

HANSEL AND GRETEL IN FOSTER CARE

By Kelly Meadows

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CHARACTERS

Male or Female:

Narrator

Narrator's Alter Ego

Foster Care Agent

Foster Care Supervisor

Designer One

Designer Two

Home Builder

Male:

Father

Hansel

The Witch's Husband

Female:

Gretel

Witch

Stepmother

Mother

Snow White

The Queen

NOTE: Some roles may be doubled for a smaller cast.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Two things will make this play fun... keeping the audience on their toes about what's different from the normal story and the constant element of surprise. Since everyone's heard the tale of Hansel and Gretel quite often, let them enjoy the fact that nothing in this version goes the way they might think, from the reason the family lives at the edge of the forest to the witch having a husband and living in Youngstown, Ohio, to the decorators who come fix up Hansel's house while they're out on a picnic. That narrator, however, keeps trying to get the story straight, and is frustrated by all these wrong turns, and by the uncooperative characters who won't let him continue.

There are many ways to interpret the various parts, depending on who's playing them. The writer has specifically left them open ended, so roles like the foster care worker and the interior designers can be open to many different interpretations, allowing an actor to make his own discoveries and contribute to the piece. Since, on the other hand, this is read and not acted, it's imperative to develop characters as much as possible, and not to be afraid to take them "outside the box." Some of these roles can be doubled so the play can be performed with a smaller cast.

HANSEL AND GRETEL IN FOSTER CARE

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NARRATOR: **(trying to set a storytelling tone)** Hansel and Gretel lived with their father and stepmother in a small hovel at the edge of a deeeeeep daaaarrrrk forest.

STEPMOTHER: **(ruining the tone immediately)** You call this living?

FATHER: **(they've had this argument many times before)** You wanted to move here.

STEPMOTHER: The real estate agent... She said it had old world charm.

FATHER: What would you know about charm?

STEPMOTHER: Nothing, or I wouldn't have married you.

FOSTER: Excuse me. Department of Social Services here. Stop fighting in front of the children.

STEPMOTHER: The children aren't here.

FATHER: **(explaining, casually)** They usually fight in front of us. We never have time for a good give and take.

STEPMOTHER: They're just bad kids. We tried changing the locks, but they never got the hint.

FOSTER: That sounds like child endangerment.

STEPMOTHER: We even tried making them eat right, and they still come home every night for dinner.

FOSTER: Using good nutrition as a weapon! I'll have you prosecuted.

FATHER: **(to FOSTER)** Who are you and what are you doing here?

FOSTER: Foster care with the state of Bavaria.

FATHER: There is no state of Bavaria. It's a German Duchy.

FOSTER: **(insisting)** There is too a state of Bavaria. It's just west of West Virginia. It's full of imported German children designed to provide the U.S. with a competitive speed skating team.

NARRATOR: Will someone please let me tell the story so we can all go home before the turn of the century?

FOSTER: **(curt)** Oh, all right. But there is a Bavaria.

NARRATOR: Whatever you say. **(trying to continue)** Hansel and Gretel were very poor, and--

FOSTER: **(screeching NARRATOR to a halt)** Sure! Blame the poverty on the children. Why doesn't their stepmother get a job?

STEPMOTHER: I have a job! We've spent all our money on child psychiatry and the Sylvan Learning Center.

NARRATOR: From the time they were very young, Hansel and Gretel presented a serious disciplinary challenge. Or to put it clinically, they were spoiled, whiny, uncivilized brats. Let's listen in...

STEPMOTHER: **(as an example, sweetly)** Hansel, after you finish your sauerkraut, it's time to take some cod liver oil!

HANSEL: **(overreacting)** You can't tell me what to do! You're not my real mother.

STEPMOTHER: **(to the audience)** I get that all the time.

FOSTER: Well, what brand of sauerkraut are you giving them?

HANSEL: With sauerkraut it's *always* the wrong brand.

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NARRATOR: Contrary to popular belief, their real mother wasn't dead – she was just... very hard to find.

MOTHER: **(as if SHE's being interviewed)** All I wanted was a good life, a nice husband, and some loving children. Instead, I got psychos! Wackos! Metal heads!

