OPEN TO INTERPRETATION
TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Ken Bradbury

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SYNOPSIS: This clever spoof on the Hansel and Gretel story gets some new looks as the actors give various interpretations: Shakespeare, soap opera, Dragnet and others.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN.)

HANSEL (M)
GRETEL (F)
AT RISE:
HANSEL: Hansel!
GRETEL: And Gretel!
HANSEL: A children’s story! Or so it seems on the surface. But underneath…the implications are…
GRETEL: They are mind-boggling.
HANSEL: Stupefying.
GRETEL: And definitely…
HANSEL & GRETEL: Open to interpretation!
GRETEL: (As they become two little children.) Oh, Hansel! What a lovely day!
HANSEL: Yes, except for the fact that our mother died, our father remarried a very wicked woman who claims we eat too much, and thus sends dear Daddy out in the woods to leave us to starve. Other than that, it’s a perfect day.
GRETEL: But look, Hansel! I have brought this handful of breadcrumbs, which I have been dropping, thus assuring us that we can find our way back.
HANSEL: You are truly a wonderful sister.
GRETEL: Thanks.
HANSEL: Unfortunately, you’re not a very smart sister. Look. The birds have eaten all of your bread.
GRETEL: Oh, crumb!
HANSEL: But look! There’s a house made of candy! Let’s eat that!
GRETEL: Before dinner?
HANSEL: We’re the victims of neglect; we can do as we wish.
GRETEL: You’re right. (They begin to eat, when suddenly.) Look, Hansel! A wicked witch! She’s tying you up! She’s throwing you in a cage to fatten you! And she’s nearly blind!
HANSEL: (Now in the cage, hanging on to the bars.) Never fear, Gretel! Each day I shall stick this chicken bone out of the cage when she comes to feel my finger. She says she shall throw me into the oven when I get fat enough, but I have fooled her!
GRETEL: Oh, Hansel! Now she wants me to stick my head into the oven to see if it is hot enough! I shall ask her to stick her head in, Hansel!
HANSEL: Good thinking, Grete!
GRETEL: *(Tosses in the witch.)* Aooommph! There! She is dead!
HANSEL: End of story!
GRETEL: Hurray!
HANSEL: But! Since it’s also a rather dull story…
GRETEL: And we are still five minutes away from our time minimum…
HANSEL: Let us suppose this untidy little tale was a murder mystery!
*(Both hum the “Dragnet” theme as they get into position.*) *(Ala Jack Webb.)* It was a cool Friday in the forest. I was working day watch out of Homicide Division. My name is Hansel. I’m a cop.
*(Crossing to GRETEL, deadpan.)* Name?
GRETEL: Gretel.
HANSEL: Who’s the dead broad?
GRETEL: A witch.
HANSEL: Witch?
GRETEL: Witch.
HANSEL: Great. How’d she die?
GRETEL: I killed her.
HANSEL: With what?
GRETEL: An oven.
HANSEL: You hit her with an oven?
GRETEL: I shoved her in. I cooked her.
HANSEL: Great. Another 9-34. That’s the third “witch cooking” I’ve had this week.
GRETEL: This ain’t no copycat crime, officer. It was my own idea. She deserved it.
HANSEL: Most witches do. Got any witnesses?
GRETEL: My brother Hansel over there. The one holding the chicken bone.
HANSEL: He do that often?
GRETEL: Sort of a hobby.
HANSEL: I’ll have to take you down to the station.
GRETEL: Whatever you say.
HANSEL: *(Pulling imaginary handcuffs out of his pocket.)* These bread crumbs yours? We found ‘em in the forest.
GRETEL: Oh great.
**HANSEL:** (To the audience.) But! How would Shakespeare have dealt with this?

**GRETEL:** Hansel! Hansel! My dear Hansel! Why art thou so downcast?

**HANSEL:** (Behind bars.) Oh, Gretel! Dearest of sisters! 'Tis the wicked witch that hath entombed me! Looketh! Even now she doth come to check my finger!

