

A WORLD FULL OF SPOOKY STORIES

50 TALES TO MAKE
YOUR SPINE TINGLE

WRITTEN BY ANGELA McALLISTER
ILLUSTRATED BY MADALINA ANDRONIC

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**Frances Lincoln
Children's Books**

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INTO THE WOODS



EUROPE

A STORY FROM GERMANY



HANSEL AND GRETEL

Hansel and Gretel lived with their father and stepmother beside a great forest.

One night, their father, who was a poor woodcutter, told his wife that they had no money left. “I don’t know how we shall feed ourselves,” he sighed.

His wife had no love for Hansel and Gretel and saw this as a chance to be rid of them. “We must take the children into the forest tomorrow and leave them there,” she told her husband. “Then we’ll only have two mouths to feed.”

The woodcutter tried to protest, but his wife wouldn’t listen. “If you refuse, husband, all four of us shall starve,” she said.

Hansel and Gretel overheard their stepmother’s plan.

“Don’t worry, Hansel,” said Gretel, “I’ll look after you.” She put on her jacket, crept out into the moonlit yard, and filled her pockets with white pebbles.

The next morning, as the family walked into the forest, Gretel secretly dropped the pebbles along the path. When they were deep in the woods,

the stepmother told Hansel and Gretel to rest. “Wait here while your father and I cut some wood,” she said.

Hansel and Gretel waited all day, but no one came to fetch them. “We’ll never find our way home alone,” cried Hansel. However, when night fell and the moon appeared, Gretel’s white pebbles glowed brightly, showing them the path home.

Hansel and Gretel arrived home tired and hungry, only to receive a scolding from their stepmother. “It’s your own fault. We called, but you didn’t come,” she snapped.

The following day, she insisted that they return to the forest. This time, Gretel didn’t have a chance to gather any pebbles, so she took a crust of bread from the kitchen and dropped crumbs along the path.

Once more, the children were left in the forest. But when evening came and the moon appeared there wasn’t one breadcrumb to be seen, for birds had eaten them all.

“I’m sure we shall find our own way home,” said Gretel bravely.



Hansel and Gretel set off through the forest. Before long, they smelled something sweet and delicious. To their surprise, they found a house made of golden gingerbread with a roof of little cakes. The children were so hungry that they broke off pieces to eat.

At once, an old woman opened the door. She smiled kindly at them. “If you are hungry, my dears, come inside,” she said.

Hansel and Gretel stepped into the gingerbread house. The old woman gave them sugared pancakes and apple tart and then offered them two soft beds. Soon they were fast asleep.

Early the next morning, however, the children discovered they’d been tricked by a witch! The old woman pulled Hansel out of bed and locked

him in a stable. Then she ordered Gretel to cook for her. “When your brother is fattened up, I shall eat him!” she declared.

There was no escape. Every day, Hansel had to stick his finger through a hole so the witch could feel how plump he’d grown, but he cleverly poked a bone from his dinner out instead. The witch had bad eyesight and was easily fooled, but after four weeks, she grew impatient.

“Today I shall eat that boy, fat or thin,” the witch told Gretel. “Climb into the oven, girl, to see if it is hot.”

Gretel suspected the witch intended to cook her first. “The oven door is stuck,” she replied.

“Nonsense!” snapped the witch. She bent down and opened it. In an instant, Gretel pushed her into the hot oven and slammed the door shut.

Then Gretel released Hansel from the stable. Together they explored the gingerbread house and found jewels to fill their pockets.

Meanwhile, the woodcutter had been desperately worried about his children. When his wife suddenly fell ill and died, he came to search for them in the forest.

To his joy, he found Hansel and Gretel searching for the path home. Thanks to the witch’s jewels, the woodcutter’s family never went hungry again.



EUROPE

A STORY FROM CZECH REPUBLIC



GRANDFATHER'S EYES

Yanachek was alone in the world. One day, he met an old grandfather sitting outside a cottage who had empty holes where his eyes had been.