FATHER: We had a fierce custody battle.

MOTHER: I won! **(giddy)** Now he's stuck with them!

FOSTER: **(in disbelief)** A mother deserted her children? **(with a snuffle)** You put them on a train bound for nowhere. Nowhere, West Virginia.

STEPMOTHER: That's pretty much everywhere, West Virginia.

MOTHER: You want them? Take them. Take them to the park. Take them to the zoo! Gretel threw a mouse in the elephant pit and caused a stampede from here to New Jersey.

STEPMOTHER: That's a long stampede.

MOTHER: Exactly. It cost forty billion to rebuild Pennsylvania, and now they won't let us back into the zoo.

FATHER: No one's found the elephants!

NARRATOR: Despite her constant refusals, Hansel and Gretel still tried to have a relationship with their natural mother, who by this time was happily raising several foster children on taxpayers' money.

GRETEL: Mommy, can we come over and play?

MOTHER: **(quickly, and frightened)** Don't come near me!

HANSEL: **(whiny)** We want to play with the foster kids!

STEPMOTHER: Go. Just don't come back.

MOTHER: You knew they were like this when you married him.

STEPMOTHER: They said *you* were just a bad mother.

MOTHER: I thought *you* were a bad idea altogether, but I kept my mouth shut to get rid of the kids.

GRETEL: But your foster kids play age-inappropriate video games when you're at the salon getting a pedicure... cool! **(SHE smiles)** they'll come out disturbed and psychotic. **(whiny)** We wanna go play!

STEPMOTHER: Fine. **(to the audience)** I'd say be back in time for dinner, but... there is no dinner. Hansel, pick up a potato on the way home. We'll split it four ways.

HANSEL: You're *not* my mother.

STEPMOTHER: You're not my kid, and I feed your butt. Get over it.

HANSEL and GRETEL: **(on cue)** You can't tell us what to do.

FATHER and STEPMOTHER: **(to audience, also on cue)** We hear that all day long.

NARRATOR: Actually, no one could tell them what to do. Oh, there were suggestions, but they weren't... legal. So after awhile everyone stopped trying.

HANSEL: Stop talking about me as if I'm not here.

NARRATOR: I'm not. I'm talking about you as if I *wish* you weren't here. And when's the last time you washed your socks and underwear?

HANSEL: You can't tell me-

NARRATOR: **(insistent)** When, Hansel? As narrator, I need to know the facts. Even the smelly, poopy ones.

HANSEL: Uh...

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STEPMOTHER: He's never washed them. I wash them.

FOSTER: **(to STEPMOTHER)** When was the last time?

STEPMOTHER: Okay, it was last year, before Christmas. Actually, it was his present.

NARRATOR: **(with a sigh, continuing)** Food was scarce on the edge of the forest, usually because in the middle of the night wild animals came and took it away.

MOTHER: **(complaining)** When I lived with their father, he snuck out of bed at night and ate all the cheese.

HANSEL: **(finally figuring it out)** Dad, that was *my* cheese.

(FATHER burps)

NARRATOR: Finally, their stepmother hatched an evil plan.

STEPMOTHER: That depends whose side you're on.

NARRATOR: You're trying to leave the kids in the forest so you can save money on groceries.

STEPMOTHER: That's not evil, that's practical.

NARRATOR: **(trying it again)** "Finally, their stepmother hatched a practical plan." It sounds more like you adopted a fad diet.

FOSTER: **(happily)** "A shake for breakfast, another for lunch, and a sensible dinner." Gotta love that sensible dinger.

STEPMOTHER: I can't afford a sensible dinner. We have a dual income, but we've had to spend it all on psychiatry.

NARRATOR: Fortunately, the Department of Social Services was on to her... ahem... evil scheme. Smitty, the foster care worker **(FOSTER nods, bows, etc.)** and her **(or his)** supervisor decided to see once and for all what was the real origin of this household havoc.

ALTER EGO: How can they have jurisdiction in West Virginia if they're from the State of Bavaria?