**GRETEL:** Oh, most wretched of women! Oh, I shalt give thee more than double thy toil and trouble! Oh, thou most...

**HANSEL:** Oh, get off it! She wants to cook me! Hark! Even now she bendeth over to check her cauldron! Listen to it boil, Gretel! Do not ask for whom it boils... It boils for me! Quick! Do the deed! Now, while she turneth but away a bit.

**GRETEL:** (Begins to shove her, then stops to think.) To shove, or not to shove... That is the question...

**HANSEL:** Shovest thou! Please shovest!

**GRETEL:** Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the gripes and groans of yon whining brother...

**HANSEL:** Oh, shovest thou, quick! For even now she turns to...

And the imaginary witch drags HANSEL from the cage and toward the oven as GRETEL soliloquizes...with HANSEL making various noises in the background

**GRETEL:** Hansel! Hansel! Wherefore art thou, Hansel? A rose by any other name would burn as quickly!

**HANSEL:** Grete!!!!

**GRETEL:** Ponder I this wicked deed...for what better stuff am I than her if into the oven thither she goeth?

**HANSEL:** Gretel, I'm burning!

**GRETEL:** Burn! Burn! My conscience burns with thoughts so grieved and maddened! To push! To pull! And then alas, to shove no more!

**HANSEL:** I'm dead! (And HE dies.)

**GRETEL:** All's well that ends well. Alas, poor Hansel, I knew him well, witch! Now lieth he as still as potash on Flanders Fields.
HANSEL: Unsatisfying to say the least! What about… Vaudeville! (As both hum their way to side-by-side positions.) Whoa! I mean that witch is mean!

GRETEL: How mean is she?
HANSEL: You kick her in the heart, you’d break your toe!
GRETEL: That’s mean!
HANSEL: That’s mean! She once dated a warlock with a wooden leg.
GRETEL: What happened?
HANSEL: She got mad and broke it off.
GRETEL: That’s mean!
HANSEL: That’s mean! And ugly! When she was born, her father went down to the zoo and threw rocks at the stork!
GRETEL: That’s ugly.
HANSEL: That’s ugly! But she has everything a man would love!
GRETEL: Really?
HANSEL: Yeh…bulging muscles and a mustache!
GRETEL: That’s ugly!
HANSEL: That’s ugly! I said, “Hey! Is that your face, or did you block a kick?”
GRETEL: That’s ugly!
HANSEL: But at least she’s not two-faced.
GRETEL: Really?
HANSEL: Eh. If she had two, you think she’d wear that one?
GRETEL: That’s ugly!
HANSEL: And it’s rather tedious, don’t you think?
GRETEL: Quite.
HANSEL: I mean, English drawing-room comedy would be much more suitable. (Gets behind bars, and affecting an English accent.) Gretel, dear?
GRETEL: Yes, Hansel?
HANSEL: I do hate to be a bother, but could I trouble you to give dear old Witchy-Poo the old shove-o?
GRETEL: I beg your pardon?
HANSEL: Oh, I know it’s rather dreary and all, considering the heat…but perhaps if you could just nudge her a bit toward the old hot box. Eh?
GRETEL: Oh, you’re always the clever one, aren’t you, Hansel? Here... how about a spot of tea before we do the dirty deed?

HANSEL: Dashing! *(As something pulls him toward the oven.*) I say, Gretel, the old gal seems to be moving me toward the rotisserie. Bit of an inconvenience, don’t you think?

GRETEL: Dash it all, Hansel. You’ve spilled your tea!

HANSEL: Oh dear. Mummy won’t be happy. I say, it’s beginning to warm up, what?

GRETEL: Should I open a window?

HANSEL: Don’t fret yourself, Gretel. It’ll be over in a minute. I don’t suppose you could spare a moment?

GRETEL: Something the matter?

HANSEL: Oh, a trifle... but could you pull yourself away from your crumpets just a moment? I seem to be roasting.

GRETEL: Oh. Sorry.

HANSEL: No, it’s my problem. Bit of a mess, I’m afraid. *(Looks down.*) Ashes to ashes. Too late now. Say goodbye to dear daddy, won’t you?