“Do you have any work for me?” asked Yanachek.

“I need someone to take my hungry goats to the meadow,” said the blind man, so Yanachek agreed to tend to his goats.

The blind old man was grateful. “But don’t go near the hill in the woods,” he warned, “or the Yezinkas will catch you. Those wicked witches stole my eyes!”

“Don’t worry about me,” said Yanachek cheerfully, “I can look after myself.”

At first, Yanachek grazed the goats in the meadow nearby, but one morning, he decided to find them better grass to eat on the hill. “I’m not afraid of any Yezinkas,” he thought.

First, he cut three long bramble branches and wound them around the crown of his hat. Then he drove the goats through the wood to the hill.

As Yanachek sat watching the goats graze, a beautiful maiden stepped out of the woods. “Here’s an apple for you, shepherd boy,” she said.

Yanachek guessed that she must be a Yezinka out to trick him.

“No thank you,” he replied. “My master gives me all the apples I want.” Seeing that he couldn’t be persuaded, the maiden vanished.

A short while later, another maiden appeared and offered him a red rose.

Yanachek refused it. "My master's garden is full of roses," he said. At these words, the maiden vanished.

Then a third maiden appeared, carrying a golden comb. "Let me comb your hair, shepherd boy," she said.

Yanachek took off his hat. However, when the maiden came close, he quickly unwound a bramble branch and tied her hands with it, for he knew that a Yezinka cannot move if she is struck by a bramble.

"Help, sisters!" cried the Yezinka. The other two maidens came running, but Yanachek was ready with more bramble branches and quickly tied them up too. Then he ran home to fetch the old man.

Yanachek led the blind man through the wood to the hill where the Yezinkas were struggling in vain. "Tell me where my master's eyes are," said Yanachek.

The first maiden agreed to show him. She led them along the bank of a deep river to a cave where she and her sisters had collected an enormous pile of eyes. She picked out a pair for the old man.

However, when he looked through them the old man gasped in horror. "I see dark treetops, moths, and bats," he cried. "These are not my eyes; they are owls' eyes! Take them out!"

So Yanachek took them out and threw the maiden into the river.

Then the second maiden chose a pair of eyes from the pile. When the old man looked through them, he shook with terror.

"I see tangled bushes, snapping teeth, and hot red tongues," he cried. "These are not my eyes; they are wolves' eyes! Take them out!"

So Yanachek took them out and threw the second maiden into the river.

Then the third maiden chose a pair of eyes. When the old man looked through them, he trembled with fear.

"I see murky water, swirling weeds, and flashing fins," he cried. "These are not my eyes, they are fishes' eyes! Take them out!"

But the third maiden didn't want to follow her sisters into the river. She begged Yanachek to try another pair.

This time, the old man looked and smiled. "At last I see the hill and my goats and my good friend Yanachek," he said. "These are my own dear eyes!"

So Yanachek released the Yezinka, and then he and the old man returned home to live happily together.



EUROPE

A STORY FROM RUSSIA



VASILISSA THE BEAUTIFUL

Vasilissa was the only child of a merchant and his wife. When she was eight years old, her mother became very ill. Vasilissa's mother took a little wooden doll from beneath her pillow and gave it to her daughter.

"Keep this doll a secret and look after it well," she told Vasilissa. "Soon I must leave you, but if you are ever in trouble and need advice, feed the little doll, tell it your worries, and it will help you." Then she kissed her daughter and gave her a blessing. A few days later, Vasilissa's mother died.

Time passed. The merchant grew lonely, so he married another wife, a widow who had two daughters of her own. "I hope she will be a good mother to you," he told Vasilissa.

But the merchant had chosen unwisely, for the widow was really a cold, cruel woman who had only married him for his wealth. She and her daughters became jealous of Vasilissa, who had grown into a beautiful girl, so they treated her harshly and gave her work to do outside in the sun and wind, hoping she would lose her beauty.

