



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Baba Yaga

Unknown writer

There were once a man and wife who had no child, though they wished for one above all things. One day, when the husband was away, the wife laid a big stick of wood in the cradle and began to rock it and sing to it. When she looked away for a second and looked back again, she saw that the stick had arms and legs. Filled with joy, she began to rock and sing to it again; she kept it up for a long time, and when she looked again, there, instead of the stick of wood, was a fine little boy in the cradle.

The woman took the child up and nursed him, and after that he was to her as her own son. She named him Peter, and made a little sweater, a coat, pants and a cap for him to wear.

One day Peter put on his little coat and went out in a boat to fish on the river. At noon his mother went down to the bank of the stream and called to him, "Peter, Peter, bring your boat to shore, for I have brought a little cake for you to eat."

Then Peter said to his boat: "Little boat, little boat, float a little nearer. Little boat, little boat, float a little nearer." The boat floated up to the shore; Peter took the cake and went back to his fishing again.

Now it so happened that a Baba Jaga, a terrible witch, was hiding in the bushes nearby. She heard all that passed between the woman and the child. So after the woman had gone home, the Baba Jaga waited for a while, and then she went down to the edge of the river and hid herself there, and called out: "Peter, Peter, bring your boat to the shore, for I have brought another little cake for you."

But when Peter heard her voice, which was very coarse and loud, he knew it must be a Baba Jaga calling him, so he said: "Little boat, little boat, float a little farther. Little boat, little boat, float a little farther." Then the boat floated away still farther out of the Baba Jaga's reach.

The old witch soon guessed what was going on, and she rushed off to a blacksmith. "Blacksmith, blacksmith, forge me a little fine voice as quickly as you can," she cried, "or I will put you in my mortar and grind you to pieces with my pestle."

The blacksmith was frightened. He made her a little fine voice as quickly as he could, and the Baba Jaga took it and hastened back to the river. There she hid herself close to the shore and called in her little new voice, "Peter, Peter, bring your boat to the shore, for I have brought another little cake for you to eat."



When Peter heard the Baba Jaga calling him in her fine, small voice, he thought it was his mother, so he said to his boat: "Little boat, little boat, float a little nearer. Little boat, little boat, float a little nearer." Then the little boat came to the land. Peter looked all about, but saw no one. He wondered where his mother had gone, and stepped out of his boat to look for her.

Immediately the Baba Jaga seized him. Like a whirlwind she rushed away with him through the forest and never stopped till she reached her own house. There she locked him up in a cage behind the house to keep him until he grew fat. After she had locked him up, she went back into the house, and her little cat was there. "Mistress," said the cat, "I have cooked dinner for you, and I am very hungry. Will you not give me something to eat?"

"All that I leave, that you can have," answered the Baba Jaga. She sat down at the table and ate up everything but one small bone. That was all the cat had.

Meanwhile at home the mother waited and waited for Peter to come back from the river with his fish. Then at last she went down to look for him. There was his boat drawn up on the shore empty, and all round it were marks of the Baba Jaga's feet, and the trees and bushes were broken where she had rushed away through the forest. Then the mother knew that a witch had carried off the little boy.

She went back home, weeping and wailing. Now the woman had a very faithful servant, and when this girl heard her mistress wailing, she asked her what the matter was. The woman told her all that she had seen down at the river, and how she was sure a Baba Jaga had flown away with Peter.

"Mistress," said the girl, "there is no reason for you to despair. Just give me a little wheaten cake to I have some energy, and I will set out and find Peter, even if I have to travel to the end of the world."

Then the woman was comforted. She gave the servant a cake, and the girl set out in search of Peter. She went on and on, and after a while she came to the Baba Jaga's house. It stood on chicken legs, and turned whichever way the wind blew. The girl knocked at the door, and the Baba Jaga opened it.

"What do you want?" she asked. "Are you seeking work or shunning work?"

"I am seeking work," answered the girl. "Can you give me anything to do?"



The witch scowled at her terribly. "You may come in," she said, "and clean my house, but do not go peeping and prying about, or it will end badly for you."

The girl went in and began to clean the house, while the Baba Jaga flew away into the forest, riding in a mortar, urging it along with a pestle, and sweeping away the traces with a broom. After the witch had gone, the little cat said to the girl, "Give me, I beg of you, a little food, for I am starving with hunger."

"Here is a little cake; it is all I have, but I will give it to you."

The little cat took the cake and ate it all up, every crumb. "Now listen," said the cat. "I know why you are here, and that you are searching for the little boy named Peter. He is in a cage behind the house, but you can do nothing to help him now. Wait until after dinner, when the Baba Jaga goes to sleep. Then rub her eyes with tar so that she cannot get them open, and you can escape with the child through the forest."

The girl thanked the little cat and promised to do as it told her. When the Baba Jaga came home, "Well, have you been peeping and prying?" she asked.

"That I have not," answered the girl.

The Baba Jaga sat down, ate everything there was on the table, bones and all. Then she lay down and went to sleep. She snored terribly. The girl took some tar and smeared the witch's eyelids with it. Then she went out to where Peter was and let him out of the cage, and they ran away through the forest together.

The Baba Jaga slept for a long time. At last she yawned and woke, but she could not get her eyes open. They were stuck tight. She was in a terrible rage; she stamped about and roared terribly. "I know who has done this," she cried, "and as soon as I get my eyes open, I will go after her and tear her to pieces." Then she called to the cat to come and scratch her eyes open with its sharp little claws.

“That I will not,” answered the cat. “As long as I have been with you, you have given me nothing but hard words and bones to gnaw, but she stroked my fur, and gave me a cake to eat. Scratch your own eyes open, for you shall have no help from me.” And then the little cat ran away into the forest.

The faithful servant and Peter journeyed safely on through the forest, and you may guess whether or not the mother was glad to have her little Peter safe home again.

As to the old Baba Jaga, she may be shouting and stamping and rubbing the pitch from her eyes yet, for all I know.

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