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## The Misunderstood Witch

A lighthearted look at a favorite fairy tale, as the witch from “Hansel and Gretel” guides tourists through her gingerbread cottage. . . .

by Alida Young

### Characters

*ROSE-ELLEN, in black witch’s hat and long black robe, enters and addresses audience.*

**ROSE-ELLEN:** It’s nearly time for the next tour of my house to begin. I suppose I was foolish to open my lovely home to strangers, but with the price of fuel skyrocketing and the taxes so high, one must do something. Witchcraft has been in a slump lately—vampires, demons, and werewolves get all the attention. There’s nothing for it but to give house tours to little monsters. *(Suddenly sweet)* Ah, my dear children, come in, come in, come in. Isn’t it a perfectly enchanting day for a tour? *(Pauses; as if answering child)* Yes, this is the gingerbread house you’ve all read about—full-page spread in the October issue of *Cottage Beautiful*. *(Pointing up)* Take particular notice of the roof. It’s made from one of my special bundt cake recipes. Been in my family for years and years. *(Pauses)*

*(With irritation)* What do you mean, “Hey, witch”? My dear child, my name is Rose-Ellen. Next question? *(Pauses)* Hansel and Gretel?

*(To the audience)* They always ask about Hansel and Gretel. *(As if to child)* Yes, they were here once upon a time. *(Shaking finger)* But I hope you children don’t tell fibs about me the way those two did. It just isn’t fair. I’m a sweet, innocent witch who wouldn’t hurt a fly.

*(To the audience)* Well, I might frighten somebody once in a while or make someone shiver, but what else are witches supposed to do?

Right from the first I suspected that Hansel and Gretel were a bit loose with the truth, as it were. Personally, I think they quarreled with their parents and ran away from home. That story about their father leaving them in the woods! My dears, it’s ridiculous.

(*As if to child*) Please! Do not touch my Louis the Fourteenth sugar-cane chair! And absolutely no sneaking behind my back to lick the licorice woodwork. After the tour, I'm offering darling little packages of my special candies—for only one dollar.

Now, where was I? (*Pause*) Let's see, I remember when Hansel and Gretel came here, as though were yesterday. Late one night, I heard a munching and gnawing sound outside. Thinking it was some of neighborhood rowdies, I went to frighten them away.

(*Aside to audience*) After all, one cannot have one's house nibbled away piece by piece, can one?

(*To imaginary child*) What? Yes, it was Hansel and Gretel. But they didn't frighten away easily. They wanted to stay and gorge themselves on my house. (*Looks around*) My dear little house.

So, there was nothing for me to do but to give them a *real* scare. I know you children will find it difficult to believe, but I actually made myself ugly. I even put a plastic wart on the end of my nose. Then I told Gretel to cook a nice breakfast. "We must fatten Hansel," I said. "When he's plump enough, I shall eat him!"

(*To audience; chuckling*) I could scarcely keep from laughing at that.

So anyway, I locked Hansel in a cage. After a day or two, I went to him and said, "Hansel, stretch your finger through the bars so that I can see if you're fat enough to eat." You wouldn't believe what that little scamp did to try to fool me. He held out a chicken bone. A chicken bone! As if that would fool me! I wasn't fooled for a minute.

(*Aside*) Actually, I was disappointed. I thought I'd done rather a good job of frightening the child. After all, I got straight A's in frightening at ghoulish school.

I could see I was going to have to take drastic measures to get them to go. So I told Gretel to light a fire in my big wood stove. (*Beckons and crosses left*) If you children will follow me out to the kitchen, you can see my stove. What? Little girl, *my* broom is not for sweeping.

Anyway, I told Gretel to climb into the oven to see if it was hot enough. The silly goose whined, "I don't know how, I don't know how!" So I showed her. I climbed in and closed the door.

If you children will come around behind the stove, you'll see that it opens from both front and back. I secretly crawled out the back, but I pretended that I was inside and I screamed and yelled most vociferously!

My dears, that did it. Gretel scuttled out of my house and unlocked the cage with the key I'd conveniently left in the lock. "We're free!" she yelled, loud enough to be heard in the next kingdom. "The horrid old witch is dead!"

(*To the audience*) That remark was uncalled for. After all, I was quite young in those days and I was certainly not horrid. (*Preens and simpers*) I thought I'd seen the last of them, but those two managed to get on all the talk shows, and their ghostwritten story made the best-seller list.

That's it, boys and girls. You've heard my side of the story and you've seen the house, so please line up for the candy. Have your dollars ready.

No showing. . . .What? You don't want to buy my candy? Overpriced! Have you checked the cost of chocolate and sugar and vanilla recently? (*Irritated*) How dare you say this tour is a rip-off? I'm getting a little tired of your snide remarks. Maybe you'd better go home. (*Suddenly*) BOO! (*Pause*) Mercy me, did I really frighten you? (*Sweetly*) I'm so sorry.

(*To the audience*) Actually, the little monsters aren't happy unless a witch gives them a scare or two. And it was

fun, too. I haven't done that in ages.

(*Pause*) Now, children, if you'll excuse me, I'm just the teensiest bit weary. (*To audience*) I'm not as young as I once was, and witching is an exhausting profession. But what am I to do? A witch never retires!

(*Calling sweetly*) You come back again, you hear? And bring all your brothers and sisters. Rose-Ellen just adores little children. (*Exits; curtain*)

**THE END**