

# Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

2400 THIRD AVENUE SOUTH  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404  
612-872-5108  
FAX 612-874-8119

## *Missing*

By  
**Charles Way**

*Missing* was originally co-commissioned by Theatr lolo and Germany's Theater Consol in 2009.

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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.**

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.

He doesn't say that-out loud-its just in his eyes-like a bloody troll he is-red eyes staring at me-as if I'm to blame. They say I'm fit for work now-but I'm not-I know I'm not. And if I went back to work-some crappy job-I'd get less than I do on benefits. I stay out of work for the good of the family.

Hansel?

What?

What are you doing-sneaking around like that?

I'm going out.

Out? There's no point in asking him-even when I'm sober. He likes his little secrets does Hansel. He's like a clam. Grethel isn't much better-though she's sweet enough-but I have to say the school is right-she's not normal- lives in another world. Grethel doesn't watch TV-she glares at it- and suddenly-just when I'm going out myself she says-

Can I have a story?

A story? You've been watching stories all day long on TV. I'm going for a drink.

Can I come with you?

Sure. Why not-you're my little girl aren't you.

You can't take her there.

That's right I say-very true-you stay here Grethel with your big brother-he'll look after you. He's got nothing else to do.

After that he just gives me one of those stares. Troll face. He thinks he's hard. Ha! I've seen his hands shake-he can't even lift a coke or a smoke without his hands shaking.

It's time you left home.

Me?

No not you-Hansel!

A young man like that can't be hanging around the house all day. He's got to get out-get busy-move on.

I don't want Hansel to go.

And after that-it'll be your turn Grethel. Come sixteen you're out too. There's not enough money coming in for the four us-fact of life.

Grethel looks at me-but I can't say anything.

Fags and booze cost money.

Did you hear that husband? The sword of judgement –coming down on our skulls. Well –its time you two got real-we're not here just to look after you-provide you with food and shelter-we've got our lives to live too. This house isn't yours you know.

Yes it is.

Oh? What have you paid for Grethel? Nothing. You cost money you do and lots of it . Look at him staring husband-as if he'd like to chop us up into a thousand bits.

Maybe I will.

What did you say?

You heard.

My wife stares at me as if I should shout something back-like 'show us some respect you little good for nothing'. But what's the point?

I drink a lot that night and later my wife says to me-

There must be more to life. I mean you see other people don't you- getting away-pulling away in big cars-dragging caravans-going on their travels-to hot sunny places. That's the life you promised me husband-and I believed you-and what have I got-this-and it's those kids that hold us back-you know I'm right-a millstone around our necks they are-whatever you say.

But I don't say anything-too much bother-

I'd do anything to get that life.

She says and looks at me-

Anything.

#### **4 STEPMOTHER**

I had a little girl once-

I looked after her pretty well-but they still took her away- I had no say in the matter.

Well after that I had other kids and they took them too

But I didn't cry for them-not like I did the first one.

They said they were-in danger. Undernourished.

I thought life would get better with him-

Two of us against the world - and him with a good job-at the time-until he lost it drinking and driving-no really-driving along with a can of beer in his hand –using his knees to steer the car. He even offered the policeman a drink. Idiot.

And I believed all the things he said he was going to do for me.

Promised me the world-so I tried to be nice to the kids-though I never hit it off with Hansel.

I gave him things-like smokes and stuff but I think he just threw them away –or sold them.

That's more his style-he's scheming-you can see it in his eyes

He thinks he's above the rest of us-if only he could see himself-in his hood -Ha.

And as for Grethel-she's just plain weird-

I tell you I can't get through to her and actually-I don't really care.

They're not my fault are they? Not my kids.

I should have known-I did inside- that you can't replace 'Mother'.

I can't stand that woman-I know she's dead -but I still can't stand her.

Husband keeps a dress of hers in the wardrobe-which is a bit weird I think

So I tried to throw it out-but he wouldn't let me and I tried more than once.

