

Hansel and Gretel

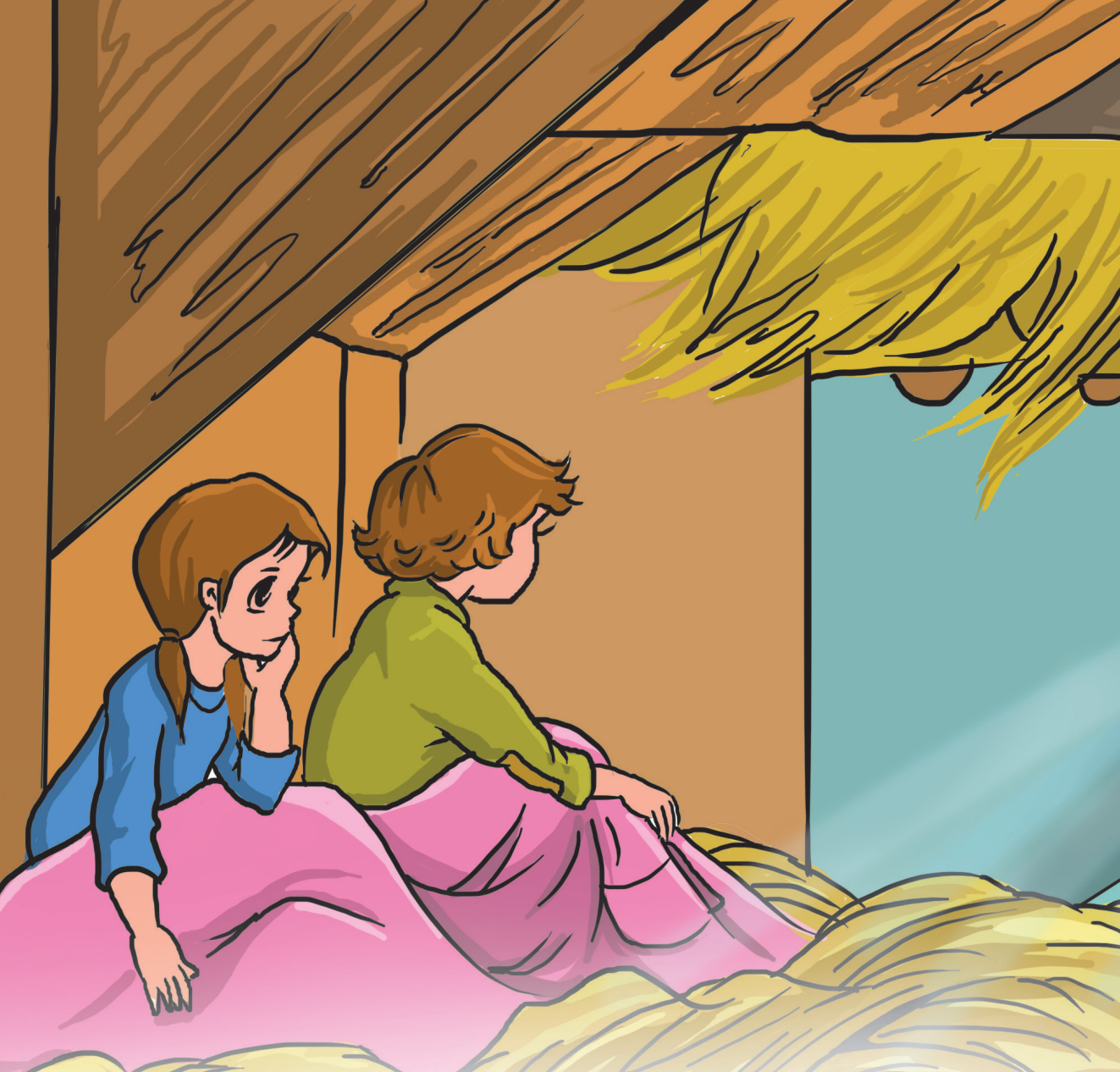


Hansel and the Gretel

Hard by a great forest dwelt a poor wood-cutter with his wife and his two children. The boy was called Hansel and the girl Gretel. He had little to bite and to break, and once when great dearth fell on the land, he could no longer procure even daily bread. Now when he thought over this by night in his bed, and tossed about in his anxiety, he groaned and said to his wife, "What is to become of us? How are we to feed our poor children, when we no longer have anything even for ourselves.?"

