

Hansel the Criminal and Gretel the Presumptuous

By: Madeline Hochstetler

Hi. You've probably heard of me. I guess I'm kinda infamous around here.... I'm known as the Wicked Witch who lures kids in and eats them, who apparently was going to eat Hansel and trap Gretel in the oven! But that was just one of Hansel and Gretel's lies. Yes, I'm a witch, but not THAT kind. I'm basically a magical grandma. *This is what actually happened...*

I was relaxing on the couch, trying to read a book. The key word is *trying*. I have bad vision.

All of a sudden, I heard a *crunch, crunch, crunch!* coming from my kitchen. Then a sound like something getting peeled off of my roof! I staggered over to the window by my sink, and I saw two kids. One of them, the girl, had blonde hair pulled back into a neat bun, with one of the loose curls that had fallen out sticking to one of the window panes she was eating. Her sky blue dress and apron had crumbs of bread sticking to them.

The second child, the boy, was the youngest. His brown overalls were stained with dirt and grass. He was on my roof, munching on one of the pancakes that made up the shingles.

As soon as I stepped outside, they dropped their food.

“Hello,” I said in a crackly voice.

“H-hi....” the girl stammered. “I’m Gretel, this is my little brother, Hansel.”

I’ve heard of them before. They’re the poor kids who live right out of town. I decided to be neighborly and ask, “Would you like to stay for dinner? I was about to put it on the stove.”

“Yeah!” Hansel exclaimed, getting a stern look from his sister. “Er, I mean, could we, Gretel?”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to impose....” Gretel trailed off.

I shook my hand at her. “It wouldn’t be an imposition at all, dear!”

“Well,” she started, “If you insist, I guess.”

“YES!” Hansel shouted, pumping his fist in the air.

We had a nice dinner, and I offered for them to stay overnight. They took the invitation, and I made up a comfortable bed for them. In the morning, Gretel had finally warmed up to me, so she asked to stay a bit longer. I said yes.

That night, at midnight, I heard a racket coming from the living room. I snuck out of my bedroom, just in time to see Hansel tiptoeing back into the guestroom with a stash of \$100 bills in one pocket of his hoodie, and a bunch of coins clinking around in the other.

“What are you doing?” I asked. He froze in fright.

“I was j-just, um... just, uh, t-taking a l-look around?” he trembled. Then he smiled sheepishly.

I looked at him, my eyebrows raised. “Okay, then why are your pockets filled with money? MY money?”

“I was just, well, I was, uh...” He was sweating. The poor thing! But he was a thief. He deserved jail! And since the juvenile detention center got burnt down last week, well... I had to take matters into my *own* hands.

I sent Hansel to bed. Thief or not, he needed sleep. Plus, I still had to figure out what to do about him.

I woke up at about 3:00 with the best idea. The cage! The cage that my old dog, Snickers, stayed in! He had died a few years ago. It was so sad, but I have a cage!

I jumped out of bed and rummaged through my closet. I pulled out the old, rusty dog cage. My plan was to grab Hansel and lock him up while he was still asleep. When he woke up, he'd wonder why he was in a rusted dog cage, but whatever.

In the guestroom, Hansel and Gretel were sound asleep. When I tried to pick Hansel up, across the room, Gretel rustled around. Had I really been that loud? Or did she just not sleep as soundly as I thought? Then I tried again, this time extra carefully. She just snored. YES! I had done it! Now all I had to do was put Hansel in the cage without waking him....

I'm glad I don't work at a jail. Even putting a *sleeping child* in a *dog cage* is hard, let alone grown criminals bustling around, trying to escape.

You may think, 'Seriously? He was just trying to get a little extra money for his family! He is poor, you know! Plus, he may not have even known it was wrong!'

Really? He knew full well that it was wrong, or he wouldn't have lied about it, or done it in the middle of the night. Get my point? And why don't *you* try having a kid steal over \$1,000 from you while you're letting the child stay at your house, for free, no chores, no work? I'm being hospitable, but Hansel's just being cruel!

Anyhow, I'd somehow managed to get Hansel shoved into his new-and-improved bed, the cage. The substitute juvenile detention center.

The next morning, I had awakened to an unsettling racket of banging. Then there was a series of disturbing noises. An 'OUCH!' from a male voice, a shrill scream, more banging, the thumping of hard footsteps, an even more feminine scream, a "Who did this to you?" from Gretel, and a "My guess is that stupid witch who's hosting us," from Hansel.

Excuuuuse me, but I believe that I was doing a great job hosting them! *He's* the criminal!

I edged toward the kitchen and peeked around a corner to get a glimpse of what was going on. Gretel was standing by the dog cage, wiggling her fingers in a claw-shape, like you do

when you're telling a spooky story. I could almost see the flashlight beam circling around her face.

"Watch out; I've read about this once! Witches ONLY keep innocent children in cages if they're planning to... well, eat them!" she said in a spooky voice. SO not true! Well, okay, maybe *evil* witches, but not me! I'm a *nice* witch!

"Please save me!" Hansel said in a hoarse whisper.

"I'll try, but no guarantees!" Gretel replied.

Okay. NO! This ISN'T right! I'm not going to go out of my way to make these ungracious children have a nice stay with no work, no chores, if they're going to call me an evil witch!

And to think I was going to let them live here. 'I'm going to make Gretel help cook!' I thought. That's at least helpful. Plus, if they WERE going to live here, I would, with no doubt, have her help cook. And Hansel would probably have to go hunt.

I limped into the kitchen like the old lady that I am, and the siblings instantaneously shut up. 'They really *are* scared of me!' I contemplated. "That may just come in handy," I thought aloud.

"Uh, WHAT may come in handy?" Gretel uttered.

"Oh, nothing, children. Gretel, can I speak to you quickly?" I waved Gretel into the living room. "I have a favor to ask you—"

"NO! I AM **NOT** COOKING MY BROTHER!" she screamed.

So, she just made the assumption that I was going to ask her to cook her brother? "Why would you think that?"

"Because! A book I read said that if a witch puts you in a cage, that means she's going to cook you! And, well, you're a

witch, and Hansel's in a cage, so I just thought...." Gretel trailed off.

I wonder which book she read. And just like that, almost as though she was reading my mind, she blurted, "The book's called, *'Fantasy Survival Facts'* by James Allan. The chapter was called, *'If You Run Into a Witch.'*"

"Sweetheart, those stories aren't true! They're fiction! Just for entertainment." I tugged Gretel into a hug.

"The book said, "TRUE FACTS" right there on the cover!" she exclaimed, pulling away from me.

"Well, the reason I brought you out here: I would like you to help cook meals. OK?"

"Mm," she said, striding into the kitchen.

A few days later, Gretel was getting the hang of this cooking thing. I barely even had to lift a finger! **Barely.** I cook the bread.

One night, for dinner, I was putting the bread in the oven. I pushed it in a little too far, and I couldn't reach the tray to pull it closer.

"Gretel, sweetie, can you tell me if the bread is golden brown yet? I pushed it back a bit too far to see it. You know how bad my eyesight is. If you can't see it, I can put you on this plank of wood and push you back a bit," I said, waving a piece of wood around.

"Uh, maybe **you** could sit on the wood?" I could just see the gears in her brain turning, but I took my chances.

I sat on the wood. She pushed me in. "HA! Now you can't trap me in the oven!" Gretel shouted. And with that, she slammed the door to the oven shut, barricading it with the dinner table. I was trapped! But I was technically a witch, so I magiced my way outta there. By the time I got out, the sinister siblings were gone, and had stolen some jewels.

The End