It was Hansel who caught me-stuffing it into a black bin liner in the kitchen.

And then Grethel and husband come in and they all just stare at me-

Like I was the devil.

Its funny then isn't it? Ironic –that's the word

That it falls to me to save this little lot-this wreckage

To whom I've got no connection at all-not really. But how?

We buy a lottery ticket every week don't we- and we watch others win

And buy big houses and waste every penny-some of them do.

All they want is gold taps in the kitchen-thinks like that.

I'm not saying I wouldn't buy things-but I wouldn't waste it-the chance-to escape-somewhere warm.

The thing is-I'm not a cold climate person. The cold hangs round this city as if the sky were just a big damp kitchen cloth draped over everything. I blame the trees-they surround the place like they're laying us to siege.

I need to get out-not die here-in this place-with nothing.

When he lost his job-and started to drink-like he does now

I was going to leave-just walk out-but then I saw something on tele-

And I had an idea. I told my cousin about it -I think he's a cousin

And he laughed like a drain- but then he just said-Okay. Why not?

Hansel and Grethel don't know my cousin- no one does-that's the beauty of it.

### **PART THREE- Looking for Grethel.**

#### **GRETHEL**

The place where he kept me didn't frighten me-not at first-because he'd made it cosy

And he showed it to me- like on those TV programmes where someone is shown round a new house

This is the kitchen-which is well appointed-'appointed'.

This is the master bedroom and the en suite, 'en suite' it was like that.

In a way it was exciting because it was like being shown a secret place- a house beneath a house

And he showed me how you went through one room-into another one.

And from the outside you wouldn't know it was there at all.

The room was small and had a sink and a toilet in it-there were no windows

But I didn't say anything about that.

He wasn't nasty to me- and the first time he spoke to me I thought he had a nice voice

-Hi Grethel-what are you doing out here-it's a bit late?

I'm looking for my brother

-Oh Hansel. Would you like a sweet?

He offers me a sweet-it has purple wrapping. I take one-two-three. He laughs.

-That's okay have as many as you want. Do you want me to take you home Grethel?

I want to find Hansel.

-Can you keep a secret Grethel?

Yes

-I know where he is-Hansel is a friend of mine.

Where is he?

-He's at my house

Why?

-That's the secret part. Promise not to tell.

I nod

-Okay-he's got into some trouble-like he did before-with the police-so he can't come home for a little bit. Don't tell anyone will you?

No. How long will he be away?

-He doesn't know-that's why he sent me here-to find you. He wants to tell you that he's alright. He'll come home as soon as he can.

I want to see him

-That's not possible

I want to see him now.

-But It's late Grethel.

I don't care.

-You'd have to come to my house.

Where is your house?

-Not far-not by car. It's in the forest.

I want Hansel.

-Okay-then I'll take you-if it's what you really want. But first I should phone your Mother to tell her.

She's not my mother.

-Your stepmother.

He makes the call-but he turns away so I don't hear what he says. Then he offers me his hand and I take it.

I don't know how long the drive is. There's a blanket on the back seat and he says I can lie down and have a sleep and that's what I do. When I wake up I'm already inside his house. He must have carried me in the blanket.

Where are we?

-At my place.

Where's Hansel?

-I don't know-he must have gone out. You can wait in here. Oh-do you have a mobile?

Yes

-Can I borrow it-I'm out of credit?

I left it at home.

-Oh.

Then he brings me some more sweets and we watch Tele together. I keep asking about Hansel and after a while he seems to get annoyed and goes out. He locks the door behind him. I watched the tele and there's a film on with bad people doing bad things to each other and I shut my eyes. I start to cry then cos I know that I'd been tricked-and I cry and cry.

## **HANSEL**

Stepmother says-

Don't call Grethel's friends till the morning. Some people have to work you know-

So I wait till eight but they haven't seen her. Dad comes in- looks like a ghost. She glares at him and I can see something in her eyes-but I can't tell what it is.

I feel-awful-bloody awful. What?