Vasilissa never complained, but one night she remembered the little doll her mother had given her. She fed it some crumbs of bread. Suddenly,

the little doll's eyes shone like fireflies. "My stepmother hates me," Vasilissa told the little doll. "What shall I do?"

"Forget your troubles and sleep," the little doll replied. "The morning is wiser than the evening." And from that day, the little doll secretly helped Vasilissa with her work.

After a few months, the merchant announced that he had to make a long journey to a distant land. As soon as he was gone, the stepmother sold his house and moved the family far away to the edge of a dark forest. Vasilissa was filled with despair, but she fed the little doll and it listened to her troubles and comforted her.

At the heart of the forest, in a house that stood on a pair of chicken's legs, lived an old witch named Baba Yaga. Nobody ever went near the house, afraid that they would be caught and eaten. However, Vasilissa's stepmother began sending her into the forest each day to collect a basket of nuts and berries, hoping that she would be caught by Baba Yaga and never seen again. Luckily, Vasilissa's little doll showed her how to fill her basket without straying close to the witch's house. But Vasilissa's safe return only made her stepmother hate her more.

Before long, the stepmother devised another plan to get rid of Vasilissa. One evening, she let the fire in the stove go out. "Now we don't have a flame to light a candle or cook the dinner," she complained. "Vasilissa must go into the forest to get a light from Baba Yaga." Vasilissa was terrified, but her stepsisters refused to go and pushed her out of the door.

Alone in the dark, Vasilissa took the little doll from her pocket and fed it some berries. The little doll's eyes shone like glowworms. "Don't be afraid, Vasilissa," it said. "Do as you have been told. No harm can come to you as long as I am with you."

Vasilissa set off bravely to find Baba Yaga's house. As night fell, the forest came alive with shadowy creatures. Clutching the little doll, Vasilissa walked on, deep into the woods.

After several hours, she suddenly saw a horseman in white robes gallop out of the trees on a white steed. As he passed, the first light of dawn appeared.

Vasilissa continued, farther into the forest. A short while later, a second horseman, dressed in red, rode by on a red steed, and as he passed, the sun rose in the sky.



Still Vasilissa walked on, searching for Baba Yaga. At last, as twilight fell, she came to a clearing in which stood a house on chicken's legs, surrounded by a fence of dead men's bones. Along the fence hung hollow-eyed skulls, and the lock at the gate was a jaw filled with sharp teeth. Vasilissa froze in terror. Suddenly, a third horseman dressed in black rode up on a black steed. He passed through the gate and night descended. At once, the eyes of the skulls began to glow brightly and the trees rustled and moaned. Out of the forest flew the witch, Baba Yaga, sitting in a mortar that she steered along with a pestle. She swayed from side to side sweeping away her trail with a broom, and when she reached the clearing, she stopped and sniffed the air. "Who's hiding at my gate?" she cried.

Vasilissa stepped out of the shadows, trembling with fear. "My stepmother sent me to ask for a light," she said.

Baba Yaga stared hard at Vasilissa. “Ah yes, I know where you come from,” she muttered, “but if you want a light, you must work for me awhile, otherwise I shall eat you for my supper.” With that, she commanded the gates to open and flew through. Vasilissa shuddered. Gripping the doll in her pocket, she followed the witch and heard the jaws of the gate lock behind her.

In the house, Baba Yaga told Vasilissa to prepare her supper. The witch ate enough meat for a dozen people, but there was only a little cabbage soup and a crust of bread for Vasilissa. “While I am away tomorrow, you must clean the house, sweep the yard, and pick all the wild peas out of my sack of wheat,” she told Vasilissa. Then the bony old witch lay on top of the stove and shut her eyes.

When Vasilissa was sure that Baba Yaga was asleep, she took the little doll out of her pocket and fed it the last spoonful of soup. The little doll’s eyes shone like candles. “I’m so afraid,” said Vasilissa. “If I don’t do everything Baba Yaga has asked, she’ll eat me for her supper.”