NARRATOR: Who are you?

ALTER EGO: I'm your alter ego. I'm going to nag at your conscience and find fault with your narration. It's easy money.

GRETTEL: Then why don't you just be my mother? That's all she ever did.

ALTER EGO: And rightfully so. Now... tell me how they get jurisdiction.

GRETTEL: I don't know what jurisdiction means.

ALTER EGO: **(official)** I wasn't asking you.

GRETTEL: No one ever asks me anything!

ALTER EGO: Because you don't KNOW anything!

NARRATOR: She has jurisdiction because no one knows where Bavaria ends and West Virginia begins. It's been an issue since the Civil War and I'm not going to dispute it!

FOSTER: Madam **(Mister)** Supervisor... I respectfully request-

SUPERVISOR: Better drop that respect. We're in West Virginia.

ALTER EGO: That's a bigoted remark if I ever heard one.

SUPERVISOR: **(tossing it off)** Oh, we have this rivalry going with them. West Virginia and Bavaria. You know the jokes? All the businesses are on the Yellow Page? They closed the library when someone stole the book? That kinda thing. It's friendly. **(more sinister)** On the surface, at least.

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ALTER EGO: I don't like it.

SUPERVISOR: *You* don't have to. You probably come from some new age state like Oregon or Colorado. Now shut up or you're getting a very large foster family and **(threatening)** I'll see to it that they break your mother's china. **(giving orders, clippy)** Now Smitty? I want you to follow that family into the deep dark forest and see what's going on.

FOSTER: **(The Foster Care Agent is named SMITTY.)** The last foster care worker who did that got eaten by a leopard.

SUPERVISOR: Just in time, too. He was due for a raise.

HANSEL: **(whining)** I don't wanna go.

GRETEL: **(SHE could care less, but SHE wants to whine.)** Me neither.

STEPMOTHER: **(upbeat)** We're going on a picnic, and we're going to have fun. **(a bit sinister)** Well, I am, at least. **(dreamy)** For the rest of my life.

GRETEL: You can't make me go. You're not my-

STEPMOTHER: Yeah whatever. **(demonic)** GET IN THE CAR!

NARRATOR: Although it was just a hop, skip, and jump to the forest, this family was all too used to the urbanization of the larger cities of West Virginia and drove everywhere. Except to the grocery store, since they couldn't afford enough to eat.

FOSTER: They might if they got rid of the car.

ALTER EGO: Then they couldn't carry the groceries home.

STEPMOTHER: Besides, if we drive, they can't leave a pebble path and find their way back. **(proud of herself)** Evil and practical!

HANSEL: We'll follow the tire tracks!

STEPMOTHER: The tires are bald.

NARRATOR: So the family got in their old Ford-

MOTHER: I should have won that in the settlement.

NARRATOR: Bitter! **(starting over)** So... the family got in their old Ford, and off they toddled into the forest.

FOSTER: I'm following them.

NARRATOR: And follow them she did.

FOSTER: I'm going to get to the bottom of this. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's children-

SUPERVISOR: You can't stand children?

FOSTER: Will you let me finish?

SUPERVISOR: As your supervisor, I don't have to. I'm writing you up, unnnnn-less you come up with evidence that these children are being mistreated, so we can place them in a speed skating camp in Bavaria.

ALTER EGO: Why should Bavaria take care of West Virginia's children?

SUPERVISOR: **(duh)** Because I want a gold medal.

NARRATOR: They drove a short way until finally, they came to a clearing.

STEPMOTHER: **(as if SHE is parking the car)** What's this doing here?

FATHER: I don't know how we can lose the kids in a clearing. Who cleared it?

STEPMOTHER: There's a swing set, a sliding board... Oh, look! There's a jungle gym, maybe they'll fall off.

HANSEL: Look, there's a girl and her mother playing!

GRETEL: Let's pull her pigtails!

NARRATOR: Little did they know that-

HANSEL: **(interrupting)** Yes we did! She's a celebrity! Snow White?

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NARRATOR: **(annoyed)** Yes, her. Oh, there she is. You're so pale, Miss White. I told you to put on some rouge or you'd look like something out of *The X Files*.

