

THE MARVELOUS MISADVENTURES OF BABA YAGA

AN INTERACTIVE CHILDREN'S PLAY INSPIRED BY A RUSSIAN
FOLKTALE

By Patrick Rainville Dorn

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THE MARVELOUS MISADVENTURES OF BABA YAGA

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SYNOPSIS: Russian folklore's funny and fearsome wicked witch, Baba Yaga, takes a terrible tumble when her chicken-legged walking hut slips on a banana peel! Characters from Baba Yaga's most beloved stories gather for a "funtastic funeral," reenacting their hilarious adventures outwitting the comical witch. With the help of an audience full of "enchanted toads," spirited young Vasilisa and her nurturing nesting doll, Matryoshka, along with her father, a cat and a dog, perform seemingly impossible tasks: acting like trees, playing leapfrog, and folding laundry! With an extremely simple, tour-friendly set, outlandish characters, slapstick humor, clever dialogue and non-stop action, audiences will shed tears of laughter when they become active participants in *The Marvelous Misadventures of Baba Yaga*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (4 WOMEN, 2 MEN, FLEXIBLE)

VASILISA (F).....A brave, kind girl. (182 lines)

MIKHAIL (M).....Her father. (114 lines)

MATRYOSHKA (F)A grandmotherly nesting doll. (91 lines)

KATYA/ILYA (M/F).....A cat. (89 lines)

RUDOLF/ANYA (M/F).....A dog. (83 lines)

BABA YAGA (F).....A comical witch. (95 lines)

SETTING

A forest clearing in Old Russia, in the days when a respectable witch could still roam the woods looking for children to eat, and anything could happen if you were young, clever or pretty enough, had the right friends, and kept your wits about you.

STAGING

ENTRANCES RIGHT and LEFT. UP STAGE CENTER is an upside-down hut, with two chicken legs sticking straight up in the air. (See PRODUCTION NOTES.) There is a small, practical door in the hut. Scattered about the stage are an overturned bench, a laundry basket with clothing and linens spilling out, a cooking pot, a very large washtub mounted on casters, a table, stools, and a banana peel. Optional forest backdrop.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Marvelous Misadventures of Baba Yaga can be performed in nearly any public space: auditorium, cafeteria, gymnasium or classroom. Clearly define an “onstage” space, an “offstage” space, and an “audience” space. Something as simple as tape on the floor can separate the audience from the performance area. A folding screen set off to the side can provide a “backstage.” If there is so much distance between the stage and audience that the time taken to gather participants and bring them onstage slows the play down, place benches to the side of the playing area. Prior to the performance, the actors (who should be mingling with the children before the show in any case) will invite those who wish to be part of the play to come up onstage and sit on one of the benches. Assure those not chosen that they will have opportunities to participate from their seats.

BABA YAGA’S HUT:

This should be a simple, lightweight flat (either muslin or foam board), perhaps six feet high and four feet wide. The door is a flap which can be held shut by a Velcro strap or latch. The flat must not be so tall that it can’t be easily rotated to the “right side up” position. Paint the flat to look like a log hut on slightly wobbly chicken legs. The chicken legs may be attached to the flat so that they are pitched at silly angles, but then appear straighter (but wobbly) when the flat is right side up. Behind the flat is a sturdy table or platform. The flat should be able to detach from the table when it is rotated, but otherwise be secure enough that it won’t fall over when BABA YAGA crawls in and out. Since the hut is “upside down” at the beginning of

the play, BABA YAGA makes her entrance by crawling through the upside down door, from on top of the table or platform.

NOTE ON PARTICIPATION:

Involve as many children (and adults!) as possible, without allowing “crowd control” to bog down the play. CAST will need to pay attention so that the same volunteers don’t keep coming up, leaving others out. One way to do this is to draw “trees” from one part of the audience, “leap-froggers” from another, etc. ACTORS can even ask a child if they’ve been up already, or if over-eager children continuously raise their hands, ACTORS can say, “Let’s give everyone a chance,” or, “Let’s choose someone who hasn’t had a chance to come up yet.” Be sure to choose eager children, and thank them for cooperation. CAST MEMBERS lead participants from their seats to the stage, and back again. Never leave audience members alone onstage, or take them backstage out of view of the rest of the audience. CAST will need to respond succinctly to children who call out suggestions from the audience, redirecting them in the desired direction, but not contradicting their ideas or ignoring them. For sequences where most children are making noise (weeping and wailing scene), be sure to establish a visual “cut off” signal, like “zipping your lips” or “raising my hand” prior to the participation. You’ll never be able to out-shout them, but you need to be able to start and stop the participation on cue.

PROPERTIES:

Onstage:

Scarf

Blanket

Various laundry items including socks, underwear, skirts, sweaters, pillow cases, etc.

