

PLAYS FOR  
**New Audiences**

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

# *Missing*

by Charles Way

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## Characters

Hansel

Grethel

Father

Stepmother

Cousin of Stepmother {Played by father}

The play was written for a cast of four 2 male-2 female.

Part one-Hansel and his Family.

Part two- Looking back-Four points of view.

Part three-Looking for Grethel.

Part four-Aftermath-Four points of view.

**NOTE- The play was conceived as a piece of narrative physical theatre in which movement and text work as action together. There are occasions however when movement action alone will be all that is needed- and the text is an active 'stage direction'. To indicate such a possibility I have underlined certain sections which are quite clearly not necessary as spoken text. These are 'examples' only and the director/company, depending on the nature of the production may make other choices. The lines may be divided among the cast at the director's discretion.**

Charles Way

**PART ONE- Hansel and his family.**

The papers said he looked like something the devil cooked up for dinner

They didn't like the way he hid his face with a hood

They didn't like the way he clung to the shadows

To the side of the street-like a cat-up to no good.

His name is Hansel.

From his bedroom window Hansel can see the old mine

Where his grandfather used to work.

It's a huge, red rotting thing

An iron shape cut out against a clear sky.

Sometimes Hansel climbs up the side of the airshaft through rusting iron hoops

On to a ledge that gives a good view of the field, the mine and the city beyond.

It's forbidden of course but he likes it there-he sits and smokes- watching the city lights-

Up there no one can creep up from behind

It feels safe and gives him a chance to think.

What does Hansel think about?

His Family.

His Father –used to work the mine too before it closed down.

After that he became a driver delivering parcels all over Europe.

Until he lost the Job.

He says he misses his friends from the old days and that's why he drinks.

He says work gave his drinking shape-but now he can drink all day.

On those days he forgets to ask Hansel -

Where have you been?

Who were you with?

What were you doing?

Come home at a reasonable time.

The only thing Hansel does is look after his little sister-

Grethel.

His Mother had asked him to do this-she trusted him-

And he does -he looks after her- protects her.

Sometimes he fights for her-with his bare fists in the field below.

Where's their mother?

She's dead.

She died when Hansel was ten.

When he was twelve his father married again.

Once he told Hansel that he loved alcohol more than he loved his new wife-

Their stepmother.

At first Grethel was pleased- she so wanted a mother-like the one Hansel spoke about-

A mother who loved you-who told you stories.

## **PART TWO**

### **Looking back-Four points of view.**

#### **1 Hansel**

Grethel was very young when mother died.

When Father told her she was going to have a new Mum, Grethel was happy. She smiled and smiled.

When stepmother didn't turn out to be what she'd imagined Grethel smiled even more-

Like she was too scared to relax her cheeks.

I didn't like our new mother from the start.

She was all smiles herself to begin with

But when she wasn't looking at us directly the smile dropped from her face

And her face was mean and hard.

At first the battle between us was silent.

She took over the house, which was what Father wanted.

She did everything for him, lots of little things he could easily have done for himself

Like collecting Grethel's child benefit money-or-paying the gas bill

And gradually he became-smaller and smaller- like he was shrinking.

He never asked me about anything-about why I didn't go to school or anything.

I tried to get work, but I'm not good with people.

To work in a cafe you have to smile and talk about things that don't mean anything.

I don't like talking - I feel weak after. Silence is powerful and I like that.

I did get a job once but I got the sack because I took money from the till.

Father said-

You little thieving rat-you're no son of mine-You're a monster.

Which was good.

I don't know where you bloody came from.

Which was odd.

His wife stood behind him smoking and smiling

I told you so-I told you he was no good. The sooner he leaves this house the better.

They seemed to want me to respond-maybe give them a good reason to chuck me out-

But what about Grethel-

I took the money to buy her some school stuff.

It's important that she keeps going to school-

And I don't want her to look out of place-or feel bad about having old things-

So I bought her a new plastic dinner box, and some cheese strings.

I can't leave her with them.

So I just stare at them-sullen, mean, angry

And in the end she gets scared-

Why are you staring at me-you little devil?

Result.

Stop staring.

But I don't stop. One night- the night-I go over to the mine.

I climb up through the hoops and sit on the ledge

The city is moving. Lights-travelling-here -there-where?

I hear police sirens and an ambulance.

I see the lights of the stadium and hear the crowd chanting.

Perhaps they'll get into the champion's league-but who cares-I don't.

In the field below I see a small figure walking. It looks like a girl. Grethel?

She's calling out, shouting something but she is too far away and the wind takes her voice.

Then I see another shape, moving slowly through the kids play area.

It waits there for a moment before moving forward-towards Grethel.

It's a man-I can tell that-even from here.

I call out

Grethel!

But she can't hear me either.

Perhaps it's a security guard-or someone she knows

Perhaps there's nothing to be scared of, or worried about-but I know there is.

I can tell by the way the man moves-looking around to see if anyone's watching.

I step back so my shape won't be seen against the sky.

I'm probably no more than a thousand yards away- but the wrong side of the perimeter fence

So I freeze-I watch.

She turns to see him and then she starts to walk away

Good girl-but then he must say something and she turns back.

They talk-then he gives her something-I can't tell what.

Then he turns and she follows him.

I yell her name into the wind-I scream-

GRETHEL!

But she doesn't look back-she takes his hand and they walk into the shadows. She takes his hand.

She's gone. Gone? No, no. It's eleven at night-Grethel's home asleep-where I left her. Why would she come out -this late? All I could see was a shape of a girl. It could have been anyone.

I climb down the ladder-almost fall-run home-and 'she' is there.

Not Grethel- Stepmother.

What you running from?

I run upstairs-open Grethel's door-

Grethel?

She isn't there. I go down.

Where's Grethel?

