

CHILD, COME HOME

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"All Adults are liars. Before they tell Bedtime Stories to Children, they tell Stories to themselves first." A retelling, remix, and rememory of HANSEL & GRETEL. When HAN & GRET are abandoned in the Woods by their father, they realize what it means to Come Home.

dramatis personae

HAN(SEL): Black boy, Older Half Sibling, younger child. Protective. Hides fear, but knows less than he reveals. Protective of GRET(EL). Trusting of Adults.

GRET(EL): Black girl, Younger Half Sibling & younger child. Admits fear, but knows more than she reveals. Afraid of Adults, or rather, the uncertainty they bring. To her, HAN(SEL) is Home

1812. An old cottage in the woods. A darkened child's room. Toys litter the floor. Definitely cold. Outside, the wind howls like a wolf and the wolves howl like the lonely. In the background, Moonlight creeps through their window like a secret. Two beds are parallel to each other. *HAN* sleeps soundly. *GRET* frets in hers. She sits up, shivers, and stares out the window. "*Tomorrow*" she thinks. She hugs a teddy bear.

Eventually, she stirs her older brother awake.

GRET

Hey, Han? Han! Hey! Wake up! *HAN*.

HAN

What, Gret?

GRET

I can't sleep.

HAN

Ugh. Did you wet the bed again?

GRET

NO.

Checks cover

GRET

(Quietly) No.

I can't sleep.

HAN

Try closing your eyes then, dummy.

GRET

That's the first thing I did, *STUPID*.

HAN

Have you tried not being a *LOSER* then?

GRET

Have you tried not being a *JERK*?

HAN

Have you tried not being UGLY? You know ugly people don't sleep well.

GRET

That's not — Really?

HAN

Oh yeah for sure. You know what Poppa always says. "God doesn't like Ugly".

GRET

God doesn't like me?

HAN

Sorry, Gret. I don't make the rules.

GRET

WE LOOK THE SAME.

HAN

Nah, you look like ya daddy.

GRET

Well, you look like ya momma!

HAN

Yo momma!

GRET

Yo daddy!

HAN

Yo bald headed, Granny!

GRET

Stop! You know Gran Gran is sensitive about her bald spot.

HAN

I wish you were sensitive about being ugly!

GRET

And I wish you were just sensitive! Ooo, I can't stand you!

HAN

Why? So I could be a *jammerlappen* who's afraid of their own shadow like you?

GRET

I'm not scared of my shadow!

HAN

Suuuuure. And Poppa isn't a starving woodcutter who remarried a *slattern* of a wife!

GRET

Forget it, Han. Forget I said anything!

HAN

I *would* if you *would* go to bed!

GRET

I CAN'T SLEEP.

HAN

WELL NOW I CAN'T EITHER.

GRET

GUT. (GOOD!)

HAN

WUNDERBAR (GREAT!)

heavy banging on their door

they wait

Silence

GRET grabs a toy for comfort / maybe hops in HAN's bed

HAN

What are you doing? You know we have to get up early with Poppa!

GRET

I already said I couldn't sleep.

HAN

So waking up the whole village is your solution? Smooth move, *Der Vogel-for-brains*.

GRET

What do you want me to do?!

HAN

Sleep!

GRET

I can't stop thinking about tomorrow.

HAN

Tomorrow isn't here, Gret.

GRET

But it's coming, Han.

Hugs Teddy Bear tighter / Maybe knees too

It always comes.

HAN

And we always deal with it.

GRET

I don't like the woods, Han. It gets dark.

HAN

I know.

GRET

I can only see you and the moon, Han.

HAN

I know.

GRET

I can only see *you*.

HAN

I know.

GRET
But I can't see Home.

pause

HAN
I know.

GRET
Don't you ever get scared?

HAN
No.

GRET
Why? Is it the pebbles you leave behind?

HAN
Because I always know I'll find my way home. God will not forsake us.

GRET
But will Poppa though?

HAN
What do you mean?

GRET
Everyday we get hungrier, but everyday, the food gets scarcer.
So, everyday, he takes us further and further into the woods.
Everyday it gets harder to get home, Han.
Everyday it gets darker...

HAN
What are you getting at?

GRET
I think... he wants us to get lost.