Cooking pot

Large wash tub on wheels (pad the inside for comfort)

Laundry basket

Table

Blue hair ribbon

Comb

Bench

Stools

Brought on:

Matryoshka “nesting” doll (VASILISA)

Paper sack with roast beef sandwich and banana (MIKHAIL)

Velcro “cowhide” strap, firewood (BABA YAGA)

Long piece of blue fabric or blanket (MIKHAIL)

FLEXIBLE CASTING:

The role of KATYA can be played by a male, and called ILYA. Likewise, RUDOLF can be played by a female, and called ANYA. For bigger laughs, consider casting a male as BABA YAGA. There is a long-standing theatrical convention which permits men to play witches and grotesquely ugly women (most frequently in “Hansel and Gretel” and “Cinderella”).

COSTUMES:

MIKHAIL: Basic Russian peasant garb, puffy shirt, vest, trousers with a patch on the rear, soft high boots, optional cap.

VASILISA: Basic Russian peasant girl clothing: colorful ankle-length dress, apron with pockets, soft leather boots.

MATRYOSHKA: Must match nesting doll prop: full-length hoop or petticoat skirt with apron, “babushka” scarf on head, soft boots or ballet slippers, rosy cheeks.

KATYA and RUDOLF: Animal costumes and makeup may be as realistic or as stylized as you wish, but must allow for freedom of movement.

BABA YAGA: Have fun with this comical costume. Colorful bloomers are a must. Costume may look a little “weedy.” Not too scary, but not too clown-like, either. Hideous fake nose with wart, blacked out teeth, various warts and moles, stringy hair, goofy hat.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

PRIOR TO CURTAIN:

CAST, except BABA YAGA, greets audience, helps get them seated, prepared for participation. SEE PRODUCTION NOTES. At least a minute or two prior to CURTAIN, CAST EXITS.

AT RISE:

The STAGE is empty. SOUND of chanting: a low, mournful dirge.

ALL: (OFFSTAGE.) Baa . . . baa . . . Yaa . . . gaa. Baa . . . baa . . . Yaa . . . gaa. (Repeats. CAST ENTERS LEFT in single file, arranged by height, from tallest to smallest. CAST marches slowly across the stage, chanting. When the procession reaches STAGE RIGHT, it makes a U-turn and starts moving LEFT. When the CAST splits CENTER, they stop. Failing to stop soon enough, the smallest actor at the end of the procession bumps into the person in front of him/her, causing a chain reaction up the line. As one, they turn, face the hut UPSTAGE.) Baa . . . baa . . . Yaa . . . gaa. Baa . . . baa . . . Yaa . . . gaa. (Long pause. Suddenly, CAST cheers, jumps for joy, exchanges hugs, "high fives," etc.)

VASILISA: It's true.

MIKHAIL: At long last.

MATRYOSHKA: She's really gone.

RUDOLF: Gone for good.

KATYA: Good riddance, I say.

ALL: So say we all!

RUDOLF: Look at her hut.

MATRYOSHKA: What a mess.

KATYA: (Picks up banana peel.) Who would have thought one little banana peel could do so much damage? (Tosses it OFFSTAGE.)

MIKHAIL: It's all in the momentum.

VASILISA: That's what comes from living in a hut with chicken legs.

MATRYOSHKA: As a general rule, houses don't look where they're going.

RUDOLF: No one could survive a tumble like that.

KATYA: Which means, no more . . .

ALL: Baba Yaga!

VASILISA: What a wicked witch she was.

MATRYOSHKA: With sharp teeth made of iron.

MIKHAIL: And fingernails like thorns.

KATYA: She was cruel to animals.

RUDOLF: And I don't even want to talk about her lack of personal hygiene. Pee-yoo!

VASILISA: So why do I miss her, now that she's dead and gone?

MATRYOSHKA: You don't. Do you? You do!

KATYA: I don't.

RUDOLF: Me, neither.

MIKHAIL: How can you say that, Vasilisa?

MATRYOSHKA: What did Baba Yaga ever do for you?

VASILISA: Well, for starters, she didn't cook me up and eat me when she had the chance.

KATYA: It wasn't for lack of trying!

RUDOLF: You outsmarted her and got away, that's all.

MATRYOSHKA: With a little help from those who love you.

MIKHAIL: Still, I can see what Vasilisa means.

KATYA: We did have our share of adventures with that witch around, didn't we?

RUDOLF: I'll say. Never a dull moment.

MATRYOSHKA: But now those days are over, and we can all live happily ever after. Right? (*Looks around.*) Right?

ALL: Right. (*Pause. They sigh.*) Ahhh . . .

MIKHAIL: I suppose we ought to go back to the village.

KATYA: Nothing for us here.

RUDOLF: Not anymore.

