INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The narrator sits in a comfy armchair.

Narrator:

Next to a great forest there lived a poor woodcutter with his wife and his two children. The boy's name was Hansel.

Hansel, perched on the edge of the sofa, waves.

Narrator: (CONT'D)

And the girl's name was Gretel.

Gretel, on the other leg of the sofa, also waves.

NARRATOR: (CONT'D)

The woodcutter had but little to eat, and once, when a great famine came to the land, he could no longer provide even their daily bread.

(Beat)

One evening, as he was worrying about his problems, he sighed and said to his wife -

Woodcutter:

How can we feed our children when we have nothing for ourselves?

Stepmother:

Do you know what?

Narrator:

Answered the woman.

Stepmother:

Early tomorrow morning we will take the two children out into the thickest part of the woods, make a fire for them, and give each of them a little piece of bread, then leave them by themselves and go off to our work. They will not find their way back home, and we will be rid of them!

Woodcutter:

Good heavens, woman!

Narrator:

Cried the man.

Woodcutter:

I will not do that! How could I bring myself to abandon my own children alone in the woods? Wild animals would soon come and tear them to piece!

NARRATOR:

The woman was annoyed.

Stepmother:

You fool! Then all four of us will starve!

Woodcutter:

But... I do feel sorry for the poor children.

Narrator:

Mumbled the unfortunate man.

INT. bedroom - evening

The narrator sits on the edge of the bed.

Narrator:

The two children had not been able to fall asleep because of their hunger, and they had heard what their stepmother had said to their father. Gretel cried bitterly,

Gretel:

It's over for us!!

NARRATOR:

But Hansel had a plan.

Hansel:

Don't worry Gretel. I know what to do.

INT. downstairs CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Narrator:

As soon as the adults had fallen asleep, Hansel got up, pulled on his jacket, opened the door, and crept outside. The moon was shining brightly, and the white pebbles in front of the house were glistening like silver coins. Hansel bent over and filled his pockets with them, as many as would fit.

Hansel creeps outside, bends to the floor and fills his pockets with pebbles.

Narrator: (CONT'D)

Then he went back inside and told his sister.

Hansel:

Don't worry, Gretel. Sleep well. God will not forsake us.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

NARRATOR:

The next morning, before it was even light, the stepmother burst in and woke the two children.

Stepmother: (towering over them)

Get up, you lazybones! We are going into the woods to fetch wood!

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

NARRATOR:

Then, all together, they set forth into the woods; the overgrown trees looming above them. After they had walked a little way, Hansel began stopping and looking back towards the house. The father asked,

Woodcutter:

Hansel, why are you stopping and looking back? Pay attention now.

Hansel:

Oh, father. I am looking at my white cat that is sitting on the roof and wants to say good-bye to me.

NARRATOR:

The stepmother retorted:

Stepmother:

You fool, that isn't your cat! That's the morning sun shining on the chimney.

NARRATOR:

However, Hansel had not been looking at his cat, but instead had been dropping the shiny pebbles from his pocket onto the path.

When they arrived in the middle of the woods, the father told his children,

Woodcutter:

You children gather some wood, and I will make a fire so you won't freeze.

NARRATOR:

So Hansel and Gretel gathered together some twigs, and put them in a pile as high as a small mountain. The twigs were set alight, and when the flames were burning well, the stepmother told them:

Stepmother:

Lie down by the fire and rest. We will go into the woods to cut timber. When we are finished, we will come back and get you.

NARRATOR:

So Hansel and Gretel sat by the fire, which crackled while warming their hands and faces. A wind whistled through the woodland, swaying the trees and branches all around them, blowing smoke in their faces. After Hansel and Gretel had sat there a long time, their eyes grew weary, and they fell sound sleep.

The narrator closes her eyes and falls asleep.

Ext. garden - night

The blue light of night. The narrator opens her eyes.

Narrator:

When they finally awoke, it was dark. Gretel began to cry.

Gretel:

How will we get out of woods?!

NARRATOR:

Hansel comforted her.

Hansel:

Wait a little until the moon comes up, and then we'll find the way.

NARRATOR:

After the full moon had come up, a beam of light was thrown down across the woodland, and Hansel took his little sister by the hand. In the moonlight, the trees no longer looked like their forms in daylight.

Cutaways to footage of creeping branches; woodland at night.

NarrATOR: (CONT'D)

Now, disfigured and looming bodies surrounded them, with fingers clawing out in all directions, ready to snag an unsuspecting victim. It was as though the moonlight had bewitched the natural world. Hansel and Gretel followed the pebbles that glistened there like newly minted coins, showing them the way out. They walked throughout the entire night.

The narrator exits frame.

Ext. House - day

The front door of a house. The narrator enters frame.