“Don’t worry, sleep now,” said the little doll. “The morning is wiser than the evening.”

The next morning, Vasilissa woke before it was light. She saw the white horseman gallop across the clearing and leap the fence. As he disappeared into the forest, dawn appeared and the lights of the skulls’ eyes dimmed.

At the gate, Baba Yaga climbed into her mortar and whistled for her pestle and broom. Then the red horseman galloped across the clearing and the sun rose. Vasilissa watched Baba Yaga fly away. With a heavy heart, she wondered how to manage all the tasks she’d been given but, to her relief, she saw that the little doll had already done them all.

That evening, the black horseman galloped across the clearing and night fell. The skulls glowed, and Baba Yaga returned. To her annoyance, she couldn’t find anything to complain about. She called for her servants, and three hands appeared to carry away the sack of wheat.



The next day, Baba Yaga gave Vasilissa more tasks. "When you've swept the house and the yard, take my sack of poppy seeds, and clean the earth off every one," she told Vasilissa. "If they are not clean, I will eat you for supper."

Once more, the little doll did the work, and that evening there was nothing for the witch to complain about. She called for her servants and the three hands carried away the sack of poppy seeds.



When Baba Yaga had eaten her supper, she peered closely at Vasilissa, “Speak, child,” she said, “I see you have a question, but remember, not every question has a good answer.”

“I wish to know who the white horseman is,” said Vasilissa nervously.

“That is my servant Bright Day,” answered Baba Yaga. “He cannot hurt you.”

“And who is the red horseman?” asked Vasilissa.

“That is my servant Red Sun,” answered Baba Yaga. “He cannot hurt you.”

“Then who is the black horseman?” asked Vasilissa.

“That is my servant Dark Night,” answered Baba Yaga. “He cannot hurt you either. Ask me another question.”

Vasilissa was curious to know about the three hands, but she remembered that not every question has a good answer and remained silent.

Baba Yaga scowled. "It's lucky for you that you didn't ask about my other servants, the three hands, otherwise they would have taken you off to be my supper, just like the wheat and poppy seeds." Then the old witch asked Vasilissa how she was able to do all the tasks she'd been given so perfectly.

Vasilissa saw Baba Yaga staring at her pocket but stopped herself from giving her secret away. "The blessing of my mother helps me," she answered.

At these words, the old witch screamed as if she was in pain. "I'll have nobody with a blessing in this house," she shrieked. "Get out and be gone!"

Vasilissa ran out of the house and across the clearing. As she reached the gate, Baba Yaga commanded it to open and threw a skull with burning eyes after her. "There is the fire you came for," she cried. "Your stepmother may have the joy of it!"

Vasilissa put the shining skull on the end of a stick and hurried away home through the forest. She walked all through the night and the following day. At last, as evening fell, she came to the edge of the forest and found her stepmother's house. Thinking that the stepmother must have found fire herself after all that time, Vasilissa threw the skull away among the bushes. But to her surprise, it spoke to her.

"Don't throw me away, beautiful Vasilissa," said the skull. "Take me to your stepmother." So she picked it up and carried it into the house.

Vasilissa's stepmother and stepsisters were very pleased to see her. Since the night Vasilissa left, they had been unable to keep a fire alight in the house, no matter how they tried, and they were very cold and hungry. The stepmother took the witch's fire and lit a candle.

To her relief, the candle stayed alight. But once the skull was in the house, its eyes started to burn like red-hot coals. It stared at the stepmother and her daughters. No matter which way they turned, the eyes began to burn into them, hotter and hotter, fierce as a furnace, until suddenly all three of them caught fire and were burnt to ashes.

The next morning, Vasilissa buried the ashes and the witch's skull. As she wiped the earth from her hands, she heard a cry from the path. There stood her father, who had long been searching for his Vasilissa, overjoyed to be reunited with her at last.

The merchant promised never to leave his daughter again, and she kept the little wooden doll in her pocket for the rest of her days.