MATRYOSHKA: There are a lot of chores to do.

VASILISA: This forest seems a lot smaller and tamer now that Baba Yaga's gone.

RUDOLF: (*Notices audience.*) But not empty!

MIKHAIL: What do you mean?

KATYA: (*Points to audience.*) Baba Yaga's enchanted toads are still here.

VASILISA: Are they dangerous?

MATRYOSHKA: Not if you're friendly and nice to them. *(Goes to audience member.)* Hey there, little fella. *(Pats his head. To OTHERS.)* What a good little toad.

MIKHAIL: Why are they still here?

KATYA: *(To audience member.)* Did you come for Baba Yaga's funeral, too?

RUDOLF: Of course they did.

VASILISA: Well then, we should go ahead with it.

MATRYOSHKA: We'll reenact her story so that everyone will remember what Baba Yaga was like.

KATYA: *(To audience.)* And you can help us.

MIKHAIL: We'll tell it like it really was.

MATRYOSHKA: The good . . .

RUDOLF: The bad . . .

ALL: And the ugly! *(They strike scary poses, make witch-like faces and cackle. Laughing, they set up a table and chairs.)*

VASILISA: *(To audience.)* The story begins a long time ago, when you were all just little tadpoles. Back in our village, my mother became very sick.

MIKHAIL: I did my best to take care of her and my daughter, Vasilisa. *(Gestures to VASILISA.)*

VASILISA: One day, my mother called me to her bedside.

KATYA finds scarf and blanket in pile of spilled laundry, puts scarf on over her head, sits in chair and covers herself with the blanket. Pretends to be VASILISA'S mother.

KATYA: Vasilisa, come here, dear.

VASILISA: What is it, Mother?

KATYA: I'm afraid I'm not going to be with you much longer. Cough. Cough.

VASILISA: Don't say that.

KATYA: But before I go, I want to give you the gift of a mother's undying love. *(Mimes handing her a nesting doll.)* Here. Take this.

VASILISA: It's a nesting doll.

KATYA: That's right, dear. A Matryoshka doll. But this is no ordinary doll.

VASILISA: It's not?

KATYA: No. And stop interrupting me. I haven't got much time. Cough, cough. Anyway, if you ever get into trouble, open up the Matryoshka doll, and my love for you will come to the rescue.

VASILISA: Just open it up?

KATYA: Just open it up and ask Matryoshka to come. Now go outside and play, dear. Cough, cough.

VASILISA: *(Takes two halves of nesting doll out of two apron pockets. To audience.)* And that's how I got this!

KATYA takes off scarf, blanket, stands.

MIKHAIL: That Matryoshka doll has been a real blessing ever since your mother died.

VASILISA: *(To audience.)* I'll say. Whenever I feel lonely or sad, I open up my nesting doll and Matryoshka here appears like magic to comfort me. *(Gestures to MATRYOSHKA, who smiles, curtsies.)* She sings me songs, gives advice. I keep her with me, always.

RUDOLF: Put the pieces back together, Vasilisa!

KATYA: I love it when you do that.

VASILISA: *(To MATRYOSHKA.)* You don't mind, do you? For the toads?

MATRYOSHKA: Go right ahead, dear.

VASILISA: Okay, here goes. *(Recites.)* Hide, Matryoshka, hide! *(Puts the two halves of the nesting doll together.)*

MATRYOSHKA: Whooo! *(MATRYOSHKA spins like a top. EXITS spinning.)*

MIKHAIL: Amazing.

RUDOLF: Woof! Woof!

KATYA: Now take it apart again.

VASILISA: Okay. *(Recites.)* Come, Matryoshka, come! *(Takes nesting doll apart. MATRYOSHKA ENTERS, spinning.)*

MATRYOSHKA: Whooo! Hooo! *(Stops, a little dizzy.)*

RUDOLF: Do it again!

KATYA: Yes, Vasilisa. Do it again!

VASILISA: (*Looks at MATRYOSHKA.*) Maybe later?

MATRYOSHKA: Just let me catch my breath! (*Shakes her face and body like a wet dog.*) There. Good as new.

MIKHAIL: Perhaps the toads would like to see you do it again.

VASILISA: (*To audience.*) Would you like to see Matryoshka disappear and reappear again?

KATYA and RUDOLF encourage audience to say, "Yes, please."

MATRYOSHKA: I told you they were good little toads. And so polite, too.

VASILISA: All right, then. When I put the two halves of the doll back together, call out: "Hide, Matryoshka, hide!"

RUDOLF: Did you get that?

KATYA: Shout, "Hide, Matryoshka, hide!"

MIKHAIL: But not until she puts the two halves together.

VASILISA: Here we go. (*Puts two halves of Matryoshka doll together.*)

ALL: Hide, Matryoshka, hide!