Grethel's missing.

What?

He said Grethel hasn't come home.

Her phone rings-she answers it. We wait.

Who was it?

A call centre-India –somewhere.

Where is she?

We don't know.

I'll call the police.

No I'll call the police.

I watch her dial-and she takes a deep breath-and her voice changes.

It's my little girl-my stepdaughter-she's not come home- and I'm terribly worried.

I know something isn't right but there's no time because then it starts first the police-Where were you last night? Out -alone. Where? Looking for Grethel. Within hours people we barely know are sending messages of sympathy. When I go outside-someone takes a photo of me-doesn't even ask. Word has got round-a missing child. By the evening it's on the local TV and there's our house-with the smashed front window and the scrubby garden the local cats use as a toilet. The next morning it's on national TV--- Next thing local people get together and search the area-Stepmother smiles a lot-thanks them- looks as if she might cry. She appears on tele--

I just want you to know Grethel-if you can hear me-that I really miss you and if you've run away-are hiding somewhere- with someone-its alright don't be frightened-you've done nothing wrong-just come home-please come home.

Father speaks too –he reads out his piece and won't look at the camera-

If anyone has seen, or knows where my daughter is- I urge them to come forward-take pity on her and on us. Come forward please.

The papers say stepmother is emotional, and that father is cold and distant.

The police come back to the house -

Where did you look Hansel? When you were looking for Grethel-what did you see?

I stare at them.

What did you see? Nothing.

I run to the mine-climb the ladder-nothing? Sit on the ledge. Stare at the city –NOTHING? But I did see something- I saw Grethel taken by a shadow-at a distance of a thousand yards? But what good is that? And what if news got out that I had seen someone take her-then that someone might-do something he never planned to do- just to cover his tracks. And he might do that anyway-cos isn't that what happens-when little girls go missing? No. NO! I have to have time to find her-me-no one else. I have to work it out because I know something isn't right-not with stepmother and more terrifying -not with father. Think-think.

I climb back down and stand where Grethel had stood-reaching out her hand-for what?

I shine a light from my phone on to the ground and I see a sweet wrapper-purple-and a few yards away another sweet wrapper- Did she drop them? Is that what I saw, Grethel tempted away by a man with sweets? Grethel wouldn't do that. I've told her so many times. Did she know this person?

I walk-toward the road-through the playground –past the crocodile. I reach the road-it's dimly lit-there's only one place to park. I walk to it-look down. There in the gutter is another sweet-this time it's not opened. Grethel has left me a clue--- a trail—but if she went in a car-then it was no good-no good.

## **GRETHEL**

He says a week has passed-but I can't tell. I cried a lot at first and screamed. He said

You sound like a cat

And slapped my face.

There's no point in screaming-because we're deep in the woods .No one can hear.

Everyday he brings me sweets, nothing else-and I feel ill all the time. He thinks this is funny- I ask for other food-but he doesn't seem to understand. He says

Kids live on sweets don't they.

I watch tele all day long, not news-just cartoons. After seven days my little head begins to spin 'like a top'. I don't understand that 'like a top' but I've heard the words. Everyday he gets a bit more angry and leaves me alone for hours and hours. I know something bad has happened because Hansel hasn't come. I sit on the bed and dream a lot. I dream that this isn't happening to me-not to me-it's happening to someone else who looks like me. I imagine this person so fiercely that after a while I begin to see her sitting on the end of the bed. When I wave she waves back. I stick out my tongue and she sticks out her tongue and that makes me smile-but she doesn't smile-which is strange. I talk to her for a long time and she listens very carefully and I tell her not to worry-Hansel will come and save her. He is the only one in the world who will come. At first the little girl who looks like me vanished sometimes-but every day she becomes a little bit more real—although she 's not real- I know that-she's not made out of skin and bone like me. I have stopped crying so much because now she does all the crying and I sit on the end of the bed and watch her -and yesterday she was sick on all those sweets. Poor little girl.