HAN
What?

a realization

GRET

He doesn't want us to come home, Han.

Pause

HAN

Why did you say that? That doesn't make any sense.

GRET

I heard him talking to *die Stiefmütter*. (stepmother)

HAN

You don't know what you're talking about.

GRET

But I do know what I heard.

HAN

You're just a child.

GRET

Exactly. All children know, Han.

They might not understand, but they know.

And I *know* they don't want us to come home.

Too many mouths to feed, but not enough food she said.

HAN

Then shut yours right now so we can have enough energy to make it to tomorrow!

Pause

Han turns over/ pretends to sleep

GRET

Han?

GRET

Yes, Gret?

GRET

You used all your pebbles right? The ones that helped us home last night?

HAN

Don't worry about it, Gret.

GRET

But how will we find our way now?

HAN

I can find the path.

GRET

How?

HAN

I'll use something else.

GRET

What?

Sits up

HAN

Bread! Twigs! Figs! I dunno. Anything.

Even blood if I need to.

But mark my words, Gret. We will make it home.

Mark my words

and I'll mark the path.

GRET

You sound just like an adult, Han.

HAN

Why? Because I take care of you like one?

GRET

No. Because you *lie* like one.

HAN

When did I lie to you?

GRET

When you said you weren't scared too.

HAN

I'm not afraid.

GRET

I never met a grown up who wasn't scared of something. They all say they aren't. But they are.
All adults are liars.

Before they tell Bedtime Stories to children, they tell Stories to themselves.

GRET begins to play with the toys on the floor

The tallest of fables.

The most fantastical of the unbelievable.

Poppa says he's never hungry even when his stomach rumbles

Mashes toys together violently

Or when his ribs poke through his skin like *Opa's* pitchforks

HAN

I wasn't lying, Gret.

GRET

You only look like Poppa when you lie though.

HAN

So what do I look like now?

makes face

GRET

You look like the first time Poppa said, "I'll be right back".

Pause

HAN

You remember that?

GRET

I'm a kid. I remember every promise made to me.

HAN

There's something you're not saying though.

GRET

No.

HAN

Say it, Scaredy Cat.

GRET

You're not gonna like me anymore if I do. Just like Poppa.

HAN

Stop comparing me to Him. I'm not Poppa.

GRET

And that's the best part about you, Han.

But what child doesn't want to be like their Parents?

What Son doesn't want to be like their Poppa?

I'm afraid you'll abandon me too someday. Because children aren't forgotten, Han /

They're abandoned.

Left to fend for themselves in the woods.

A confession

Sometimes I feel like you'll leave me in the woods too like your pebbles. Except, this time...

HAN

(Softly) Gret?

GRET

This time you won't come back.

HAN

Didn't I say I'll never abandon you?

GRET

But you're always saying stuff, Han. Always.

"I'll protect you"

"I'll figure something out".

"Don't worry about it".

And how could I not when we *both* know the truth

But only one of us will admit it?

HAN begins to take GRET to her own bed

HAN

Gret. You're the bravest person I know. And you're right.

I'm always afraid. Always terrified. Always a Child until it's time to do Adult things.

Honestly, I never know what's going to happen. How could I?
 All I know is, if I admit my fear, my fear catches me
 Like a wolf catches their prey in the woods.
 So I pray too.
 I pray to a God, to a Poppa, that I know will never forsake me.
 And I offer him gratitude too.

GRET
 Why Han? Why do you still pray?

*HAN tucks GRET in
 A familiar ritual*

HAN
 Of all the cowards in this family, you are, by far, the most courageous.
 Being brave isn't the absence of fear. It's being present in the presence of fear.
 And you are the only child I know
 Who stays a child in an adult world.
 Who stays truthful
 in a world of liars.
 So no.
 I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow morning.
 I don't know how far Poppa will lead us this time. I don't know how long it will take to make it
 Home
 But I do know...

GRET rises suddenly

GRET
 What, Han? What do you know? Tell me, Han, tell me!

HAN pushes her down gently

HAN
 I know I'll be with you every step of the way.
 I'll be the child
 The path!
 that leads us home!

*somewhere, a wolf howls
 elsewhere, a bird chirps
 and someday, somehow, against all odds
 a child comes home*

END OF PLAY