MATRYOSHKA: Whooo! (*MATRYOSHKA EXITS, spinning.*)

MIKHAIL: Well, that was exciting.

RUDOLF: Woof! Woof!

KATYA: I could watch her do that all day.

VASILISA: (*To audience.*) Are you ready to bring her back?

RUDOLF: When Vasilisa takes the doll apart, everybody shout . . .

KATYA: Come, Matryoshka, come!

VASILISA: Here goes! (*Takes doll apart.*)

ALL: Come, Matryoshka, come! (*MATRYOSHKA ENTERS, spinning.*)

MATRYOSHKA: Whooo! Hooo! (*Stops, shakes like a dog, straightens her clothing.*) Ahhh.

KATYA: (*To audience.*) Well done, you adorable toads.

RUDOLF: That trick is going to come in handy later on in our story about Baba Yaga.

MATRYOSHKA: (*Refers to CAST.*) When the time comes, they'll help you remember what to say, and when to say it.

MIKHAIL: I don't know what Vasilisa would have done without you.

MATRYOSHKA: Oh, I'm full of surprises.

RUDOLF: It's a good thing Baba Yaga didn't know about you.

KATYA: Things might have ended very differently.

VASILISA: Yes, with me in a soup pot!

MATRYOSHKA: It would have never happened if Mikhail here hadn't sent you on a fool's errand.

RUDOLF: Let it go, Matryoshka. He's apologized a million times or more.

MIKHAIL: I would never deliberately send my daughter into a dangerous situation.

KATYA: Besides, if Vasilisa hadn't found her way here, we never would have met and become friends.

VASILISA: I'll always be grateful for your help. *(Looks at audience.)* But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

MATRYOSHKA: Mustn't forget the toads. *(Explains.)* It all began with a needle.

VASILISA: *(Sits on floor.)* I was playing with my Matryoshka doll one morning when my father called.

MIKHAIL: *(Calls.)* Vasilisa! Where are you, daughter?

VASILISA: Here I am, Father.

MIKHAIL: *(Looks.)* Where?

VASILISA: Right here!

MIKHAIL: Oh, there you are. Have you seen my needle?

VASILISA: Your needle?

MIKHAIL: Yes. I was going to finish the mending, and I seem to have misplaced my needle.

VASILISA: *(Stands.)* Did you look in the sewing basket?

MIKHAIL: Yes.

VASILISA: And in the spool of thread?

MIKHAIL: Yes. I've looked high and low, near and far.

VASILISA: How about in the haystack?

MIKHAIL: What would a needle be doing in a haystack? No, I'm afraid it's lost forever, and I simply must do the mending.

VASILISA: What can I do?

MIKHAIL: You'll have to walk all the way into town and buy one.

VASILISA: By myself?

MIKHAIL: You're getting to be a big girl now. And with your mother gone, you need to become more independent.

VASILISA: (*Pumps fist in victory.*) All right! (*Recovers composure.*) I mean, yes, Father. I'll go, right now.

MIKHAIL: And don't forget your Matryoshka.

VASILISA: (*Holds it up, then places it in apron pocket.*) Never! (*Starts to EXIT RIGHT.*) Bye, now.

MIKHAIL: (*Hands her a paper sack.*) Here's a sack lunch for you to eat if you get hungry. But be sure to get back before dark.

VASILISA: (*Takes sack, walks a few steps.*) I will. (*Stops.*) When I get to the crossroads, do I turn right or left?

MIKHAIL: Oh, my goodness! Turn left! Don't turn right! Right leads deeper into the forest. The village is to the left.

VASILISA: Right.

MIKHAIL: No, left! Don't frighten me, child. Do you know who lives in that forest? No, you don't. And I hope you never do.

VASILISA: Someone scary lives out there?

MIKHAIL: Baba Yaga, the witch.

VASILISA: Where in the forest?

MIKHAIL: No one knows for sure. She moves around.

VASILISA: Does she have a camper?

MIKHAIL: No, Vasilisa. Baba Yaga lives in a hut that walks around on chicken legs!

VASILISA: That must be a sight to see.

MIKHAIL: No, it isn't! Baba Yaga likes to eat little children. No one who crosses her path is ever seen again. So when you get to the crossroads, turn left.

VASILISA: (*Confirms.*) Right.

MIKHAIL: (*Slaps forehead.*) No, left! (*Reconsiders.*) Maybe I should just go get the needle myself.

VASILISA: No, I'll do it.

MIKHAIL: I don't know . . .

VASILISA: I'll be sure to go the right way when I get to the crossroads.

MIKHAIL: No! The left. Go to the left! (*Staggers.*) Oh, I feel faint.

VASILISA: Goodbye, Father. (*EXITS RIGHT.*)

MIKHAIL: *(Calls.)* Be careful! *(Sits down. Jumps back up.)* Ouch! *(Feels the seat of his pants. Turns around, reveals a patch. Mimes pulling out a needle.)* I found the needle! I left it in my pants when I sewed this patch on. *(Calls.)* Vasilisa! I found the needle! Too late. She's already gone. Oh dear. I hope she'll be all right. *(Sits.)*

RUDOLF: And that's how Vasilisa's adventure began.

MIKHAIL stands, moves to the side.

KATYA: Vasilisa enjoyed her moment of freedom. But all too soon, she came to the crossroads.

VASILISA ENTERS LEFT, skipping.

VASILISA: Oh my goodness. Here I am at the crossroads already. My, how time flies. Now, which way was I supposed to turn? *(Looks LEFT and RIGHT. Points to the RIGHT.)* Was it to the left? *(MATRYOSHKA, KATYA, RUDOLF and MIKHAIL elicit responses from audience. She points to the LEFT.)* Or was it to the right? *(Notices audience.)* Oh hello, toads. Do you know which way it is to the village? Should I go to the right . . . *(Points LEFT)* . . . or to the left? *(Points RIGHT.)* To the left. Okay. So is that MY left or YOUR left?

KATYA: Toads, please point to the left with your left hand, and show Vasilisa the way to the village.

VASILISA: *(Points LEFT.)* But see, when I point to the left, I'm pointing in the other direction! *(Walks up to a child.)* Are you pointing left? So am I, but we're pointing in opposite directions. I have an idea. *(VASILISA slowly turns, facing UPSTAGE.)* Now we're both pointing to the left. So that's the way I should go. Right?

ALL: No, left!

VASILISA: Exactly! *(Points to STAGE RIGHT.)* I'll go that way. Thanks for your help, you adorable little toads! *(VASILISA EXITS RIGHT, skipping.)*

MATRYOSHKA: What Vasilisa didn't realize was that right and left depend on the person's point of view. From the direction she was coming, she should have turned left. (*Points LEFT.*) But instead, she went to the right.

RUDOLF: Which leads deeper into the forest . . .

KATYA: And right toward Baba Yaga's magical hut with the chicken legs!

MIKHAIL: I told you it wasn't my fault.

MATRYOSHKA: Vasilisa is going deep into the forest. So in order to tell this story properly, we'll need to have some trees.

RUDOLF: Maybe the toads could pretend to be trees.

KATYA: It would be good practice for later. (*To audience.*) Trees are an important part of this story at the beginning and at the end.

MIKHAIL: Who would like to become a tree so Vasilisa will feel like she's deep in the forest?

CAST takes volunteers and stands them up around the stage area, posing them.

RUDOLF: This one here is a very tall tree.

KATYA: And this one has lovely branches.

MIKHAIL: How did you all become so good at pretending?

MATRYOSHKA: They're ENCHANTED toads. They can be and do anything the story requires.

RUDOLF: Well, they're certainly good at being trees.

KATYA: I can almost smell the pine needles.

MIKHAIL: Here comes Vasilisa. She looks pretty lost to me.

VASILISA ENTERS LEFT.

VASILISA: I don't remember the village being quite this far from home. I must be nearly there by now.

KATYA: (*Imitates an owl.*) Whoo. Whoo.

VASILISA: What's that? An owl?

RUDOLF: (*Imitates a wolf.*) Owwooo!

VASILISA: And a wolf! (*Wanders amongst the "trees," weaving in and out*) This can't be right - I mean left. Somehow I turned the

wrong way at the crossroads, and now I've wandered into the forest. And though these are certainly the most marvelous trees, I do believe I'm . . . lost.

MIKHAIL: *(To audience members who aren't "trees.")* Can you make sounds like toads? Well, of course you can!

ALL: Ribbit! Ribbit! Croak! Croak!

VASILISA: And now I'm surrounded by a whole bunch of ferocious porcupines!

RUDOLF: Porcupines?!

VASILISA: What shall I do? I'm scared. *(Sits, takes out Matryoshka doll.)* Dear Matryoshka, what can I do now? It's going to be dark before too long.

KATYA: She's going to open the doll. Get ready, everybody.

RUDOLF: When she opens it, everyone say, "Come, Matryoshka, come!"

MIKHAIL: Here we go . . .

ALL: *(As VASILISA opens the doll.)* Come, Matryoshka, come!

MATRYOSHKA carefully spins between the trees, pretending to bounce off them like a pinball.

MATRYOSHKA: Whoo! Oof! Oops. Ow. Oh, sorry. My goodness, such a lot of trees. Vasilisa, what are you doing in the middle of the forest?

VASILISA: I'm on my way to the village to buy a needle.

MATRYOSHKA: You've gone the wrong way. You should have turned left at the crossroads.

VASILISA: I'm so confused, I don't know my right from my left anymore. I just want to go home. *(Looks at sack.)* Maybe I'll have something to eat, and then try to find my way back.

MATRYOSHKA: It's not going to be that simple, my dear. You're now in Baba Yaga's realm, and you must face her before you can go home.

VASILISA: Do I have to?

MATRYOSHKA: Yes, Vasilisa, you do. But you don't have to do it alone.

VASILISA: No, because I have you. *(Pulls sandwich out of the sack.)* And a sandwich. Do you want some? *(Looks.)* It's roast beef on rye with a bit of mayo.

MATRYOSHKA: You're going to need more allies than just me. Maybe you should save that sandwich for later. It might come in handy.

VASILISA: Do you think Baba Yaga would rather eat roast beef on rye than a little girl?

MATRYOSHKA: Sadly, no. But you still might find a use for it.

VASILISA: *(Puts sandwich in sack.)* I'll put it back for now.

MATRYOSHKA: That's a good girl.

VASILISA: So what do I do now?

MATRYOSHKA: You're going to have to face Baba Yaga, but you don't have to be afraid. *(Points UPSTAGE.)* Her hut is in that clearing over there. Now, put me back together, and when you really need me, call and I'll be there for you.

VASILISA: Thank you, Matryoshka.

RUDOLF: She's going to put the pieces together.

KATYA: Remember, everyone say, "Hide, Matryoshka, hide!"

VASILISA puts the two halves of the nesting doll together.

ALL: Hide, Matryoshka, hide!

MATRYOSHKA: Whoo! Hoo! *(EXITS through the "forest," spinning.)* See you later!

RUDOLF: And so, Vasilisa wandered out of the forest and into the clearing.

KATYA: That means we're done with the trees now. You can go back to your toadstools. Thank you so much, you adorable toads! *(CAST helps audience back to their seats.)* So, what happened next?

VASILISA: As soon as I got into the clearing, I came across a large and squeaky gate. *(Looks around.)* Which isn't here anymore. The hut must have moved since my adventure.

MIKHAIL: *(To audience.)* Who would like to play the gate with me? *(Gathers two or three participants. Picks up a cooking pot, puts it*

on his head. They form "gate.") We're a squeaky, creaky gate, and our job is to warn Baba Yaga if any strangers approach.

VASILISA reaches to touch the gate.

MIKHAIL: Screech!

VASILISA removes hand.

VASILISA: Wow! That's some squeaky, creaky gate. (*Touches "gate" again.*)

MIKHAIL: (*Encourages "gate" participants to squeak, too.*) Screech!

VASILISA pulls hand back.

VASILISA: That just can't be comfortable, even for a gate. There must be something I can do for you. (*Reaches into sack.*) Would you like a sandwich? (*Opens sandwich up.*) It's roast beef on rye.

MIKHAIL: (*Shakes head "no."*) Squeak, creak, screech.

VASILISA: Oh! That sound just puts my teeth on edge! (*Gets an idea.*) Of course a gate wouldn't want roast beef or rye, but how about the mayonnaise? (*MIKHAIL considers.*) I could just rub the mayo into your hinges. There's vegetable oil in there. It might just do the trick. (*Offers slice of bread.*) May I?

MIKHAIL: (*With cooperation of the rest of the gate, nods.*) Squeak, creak.

VASILISA "rubs" bread on MIKHAIL and gate participants.

VASILISA: There you go. Nice and greasy. When my dad makes a sandwich, he really slathers on the mayo.

MIKHAIL: (*Breaks character as "gate."*) Hey, I thought you liked it that way.

VASILISA: A little mayo goes a long way. (*Finishes.*) There. How does that feel?

MIKHAIL: (*As gate, swings back and forth.*) Ahhh. That's better. Thank you so much, little girl. What's your name?

VASILISA: Vasilisa.

MIKHAIL: Well, Vasilisa, you've done me a favor, and if I ever have the chance, I'll return it. Would you like to go through to Baba Yaga's house?

VASILISA: Not really, but I guess I have to. Don't I?

MIKHAIL: Yep.

VASILISA: All right, then.

MIKHAIL: Nice knowing you, kid. Good luck.

VASILISA: *(Passes through the "gate," which closes behind her with a sigh.)* I wish you wouldn't say it like that.

MIKHAIL: Sorry. *(MIKHAIL thanks "gate" participants and helps them return to their seats. Takes cooking pot off head and places it on table.)* Thanks for the help. We'll be needing the gate again later in the story, so be ready when I call for you.

VASILISA puts sandwich back together, places it in the sack.

KATYA: *(Narrates.)* And so Vasilisa passed through the gate and into Baba Yaga's yard.