SNOW WHITE: **(SHE's a princess, and acts every bit of it)** What of it? At least I don't have pimples.

GRETEL: What are you doing here?

SNOW WHITE: I'm trying to get away from my stepmother.

GRETEL: We're trying to do the same. She never lets us do anything.

HANSEL: Yeah, what is it with stepmothers these days?

SNOW WHITE: Mine's trying to kill me.

QUEEN: I am not-

NARRATOR: Said the queen...

QUEEN: I just don't want to be second place to your loveliness. **(bitter)** Fairest of them all! She prances around going "fairest of them all!" All day long. She's obsessed!

SNOW WHITE: What do you care? You don't even go to the mall. **(to HANSEL and GRETEL)** We go through this all the time. She could put me on *American Idol*, but noooooooo, she shuts me up in a castle with Rapunzel, who, incidentally, wears a polyester wig.

GRETEL: I don't know why my parents say I'm a bad girl.

NARRATOR: And with that, Gretel gave Snow White's pigtails a yankiepoos.

SNOW WHITE: Ow!

QUEEN: **(disciplining)** Stop tormenting my stepdaughter! **(smiling)** Let me do it.

SNOW WHITE: Ow!

FATHER: Stop pulling that girl's pigtails.

HANSEL: Why? Her mom's in on it!

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, Smitty was typing a report into her palm pilot.

FOSTER: **(pretending to type on a Palm Pilot)** Incurable children, tormenting a total stranger.

ALTER EGO: Snow White? She's national! You can do what you like with her.

SNOW WHITE: And I can sue. Or worse, I'll have my stepmom cast a spell on you.

FOSTER: Parents unable and unwilling to control their children. I don't know who's worse here.

SUPERVISOR: It's your job to know. You'd better find out, Smitty.

FOSTER: I'll investigate further, if I don't get eaten first.

STEPMOTHER: Look, take the kids back to Connecticut.

FOSTER: What happens there?

STEPMOTHER: They can't get out until they learn to spell it. Let's go home.

FATHER: Already? We haven't had the picnic yet.

STEPMOTHER: We can't picnic if there's nothing to eat.

SNOW WHITE: **(like a cute, pathetic little girl)** Can I come back with you? Please?

STEPMOTHER: Maybe we can trade. Your Majesty, what if you take Gretel and we take Snow White?

QUEEN: Well, she's a darned sight uglier. So yes... it would be advantageous to my position in front of the mirror... but Snow and I have a dynamic going. I'd hate to ruin it.

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SNOW WHITE: Hellllllp!

QUEEN: Oh, and here's some apples for the children.

SNOW WHITE: Don't touch those! She had the class bob for apples on Halloween and I got the poisoned one.

QUEEN: **(laughing and reminiscing)** Vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and oh so much mucus! Those were the days!

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, two things happened, each worse than the next.

ALTER EGO: What?

NARRATOR: I'm getting to that.

ALTER EGO: Not fast enough.

NARRATOR: This is West Virginia. Slow pace.

QUEEN: Move it, little girl!

SNOW WHITE: Heeeelllllp!

QUEEN: It's for your own good. **(explaining)** With her complexion, she can't stay out in the sun too long. She's turning into Snow Redneck.

NARRATOR: The first problem occurred when the foster care worker shuffled through the forest in a pair of dancing clogs and completely obliterated any trace of tire tracks, forcing everyone to spend an extra three hours finding their way home.

FOSTER: It gives me more chance to observe.

SUPERVISOR: You're not getting any overtime, so I'd be more careful.

NARRATOR: Second, a crew from a home remodeling TV program happenstanced upon the empty house at the edge of the woods. They were itching for a makeover, and nothing would stop them! Nothing but low ratings.

DESIGNER ONE: **(playfully disgusted, but in awe at the same time, as if talking for a TV camera)** Look at this dump!

DESIGNER TWO: **(overzealous)** We need to spruce it up!

DESIGNER ONE: They'll be so grateful.

DESIGNER TWO: This kitchen is spotless! They must be too poor to buy food.