What do you mean,' Where's Grethel?'

She's not in her room.

A silence

Have you looked in the bathroom?

I look in the bathroom-it's empty. I go down.

She's not there-where is she?

I don't know-why should I?

You were here.

If you're worried go and look for her- you're her brother after all.

I stare at her-she says

I can't go I've had a drink- nothing else to do.

She doesn't look drunk-or sound it.

She's probably staying over with friends.

Who?

How should I know? She'll phone in the morning.

I go back to Grethel's room-sit on the bed.

She's probably right. Grethel's with friends. It wasn't her at all.

I am tired-suddenly so tired-

I stare at the phone-

Perhaps I should call the police-but the police know me-what would they think? They wouldn't believe me-they'd laugh.

I go back down.

Where's Dad?

Where do you think?

I walk to the club. He's not there. I ask around. He was there but he left.

I start to walk home taking the route he may have taken..

A police car passes -slows down. I stare at them and they drive off.

I see a figure in the street-lying down-as if asleep. He's drunk.

I yell at him-

Where's Grethel?

He starts to cry.

Then he covers his head as if I'm about to kick his head in.



Maybe I should-teach him a lesson. But I don't. I go home.

Did you find him?

I nod.

Did she call?

Who?

Did Grethel call?

No-I found her phone.

I look at her phone. I check my own phone-dead-no credit-maybe she tried to call me.

Where's your father?

On the pavement-

He's a weak man.-but don't you worry-I'll look after him. I'll look after all of us-even you.

I stare at her.

## **2 GRETHEL**

I like to make things up. I don't mean lying-I just mean make things up. Like this teacher asked me what I'd had for breakfast-the real answer was-ice cream-because I'd found it in the fridge- but I said eggs and ham and fruit and cheese and bread and coffee -because that's what Jenny has in her house.

Sometimes I watch the TV for hours and afterwards I can't remember any of it.

I do that all the time-I like it-I drift off----

Though sometimes I get angry-really angry and once I ripped some curtains down at school and I got sent home. They said I'd sworn at a teacher-and I said sorry. I heard them say-it was 'typical'-I didn't know what that meant 'typical'.

Most of the time I'm quiet. People ask me things and I don't hear them. I just hear their voices- a long way away and by the time I know they've been saying something to me-they've given up.

I always hear Hansel though.

I've got a new Mother. She calls me 'Daddy's girl'.

My Dad says he loves me and he buys me big fluffy toys.

Once he bought me a big teddy bear-and it was bigger than me and when it caught fire-I burnt my hands and the fumes were so bad that Hansel had to carry me outside.

When I'm with Hansel I feel ok-

Hansel always defends me, and he got beaten up once in the big flat field by the big red mine. There's a playground there and it's got pretty coloured letters and stuff all over it-even on the rides. There's a plastic crocodile that moves up and down-and this big boy pushed me off and made me give him the money I'd been given to buy a Kebab. I cried all the way home-but there was no one at home, except Hansel and he went and hit the boy in the mouth. A tooth came out-and I've still got it because it fell out right next to the crocodile.

A crocodile's tooth-that's what it is.

One night-the night—

I was upset because Dad wouldn't speak to me and I didn't know if I'd done something wrong. He wouldn't even look at me and I got scared. Stepmother told him to go for a drink. He looked sad and tired-like he wanted to cry. I don't like crying- when I asked stepmother what was wrong she said-

Nothing.

And I knew that wasn't true.

I asked

Where's Hansel?

I don't know-why don't you go and look for him?

I asked dad -is it alright to go looking for Hansel at eleven o'clock?

Yes-go on-go and look for him-

And he looked away as if I wasn't there.

Stepmother said

Go on then- but don't be long-I saw him in the park-

Near the crocodile?

Yes.

She had a phone in her hand like she was waiting to call someone-and I went out looking for Hansel.

It was very windy-and dark too-but every now and then the moon came out-like it does in the stories Hansel tells me. He says our mother told him lots of stories.

I knew Hansel had a secret place but I didn't know where.

I thought he might see me-hear me-if I shouted loud enough.

HANSEL!

Then from the side of the park, where the crocodile is-I see a light-like a cigarette light and I think it's Hansel maybe-coming towards me-but it isn't-

It isn't Hansel.

### **3 FATHER**

I'm often a little-under the influence-but that doesn't make what I say any the less true. People say things used to be better-in the old days- It wasn't. People were poor then in a way that would shock today-a different kind of poor-the real knot in the belly hunger type of poor. What they had-sometimes-what I had for a short time was work-not that it made us rich or anything, but it gave us routine-and a sense of belonging to something. But the work was so hard there was no time left for anything else. Sleep, work, eat. Sleep, work, eat. What kind of life is that?

I looked forward to not working at all-doing nothing-I looked forward to that until the day she died-my wife.

Everyone expects the man to die first- but cancer takes no notice of what people expect-it just does its work. Lots of people round here get cancer, it's in the water-the air-the mud. You've got no control over it. When I think back-I've not had control over anything. And that's a question in my head-what kind of men-are we if we have no control over anything that happens? Well, I just accept it now-I don't fight it anymore. I have no control-no power-that's it.

That's why I was lucky to find a new wife. I thought 'she'd be good for us', a last throw of the dice.

I had good intentions-I am a good man. I don't mind saying it-whatever you might think-will think. I had good-intentions.

Grethel made an effort-tried to be nice-smiling-but not Hansel. I tell you straight I don't understand my son. I don't understand the world he lives in. He's either stuck in front of a computer-or out-with friends I never meet-and if I do I don't like the look of them because they look like him. Like shit. When I see him my blood boils- he's a loner-a misfit.

I still try sometimes-I say to him-I say-

Have a drink son-with your old man.

I don't want a drink-not with you.

**PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT**