

A Mother's Blessing

by Margaret Bateson-Hill

The night Vasilisa's mother died she gave her daughter a small doll.

"Here is my blessing," she sighed. "Promise me you will look after it and feed it, for it will help you if ever you are in need."

Vasilisa always kept the doll in her pocket, but she never needed to ask for help until the day her new stepmother came storming out of the house.

"Go into the forest and ask Baba Yaga for a light. And don't come back with out it." Vasilisa was frightened. Baba Yaga was a witch.

Vasilisa took out her doll and fed it with a crumb of bread. "Mother's blessing what shall I do?" she whispered.

"Do as your stepmother asks,' replied the doll.

Vasilisa followed the twisting path into the darkness of the forest. From all around came howls and growls, but no wild animal attacked her. She walked until the sun was high in the sky. Through the pine trees, Vasilisa saw a strange house hopping and jumping on chicken legs. Around the house was a fence made of old, dry bones and skulls. Vasilisa felt the windows watching her as the gate swung silently open to let pass. The door, like a narrow mouth, suddenly opened and out strode Baba Yaga. Vasilisa stared





in fear at the witch's long, bony legs and her warty, toad-like skin. And how could Vasilisa fail to notice that Baba Yaga had a mouth full of large, iron teeth?

"My stepmother has sent me for a light," she stammered.

Baba Yaga stared at the little girl and licked her lips. "Sweep the yard, separate this bowl of wheat

grains and poppy seeds, cook my dinner before my return and only then may you have your light. I'm going out." Baba Yaga jumped into her stone mortar, gave two quick swishes with her giant pestle, and was gone.

Vailissa wanted to cry, but instead she gave the doll a crumb of bread.

"Mother's blessing what shall I do?"

"Sleep now and leave the jobs to me," replied the doll.

When Vasilisa woke up, the yard was swept, the seeds were sorted and dinner smelt delicious.

Baba Yaga swept into the house. "I don't believe it! How did you finish those tasks so quickly?"

"My mother's blessing helped me," smiled Vasilisa.

Baba Yaga handed Vasilisa a skull lamp. "Run home before I eat you!" she snarled.

Vasilisa ran home as fast as her legs would carry her, and when she gave the lamp to her stepmother the light burned her up, turning her to dust. But Vasilisa, with the wisdom of her mother to guide her, lived happily ever after.