GRETEL: Of course.

HANSEL: Well, that seems to be it. Ta-tah, Gretel.

GRETEL: *(Toasting him with her tea-cup.*) Cheers. *(HANSEL screams.*) Unlimited possibilities.

HANSEL: All a trifle unsatisfying. Unless!

GRETEL: Yes!

HANSEL: The Soap Opera! *(Becoming a dark-haired macho hero.)* Gret!

GRETEL: *(With a breathless intensity.)* Yes, Hans!

HANSEL: You killed her!

GRETEL: I...

HANSEL: You killed her! Dirk and Dana told me I couldn’t trust you.

GRETEL: But she was about to kill you!

HANSEL: Don’t lie to me! As soon as I found out about Shannon’s amnesia and that I was her long-lost brother who had the face-lift in New York when we were staying at Staff and Daffon’s...

GRETEL: That was Bo and Derrick!

HANSEL: Who told you that?

GRETEL: Bart and Shana.
HANSEL: Not Luke and Jessica?
GRETEL: Not according to Abby and Beau.
HANSEL: Do you mind if we stop? I really hate this.
GRETEL: Me too. (Suddenly struck.) Musical comedy!

The following lines are sung...sort of...don't worry: the weirder the better

HANSEL: “Oh, what a beautiful morning!”
GRETEL: “The bird of paradise just stole my bread!”
HANSEL: “But it’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood!”
GRETEL: “Look! A big rock candy mountain!”
HANSEL: “There is someone, walking behind you! Turn around!
    Turn around!”
GRETEL: “Whenever I feel afraid, I hold my head up high!”
HANSEL: (Behind bars.) “If I had the wings of an angel… Over these
    prison bars, I would fly!”
GRETEL: “Hello, Witchy! Well, Hello, Witchy! It’s so nice to shove
    you in where you belong!” (And SHE shoves her into the musical
    oven.)
HANSEL: “Oh, you beautiful doll!”
GRETEL: “I gotta crow! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!”
HANSEL & GRETEL: “Ding Dong, the witch is dead!”
HANSEL: But this is all so...so shallow.
GRETEL: Meaningless.
HANSEL: We must go deeper...deeper into the meaning of the
    piece.
GRETEL: Hansel!
HANSEL: Yes, Gretel!
GRETEL: That bread...
HANSEL: Yes?
GRETEL: The bread I scattered along the path...I don’t know what
    came over me, Hansel. It’s like...it’s like I wanted us to get lost!
HANSEL: Oh, Gretel. I understand.
GRETEL: (Leaving HANSEL in a frozen pose.) I wonder what he meant by “I understand?” He’s never trusted me, just because I’m a woman. He feels threatened by me. I know he does. (To HANSEL, sweetly.) I knew you would.

HANSEL: (Leaving GRETEL frozen.) “I knew you would?” She’s taking me for granted again. She always wants to relate with me somehow when she knows that it’s a part of my maleness to keep my feelings to myself. She wants this control. That’s all it is, just a matter of control. Doesn’t she know that men are from Mars? When you drain us of our feelings, we have nothing left. (To GRETEL, kindly.) Thank you.

GRETEL: (Leaving HANSEL frozen.) “Thank you?” What’s he want? Everything’s a ploy with him...a gimmick. He uses words like a tool. If he can’t dominate, then there’s nothing left of him. How can I ever truly discover who I am as long as I’m under the thumb of his male need to be in charge of every situation?

HANSEL: Stop!

GRETEL: Thank you.

HANSEL: I wonder what she meant by that?

GRETEL: It’s over.

HANSEL: Oh.

GRETEL: And so the story ends.

HANSEL: One dead witch, two hyperactive children overdosed on sucrose, an oven that can’t be used again for cookies, and a father who still has a lot of explaining to do.

GRETEL: Unsatisfying.

HANSEL: Unbelievable.

GRETEL: But...

HANSEL & GRETEL: Open to interpretation!

GRETEL: And that’s why we call it theatre!

HANSEL & GRETEL: Ta-Dah!

THE END