NARRATOR:

As morning was breaking, they arrived at their father's house. They knocked on the door, and when the woman opened it and saw that it was Hansel and Gretel, she shrieked,

Stepmother: (opening the door)

You wicked children! Why did you sleep so long in the woods? We thought that you did not want to come back!

NARRATOR:

But the father was overjoyed when he saw his children once more, for he had not wanted to leave them alone.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The narrator is on the sofa.

Narrator:

Not long afterwards, there was once again great need everywhere, and one evening the children heard their stepmother say to their father:

Stepmother:

We have eaten everything! We have only a half loaf of bread left! We must get rid of the children. We will take them deeper into the woods this time, so they will not find their way out. Otherwise we will all die.

NARRATOR:

The man was very disheartened, and tried to convince his wife,

Woodcutter:

It would be better to share the last bit of bread with the children.

NARRATOR:

But the woman would not listen.

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

NARRATOR:

The children were still awake and had overheard the conversation. So when the adults were asleep, Hansel got up again and went to gather pebbles as he had done before... but the woman had locked the door, and he could not get out! Nevertheless, he comforted his little sister and said:

Hansel:

Don't cry, Gretel. Sleep well. God will help us.

EXT. GARDEN - day

NARRATOR:

Early the next morning the woman came and got the children from their beds, and gave them a little piece of bread to eat. On the way to the woods, Hansel crumbled his piece in his pocket, then often stood still, throwing crumbs onto the ground. His father asked,

Woodcutter:

Hansel, why are you always stopping and looking around? Keep walking straight ahead.

Hansel:

I can see my pigeon sitting on the roof. It wants to say good-bye to me.

Narrator:

Hansel replied.

Stepmother:

Fool! That isn't your pigeon! That's the morning sun shining on the chimney!

NARRATOR:

Exclaimed the stepmother. But, little by little, Hansel dropped all the crumbs onto the path.

(Beat)

The stepmother took them deeper into the woods than they had ever been before. And the further they went, the more intimidating it seemed. Unfamiliar trees, flora and fauna surrounded them. It was an eerie, mysterious new world. A once sweet-smelling environment began to change to a decayed, unfamiliar stench, as they ventured into the oldest part of the wood.

Once again, a large fire was made, and the stepmother told the children:

Stepmother:

We are going to cut wood. We will come and get you in the evening when we are finished.

NARRATOR:

Soon, evening came, but no one came to get the poor children. It was dark, and once again the trees seemed to transform from their familiar forms, shattering the illusion of safety. Eventually, they fell asleep. When they awoke, Hansel comforted Gretel saying:

Hansel:

When the moon comes up I will be able to see the crumbs of bread that I scattered, and they will show us the way back home!

NARRATOR:

When the moon appeared they got up, but they could not find any crumbs, for the many thousands of birds that fly about in the woods and in the fields had pecked them up.

Hansel was determined.

Hansel:

We will find our way!

NARRATOR:

But they did not find it. They walked through the entire night and the next day from morning until evening, but they did not find their way out of the woods. They were terribly hungry, and were so tired that their legs would no longer carry them. Then eventually, they saw a little snow-white bird sitting on a branch. It sang so beautifully that they stopped to listen. When it was finished it stretched its wings and flew in front of them. They followed it until they came to a little house. The bird sat on the roof, and when they came closer, they saw that the house was built entirely from bread with a roof made of cake, and the windows were made of clear sugar. Hansel was overjoyed.

Hansel:

Let's help ourselves to a good meal! I'll eat a piece of the roof, and Gretel, you eat from the window. That will be sweet.

NARRATOR:

Hansel reached up and broke off a bit of the roof to see how it tasted, while Gretel stood next to the windowpanes, nibbling at them. Then a gentle voice called out from inside: 'Nibble, nibble, little mouse, Who is nibbling at my house?' The children answered:

Hansel and greteL:

The wind, the wind; the heavenly child.

NARRATOR:

And they continued to eat. Hansel, who very much liked the taste of the roof, tore down another large piece, and Gretel poked out an entire round windowpane. Suddenly the door opened, and a woman, as old as the hills and leaning on a crutch, crept out.

The witch hobbles into frame.

Narrator: (CONT'D)

Hansel and Gretel were so frightened that they dropped what they were holding in their hands.

But the old woman shook her head and said,

Witch:

Oh, you dear children, who brought you here? Come in and stay with me. No harm will come to you.

Int. kitchen - day

NARRATOR:

She took them by the hand and led them into her house. Then she served them a good meal: milk and pancakes with sugar, apples, and nuts - and made two nice beds for them. Hansel and Gretel went to bed, thinking they were in heaven. But alas, the old woman had only pretended to be friendly. She was really a wicked witch, lying in wait for children, who had built her house of bread merely to lure them to her - and if she captured one, she would kill him, cook him, and eat him! For her, that was a day to celebrate.