DESIGNER ONE: Let's paint it pink!

DESIGNER TWO: And let's put *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* all over the little boy's room!

DESIGNER ONE: I hated Lara Croft.

DESIGNER TWO: She's the only girl I can draw. It's Lara Croft for the boy, and then Justin Timberlake in the little girl's room. But hurry. They might be back soon. **(sing songy)** We want to surprise them!

DESIGNER ONE: Do you think anyone actually lives here? What a hovel!

DESIGNER TWO: I heard about that family that got kicked out of town.

DESIGNER ONE: In West Virginia? They must be *really* awful.

NARRATOR: And in the course of the next three hours, the two designers proceeded to "spruce up." Depending on your definitions of *spruce*, and *up*.

DESIGNER ONE: It all goes with the spruce tree in the back yard. Now for the living room...

DESIGNER TWO: Deep blue, and let's replace their furniture with sliding boards.

DESIGNER ONE: Ewww... pee stains on the carpet.

NARRATOR: What's worse is they didn't have a dog.

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FOSTER: Stop it. You're creating an environment that's deleterious to raising a child.

NARRATOR: I think the children are doing that on their own.

ALTER EGO: Excuse me... deleterious?

FOSTER: Yes. We use it all the time. It means harmful. But frankly, I'd prefer to talk over your head.

MOTHER: So what happened? They're *my* children! I have a right to know.

ALTER EGO: Like you care.

MOTHER: (**agrees, casually**) I don't *care* about Demi and Ashton, but I still want to know. Maybe they met some dreadful end at the hands of the social welfare system.

ALTER EGO: Demi and Ashton?

MOTHER: No, their publicists. What do you think?

NARRATOR: Finally they got home.

HANSEL: That's not our home!

DESIGNER ONE: It's your *new* home! You'll love it.

DESIGNER TWO: Just some minor changes.

DESIGNER ONE: Oh, and smile, you're on TV.

HANSEL: I hate it!

GRETEL: I hate it!

DESIGNER ONE: Now you two behave or I'll spank you in front of the entire Home and Garden TV Network.

HANSEL: Anything for TV exposure.

NARRATOR: Soon, though, the designers left to paint the rest of West Virginia pink!

DESIGNER TWO: I'm starting a trend. We designers get dictatorial sometimes.

NARRATOR: And Hansel and his stepmother found themselves in a place they'd never been before – agreement.

HANSEL: I can't live in this décor!

STEPMOTHER: It really is pretty awful. I can't wait to send you to your room!

FATHER: I like the couch. It's fluffy.

GRETEL: I *hate* Justin Timberlake. I wanted him to marry me and he didn't answer my letters.

FATHER: That's because you wrote him in German.

GRETEL: It's the only language I know how to write!

STEPMOTHER: No wonder she's flunking school.

FOSTER: See? They need to go to Bavaria. (**sinister**) Everyone speaks German in Bavaria.

FATHER: That's what I'm afraid of.

SNOW WHITE: Hey, I'll take the Timberlake room.

FATHER: What are you doing here?

SNOW WHITE: I don't know yet. But anything to escape from that old witch.

FOSTER: Don't call your mother an old witch!

SNOW WHITE: *My* mother really *is* an old witch. She's the oldest, oldest, oldest, oldest-

QUEEN: (**insecure**) All right already!

FOSTER: This whole state is a hotbed of unfit parents.

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SUPERVISOR: And what have you done about it? Everyone's still shacking up with their evil stepmothers! Do you want another generation of Bavarians to grow up like this?

NARRATOR: Hansel and Gretel decided they couldn't stomach the new décor-

GRETEL: I can't believe they kept the carpet.

DESIGNER ONE: Pee stains are in.

NARRATOR: So they decided to run away.

STEPMOTHER: Good.

MOTHER: As long as they don't come here.

GRETEL: Where can we go? No one will have us!

HANSEL: That old lady with Snow White. She seems to share our penchant for evil.

SNOW WHITE: Ow!

NARRATOR: Now what?

SNOW WHITE: Nothing. I just wanted to get them in trouble. **(trying to be sassy)** I have a wild side too, ya know.