RUDOLF: *(Leaps and prowls about.)* Where a wild and ferocious guard dog patrolled around, waiting to bark and chase and chew the face off anyone trespassing near Baba Yaga's hut! Including little girls. Woof!

KATYA: Hey, knock it off, Rudolf. You're scaring the adorable little toads.

MIKHAIL: *(Reassures.)* His bark is much worse than his bite.

RUDOLF: Sorry. I was just getting into the story. *(Explains.)* And if I was a little cranky, it's because I was so hungry! Baba Yaga never even gave me a bone of my own. So when I saw Vasilisa come into the yard, I may have overreacted, just a little. But I was only doing my job. *(Sees VASILISA, who waves. RUDOLF charges at her.)* Woof! Woof! Grrr.

VASILISA: *(Taken aback.)* Uh, hello there. Nice doggy. Good doggy.

RUDOLF: Woof! Grr! Woof!

VASILISA: My, what big eyes you have.

MIKHAIL: Wrong story, Vasilisa.

VASILISA: *(To RUDOLF.)* Well, you do have very nice puppy dog eyes.

RUDOLF: *(Barks with less conviction.)* Woof!

VASILISA: And what big teeth you have.

KATYA: Vasilisa! You are NOT Little Red Riding Hood!

VASILISA: *(To RUDOLF.)* Maybe not, but your teeth are very white and very, very big just the same. How do you keep them looking so nice?

RUDOLF: *(Hangs head in embarrassment.)* I chew on sticks and branches, mostly. *(Perks up.)* Once in awhile, I floss with a slow-moving porcupine.

VASILISA: Well, it's clearly working for you. Too bad you've got such a problem with drooling, though.

RUDOLF: *(Wipes mouth on sleeve.)* Sorry. Can't help myself. I can smell the bread you have in your sack, and the old slobber glands just kick in automatically.

VASILISA: *(Reaches into sack.)* Oh, are you hungry?

RUDOLF: *(Sits, pants, begs.)* Oh, yes. Yes, I am. Yes, yes, yes!

VASILISA: *(Pulls out sandwich.)* I've got this roast beef on rye.

RUDOLF: Does it have mayonnaise on it?

VASILISA: Not anymore.

RUDOLF: Good. I'd just scrape it off anyway. Too oily.

VASILISA: I'll make a deal with you. If you promise not to chew my face off, I'll give you the bread from my sandwich.

RUDOLF: Just the bread?

VASILISA: I'd like to save the roast beef for myself. But you can have the rye. I'm cutting down on carbs anyway.

RUDOLF: Sounds good to me.

VASILISA gives bread to RUDOLF, who eats it up.

VASILISA: *(Puts meat back in sack.)* I'll just save this for later.

RUDOLF: Thank you so much, little girl. What's your name?

VASILISA: Vasilisa.

RUDOLF: Well, Vasilisa, you've done me a favor, and if I ever have the chance, I'll return it.

VASILISA: Thanks. So do you have any pointers on how to survive my visit to Baba Yaga?

RUDOLF: Uh, no, sorry. No human who meets Baba Yaga is ever seen again.

VASILISA: Great. Just peachy.

RUDOLF: Good luck!

VASILISA: Thanks, I'll need it. *(Aside.)* I wish people would stop wishing me luck!

MIKHAIL: *(Narrates.)* As Vasilisa gathered her courage and approached the hut, she heard a crying sound.

KATYA: Meow! Meow!

VASILISA: What's that sound?

KATYA: Well, it ain't a porcupine!

VASILISA: A kitty! Hello, kitty. My, you're awfully big for a kitten.

KATYA: I'm not a kitten. I'm a full-grown cat, with lion-sized problems.

VASILISA: Is something wrong?

KATYA: I'm going to need more than nine lives to get out of this mess. Meow!

VASILISA: Anything I can do to help?

KATYA: Got any magic tricks up your sleeve?

VASILISA: No, but I have some roast beef in my sack. It used to be a sandwich, but I'm sort of giving it away, bit by bit. *(Holds up meat.)*

KATYA: *(Sniffs.)* I'll pass. No, what I need is a new act to entertain Baba Yaga.

VASILISA: *(Puts meat back in sack, sets it on table.)* A new act?

KATYA: See, the witch and I have this arrangement. I provide entertainment for her, and she doesn't cook me up in her big soup pot and eat me.

VASILISA: That doesn't sound like a very good job.

KATYA: It's a living. I've tried riding a unicycle and making balloon animals, which is no easy trick for a cat with claws. Those kinds of things amuse her, but only for awhile. Once I got desperate and tried to juggle porcupines. *(To audience.)* Kids, don't try that at home - - unless you have a brand new box of Band-Aids!

VASILISA: Well, of course Baba Yaga would get bored if all she does is sit and watch all the time. You need to give her something to do. Give her a chance to get involved, to participate.

