

Baba Yaga, the Girl, and the Hedgehog

A Baba Yaga Story Retold



Baba Yaga's house

There are many Russian stories about the creepy Baba Yaga. Though she is sometimes nice, most of the tales of Baba Yaga are terrifying. In all the stories, she's an old creature that has lived for hundreds of years. In many stories, she lives in a house that has chicken legs. The house walks around the forest on its chicken legs with Baba Yaga inside of it. In this story, that's exactly what the house was doing when Marusia happened by.

Marusia was a little Russian girl. She was on her way to buy turnips at the market for her family when she accidentally passed through Baba Yaga's corner of the forest. Along strutted Baba Yaga's house on its giant chicken legs. Baba Yaga found Marusia and put her in a pot to cook her for dinner.

"I love to eat bad little Russian girls," said Baba Yaga.

"But I'm not a bad girl," said Marusia, "I'm a good girl!"

"I can't eat a good girl for my dinner," said Baba Yaga. "But I can make her cook my dinner." And that's what Marusia did along with some cleaning.

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After Baba Yaga ate, she fell asleep. Marusia was trapped. The old witch had magically locked her front gate.

Day after day, Baba Yaga flew out in search of a special flower. She told Marusia that the flower would help her live another 200 years.

Trapped, Marusia had no choice but to continue to cook and clean for the old hag. One morning, Marusia asked, "Baba Yaga, may I have some turnips? My mother sent me to buy turnips, but I lost the money and..."

"You lost the money," said Baba Yaga. "Then you are a bad Russian girl." With that Baba Yaga swept up the small girl and put her in a soup pot. Then the old crone went outside to get some mushrooms and greens for her soup. While she was there, she came across a hedgehog. The hedgehog also ended up in the pot with Marusia.

As it turned out, the hedgehog could speak quite well. Marusia asked how he learned to speak. The hedgehog told her his story. He said he was the son of the tsar and tsarina. The royal couple couldn't have any children. This made the tsarina very sad. One day the tsarina stood near a very special flower in the royal gardens. She wished for a son, even if he was only the size of a hedgehog. And that's when the hedgehog appeared. At first, the royal couple was thrilled. But people made fun of their hedgehog son. In time they became embarrassed of him. So they put him on a rooster and sent him off into the woods to live on his own.

As Marusia listened to the hedgehog she got an idea. "This special flower, what did it look like," she asked the hedgehog.

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“It was a black sunflower,” said the hedgehog.

“Baba Yaga,” Marusia called. “If I tell you where to find your black sunflower, will you give me the turnips I need and let us go?”

“Why yes,” said Baba Yaga.

“Hedgehog, can you show us where to find the flower,” Marusia asked.



The hedgehog agreed. Baba Yaga threw Marusia and the hedgehog into her giant mortar and pestle, and off they went. They flew over forests and mountains. Finally they came to the palace garden. Baba Yaga picked the black sunflower. As soon as she did, the hedgehog turned into a real boy named Dmitri. Baba Yaga was too excited about her flower to even notice. Together, the three flew back to Baba Yaga's house. Marusia got her turnips and she and Dmitri were free to go. The two children went to Marusia's house where they made turnip soup and lived happily ever after.

SOURCE: Small, E., Lent, B., & B. (1966). *Baba Yaga*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.