



An Unhappy Mum

My husband has many good characteristics. He is a kind and loving man who would do anything to provide for his family. Despite what I am about to tell you, he adores our children, Hansel and Gretel. However, he is often prone to making terrible decisions in the heat of the moment. These can sometimes lead to appalling catastrophes.

A week or so ago, we were short of food in the house. We are poor folk who live in the forest and make our money selling wood, so it's not uncommon for us to have to go without every now and again. The market had been closed for a while because of the roadworks on the main lane into the village, so I hadn't had a chance to sell much timber. On top of that, farmer Gillion's field had been dug up by a bunch of billy-goats who'd made it over the bridge - no grain meant no bread from the mill. Times were hard, but we've been through worse.

I tried to sit down and explain all of this to Frederick, but he went into his usual panic. "It is unfair to keep the children in such squalor," he moaned. "I shall set them free in the forest to fend for themselves. Maybe they'll find some food."

Of course, I told him he was ridiculous, but he's as stubborn as a mule, and his mind was made up. The next day, I set out for the village and sold most of our wood and bought a pantry-full of food. You can imagine my annoyance, then, when I returned home to find that Frederick had set the children free into the forest.

Knowing what their father was like, the children must have made a plan as he led them astray. When I shot out to find them, I found a line of pale pebbles heading off into the shadows. I knew what was lurking for them that way - poor old Mrs Aga had gone a little mad after her cats died and had built a house out of sweets. It was bad enough that it melted every time it rained - you could taste the sugar in the water from the well for days. But, lately, she'd also started eating the children of the village.

We'd tried having words with her, but she just wasn't being reasonable. Hansel and Gretel were heading straight for her sugary lair. Gretel is pretty switched on, but Hansel can be easily led, so I



was more concerned about him.

In the end, I needn't have worried. By the time I'd followed the track and found the house, they'd managed to concoct a cunning plan, and Mrs Aga was busily roasting in her own oven. We had to tell them off, of course. Nobody wants to go that way. I saved the worst of my wrath for my husband, though. If he'd kept his cool, none of this would have happened. Honestly, sometimes it's like having three children.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find a word that tells you Frederick cares a lot for his children.
2. Write a definition for "prone" in this context.
3. Which word does Frederick say that means "extremely dirty or unpleasant conditions"?
4. Find and copy a phrase that tells you Frederick didn't often change his mind.
5. Which word tells you that Frederick was going to lead the children away from where they should be?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

Why were the family struggling to buy food?

R

What did the family sell to make money?

I

Do you think the mother was surprised by what the father did? Why?

E

Is the use of first person effective here? Why?

I

What did the children do to Mrs Aga?