

## ***The Fall***

**Vanessa Ackerman**

One of 4 plays commissioned as part of Menagerie Theatre Company's 'Escapism' project, May 2020.

This is a play for two performers – the performer playing Hansel has the added challenge of playing him as both an old and a young man.

Notes for performers :

- SFX or FX in the script stands for 'Sound Effect'
- Feel free to add live or recorded music if you wish
- If you are unable to create desired sound effect, find a creative way around that (eg. Narration)
- Please open and end your recording of the play with the title followed by the writer's name.
- If you wish, you may also name the performers and anyone else who was involved in the recording. By doing this, you give your consent for those names to be in the public domain when Menagerie releases the recording via our website and social media channels.
- See the guidelines on our webpage for how to send the recording to Menagerie.
- If you have any questions about the play or recording, please email [office@menagerie.uk.com](mailto:office@menagerie.uk.com)
- And don't forget – have fun.

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## **THE FALL**

**by Vanessa Ackerman**

**A play for two voices**

**Hansel**

**Gretel**

**/ indicates where the characters interrupt each other**

**FX : V.O. Hansel as an elderly man, narrating,**

Let's say someone tells you a story. A story about your childhood.

You know the story is a lie, so everytime you hear it, it makes your skin crawl. The problem is everyone else loves this story too. They love it so much they make films about it. All over the world. Because they believe this story has some kind of deep and secret meaning.

And that if they keep telling it, at some point the meaning will reveal itself.

That's how it's always been for Grettie and me.

People marvel at our courage and ingenuity. And it's true, we were really smart kids. Especially me. Grettie was always more sensitive, but that's for another time.

And people pity us. How could they have been left alone to roam around a forest? It isn't right.

So they just can't help themselves ; they have to give us a fairy tale ending.

After defeating the witch in the Gingerbread house, they say, over and over again, Hansel and Gretel came upon a river.

A beautiful white bird led them across this river and the two children finally came home to their father who was very happy to see them. Overjoyed. And even their stepmother was dead. Great. Wonderful. And the three of them lived happily ever after.

Well, let me tell you what really happened when we came home that night. It was so long ago. But I need to tell you. For my sister's sake. She would never admit it, but I think Grettie would have wanted you to know. And to be honest, even if she didn't, I would tell you anyway.

**FX: Distant Thunder. A dark night.**

**FX : Gretel stands at the door of the house. She calls out to Hansel who is sitting outside**

**Gretel** Hans, Hans. Come inside now.

**Hansel** One... two... three... four...

**Gretel** Come on. No point in waiting out here.

**Hansel** Five ...six... seven...nine

**Gretel** Stop it.

**Hansel** I need to know when the lightning strikes.

**Gretel** But you always skip a number.

**Hansel** Only if it's unlucky.

***Gretel sits down next to Hansel***

**Gretel** Listen, let's pretend he's gone for a walk. He's gone out to buy some milk. And he'll be back. In a bit. Alright.

**Hansel** No.

**Gretel** Just for a little while.

**Hansel** Leave me alone. I'm thinking.

**Gretel** 'Till we get used to it.

**Hansel** I've got ten different supersenses. I can sense he'll be here in the morning.

**Gretel** Hans. He's gone.

**Hansel** You don't know that for a fact. You can't prove it.

**Gretel** I know because. There's no food in the fridge.

**Hansel** There never was any food in the fridge.

**Gretel** The house is spotless. And. He didn't even leave a note. Like: Hello my darling children, I've missed you, in case you come home, I've just popped to the shop, I'll be back in half an hour. Love, Dad.

**Hansel** That's because he would never say that. He'd never write Love, Dad. Maybe he's been abducted.

**Gretel** Well, he's not worth much.

**Hansel** We could send a distress signal, light a fire or something. The grass is really dry.

**Gretel** Who's going to see it, silly ? There's no-one around. Noone knows we're here. Everyone thinks we're dead.

**Hansel** He's in the house somewhere. In his workshop. He doesn't know we're here yet, that's all. (**he calls out**) Dad! Dad! It's me, Hans !

**Gretel** I've looked everywhere.

**Hansel** The yellow room?

**Gretel** Yes.

**Hansel** The black one?

**Gretel** It's locked.

**Hansel** What about the basement?

**Gretel** He's not there.

**Hansel** And the attic?

**Gretel** Nowhere.

**pause**

He's vanished.

**pause**

**Hansel** He's out looking for us. He was so upset when we left that he...

**Gretel** We didn't leave, Hans. We were dumped in the middle of the woods, like a pair of old socks.

**Hansel** He felt bad, I know he did.

**Gretel** Not bad enough.

**Hansel** Don't say mean things about him all the time.

**Gretel** Sorry. Sorry, little lamb. Sorry.

**FX :** **Thunder again, nearer this time.**

**Hansel** One... three... four...

**Gretel** Come on now, stop that.

**Hansel** The house is too spooky without him. I feel really spooked Grettie.

**Gretel** It's just a stupid old house. Stupid, empty house.

**Hansel** It's better out here in the garden. We could sleep under the willow tree.

**Gretel** No. we need to go inside and do normal things now, ok. Like getting into our pyjamas , brushing our teeth and saying our prayers. Like normal kids.

**Hansel** This is normal.

**Gretel** No, it's not. It's really weird.

**Hansel** If he's out looking for us , he's probably lost because he has a terrible sense of direction. That's one of his attributes. We should go back and have a look. Before it's too late. What if he gets eaten by something?

**Gretel** Who's going to eat him, he's got skin like old leather. Anyway, he left his boots by the bed, the floor's all muddy.

**Hansel** See, that's a clue.

**FX:** **The thunder is much louder now**

**Gretel** Where is he then?.

**Hansel** I don't know.

**Gretel** He should be here. Why isn't he here?

**FX** ***She starts to cry***

**Gretel** I thought he'd be waiting for us with soup and bread or something and he'd look at us and say Hansel, Gretel I was so worried and... I'm sorry for everything I did to you.. I'm sorry I've been such a weak, spineless father ... I'm sorry I didn't protect you...

**Hansel** Grettie, we'll find him I promise. We need to think, we need to... We need to re-trace our steps.

**Gretel** Oh no not again Hans.

**Hansel** There's a very strong probability that he's out in the storm looking for us. Let's go down to the river, and if that dumb bird is still there, maybe it can take us back to the forest.

**Gretel** It was a duck.

**Hansel** No it wasn't, it was definitely a bird.

**Gretel** What's the point anyway. He never wanted us in the first place.

**FX** ***V.O Older Hansel narrating***

She had that dead look in her eyes. The look that says, I want to curl up and go to sleep for a hundred years and maybe even never wake up. I knew I had to get us away from the house, back to where there was still some hope of finding him.

**Hansel** Three is a magic number, right?

**Gretel** So what ?

**Hansel** So we've been back and forth to the forest twice already, haven't we ? Once with the pebbles, and once with the breadcrumbs.



**Gretel**        So?

**Hansel**        So that means we need to go back a third time.

**Gretel**        Why, what for?

**Hansel**        To complete our mission. And that's when it will happen.

**Gretel**        When what will happen ?

**Hansel**        The happy ending .

**Gretel**        Oh shut up, Hans I'm too old to believe in magic.

**Hansel**        You're right. Sometimes, you're very old. The other day, when you were pointing at things the whole time...oh look at those buttercups...oh look at that beautiful oak tree...point , point, point...

**Gretel**        I was trying to help.

**Hansel**        It made you seem really old. No offense.  
But it's not magic. It's a rational hypothesis. Let's go.

**FX**            ***Hansel starts running along the gravel path. Gretel runs after him***

**FX**            ***Loud Thunder right above them now***

**Gretel**        Wait , wait, it's too late, we can go in the morning.

**Hansel**        Hurry up.

**FX**            ***Loud Thunder and Rain.***

**FX**            ***Hansel and Gretel arrive at the riverbank***

**Hansel**        Where's the duckbird then ?

**Gretel**        I told you it wouldn't be here.

***They look around***

**Gretel**        I'm freezing. I'm tired. I want to go home now.

**FX                *She starts to walk back. Hansel spots a small raft.***

**Hansel**        Look Grettie, we can use this boat. It seems sturdy enough. And it's even got paddles.

**Gretel**        That old thing ?

**Hansel**        I think he left it here for us.

**Gretel**        It's rotting!. .. we'll drown.

**Hansel**        You have to come with me, I won't be able to row by myself, I'm not strong enough.

**Gretel**        I don't care if I never see him again. This is the third time he's left us. Get that into your head.

**Hansel**        He doesn't know any better.

**Gretel**        You're always finding excuses for him. But we don't need him anymore. I'll look after you now. We'll look after ourselves. We've got those jewels and coins from the witch, we've got food. We don't need anybody.

**Hansel.**        One last time Grettie. Please.

**Gretel**        Look at it. The river is wild. What about all the monsters lurking around in there, they'll tear us to pieces if we fall in. I don't even know how to swim.

**Hansel**        I'm a brilliant swimmer so if you fall in...

**Gretel**        I wouldn't though, would I?

**Hansel** No you wouldn't , but if you did, I'd jump in and save you. Why is this boat here anyway ? It must be a sign.

**Gretel** Well the sign is wrong . I'm going home.

**FX** **VO. Older Hans narrating**

She really had given up. And who could blame her? I realised at that point that I was going to have to man up and take charge. So, I did the only thing I was really good at doing, the only thing I had ever learned from my father. I lied.

**Hansel** Don't worry, Dad taught me how to row. I know exactly what to do. And the river's quite shallow. If you were standing in it, it would only come up to your waist.

**Gretel** Really?

**Hansel** Yes, don't worry. It'll be fine.

**Gretel** If we don't find him, promise me we'll never look for him again. Ever.

**Hansel** I promise, Grettie.

**Gretel** Alright. One last time then.

**FX :** **Gretel steps into the raft**

**Gretel** It's very wobbly.

**Hansel** Why don't we swap seats? I'll be at the back that way I can steer it.

**FX :** **Hansel creeps in past her**

**Gretel** Careful. You nearly tipped it over. Oh god ,the paddle is so heavy. Hans, this is a terrible idea.

**Hansel** It'll be fine. Trust me. All you have to do is listen to my instructions.

**Gretel**        Alright.

**Hansel**        Here we go... left, right, left right,.... Ok now... paddle harder, Grettie, what are you doing?

**Gretel**        I'm paddling!

**Hansel**        You're not, you've really got to get in there, push the paddle into the water! Come on.

**Gretel**        Lovely breeze.

**Hansel**        You can't just drift along like that. We need to stay ahead of the current.

**Gretel**        Stop shouting at me.

**Hansel**        I'm not shouting I'm explaining, just dig into the water..Left... right... Left... right. That's better...

***the river flows gently for a while then ,***

Grettie.

**Gretel**        What ?

**Hansel**        I don't want to scare you...

**Gretel**        What is it ?

**Hansel**        Coming up ahead of us there's a really big thing.

**Gretel**        What kind of thing?

**Hansel**        I don't know what it is, but it's massive.

**Gretel**        What?

**Hansel**        And it has really, really sharp edges...

**Gretel** Just make it turn around then, let's go back.

**Hansel** I don't know how. The wind is too strong...

**Gretel** Do something, Hans, please .

**Hansel** Don't let go of the paddle, if you feel yourself slipping...

**Gretel** What ?

**Hansel** Dig your heels in, hang on tight, don't let go

**Gretel** Make it stop... stop!

**Hansel** I can't , I can't do anything, I'm sorry Grettie..

**Gretel** Stop...please... stop...

**Hansel** Ok... here comes the rock...

**FX :** ***The raft crashes into the rock***

**Hansel** Are you alright?

**Gretel** No I'm... I'm... not ok. I feel sick. ...

**Hansel** Grettie ...we can't stop here..

**Gretel** Why not?

**Hansel** Because...because the fall is coming.

**Gretel** What fall?

**Hansel** Straight ahead. I am going to count to ten and we are going over.

**Gretel** What ? what?

**Hansel** One ...two...three...

**Gretel** No!

**Hansel** Do exactly as I tell you and you'll be fine. Four...five...

**Gretel** I'm getting out!

**Hansel** Stay right where you are.

**Gretel** No no I'm jumping out....

**Hansel** I am not coming after you. I am warning you, you'll have to swim back by yourself.  
Six...Seven...

**Gretel** Hans I can't swim you know that.

**Hansel** Sorry, we don't have a choice.

**Gretel** We're going to die. Do you understand ? if we go over that fall we are going to die...

**Hansel** You better start praying.

**Gretel** Did you know it was going to be such a big fall?

**Hansel** Are you praying?

**Gretel** Did you?

**Hansel** Never let go of the paddle Grettie..

**Gretel** No, no. This is just ...I don't... I can't.. Skip a number Hans, please!

**Hansel** Eight... Nine... ten...here we go!!!!

**FX :** **The roar of the fall then silence.**

**FX :**            ***The canoe glides onto shore. They are back where they started.***

**FX :**            ***They get up slowly, bruised and muddied . They try to catch their breath and speak over each other***

**Hansel**            If you'd...I ... would have saved you/

**Gretel**            We were falling/

**Hansel**            I would have swum all the way/

**Gretel**            Flying and falling at the same time/it was

**Hansel**            With you hanging onto my back/

**Gretel**            That's not what you said/

**Hansel**            I would have taken you to this place/

**Gretel**            You said I would have to swim by myself/

**Hansel**            and it might be the most amazing place in the world/

**Gretel**            I would have been alone/

**Hansel**            We're alive!

**Gretel**            We never even managed to cross the river.

**pause**

**Hansel**            Oh god, Grettie...You're bleeding.

**Gretel**            What? Where?

**Hansel**            On your forehead ..

**Gretel** I can't be.

**Hansel** You are.

**Gretel** I don't feel anything

**Hansel** You really are. It's a very deep gash.

**Gretel** ***She touches her forehead*** Oh! So much blood.

**Hansel** You must have grazed it on the rock.

**FX** **Gretel starts to walk home at a pace. Hansel chases after her.**

**Gretel** You knew it was dangerous. You knew about the rock and you knew about the fall. Why did you take us down there ? You wanted to hurt me, didn't you?

**Hansel** I thought... you were...I thought .. it was better to keep looking for him..

**Gretel** Well it wasn't .It was really scary and stupid. Just like everything you do.

**Hansel** I thought, because , the thing is, he used to go out walking at night..a bit of a night owl...before we..before he... so..

**Gretel** I'm not talking about him anymore.

**Hansel** It's another fact.

**Gretel** No more facts.

**Hansel** He always used to come alive in the late afternoon,after work. He'd take his boots off, smoke his pipe. Remember? Grettie? And then , come sunset he was/And he's. So I thought.

**Gretel** Enough! Never again. You promised.

**FX** **VO. Older Hansel narrating**



The blood on Grettie's forehead was oozing out like it was going to flood the whole world.

Why had I done this to her? Maybe she was right. Maybe I'd done it on purpose. What kind of a brother tricks his sister into plunging headfirst into a waterfall?

**Hansel** I'm sorry. You're right about him, Grettie. He was a really bad dog .

**Gretel** Always in the doghouse.

**Hansel** He was a devil.

**Gretel** A thorny devil. Slithering away.

**Hansel** Why couldn't I see that?

**Gretel** Because he had two faces.

**Hansel** Maybe. I can't remember anything now.

**Gretel** One of them was blind. Blind and mute with a long, thin neck. And. Yellow teeth. A horrible smile

**Hansel** What about the other face?

**Gretel** I don't know.

**Hansel** The other face, what did it look like ?

**Gretel** I couldn't. I could never. I don't know.

**Hansel** That's because you never saw it.

**Gretel** I did. I did .The other face was. Perfect .

**FX :** **V.O Older Hansel narrating**

After the fall there was no more magic and for a long time there were no more signs.  
Grettie and I grew up alone in the big house.

We unlocked all the rooms and played by the willow tree .

Sometimes a small white bird that looked like a duck appeared in the garden and called out to me. But I kept my promise . I never followed it across the river and never ventured back into the forest.

Once or twice I was tempted to, but the scar on Grettie's forehead would start to tear a little and I'd stop myself.

You see, I thought that would be the end of the story.

Now that Grettie's gone though, the duckbird comes back on stormy nights and I find myself wondering where it would lead and what I might find there.