
5. hazardous

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1. "Gretel had fought back against the evil **crone**"

a. old woman; hag b. large white bird c. troll or goblin d. magician; wizard

2. "the sickly-sweet smell of burnt cake and chocolate **wafted** through the air"

a. escaped; disappeared b. drifted or floated c. danced or played d. rushed; dashed

3. "they told their father of their **misadventure**"

a. secret hideout; den b. misfortune; difficult event c. naughtiness or error d. plan or idea

4. "I should never have listened to that **fiendish** woman"

a. from Finland b. weak or tired c. friendly; likeable d. devilish; evil

5. "We know firsthand how **hazardous** eating candies and cakes can be."

a. fun; delightful b. unsafe or dangerous c. easy; simple d. tiring or exhausting