



The Sweet House

Alexandra Vanhorn

Retold Fairy Tales

Once there lived an old woman who was a successful baker. Even though she lived in the middle of a deep, dark forest, folks would come from all over to taste her delicious treats. The most coveted of her sweets was her gingerbread that she shaped into people, houses, boats, and whatever else her imagination could conjure. But bakers all around grew jealous of the old woman's success and began a nasty rumor that the secret to her success was that she was a witch. Soon folks began to believe the rumor and fewer and fewer people came to her bakery in the forest.

One day she came back from fetching water from her well to find her cottage burned to the ground. The old woman was so sad she crumbled in front of the ashes and cried for three days and three night. On the fourth day her stomach turned with hunger as she had not ate or drank the entire time she cried. All that stood from her once quaint cottage was the large brick oven she used for baking. She gathered the roots of ginger and made a sheet of gingerbread. When the food was finished she quickly ate it, barely pausing to breath. It was the finest thing she had ate in all her life. The old woman smiled and decided that a home gingerbread would be far greater then the wooden cottaged that was now burned to the ground.

So the old woman set to baking her new home, adorning it in fine candied plums and lacy sugar. At the center of the house was the great stove, proud and piping hot for baking any new home renovations. She named here new cottage "The Sweet House".

The old woman was pleased with her hard work, but still no one returned to her bakery. Instead she went down the road to the well and everyday she came home to her sweet, but empty cottage. The only person who visited her now was the delivery man that brought her all the supplies to make her sweet treats. He didn't believe she was a witch like the rumors said. So he would stay briefly for tea before leaving to continue his deliveries.

Until one day, the old woman came home to the sound of crunch, crunch, crunch at the back of her cottage. She followed the noise, finding two small children, a boy and a girl, picking and eating the candied plums and bits of gingerbread from her beautiful home. At first the old woman was filled with anger. How dare they gobble up her precious home?

Upon a closer look, the old woman's heart dropped. The children had sunken in eyes and gaunt faces. Their clothes hung loosely around their tiny bodies. These children had obviously not had a proper meal in many days and many nights. They looked up with tired but panicked silver blue eyes.

Before they could run she spoke, "My children, do not be afraid," she soothed. "If you need food, I'd be happy to give you warm meals and a cozy place to sleep."

The children exchanged looks before silently agreeing with each other. They came inside and ate their fill of fresh franzbrötchen, sausages, and plums. The old woman tucked them under a great quilt by the hearth and watched them drift into peaceful dreams. The next morning the old woman woke and fed the children sweet rolls with great globs of butter, marmalade, and honey. The children ate happily and the woman was filled with joy. When the children finished eating she asked, "Did you both get lost in the forest? I can help you find your way home."

The children shifted nervously in their chairs. The girl trembled. The boy spoke.

"Our father lost his job and our parents could not feed us. Mother said we were going into the woods for mushrooms. She left us in a grove and told us to wait for her to return with a surprise, but she never came back."

The old woman was overcome with grief. These poor children had been left to die. She embraced the children, their frail bodies fitting easily in her arms.

"You are welcome to stay here, my children. I will keep you safe."

The children hugged her back and agreed to stay. Though when she held her, the old woman couldn't help but notice the girl dug her nails into the old woman's shoulder.

The old woman and the children quickly settled into their routine the same way you wear a new jacket. Each day they began with a large breakfast. Then the children would follow the old woman to the well, silently walking as they made their way down the trail. They were sullen children, but this never bothered the old woman. They would return home for a lovely lunch followed by a delicious dinner.

Until one day the girl tried to bite the delivery man. After that the delivery man stopped staying for tea. Everything changed.

Each day the children grew healthier but they did not grow happier. Their once soft smiles were replaced by

demanding fists, slamming against the table for more food. They complained when there wasn't enough cookies to snack on and gnawed on the gingerbread walls in anger. They shouted when the old woman was too slow to set the table, shoving past her to eat with their hands. Each day the children grew more angry and each day the old woman felt her heart sink. The children were finally healthy again, cheeks and bellies full but these weren't the kindly children she once knew.

One day she put on her cloak to go to the well and invited the children. They threw apples at her and said they had better things to do. The old woman left before the children could see the tears in her eyes. As the old woman filled her pail, she heard a rustling in the trees. Out walked the fox, fur matted and eyes wild. He frowned at her.

"Don't go back to your cottage." He said. "All the forest knows who stays with you, and they are not to be trusted."

The old woman shook her head. In all her years in the forest, she had learned a fox was not to be trusted. "Those things you keep have no mother or father," he continued. "They are made from ash and anger and appetite. Their bellies will never be full."

"You're wrong," said the old woman. "My children are sweet, just like my home."

"Sweet can lead to rot." The fox insisted.

The old woman took her bucket and returned home to smoke billowing out her chimney like a great sheet. Had the children stoked the fire in the oven?

She rushed inside, calling out to the children, but they didn't reply. From the oven she smelled something sweet. Perhaps the children felt remorse for their harsh words? She imagined they were making a meal to thank her for all her kindness. Perhaps they were out picking her a bouquet of wild flowers. The thoughts warmed her heart. Still, the old woman couldn't help but peek at whatever delicious thing was in the oven. The old woman pulled the handle and looked inside.

She gasped at the sight of the delivery man, blistering amongst the coals. She went to run from her home, but felt a great push against her back, forcing her into the piping hot oven's mouth. The door shut and on the other side of the glass she saw two sets of beautifully blue eyes and sharp fanged smiles just before she was consumed by the burning hot oven.

The End.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com