"I'll tell you what, husband," answered the woman, "early tomorrow morning we will take the children out into the forest to where it is the thickest. There we will light a fire for them, and give each of them one more piece of bread, and then we will go to our work and leave them alone. They will not find the way home again, and we shall be rid of them." "No, wife", said the man, "I will not do that. How can I bear to leave my children alone in the forest? The wild animals would soon come and tear them to pieces." "O' you fool", said she, "then we must all four die of hunger, you may as well plane the planks for our coffins", and she left him no peace until he consented. "But I feel very sorry for the poor children, all the same", said the man. The two children had also not been able to sleep for hunger, and had heard what their step-mother had said to their father. Gretel wept bitter tears, and said to Hansel, "now all is over with us."





“Be quiet, Gretel”, said Hansel, “do not distress yourself, I will soon find a way to help us.” And when the old folks had fallen asleep, he got up, put on his little coat, opened the door below, and crept outside. The moon shone brightly, and the white pebbles which lay in front of the house glittered like real silver pennies. Hansel stooped and stuffed the little pocket of his coat with as many as he could get in. Then he went back and said to Gretel, “Be comforted, dear little sister,



and sleep in peace, God will not forsake us”, and he lay down again in his bed. When day dawned, but before the sun had risen, the woman came and awoke the two children, saying “Get up, you sluggards. We are going into the forest to fetch wood.” She gave each a little piece of bread, and said, “there is something for your dinner, but do not eat it up before then, for you will get nothing else.” Gretel took the bread under her apron, as Hansel had the pebbles in his pocket.





Then they all set out together on the way to the forest. When they had walked a short time, Hansel stood still and peeped back at the house, and did so again and again. His father said, "Hansel, what are you looking at there and staying behind for. Pay attention, and do not forget how to use your legs." "Ah, father", said Hansel, "I am looking at my little white cat, which is sitting up on the roof, and wants to say good-bye to me." The wife said, "Fool, that is not your little cat, that is the morning sun which is shining on the chimneys." Hansel, however, had not been looking back at the cat, but had been constantly throwing one of the white pebble-stones out of his pocket on the road.

When they had reached the middle of the forest, the father said, “Now, children, pile up some wood, and I will light a fire that you may not be cold.” Hansel and Gretel gathered brushwood together, as high as a little hill. The brushwood was lighted, and when the flames were burning very high, the woman said, “Now, children, lay yourselves down by the fire and rest, we will go into the forest and cut some wood. When we have done, we will come back and fetch you away.”

Hansel and Gretel sat by the fire, and when noon came, each ate a little piece of bread, and as they heard the strokes of the wood-axe they believed that their father was near. It was not the axe, however, but a branch which he had fastened to a withered tree which the wind was blowing backwards and forwards. And as they had been sitting such a long time, their eyes closed with fatigue, and they fell fast asleep.

When at last they awoke, it was already dark night. Gretel began to cry and said, “How are we to get out of the forest now?” But Hansel comforted her and said, “Just wait a little, until the moon has risen, and then we will soon find the way.” And when the full moon had risen, Hansel took his little sister by the hand and followed the pebbles which shone like newly-coined silver pieces, and showed them the way.

They walked the whole night long, and by break of day came once more to their father's house. They knocked at the door, and when the woman opened it and saw that it was Hansel and Gretel, she said, "You naughty children, why have you slept so long in the forest? We thought you were never coming back at all." The father, however, rejoiced, for it had cut him to the heart to leave them behind alone.