(Beat)

Now, witches have red eyes and cannot see very far, but they have a sense of smell like animals, and know when humans are approaching. When Hansel and Gretel came near to her, she laughed wickedly.

Witch:

Now I have them. They will not get away!

NARRATOR:

Early the next morning, before they awoke, she got up, went to their beds, and looked at the two of them lying there so peacefully, with their full red cheeks.

Witch:

They will be a good mouthful!

NARRATOR:

Then she grabbed Hansel with her withered hand carried him to a cage, and locked him in. Cry as he might, there was no help for him. Then she shook Gretel, yelling,

Witch:

Get up, lazybones! Fetch water and cook something good for your brother. He is locked outside and needs to be fattened up. When he is fat I am going to eat him!

NARRATOR:

Gretel began to cry, but it was pointless; she had to do what the witch demanded. Now Hansel was given the best things to eat every day, but Gretel received nothing but crayfish shells.

(Beat)

Every morning the old woman crept out to the cage and shouted,

Witch:

Hansel, stick out your finger, so I can feel if you are fat yet!

NARRATOR:

But Hansel stuck out a little bone, and the old woman, who had bad eyes and could not see the bone, thought it was Hansel's finger, and she wondered why he didn't get fat.

(Beat)

When four weeks had passed and Hansel was still thin, impatience overcame the witch, and she would wait no longer. She shouted to Gretel.

Witch:

Hurry up and fetch some water! Whether Hansel is fat or thin, tomorrow I am going to slaughter him and boil him.

NARRATOR:

Oh, how the poor little sister sobbed as she was forced to carry the water, and how the tears streamed down her cheeks! She cried,

Gretel:

Dear God, please help us! If only the wild animals had devoured us in the woods, then we would at least have died together!

NARRATOR:

The next morning, Gretel had to get up early, hang up the kettle with water, and make a fire. The old woman cackled.

Witch:

First, we are going to bake! I have already made a fire in the oven and kneaded the dough.

NARRATOR:

She pushed poor Gretel outside to the oven, from which fiery flames were leaping, telling her,

Witch:

Climb in, and see if it is hot enough to put the bread in yet.

NARRATOR:

When Gretel was inside, she intended to close the oven, bake her, and eat her. But Gretel saw what she had in mind, so she said -

Gretel:

I don't know how to do that. How can I get inside?

NARRATOR:

The old woman replied,

Witch:

Stupid goose! The opening is big enough. See, I myself could get in!

NARRATOR:

And she crawled up and stuck her head into the oven. Then Gretel gave her a shove, causing her to fall in. Then she closed the iron door and secured it with a bar. The old woman began to howl frightfully. But Gretel ran away, and the evil witch burned up miserably. Gretel ran straight to Hansel, unlocked his cage, and cried,

GreteL:

Hansel, we are saved! The old witch is dead!

NARRATOR:

Hansel jumped out, and they threw their arms around each other's necks, jumped with joy, and kissed one another. Because they now had nothing to fear, they went into the witch's house. In every corner were chests of pearls and precious stones, so Hansel filled his pockets, and Gretel filled her apron. Then Hansel turned to his sister and said,

Hansel:

Right! Let's get out of these witch-woods!

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

NARRATOR:

After walking a few hours ~~they arrived at a large body of water. Hansel sobbed,~~

~~HANSEL:~~

~~We cannot get across! I cannot see a walkway or a bridge.~~

~~NARRATOR:~~

~~Gretel nodded.~~

~~GRETEL:~~

~~And there are no boats. But there is a white duck swimming. If I ask it, it will help us across.~~

~~NARRATOR:~~

~~Then she called out:~~

~~GRETEL:~~

~~Duckling, duckling,~~

~~Here stand Gretel and Hansel.
Neither a walkway nor a bridge,~~

~~Take us onto your white back.~~

~~NARRATOR:~~

~~The duckling came up to them, and Hansel climbed onto it and his little sister sat down next to him.~~

~~(Beat)~~

~~When they were safely on the other side, and had walked on a little while,~~ the woods grew more and more familiar to them, and the children finally saw their father's house in the distance. They rushed inside, and threw their arms around their father's neck.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

NARRATOR:

The poor man had not had even one happy hour since he had left the children in the woods.

The woodcutter stands, looking sad.

Narrator: (CONT'D)

However, the woman had died.

The woodcutter does a thumbs up to camera.

NARRATOR: (CONT'D)

Gretel shook out her apron, scattering pearls and precious stones around the room, and Hansel added to them by throwing one handful after the other from his pockets.

Cutaway of mountains of jewels being thrown onto a table.

NARRATOR: (CONT'D)

Now all their cares were at an end, and they lived happily together.