KATYA: Now that's something I haven't tried. So, what kinds of things do you do for fun?

VASILISA: Well, I like to jump rope.

KATYA: Do you have a rope? (*VASILISA shakes head.*) Just as well. Baba Yaga would use it to tie you up before throwing you into the soup pot. But I do like the idea of jumping.

VASILISA: How about leapfrog? That's a jumping game that DEMANDS participation. And you don't need a rope.

KATYA: Never heard of it.

VASILISA: You've never heard of leapfrog?

KATYA: Nope. (*To audience.*) Have YOU heard of leapfrog?

RUDOLF: What a question to ask a bunch of adorable toads!

MIKHAIL: Of course they have. Toads know everything about jumping, hopping and leaping.

KATYA: Will some of you show me?

CAST gathers up to six volunteers, organizes a round of leapfrog, which involves setting up a line of children. The first leaps, then curls into a ball. The second leaps over the first by placing both hands on the shoulders of the first leaper, straddling them and "hopping" over. Second child then curls into a ball, and so on. When all are balled up on the floor, the child at the end of the line leaps over each child in turn. CAST guides them from RIGHT to LEFT, perhaps curving into a circle, offering suggestions and encouragement, and occasional physical assistance. If all goes well, CAST may even join in.

RUDOLF: Be sure to tuck your head under when someone is leap-frogging over you.

VASILISA: It's even more fun if you "croak" or "ribbit" as you leap.

MIKHAIL: You don't want to leap too far, or the people behind you won't be able to keep up.

KATYA: This is fun! I'm sure Baba Yaga would be happy with this game and not yell at me like she usually does. And it's good exercise, too.

CAST guides volunteers back to their seats.

VASILISA: Thank you all for being such good leapers. Regular toads are good, but you enchanted toads are the best!

KATYA: Thank you so much, little girl. I'm sure this leap-frogging game will do the trick. What's your name?

VASILISA: Vasilisa.

KATYA: Well, Vasilisa, you've done me a favor, and if I ever have the chance, I'll return it.

VASILISA: I hope you do get the chance, because it's time for me to face Baba Yaga!

MIKHAIL: *(Narrates.)* And with that, Vasilisa gathered the courage to approach Baba Yaga's chicken hut.

VASILISA takes tiny, timid steps toward the hut, turns, and faces the audience.

VASILISA: Maybe the enchanted toads would like to hear a little more about Baba Yaga first.

MATRYOSHKA: *(ENTERS, startling OTHERS.)* Don't start without me! *(To audience.)* Usually I only come out of the nesting doll when I'm called, but I have a feeling I'm going to be needed for this part of the story.

CAST faces audience, keeping their backs to the hut. Door to the hut swings open, revealing the backside of BABA YAGA. She is wearing colorful bloomers, perhaps with a wild floral print. CAST does not notice her.

RUDOLF: *(Gestures to hut, but keeps focus on audience.)* Many of you never met Baba Yaga, nose to warty nose.

KATYA: Consider yourselves lucky!

MATRYOSHKA: Of all the witches in all the world, she was the wickedest and most fearsome.

VASILISA: What about the Wicked Witch of the West in the Land of Oz?

MATRYOSHKA: Well, maybe Baba Yaga was the SECOND most wicked and fearsome.

MIKHAIL: What about the witch with the gingerbread house who captured Hansel and Gretel?

MATRYOSHKA: Okay, maybe Baba Yaga was the THIRD most wicked and fearsome.

RUDOLF: But that's still pretty bad.

VASILISA: (*Backs up toward hut.*) She's definitely someone you wouldn't want to bump in to, alive or dead! (*Bumps into BABA YAGA, who falls out of the door, rolls and lies on the floor in a heap.*)

BABA YAGA: Oof!

VASILISA: (*Jumps away.*) Eek!

KATYA leaps into RUDOLF'S arms.

KATYA: Meow!

RUDOLF: Woof!

MIKHAIL: It's Baba Yaga!

VASILISA: Is she dead?

RUDOLF sets KATYA down. They gather in a semi-circle around BABA YAGA, look down at her.

KATYA: After a crash like that?

RUDOLF: She must be.

MIKHAIL: She'd have to have a pretty thick skull to survive.

MATRYOSHKA: (*MATRYOSHKA pokes BABA YAGA with her foot.*)
And a brain the size of a pea.

BABA YAGA sits up, holds her head.

BABA YAGA: Oooh, I conked my noggin.

Startled, KATYA, RUDOLF, MIKHAIL, VASILISA and MATRYOSHKA flee into the audience, hide behind children.

THE MARVELOUS MISADVENTURES OF BABA YAGA

RUDOLF: Ahhh!

KATYA: Mommy!

MIKHAIL: Hide us!

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