NARRATOR: So off they went into the woods.

FATHER: Good, now we can move back to Charleston.

DESIGNER TWO: Are you kidding? **(still annoyingly cheerful)** With Hansel gone, we're going to convert the Lara Croft room into a home library!

FATHER: Perfect, since I'm illiterate.

DESIGNER ONE: And Justin?

SNOW WHITE: Don't you touch Justin! I'm a real princess. He's going to marry me just as soon as he's over Britney.

DESIGNER ONE: We're *all* over Britney, toots. Read the latest magazines.

FOSTER: Either way, you're stuck taking care of Snow White. You've got royalty on your hands.

FATHER: What's Snow White doing in West Virginia? I thought she came from some German duchy.

SNOW WHITE: Look, my mother is the Queen of Bavaria. She's got a youth complex. "Mirror, mirror, on the wall" – then she got a compact. She takes it everywhere. "Mirror, mirror in my purse, why do I keep getting worse?" She and the mirror sit out at Starbucks and talk over coffee. It used to tell her what she wanted to hear, but ever since it started up that I was the fairest of them all, I've had to sleep with one eye open. I've half a mind to sledgehammer the darned thing.

ALTER EGO: Meanwhile, what about Hansel and Gretel? **(sinister as well)** Or are they forgotten?

MOTHER: **(easilygoing)** Like yesterday's bowel movement.

NARRATOR: With Hansel and Gretel out of the picture, West Virginia was considered a safer place, and children could finally venture outdoors again.

HANSEL: We're lost!

GRETEL: That was sort of our intention.

NARRATOR: When suddenly...

GRETEL: Ow!

QUEEN: What have you done with my daughter?

NARRATOR: The Queen of Bavaria was pretty miffed.

HANSEL: She stowed away in the Ford and she's sponging off my parents.

GRETEL: Not a good idea, since we can't afford enough to eat.

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HANSEL: **(as an aggrieved party)** Just wait at the clearing; it's where they dump all their kids.

QUEEN: You bring her back to me or- ow!

NARRATOR: Hansel kicked her in the shins, and they ran deeper and deeper into the woods, until.... There it was!

HANSEL: **(as if it's a big discovery)** Ohio!

FOSTER: Get back in my jurisdiction!

HANSEL: You're not my mother!

FOSTER: Maybe not, but I can tell both you *and* your mother what to do! I went to school for it.

NARRATOR: But only if they returned to West Virginia. Right now, Smitty was, as they say in Social Services, in deep doo-doo.

GRETEL: Look, Hansel, it's a house!

HANSEL: **(exciting)** Made of gingerbread!

DESIGNER ONE: Why didn't we think of that? At least for the exterior!

DESIGNER TWO: Is it insulated? What if it's hot out? Does it mold? Materials wise, this is pretty brittle.

HANSEL: **(smacks his lips)** But delish!

DESIGNER ONE: **(curt)** It's not brittle - it's gingerbread.

NARRATOR: Hansel and Gretel started eating... off the south side, where it was warm, when they heard a voice faintly on the breeze. Of course, since the walls were made of gingerbread, you could pretty much hear everything.

WITCH: **(as if SHE's far away)** Nibble nibble like a mouse, who is nibbling at my house?

HUSBAND: What is it, hon?

NARRATOR: The witch and her husband had no children of their own, so they built a house of gingerbread to lure in the neighbors' kids. We don't want to point fingers, but school enrollment dropped significantly in the months after they took up residency.

WITCH: Someone's eating a hole through the dining room.

HUSBAND: Great. I guess we're having children for dinner again.

NARRATOR: Actually, they *loved* children.

WITCH: Especially with cheese and tabasco!

HUSBAND: Feh! Rotten kids.

WITCH: That's because you left them sitting out!

NARRATOR: Food being scarce at the edge of the forest, Hansel and Gretel dug in.

HANSEL: Yum! You take the bedroom Gretel; I'll pig out here in the dining room.

NARRATOR: Before you knew it, the witch's house came down faster than the Berlin Wall in 1989.

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